

## **Editorial: What makes a good article for *Leadership*? Thoughts and views from our Associate Editors, Part 2**

Last year we published an editorial that included thoughts and views about what makes a good article for *Leadership* from three of our associate editors (see Edwards, Schedlitzki, Carroll, Larsson and Smolović Jones, 2024). As this editorial was so well received, we wanted to do the same this year and publish a part 2. This time we hear from three more associate editors –Sarah Robinson, Richard Bolden and Suze Wilson, as they too respond to the following questions:

1. What do you look for in a strong article, suitable for submission to *Leadership*?
2. What do you see as a critical contribution to leadership studies?
3. Can you highlight and/or explore some past articles published in *Leadership* that exemplify your views?

As you will see below, the Associate Editors push us towards key thinking around building and traversing bridges in leadership studies to enable areas to be uncovered that have been inaccessible previously. We are also taken back 20 years to the birth of the journal *Leadership* and are reminded of the original aims; from this we are encouraged to never stop questioning. Lastly, we are also pushed to think differently about leadership with exemplars of critical leadership scholarship. We hope that you enjoy the read once more!

*Sarah Robinson (Rennes School of Business, France) – bridging leadership*

I like papers that act as ‘bridges’, leading the reader across a chasm of knowledge - gorges, bays, cityscapes, choppy waters - to places otherwise inaccessible, providing the traveller access to and glimpses into other worlds, lives, contexts. Bridges are feats of engineering: they are carefully designed for their context and purpose. Bridges support - they may sway in the wind, frightening and shaking the traveller, but they are solid and bear

weight. Bridges bring hope, give opportunity, opening up worlds and allowing two-way traffic. Bridges can also save the traveller time, leading directly to the desired destination. Although this may have costs in missing more scenic circuitous routes, they take travellers where they might not otherwise have had time or patience to go. Building and traversing academic bridges is crucial for critical scholarship. Bridges lead readers across ontological, epistemological and methodological divides. They allow access to historical, social, economic, cultural, organisational contexts otherwise difficult to access. They challenge and support readers in engaging with the unfamiliar, the hidden, the taboo.

In *Leadership*, ‘bridging’ papers for me are those leading the reader to question and challenge how, where and by whom leadership is enacted; whose leadership is validated and whose is hidden or overlooked. Such papers present examples, allowing readers to learn from stories of leadership in unfamiliar contexts, making links to their own contexts and inspiring readers to marvel at courage and tenacity, but also to be shocked and horrified by leadership’s hidden dark sides.

Starting with horror, a very influential paper for me – which inspired my own research (on Royal Bank of Scotland [RBS]) - was Tourish and Vatcha’s (2005) ‘Charismatic Leadership and Corporate Cultism’. Drawing on a vast archive of material, the authors lead the reader into a ‘corporate cult’ built through charismatic leadership and developing a culture of conformity and fear. Shining a spotlight on the dark side of charismatic leadership and bridging it to the concept of cults, we can still see their portrait of this organization as a cautionary tale. I find the following extract particularly chilling, connecting well (20 years on) to contemporary leadership contexts both organizational and political: *‘Once people over-align themselves with a company, and invest excessive faith in the wisdom of its leaders, they are liable to lose their original sense of identity, tolerate ethical lapses they would have previously deplored, find a new and possibly corrosive value system taking root, and leave*

*themselves vulnerable to manipulation by the leaders of the organization, and to whom they have mistakenly entrusted many of their vital interests'* (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005: 476.)

Moving on, I also found inspiration in the paper by Elliott and Stead (2008): 'Learning from Leading Women's experience: Towards a Sociological Understanding.' Drawing on in-depth interviews with six leading women from diverse settings, it provides insights into women's leadership learning experiences. It makes a bridge between leadership outside traditional organizational settings and the established organizationally focused literature. In so doing the paper highlights the relational and contextual nature of women's leadership, turning the lens away from more individualized approaches to the study of leadership: '*The unfolding of women's experiences... acknowledges that leadership in practice is contextual, relational and draws its inspiration from beyond traditional boundaries [their leadership is]... anchored in a dynamic and contemporary interplay of upbringing, environment, focus and alliances and networks.*' (Elliott and Stead, 2008: 177)

In continuing the theme of leadership as both contextual and relational, there are many bridging papers that lead me far from my own context and I applaud *Leadership* for this diversity. One that sticks out for me in its empirical, methodological and contextual richness is Forster, Palmer and Barnett (2015) 'Karanga mai ra: Stories of Māori women as leaders'. Drawing on research with Māori women in environmental sustainability, employment rights and sport, it makes use of the Māori practice pūrākau as a story-telling methodology to make heard 'the plurality and diversity of untold and often silenced stories of Māori women in leadership'. It reveals 'three interrelated and fluid narratives about leadership that advance our understanding of Māori women and leadership', namely leadership as influence; leadership in context; and performance of leadership (Forster, Palmer and Barnett, 2015: 339).

