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Leadership

A Critical Text

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# Contents

13

An Overview of the Leadership Discourses

Chapter Structure

- **Introduction**
- **Discourse Summary**
- **Discourses in Practice**
- **Working Across the Discourses**
- **Layering Discourses**
- **Global Leadership Discourses**
- **Conclusion**

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the leadership discourses, and describes how they relate to each other and to leadership practice. Figure 13.1 offers a visual overview of how these discourses emerged and dominated over the past century. Each evolved due to different historical, social and economic contexts, and each remains present and informs leadership practice today.

Most practitioners don't work consciously with the discourses that inform their practice. They draw on taken-for-granted assumptions and follow intuitively what they think 'normative' leadership is, and their own preferences within this limited range. Bringing the discourses to the surface allows practitioners to actively reflect, reason and choose which leadership approaches they desire and need, and
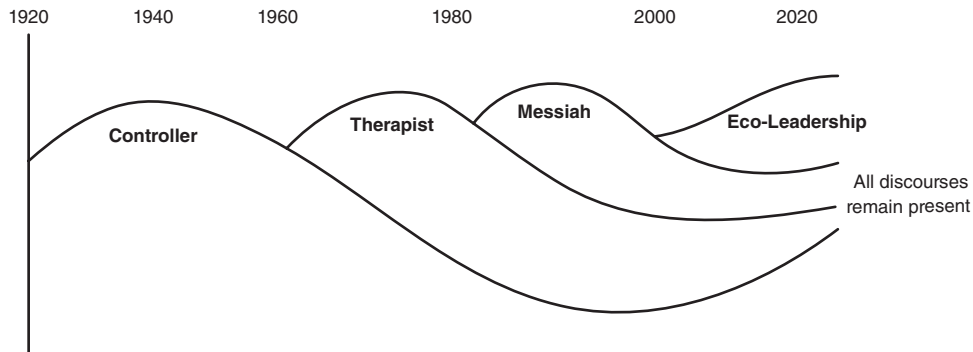
Figure 13.1   The four discourses of leadership

why they are entrapped in some and not others. There are no right or wrong discourses, but each has strengths and limitations, and if a single discourse becomes dominant and zealously used in an organization, it may become problematic.

A single discourse may clearly dominate different sectors, organizations and departments, but they all co-exist to different degrees. Individuals usually draw on different leadership approaches in practice, even when they claim and believe they are attached to one discourse. In leadership practice, the co-existence of discourses usually means one of two things and usually both:

1. A leadership synthesis of skills and culture to maximize organizational performance and enhance employee engagement is occurring.
2. Competing and conflicting leadership approaches create tensions, often damaging the organization.

I will now offer a brief summary of each discourse, before addressing how they operate together in practice.

Discourse Summary

Table 13.1 below summarizes the discourses, followed by a short synopsis on each.

Table 13.1 Summary of the four discourses of leadership

	Controller	Therapist	Messiah	Eco-Leader
Organizational metaphor	Machine The organization functions like a machine, requiring inputs and outputs, and maintenance. Employees are functional parts of the machine.	Clinic The organization is like a therapeutic clinic, with employees requiring psychological support and motivation to perform well. Personal growth is linked to organizational growth.	Community The Messiah leads the company like community with a vision. Employees put faith in the leader, work with shared purpose and feel they belong. Conformist cultures, can emerge in these companies. The leader develops strong cultures, with all putting brand & company before individuals.	Ecosystem The organization is an *ecosystem within ecosystems*. The leader looks both ways: internally at the organizational network and externally at the wider ecosystems (social, technology, and natural). Making holistic connections enables emergent capacity and adaptivity to disruptions.
Leader's focus	Body Controller leader focuses on the body to maximize productivity. Behaviourist incentives and coercion used to lead.	Psyche Therapist leader focuses on the psyche and emotions, to motivate.	Soul Messiah leader works with the soul. Followers align themselves to the vision, a cause greater than the self (the company). The Messiah is a role model, linking success with personal salvation and happiness.	System Eco-leaders lead by facilitating the whole system. They make spaces for leadership to flourish, connect people in the network, and develop communication feedback loops enabling systemic self-regulation.
Leadership approach	Maximize Efficiency Maximizes efficiency utilizing scientific rationalism to improve productivity. Transactional engagement with employees.	People and Profit Maximizes production though increased motivation, personal growth and teamwork.	Clear Vision, Strong Cultures Leader creates strong cultures, and loyal followers, behind their clear vision for the company's success.	Connectivity and Interdependence Leaders recognize interdependencies within and beyond the organization. Connectivity creates an adaptive organization that addresses social and environmental challenges, and generates business success.

