Preface

This much I know about leadership*: It is a topic for the ages.* Discussions of leadership date back to Plato and the early Greeks, but also Chinese and Egyptian societies. It was a topic during the Renaissance with Machiavelli's *The Prince,* which survives as a reference today. Proceeding onward through the turn of the twentieth century, it emerged in 'great man' theories, marking the start of serious scholarship that continues to the present. Such scholarship now joins a business press eager to dispense sage advice to hungry leaders. What is it about leadership that sustains this kind of interest? Bass (1981) asserted that leadership is a universal human phenomenon, the templates for which are supplied by parenthood. If true, it should be no surprise that we find leadership in a host of society's collectives—business and governmental organizations to be sure, but also remote African villages, sports teams, and Girl Scout troops.

Few agree on a definition. Leadership scholars are famous for their inability to agree on a definition of leadership, leading some analysts to remark that there are as many definitions as there are leadership scholars (Bass, 1981; Fiedler, 1971; Rost, 1991). However, there are good reasons for this inconsistency. Leadership occurs amidst a tremendous amount of situational variability, and it has that elusive 'eye of the beholder' quality. Some will make sense of complex conditions by arriving at an attribution of leadership that others would vehemently contest (think George W. Bush, the 43rd president of the United States, and his handling of the war in Iraq). Yet, Meindl (1995) suggests that our attributions are romanticized in this regard because too often we see leadership as *the* cause of organizational success or failure when a more complex explanation is in order. Even so, one person's leadership is another's tyranny or ineptitude.

Organizational leadership was once the sole province of men. While the concept of leadership has been around for some time, the serious study of leadership is about 100 years old. As mentioned, it began with the turn of the twentieth century 'great man' school of thought, which led social scientists to look for those characteristics and traits (such as intelligence, dominance, height, and so forth) that differentiated leaders from non-leaders. Organizational

leadership was considered the sole province of men until women began to enter the workforce in large numbers in the 1970s in other than low power positions (Kanter, 1977). Since then, gender differences in leadership have ranked among the hot topics in both the academic and business press as well as in countless discussions at watercoolers and boardrooms in organizations worldwide (Buzzanell, 2000; Collinson, 1988; Kanter, 1977; Reardon, 1995).

Leadership psychologists have supplied important foundational work in leadership studies.[1] Their early trait theories gave way to the study of leader behavior styles, famously captured in the Ohio State leadership studies, which examined initiating structure and consideration as two dimensions of leader behavior (Stogdill & Coons, 1957). Contingency theories followed, such as Fiedler's (1971) emphasizing leader–member relations, task structure, and a leader's position power as determinants of the type of leader effectiveness. Leader–member exchange (LMX) theory subsequently adopted an exclusive relational focus, where high versus low quality leader–member relationships differed in terms of the resources exchanged and outcomes delivered (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987). At about the same time, neo-charismatic leadership theories arrived on the scene, emphasizing leaders' charisma, vision, and the ability to inspire followers well beyond the terms of their employment contract (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1989; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Also, the information-processing school of leadership began to study implicit leadership theories and the role of cognition in the enactment and attribution of leadership behavior (Hanges, Lord, & Dickson, 2000; Lord & Maher, 1991). LMX, neo-charisma, and implicit leadership theories continue to this day, as authentic leadership (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005), spiritual leadership (Reave, 2005), and leadership in team-based organizations (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006) assume the newcomer roles.

As good scientists, leadership psychologists have challenged their own theories, methods, and findings over time (House & Aditya, 1997; Lowe & Gardner, 2000). Interestingly, much of the criticism points to the socially constructed nature of leadership (Calder, 1977; Lord & Brown, 2004; Meindl, 1995), a perspective that, if taken seriously, has the potential to both challenge and complement leadership psychology at a foundational level.

I do not mean to imply that psychologists are uninterested or unwilling to pursue a socially constructed view of leadership, nor do I wish to diminish their contributions to this topic in any way. I only wish to observe that their concerns for the individual and psychological rather consistently outweigh their concerns for the social and cultural. I argue that both sets of concerns must be entertained in equal strengths in order to understand a socially constructed world. Thankfully, a body of theory and research directly applicable to the social, linguistic, and cultural aspects of leadership has been accumulating. I call this work *discursive leadership* because of its focus on organizational

discourse, both as language use in social interaction and the view of Discourse made popular by Michel Foucault. In his view, Discourse is a system of thought and a way of talking about a subject that together supplies the necessary linguistic resources for communicating actors. Foucault's work is typical of the burgeoning organizational discourse literature that reflects a body of constructionist theories not specifically about leadership per se, but with great potential to illuminate it in ways that we have not yet seen. That potential motivates the writing of this book, which is less a literature review and more of an exploration of key discourse concepts and what they could mean for leadership. The voluminous research from leadership psychology serves as a useful point of contrast, springboard, and benchmark along the way.