There are many more exemplars of great ‘bridging’ papers, including Murphy (2024), Case, Connell, and Jones (2016), Evans and Sinclair (2015), and Watson, Case and Pryce (2024). All the papers I have mentioned in this piece bridge divides and provide access to leadership in historical, social, cultural, organisational and political contexts otherwise inaccessible. They are supported by impressive pillars of scholarship: in leading the unfamiliar reader to new understandings, they link both internally and externally and invite the reader to make further connections of their own.

*Richard Bolden (University of the West of England, UK) – never stop questioning!*

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the journal *Leadership*. The inaugural editorial set out aims to: (1) ‘Facilitate new ways of thinking about leadership’, (2) ‘Stimulate interest in new methods and theories of leadership research’, (3) ‘Develop a reputation as a leading scholarly journal at “the cutting edge” of the theory and practice of leadership and organization’, and (4) ‘Provide an international focus for the journal’ (Collinson and Grint, 2005: 8-9). Two decades later these remain the underpinning criteria for the journal and are illustrated through the breadth, depth, and diversity of scholarship within the 96 issues published from 2005-2024.

When assessing the suitability of articles submitted to the journal I and fellow editors/reviewers consider a range of criteria, including those outlined in Table 1. Whilst many of these are similar to what would be expected of articles in any high-quality peer reviewed academic journal, the issue of criticality (point 1) is perhaps the most significant and distinctive for those looking to publish their work in *Leadership*.

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Insert Table 1 here

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In the inaugural editorial, Collinson and Grint (2005: 7) outline the ambition for ‘setting the leadership agenda’ through ‘interdisciplinary, diverse and critical analyses of leadership processes in contemporary organizations, sectors and societies.’ This commitment was reiterated a decade later by then editor Dennis Tourish (2015) in his editorial that sought to reaffirm the ‘critical ethos of leadership’. In this article (that I highly recommend to anyone looking to publish in the journal) he outlined three main reasons why submissions are desk rejected: (1) failing to engage with critical literature on leadership, (2) failure to consider how findings might help us consider ‘leadership theory and practice in a fresh light’ (ibid: 138), or (3) failing to ‘engage with leadership theory [in order] to offer truly generalizable ideas’ (ibid: 138).

Whilst the importance of criticality is consistently re-iterated by editors and reviewers the journal continues to receive many submissions that fail to demonstrate this, which in large part explains the high rejection rate at both the pre and post review stage. There are several contributory factors, including (a) authors who submit manuscripts without taking the time to align their paper with the aims/scope of the journal, and (b) authors who fail to grasp quite what is meant by being ‘critical’ and/or struggle to weave this into their writing and/or analysis.

*Leadership* aligns itself with the field that has come to be known as ‘Critical Leadership Studies’ (CLS): ‘[a] broad, diverse and heterogeneous [range of] perspectives that share a concern to critique the power relations and identity constructions through which leadership dynamics are often reproduced, frequently rationalized, sometimes resisted and occasionally transformed’ (Collinson, 2011: 181). CLS seeks to expose and scrutinise the assumptions and agendas that underpin leadership practice in and beyond organisations in order to challenge

hegemonic power structures and outline more inclusive alternatives. Whilst we do not expect all authors to share the same values or philosophies (indeed pluralism and diversity of perspectives are actively encouraged) articles should go beyond descriptive, surface-level analyses that fail to explore the complex and contested nature of leadership in contemporary organisations and society. As such, papers that use existing theoretical frameworks, narratives and/or metrics, with no critical evaluation of their applicability in different contexts, tend to either be rejected or to require major revisions before they can be published.

Fundamentally, the journal contributes to the field of CLS by encouraging us to think differently about leadership theory, practice, research, policy and/or development – something largely achieved through questioning and challenging beliefs and practices. This is not simply an academic pursuit but one that opens opportunities for re-energising and re-configuring leadership in groups, organisations and society. To address these issues authors are also encouraged to ‘write differently about leadership’ (Tourish, 2017) and to do ‘leadership research that matters’ (Tourish, 2019).