Table 13.1 (continued)

	Controller	Therapist	Messiah	Eco-Leader
Perceptions of employees	Resources	Clients	Disciples	Distributed Leaders
	Employees are human resources, 'cogs-in-the-machine', functional and replaceable.	Leaders coach, motivate and support staff as therapeutic clients. Self-actualization takes place through reparation and creativity at work.	Employees are loyal 'disciples'. They admire and identify with the leader. The individual creates an identity within a community of believers, e.g. 'Googlers'.	Employees are distributed leaders, part of a network, with agency and autonomy, yet also part of an interdependent greater whole.
Control	Bureaucratic	Humanistic	Culture Control	Self-regulating Systems
	Control via rules, standards, clear tasks, targets and measurement of productivity and performance.	Therapeutic governance. Control by emotional management and close psychological monitoring, e.g. psychometrics	Workers internalize the cultural norms which become an organizational ideal: 'Apple is a great company'. Policing is via self-surveillance and peer pressure.	Control resides in the system itself. The leader facilitates through feedback loops and boundary maintenance. The ecosystem requires resources and nurturing to self-regulate.
Ethical stance	Utilitarian	Humanism	Collectivism	Sustainability
	Ethical neutrality: what matters is efficiency to produce success.	People matter! For company success and for the ethical good of society.	Followers should put the company and collective will first. Ethics then depend on each charismatic leader's moral stance. Some have a strong ethical vision, others are exploitative.	People, Profit, Planet: sustainable business models, social responsibility and environmental sustainability.

Discourse 1: Controller Leadership Discourse – 'Control resources to maximize efficiency'

The first leadership discourse that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, epitomized by Frederick Taylor's scientific management, is the Controller leader. The organization metaphor is the machine, and Controller Leadership meant that workers were treated like 'cogs-in-a-machine'. Leadership focuses on controlling resources (including human resources) and making the machine as efficient as possible to maximize production. This discourse is born from scientific rationalism and the industrial revolution, and its ethical stance is utilitarian, with the belief that progress comes through applying science and rationality.

The Controller leader operates as a technocrat leader, focusing on efficiency, output and productivity. This leadership approach provided huge gains, enabling mass production, cheap access to goods and raised standards of living during the first half of the twentieth century. Controller Leadership was critiqued from the outset for being inhuman in its mechanistic approach to workers, and for 'instrumental rationalism' where the ends (to make more profit through efficiencies) became more important than the means (how this was achieved). This has led to explicit immorality and less direct forms of systemic violence to people and the natural world. Controller leadership migrated from factories to offices in the 1950s, bringing bureaucratic structure and discipline to the modern office. Controller Leadership is important in most organizations, and works well when balanced with other discourses, for example in finance and sales, knowing your numbers and hitting targets is essential.

Leading and Controlling by Numbers

The Controller Leadership discourse remains today, especially in manufacturing sectors across the globe, and it has undergone a revival in knowledge economies. The rise of an audit culture has meant targets and measurement become the overriding mechanism of control. Rationalization of public services, national audits by the IMF, and performance management, reflect the rise of Controller Leadership through numbers. The audit culture produces a new realm of managers/experts of measurement and data collection, and a new bureaucracy is created. Control by numbers also means reductionism. Quantification doesn't reflect complex economic and social dynamics, and it focuses on what can be measured, rather than to take a systemic and strategic view of the effects of all the parts on the whole. There are however success stories and Controller Leadership is an important part of organizational leadership. Low cost airlines and supermarkets are examples of the successful use of Controller Leadership, providing cheap and efficient services, and it is also very important in organizing

food production and healthcare, reducing unnecessary costs and time. Yet always the question of dehumanizing the organization must be addressed and balanced with Therapist Leadership approaches. The wider questions of the impact on society and the environment, however, are not addressed in this discourse. The digital age is fast bringing new forms of Controller Leadership through initiatives such as Algorithmic Management, which offer new efficiencies and new potential for dehumanization.