There is still much to learn about leadership, especially if we surrender to its protean tendencies. As Chapter 1 makes clear, discursive leadership and leadership psychology differ on both ontological and epistemological grounds. In a nutshell, leadership psychology has been on a quest to understand the essence of leadership, whether it be found in the individual leader, the situation, or some combination thereof (Grint, 2000). By contrast, discursive leadership rejects essences because leadership is an attribution and, very likely, a contested one at that. Discourse scholars like me depart from leadership psychologists' adherence to traditional science assumptions about realist conceptions of truth and representationalist views of knowledge. Influenced by the linguistic turn in philosophy, we ask instead that both perspectives be seen as alternative ways of knowing, talking about, and justifying leadership (Deetz, 1996; Rorty, 1982).

By recognizing discursive leadership from this vantage, we have a means by which to embrace what leadership psychologists might see as the elusive, unwieldy, mutable, and maddening error variance in leadership—in short, its protean tendencies. I am certainly not claiming that discursive leadership has all of the answers to leadership's mysteries, but neither do I believe that discursive leadership is just one more approach to leadership. It represents instead a foundation for many new lines of research into leadership with potentially important implications for helping practicing leaders and others better understand how they coconstruct reality. It also represents an opportunity for new dialogue with leadership psychologists—a dialogue that I hope continues long after this book.

There are several leadership psychologists who have been gracious enough to help me begin this dialogue in Chapter 8, the book's final chapter. They include Donna Chrobot-Mason, Steve Green, Jerry Hunt, Robert Liden, and Boas Shamir. Three discursive scholars, Kevin Barge, François Cooren, and Linda Putnam, also joined in. To all of them I am grateful for the effort that they put forth under a very tight deadline. I hope that the reader finds their comments as illuminating as I did.

Some of the reviewers for this book suggested different ways in which it might be read that I found quite useful. For example, if one prefers to start out with the details supplied through language and interaction (what I call little 'd' discourse), the chapters should be read in chronological order. However, others may prefer to start with the generalities associated with a Foucauldian view of Discourse (big 'D' Discourse) as a system of thought and way of talking about a subject. In that case, I would recommend reading Chapters 4 and 5 before Chapters 2 and 3. As the book reviewers also noted, the potential readers for this book will have varying levels of familiarity with the different forms of discourse analysis. Thus, I have included a set of appendixes organized by type of discourse analysis. They are designed for quick and easy reference. Finally, except for interview discourse, the transcribed interaction in this text follows the conventions of conversation analysis (see Appendix A1). For those who do not appreciate the level of detail this provides, readers may simply skim over the detailed markings.

Those who have read all or parts of my book along the way include Carey Adams, Kevin Barge, Mary Helen Brown, Mary Ann Danielson, Jennifer Butler Ellis, David Hoffman, Fred Jablin, Robert Liden, Patricia Parker, Paaige Turner, Patricia Witherspoon, and Ted Zorn. Thank you for the time and effort that you put into reviewing my work. I especially want to thank those scholars who gave me direct feedback. They include Kevin Barge, Suzanne Boys, Lisa Fisher, Angela Garcia, Donna Chrobot-Mason, François Cooren, Rich Kiley, Linda Putnam, Edna Rogers, Marcia Schoeni, Mathew Sheep, James Taylor, and Heather Zoller. You have shaped my thinking in ways too numerous to mention.

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NOTE

1. Scholars from political communication (Hart, 1984, 1987; Trent, 1978; Trent & Friedenberg, 2004), political science (Burns, 1978), educational administration (Gronn, 1982, 1983), and organizational development (Kets de Vries, 1990a, 1991, 2005) among others have also made important contributions to leadership study. However, the broadest comparison appears between leadership psychology and discursive leadership. Where relevant, work from these related fields is introduced into individual chapters.