Whilst there is no set template for how this is to be done, past issues contain many fine examples of work that skilfully address these criteria. Most manuscripts are published as ‘standard articles’, which include empirical studies, reviews, case studies and theory development. Exemplary contributions include Robinson and Renshaw’s (2022) innovative study of leadership-as-practice; Kjellström, Stålné and Törnblom’s (2020) synthesis and conceptual framework for leadership development; Ladkin’s (2017) analysis of the election of Donald Trump in 2016; and Kelly and Nicholson’s (2022) study on ‘ancestral leadership’. Each of these papers makes a distinctive contribution to leadership theory, research, practice and/or development.

The journal also publishes ‘Leading Questions’ articles, which provides a more flexible format for exploring provocative questions and issues. Exemplary contributions include

Hughes' (2016) critique of John Kotter's work on leading change, and Grint and Holt's (2011) analysis of the questions/agendas underpinning 'Total Place', 'Big Society' and local leadership. The journal also hosts debates and discussions – such as Margaret Collinson (2018a, 2018b) and Joe Raelin et al.'s (2018) exchange on leadership-as-practice – and has recently introduced a 'Media reviews' section for commentary on contemporary issues (see, for example, Grint, 2024, Kellerman, 2024).

I hope this provides some inspiration and encouragement to those seeking to publish their work in this journal. As final guidance for those looking to enhance the criticality of their work can I suggest following Rudyard Kipling's (1902) advice: 'I keep six honest serving-men (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When And How and Where and Who...' – never stop questioning!

*Suze Wilson (Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand) - gimme all the feels!*

Criticality is not a formula, rather there are many routes authors can take to situate their work within the 'broad church' that is Critical Leadership Studies (CLS). To help illustrate this variety, below I consider 4 examples that draw on diverse disciplines, theories and methods of inquiry to facilitate thinking differently about leadership. In considering these I also extend on Richard's criteria above by suggesting that the kinds of powerful *affects* a paper can produce on a reader is also a way of fostering a critical contribution.

Joshua Haydn's (2024) recent article examines Václav Havel and his compatriots' attempts to resist authoritarian rule in Czechoslovakia, often by recourse to artistic endeavours. Rather than a conventional story of the hero's triumph against adversity, the narrative also considers Havel's weaknesses and failures, along with the vital influence of many others in this collective effort. Haydn draws on archival material, interview data and philosophy, deploying Marcel's ethics of hope to frame the analysis. His work is 'critical' in

a variety of ways. For instance, he engages with critical discussions about authentic leadership (e.g. Ford & Harding, 2011) and situates this project with reference to his critical stance on aspects of our contemporary context, pointedly arguing “leadership theory could benefit from the historical lessons of people who endured with hope amidst unfreedom” (p. 315). Reading this, as I did, in the aftermath of Trump’s re-election was not merely informative and stimulating in an intellectual sense, although it was certainly that. It was also politically energising to be reminded, yet again, that hope is not merely a positive emotion but, rather, can be constituted as a political, ethical force for good. It is a paper I stepped away from feeling fortified in my ability to cope with trends and events I otherwise find deeply distressing and disempowering. It is, in other words, a paper with transformative potential.

Helena Liu and Christopher Baker’s (2015) analysis of media representations of the philanthropic activities of some Australian business leaders is another fine example of the kind of work the journal seeks. They analyse both text and imagery to show how these media accounts subtly but powerfully reinforce white power and privilege in how leaders and leadership is presented. Their overall aim is to expose the “silent association of whiteness with discourses of heroic leadership” (p 421), because only in so doing can we start to forge genuinely inclusive ways of theorizing, developing and practicing leadership. By problematizing and denaturalising the racialised character of much leadership theory and practice, this work is very clearly rooted in key strategies of critical scholarship (Collinson, 2011). Reading this as a Pakeha (New Zealander of European origin) generates the affect of slowing me down, enabling reflection on the many ways in which I benefit from whiteness, while also empowering me to better understand its many mechanisms, tactics and effects. It is a paper that leaves me feeling I can see and grasp more about the world I inhabit than I did before and which opens up new opportunities through which I can seek to be not just



passively non-racist but actively anti-racist – in other words it, too, has a transformative potential.