Discourse 2: Therapist Leadership Discourse – 'Happy workers are more productive workers'

The Therapist Leadership discourse emerged from the 'therapeutic culture' that pervaded western society. This leadership discourse emerged initially from the post-war period, reflecting the desire for less authoritarian and controlling leaders and a more democratic society. Individualism and expressing feelings became celebrated, and the expansion of choice (including 'the pill' that revolutionized a woman's capacity to choose when and if she had a child, and therefore also revolutionized sex). Personal growth and a new generation feeling an entitlement (even a duty) to be happy pervaded the 1960s and 1970s (Furedi, 2003: Lasch, 1979; Rieff, 1966). This new therapeutic culture entered the workplace, whereby leaders and managers as authority figures, were being replaced by more caring and emotionally intelligent types. Many employees changed their expectation from work being a mundane transactional experience, to the expectation that work should be fulfilling. The Therapist leader emerged from the Human Potential and Human Relations movements and triumphed in the late 1960s, early 1970s, mirroring the counter-culture rebellion against authority epitomized by the Controller leader in the factory and bureaucratic office. The focus on personal growth and self-actualization was readily translated to the workplace, and used by leaders to motivate individuals and teams, through job redesign and job enhancement to make work more satisfying and produce team cohesion.

Supporters of Therapist Leadership believed that happier workers would be more motivated and productive than coerced and explicitly controlled workers. Therapist Leadership was more progressive and democratic, and aimed to overcome the worker alienation that occurred under Controller Leadership. No longer could a manager send out work orders and ignore the team and relational dynamics. Work became a site for personal growth and achievement, a place to create meaning and identity. Under the leader as Therapist, people 'went to work to work on themselves' (Rose, 1990). Personnel departments were established, and a huge training and development industry flourished.

Changing work patterns such as the rise of the knowledge worker meant employees brought more of their cognitive and subjective selves to work, which created a new demand on leaders to develop the skills to work with subjectivity, relationships and emotions. As the recent rise in executive coaching reveals, the Therapist discourse is thriving. Leaders are coached to become more self-aware, to fulfil their human and leadership potential, and to use coaching skills themselves to become more emotionally intelligent and authentic when leading others.

However, this discourse lost its potency in the early 1980s, especially at more senior levels, as it could no longer deliver the economic benefits across global businesses. The Asian Tiger economies were outperforming the West, drawing on different leadership approaches. Therapist Leadership is about people, motivating individuals and teams, and therefore remains important particularly at middle management and team leadership levels, but it does not equip leaders to be strategic, to work with a culture or lead systemically, creating adaptive organizations.

Discourse 3: Messiah Leadership Discourse – 'Visionary leaders and strong cultures'

Arising in the early 1980s, Messiah Leadership discourse provided charismatic leadership and vision in the face of a turbulent and uncertain environment. The Messiah appeals to individuals and society, promising salvation from the chaotic world in which a lack of control is experienced and where traditional community is diminished. As the workplace rises in importance as a site of community, replacing institutions such as the church and family, so the corporate leader replaces the priesthood as a social character of influence (Steve Jobs for example). Companies wanted employees to bring their whole self to work in order to gain competitive advantage, and therefore the Messiah leaders created strong (conformist) organizational cultures, where workers would be totally committed (compliant) and loyal to the leader and company, yet bring their creativity and full energy to work.

The Messiah character (epitomized by the transformational leader) leads by offering a vision to which followers can aspire. Their focus is on shaping the organizational culture, as control of employees relies on 'culture control' thereby removing the need for close supervision. Flattened hierarchies removed costly layers of bureaucratic management, which led to more adaptive workforces. Whilst open-plan offices created on the one hand more open-communication between previously siloed workers, on the other it enabled culture control through peer surveillance. The worker was never absent from the gaze

of their colleagues, if their desk was empty at 5pm when others were working until 7pm, they would be considered slackers and not committed to the cause.

Messiah leaders hold a lot of power, and claim to be able to transform followers, thereby disempowering them. Brand engagement is not just for customers. Coca-Cola asks its employees to 'Be the Brand', clearly attempting to merge the individual and company identity. The rise in leader earnings graphically represents the increase of perceptions and expectations of leaders since the Messiah discourse arrived:

> Since 1978, CEO pay at American firms has risen 725 percent, more than 127 times faster than worker pay over the same time period, according to new data from the Economic Policy Institute. (Waldron, 2012)

Visionary leadership is important, as are strong and aligned cultures, and Messiah Leadership often begins well, but sustainable success is the real problem. These companies aim to create harmony by gaining employees' loyalty and cultural alignment, and in doing so they eliminate difference as naysayers are socially disciplined by peers and either conform or are expelled. Commitment, loyalty and strong cultures built around a clear vision are important, but there is a tipping point whereby strong cultures become a benign form of totalitarian control. Casey (1995) refers to corporations with 'designer employees' where employees are so over-identified and colonized by the workplace culture that they no longer have the capacity to self-reflect or critique it, and they become 'capitulated selves'. These corporate cultures produce 'cult-like cultures' that produce 'groupthink' that leads to dysfunction, bad decision-making and even company collapse. Messiah Leadership is about talented leaders who can communicate clear purpose and vision, and have the capacity to mobilize people with their energy, organizing skills and thought leadership. These leaders are important at all levels in organizations, and especially at the top. Yet when Messiah leaders slip into grandiosity, hubris and omnipotence dangers lurk.

Critics claim that Messiah Leadership is an imaginary narrative, cynically created to bolster the image of companies, boost stocks and shares and keep employees compliant by creating a fantasy ideal, that is paradoxically controlling and comforting. Yet in my experience Messiah Leadership does exist, as some individuals do have special leadership qualities, they are strategic, can articulate and communicate purpose, and to some small extent can influence organizational cultures. But special leaders only become Messiah leaders in the conscious and unconscious minds of others. Corporate culture delights in telling stories of the latest Messiah leader, business schools and management

books and journals love both a hero and a villain. Shareholders, stakeholders and company employees are all complicit in turning a strong leader into the fantasy of a Messiah leader. Messiah Leadership only works well when the leader and stakeholders around them, together contain the fantasy of a leader who is omnipotent. A talented leader working in the Messiah discourse, needs a strong leadership team that is balanced by being influenced by the other three leadership discourses.

Discourse 4: Eco-Leadership Discourse – 'Connectivity, networks and (ethics)'

The Eco-Leadership discourse provides a new discourse fit for the beginning of the digital age. Changing the organizational metaphor from the twentieth-century ideal of the efficient machine, to being an *'ecosystem within ecosystems'* transforms the way organizations are structured and led. Leading an ecosystem requires a radical distributing of leadership to create responsive organizations fit for our times. Leadership needs to shift from vertical to lateral, i.e. from hierarchy and centralization to embracing lateral and networked dynamics that can produce innovation and adapt to disruption at speed. Eco-Leadership also needs to embrace ethics, to change the purpose of companies from being closed systems that make profits, to being open-systems whose successes are inevitably contingent on a healthy society and healthy environment.

Heifetz writes that 'Adaptive challenges require solutions that lie outside the current way of operating' (1994: 76), and the Eco-Leadership discourse has emerged to address the adaptive challenges of our time, taking a systemic and ethical position. Eco-Leadership takes a more holistic and networked perspective of organizations in line with the networked society in which we live.

Partial forms of Eco-Leadership exist such as commercial Eco-Leadership whereby the connectivity and networks of the digital age are used for commercial purposes, without an ethical stance. This is partial Eco-Leadership because it doesn't embrace the holistic belief in interdependency, which requires accounting for the environment and for the social impact beyond making profits. Eco-Leadership is about connectivity, interdependence and sustainability underpinned by an ethical, socially responsible stance. Eco-leaders see organizations as an interconnected living network, with virtual and physical flows between humans, nature and technologies. The task of such leaders is to think spatially, to see patterns and connections, and create a network of leaders distributed throughout the organization. Leadership from the edge of organizations enables a faster reaction to changes taking place in the external environment.

Ethics and Eco-Leadership: A Paradigm Change

Eco-Leadership means renegotiating purpose, i.e. what is valued and what success means for an organization. It addresses a paradigm change, rather than fixes a problem. Delivering growth and short-term shareholder value is no longer acceptable as the sole measurement of value and success. Eco-Leadership is to widen the concept of value beyond financial numbers to include valuing human creativity and dignity, the natural environment, aesthetics, local communities and the wellbeing of employees, stakeholders, customers and clients. The qualities of Eco-Leadership are:

1. Connectivity and interdependence
2. Systemic ethics
3. Leadership spirit
4. Organizational belonging

The Eco-Leadership approach doesn't overshadow the other discourses but encompasses them. It acts as a meta-discourse (see Box 34), offering an overview, strategically providing the organization with the right balance of leadership, and encouraging diversity to utilize different people's skills and assumptions to create an adaptive whole.

Box 34   Eco-Leadership as a Meta-Discourse

Eco-Leadership acts as a meta-discourse within organizations, influencing how the four discourses work together. Eco-leaders identify the appropriate leadership approaches within each department, and within the whole organization.

As Figure 13.2 shows, Eco-Leadership is both inside and outside the boundaries of an organization. Internally it acts as one of the four discourses, and as a meta-discourse guides how the others are utilized. Externally it embraces the wider issues that arise in the ecosystems made up of nature, technology and society.

The dotted lines indicate how the boundaries between an organization and the wider ecosystems are more open and blurred than our 'normative' constructs of organizations allow for. The 'structural coupling' between organizations and the wider environment cannot be ignored (Maturana and Varela, 1987).