Joanne Ciulla's analysis of Mandela (2014) offers another example that challenges what might be assumed by the term 'critical'. She demonstrates how in-depth biographical research can move us beyond the mythologies that often surround exceptional leaders to a richer and more complex understanding of them. In her hands, Mandela thus emerges as a far more ambiguous and indeed more fully human figure, one with character flaws and who is unable to control how others perceive him. She cautions us to remember that "Social scientists look for regularities in leaders, whereas history and biography reveal the interesting irregularities about them. Leadership studies needs to understand both" (p. 195). Yet because Mandela is so venerated, indeed he was a hero of mine long before I started thinking more critically about leadership, I recall that the first time I read this paper it had the affect of reminding me of that younger, more naïve version of myself. Yet even though my hero was no longer sitting comfortably on a pedestal, Ciulla's account made it possible to see that he was more like any one of the rest of us than I had previously dared to consider. The transformative potential of this paper was to leave me feeling profoundly encouraged that a great impact can be helped along even by deeply flawed leaders, especially if the cause they are pursuing is noble and just.

Alvesson's (2019) analysis of 8 common problems with how leadership studies are undertaken is the final example I consider. While his primary focus in this paper is to identify and critique conventional approaches to studying and theorizing leadership, he also proposes ways of addressing those concerns. A lesson to be taken here is that critique alone is rarely if ever enough. Instead, critical analysis is what enables us to get to a point where we can identify what needs to change and why that is so – it is inherently transformative in its orientation. Because Alvesson addresses issues in the field as a whole, the theoretical and

methodological contribution of the paper is broad and it offers practical guidance for scholars about the pitfalls to avoid. However, another reason I highlight it is because it offers an example of another positive affect an article can have – reading it makes me laugh out loud. Alvesson does this by steering just off the line of being overtly sarcastic in how he voices his critique such that it remains a respectable scholarly work. Yet, even so, his fury at what he clearly sees as being so much wasted, misdirected effort seeps through. I can imagine him pounding his keyboard - it is a feeling I know and relate to - and it fills me with laughter and delight to know that very feeling has the potential to produce work of such clarity, rigour and value.

While all these examples are informative, rigorous scholarship, my proposition is that part of their criticality and contribution also rests on their affective qualities, and the transformative potential those feelings can elicit. Life *is* short, so I want to read work that both informs *and* moves me in some way. Ahmed (2014) argues feelings have a ‘sticky’ quality to them, hence whether a work makes me feel fortified, enraged, contemplative, emboldened, chastened, delighted, or any other powerful feeling, if it can produce such affects then it will stay with me. It will transform something in an enduring way about how I understand leadership, myself and the world I inhabit. And, as writers, surely eliciting that kind of impact must be our most deeply felt desire?

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Again, we hope these views, thoughts and provocations are useful for us all in scoping out future articles for the journal. As before, we hope that, for those new to the journal, it sets out some guiding principles in developing papers before submission to give them a greater chance to be reviewed and eventually published in *Leadership*. Please remember that, as an Editorial Board for the journal, we are always happy to discuss work on leadership studies

and how it might fit the journal and its community. Finally, we wish you well in your research and writing and look forward to receiving more excellent contributions to the journal and the field of leadership studies.

**Sarah, Richard, Suze, Gareth and Doris**

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Table 1 – Key criteria for articles submitted to Leadership

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Consideration(s)</b>
1. <b>Criticality</b>	Does the article demonstrate critical awareness of underlying assumptions/agendas around processes of leadership and a degree of reflexivity on behalf of the author(s)?
2. <b>Accessibility</b>	Is the article engaging and accessible to an informed and engaged audience?
3. <b>Focus</b>	Is the article aligned with the aims and scope of the journal and/or topic of the special issue?
4. <b>Literature</b>	Does the article engage with relevant theory, research, policy and/or practice; is there sufficient attempt to engage with existing sources/debates within the journal/wider field of Leadership Studies?
5. <b>Contextualisation</b>	Is the source of evidence/examples sufficiently clear; is consideration given to the relevance for a global audience; does the author(s) acknowledge limits around the generalisability of findings/conclusions?
6. <b>Methodology</b>	Is the methodology appropriate for the study; is sampling/approach clear; is analysis process explained?
7. <b>Findings</b>	Are the findings presented in a clear and engaging way; is it clear how themes/issues have been identified/analysed?
8. <b>Contribution</b>	Does the article make a clear contribution to theory, research, practice; are there recommendations/implications for policy makers, practitioners, leadership developers/educators and/or researchers?
9. <b>Format</b>	Does the article follow guidelines around the preparation of manuscripts, such as font, spelling, referencing, length, figures/tables, abstract/keywords?
10. <b>Originality</b>	Does the article make a novel contribution; does it address an important issue; is it timely/relevant?