As a meta-discourse, the Eco-leader also guides the organization in a wider context, facilitating emergent strategies to address challenges and grasp new opportunities.

Figure 13.2   'Ecosystems within ecosystems'
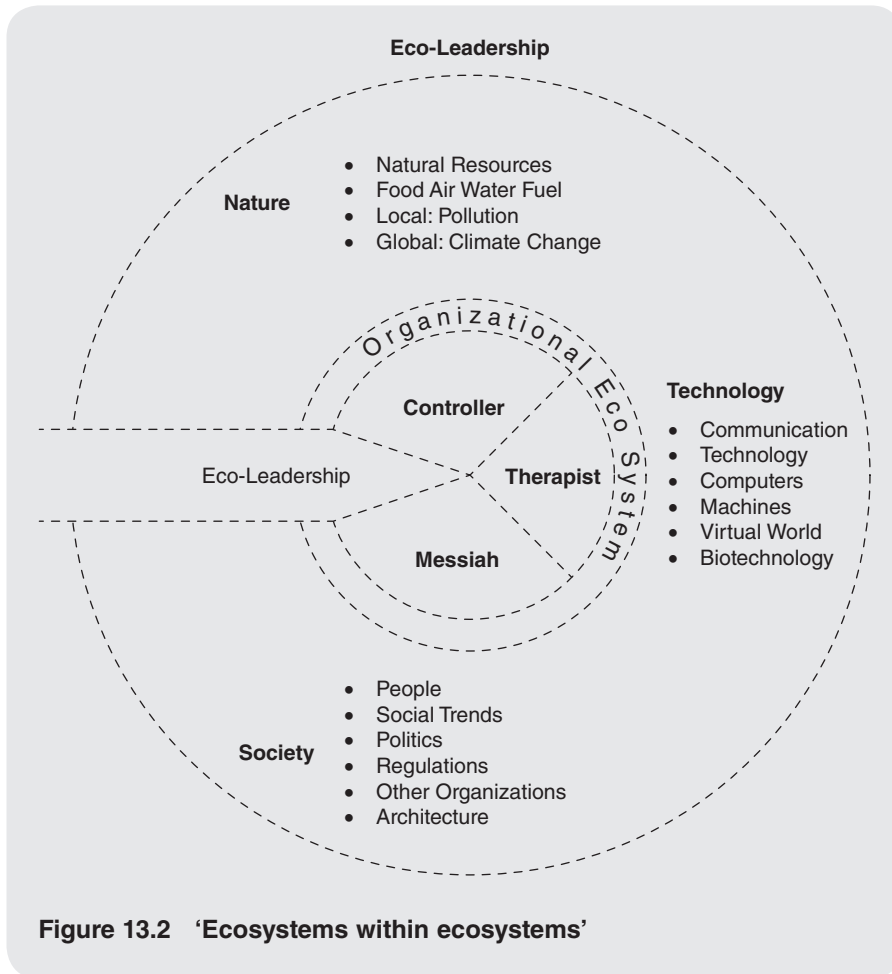
Discourses in Practice

Organizations reveal how the leadership discourses are practised through their cultures, language, texts and symbols. Figure 13.3 shows how the four leadership discourses shape organizations.

Rarely are single discourses so dominant that any one leadership approach is 100% pure. The leadership discourses always co-exist and different patterns of discourses produce different leadership cultures and practices. If the Messiah discourse is the most dominant, the way this plays out will be very different depending on how strongly represented the other discourses are.

If the Messiah discourse is strongly partnered by a strong Controller discourse, the leadership may lean towards authoritarianism for example. Whereas if the Messiah discourse is partnered by a strong Eco-Leadership discourse, the results could be a very dynamic and progressive leadership culture.

There are always tensions that arise when leadership discourses meet and overlap. They can complement each other or be in conflict with each other and each situation is unique. The approaches either integrate, merge and adapt, or they contradict each other.

Having explored how these discourses work for over a decade, some surprises have occurred. Initially we assumed that Eco-Leadership and Controller Leadership would be polarized opposites and create a lot of tension. For example I often work with organizations who pursue an Eco-Leadership approach, but cannot get the pyramid of Controller out of their unconscious minds and revert to it unintentionally, especially when under pressure. However, if a company radically want to reduce its waste to become zero carbon, a wise Eco-leader will harness Controller Leadership to control energy consumption and focus on waste reduction in an aligned and useful way.

Personal Valency Towards Leadership Discourses

Individual leaders and leadership teams rarely consciously choose their preferred leadership discourses, but are drawn to them unknowingly. They follow the discourse that is normative to them. All discourses are always present, but which ones are more dominant depends on personal and social contexts, history, geography and culture, and also the specific demands of the workplace. A bank will demand something different from a hospital, yet within the hospital the finance department might have similar discourse patterns to the bank.

Individuals internalize an 'idealized' leadership stance, which relates to their social location, and their personal experience of leadership, beginning from their parenting. In psychoanalytic terms this process is called 'valency', whereby individuals carry within themselves a propensity towards certain group/leadership cultures (Bion, 1961). For example, if a person has a very strict mother or father, or they were brought up in a strict religious culture or a harsh boarding school, this will influence the leader they identify with later in life. They may assume that all leaders should be Controller leaders, as this is the norm for them. Alternatively they may internalize a hatred for authoritarian and controlling leadership, leading them to seek a

reparative leadership model such as the Therapist discourse. Individuals who were doted on by a parent or who idealize another early role model, may identify with the Messiah discourse, aspiring and relating to special leaders who represent their idealized image from childhood. Families, schools, church, workplaces and other institutional settings with clear leadership characters and authority figures usually inform our personal valency for leadership. Organizations too have valences (unconscious preferences) towards leadership discourses; this depends on their history and culture, their product/service, their place and their cycle of development.
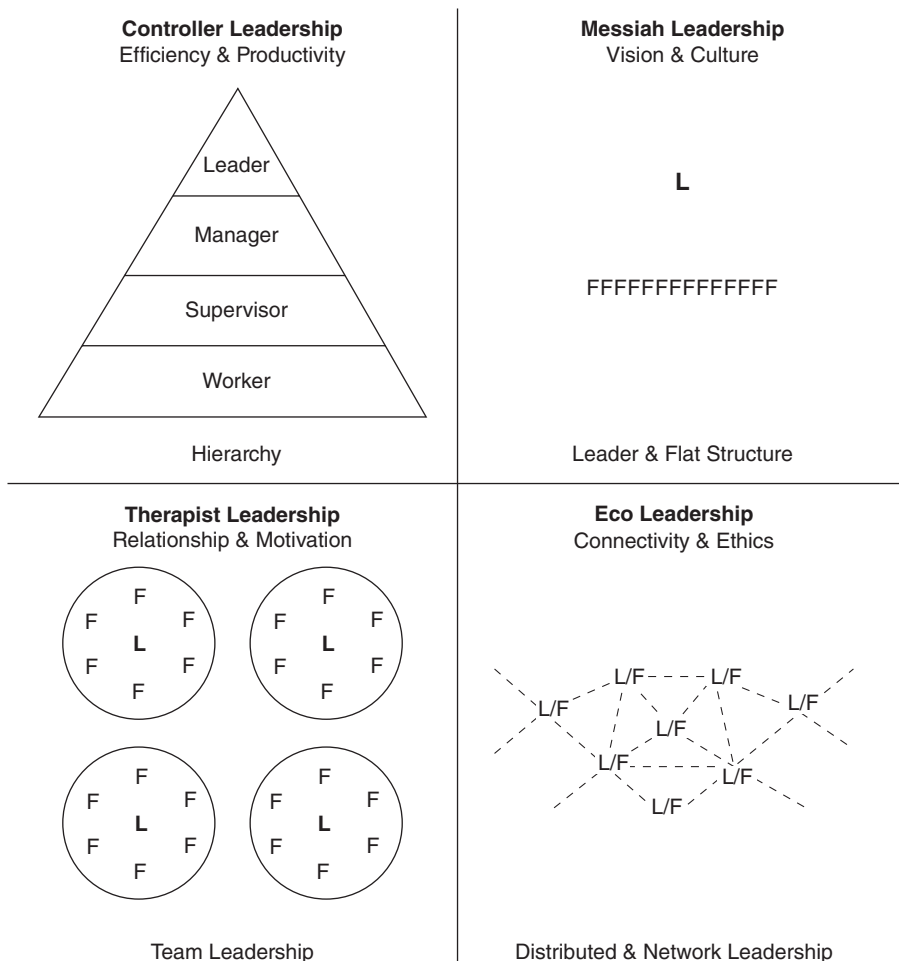
Controller Leadership Efficiency & Productivity	**Messiah Leadership** Vision & Culture
Leader Manager Supervisor Worker Hierarchy	**L** FFFFFFFFFFFFFF Leader & Flat Structure
Therapist Leadership Relationship & Motivation	**Eco Leadership** Connectivity & Ethics
Team Leadership	Distributed & Network Leadership

Figure 13.3   Organizational forms

Contexts and Contingencies Impacting on Leadership Discourses

When leadership is enacted in practice, the discourses can change due to external pressures. Individual and collective leaders can be pulled by competing discourses. Former British prime minister Tony Blair embodied the Messiah discourse. He was passionate, very persuasive, and held a strong vision attempting to modernize the culture of his political party, the country and beyond. Yet his default position was Controller Leadership setting a target-and-audit culture of micro-management in the public sector for example, which was driven in a harsh and unrelenting way. Blair's dilemma represented two internal conflicts: his own and that of his 'socialist' party. His own conflict was between his personal preference Messiah Leadership and his competing leanings towards the Controller Leadership discourse 'to get things done'. The other pressure came from the party, and the classic conflict of socialist politics, always torn between utopian idealism and hope (Messiah), and the need to be pragmatic and deal with realities on the ground (Controller). In literal terms it is the tension between the *Communist Manifesto* and Lenin's essay 'What Is To Be Done?'. These two discourses, when applied together at the extreme, are very dangerous: the Messiah creates a loyal and committed followership and applies Control to impose their vision. This became extreme with Stalin and Mao, who established a cult around themselves and imposed the ultimate Controller methods with terrible human costs. In the 1980s even Blair's diluted 'third way' politics faced this challenge: he was the 'new Messiah', who could save the public sector after years of decline under Thatcherite policies, yet the pragmatic need to impose change quickly meant a return to the Controller discourse that became dogmatic.

Leadership discourses entrap people in ways of being. Controller leadership when it becomes dominant always creates problems for employees. Blair's Labour party never understood this dynamic; so deep was their adherence to the pragmatism of the Controller discourse, that they missed the secondary impacts of forcing change through targets. In the health and education sector the consequences were a rise (and huge costs) of managerialism and bureaucracy to administer the target culture, and a lowering of clinicians' and teachers' morale, and the distortion of clinical care to hit the numbers rather than privilege patient/pupil care.

Understanding the leadership discourses makes it easier for leaders to recognize these processes.

Geographical and Sociocultural Contexts

How leadership discourses are perceived and enacted is also affected by different social, historical and cultural environments. This led me to undertake a global analysis of how the leadership discourses play out. (See the Global Leadership Discourse section below.)

Discourses and Levels of Seniority and Functions

Positions within hierarchies, and locations in functions and departments, also impact on the leadership discourse. The Messiah Leadership discourse is more favoured the higher in the organization one climbs. The Therapist leader is favoured in the realms of aspiring middle managers, team leaders, and HR departments. Human Resource departments often fluctuate between the Controller discourse when operating on transactional and contractual concerns, and the Therapist discourse when dealing with leadership and personal development. This undermines how HR departments implement good developmental policies. Trapped in Controller discourse mindsets from their contractual work, they apply this to developmental work, trying to measure and control performance for example, through transactional and pseudo-scientific means.

Working Across the Discourses

Each discourse has its merits and its weaknesses, they are not right or wrong per se. Once aware of the discourse and its meaning, leaders can assess how each discourse affects the organization, and what is required for future success. While we are all captured by a particular dominant discourse, we are not fixed by it. By becoming aware of discourses we are more able to resist those that are not helpful or have oppressive tendencies.

Boxes 35–38 offer examples of how each leadership discourse might impact within different work situations. These boxes are not definitive, rather examples to promote a dialogue as to which leadership discourses fit different situations and contexts.

Box 35 Controller Leadership in Practice

Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus on output and task	Creates employees' alienation, resentment and resistance
Results-driven and improves efficiency	
Measurable targets	Poor use of human resource, does not utilize employee's knowledge and creativity
Decisive leadership in a crisis	
Quantifies what success means	
Standardizes quality/products/performance	Creates inflexible workforce relations, often leading to employee disputes or lowering morale
Can reduce waste (increasingly important for sustainability and cost reduction)	
	New forms of Controller Leadership lead to digital surveillance and algorithmic management, further alienating workers
Data driven – important in digital age	

Useful settings	Less useful settings
Production line, manufacturing	Post-industrial workplaces
	Knowledge-led industries
Workplaces where efficiency and control are vital, e.g. nuclear industry, aspects of food production and healthcare	Education sector
	People-focused services
	Entrepreneurial business
	Innovation and creative sector
Accounting and finance departments	Senior strategic leadership
Construction industry	
Sales teams	
Task-focused project management	
First-line leadership	
Gig Economy: Algorithmic Management	
Data-driven projects	

Box 36   Therapist Leadership in Practice

Strengths	Weaknesses
Motivates and supports individuals	Lacks big picture, strategic focus
Develops team cohesion	Lacks dynamism and energy
Emotionally intelligent leaders	Doesn't build strong org' cultures
Lowering of people problems	Individual and team focus at expense of systemic focus
Builds trust	
Empowers others	Organization/teams can become inward looking and narcissistic
Offers personal growth	
Developing individuals to work smarter and harder	Teams can become dependent on kind 'parental' leader

Useful settings	Less useful settings
Steady state organizations	Therapist Leadership is useful in all organizations as relationships and emotional awareness are always important
People-focused organizations	
Education, health, public and not-for-profit	
Value-focused organizations with human development ethos	It may not be the best dominant discourse in the following:
Middle management & leadership roles	Fast-changing organizations demanding active rather than reflective energy
Human resource function	
Universities and training organizations	Manufacturing sector and building industry, which require a robust task focus
Organizations undergoing change – Therapist leaders contain anxiety	
	Senior leadership requiring a strategic focus
	Hi-tech organizations that function on technical expertise

Box 37   Messiah Leadership in Practice

Strengths	Weaknesses
Builds strong & aligned company cultures	Unsustainable over long periods
Strategic and visionary: focuses on purpose	Conformist and homogeneous cultures form, stifling innovation and change
Dynamic energized cultures	Can lead to totalizing and fundamentalist cultures
Creates community feeling that employees identify with	
	Danger that leaders become omnipotent and grandiose
Encourages self-managed 'family' teams	
Maximizes employee commitment – raises productivity and performance	Followership dependency often occurs with charismatic leadership – undermining autonomy and creativity

Useful settings	Less useful settings
Post-industrial companies	Steady state organizations
Knowledge-based companies	Industrial and manufacturing sector
Global corporations	Organizations requiring continuity and reliability e.g. healthcare, banking
Senior strategic leadership	
Start-ups and entrepreneurial organizations	Middle management/team leadership
	Public services
Organizations undertaking radical change	Not-for-profits that require volunteers and members to be active distributed leaders
Not-for-profits with passion for purpose	

Box 38   Eco-Leadership in Practice

Strengths	Weaknesses
Appropriate for today's network society and digital age	A more difficult concept to grasp and to train leaders, as it refutes simplistic solutions
Ethical and sustainable approaches	
Meta-discourse therefore able to integrate other discourses	Requires confidence to follow emergent strategies rather than rely on fixed plans
Engages and retains talent	

Strengths	Weaknesses
Distributed leadership offers opportunities	Takes long-term view rather than short-term, difficult to convince traditionally minded stakeholders
Brand loyalty from customers liking ethical companies	
New innovative business models develop	Leaders need to distribute power and control, letting go takes courage, wisdom and confidence
Emergent capability encouraging leadership from the edges	Creates time to build consensus for this approach
Reduced costs from energy and waste savings	
Greater potential for sustainable success	
Useful settings	**Less useful settings**
Most organizations benefit from Eco-Leadership	Unethical and exploitative organizations
Senior leadership roles: to establish distributed leadership cultures and lead with emergent strategies	Short-term projects are less likely to use an Eco-Leadership approach
Flat organizations, global organizations	Many organizations demand Eco + other discourses e.g. the power industry may opt for the Eco-Leadership discourse to develop sustainable business, but retain a Controller discourse for safety reasons
Organizations focusing on sustainability	
Complex public sector organizations, e.g. large hospitals and universities	
Entrepreneurs and start-ups, who rely on distributing leadership and being adaptive	

Layering Discourses

Organizations have histories, traditions and cultures and will have been formed under particular leadership discourses. As social and organizational change occurs, new discourses are engaged with to adapt, and earlier discourses are diminished but do not disappear. Each new discourse overlays the next, each a progression, developing in accordance to the conditions of its time. Sometimes they clash, sometimes they

integrate and merge, and sometimes they work in parallel together, in different parts of the organization, and with different leaders.

These discourses are like layers of hidden assumptions that lie beneath the surface of activity and espoused leadership rhetoric. These layered sediments of 'taken-for-granted' expectations form the foundations, shaping how leaders think and act.

Some organizations begin with a founding leader's vision that establishes a Messiah discourse from which all else emanates. Other organizations begin with a functional idea, believing they can be more efficient and outperform others, setting the Controller discourse as the formative layer. Prior to the Eco-Leadership discourse these layers of leadership would often interact in an ad hoc way. The Eco-leader tries to facilitate a balanced ecosystem, getting the balance right between Controller, Therapist and Messiah Leadership, providing an adaptive approach that doesn't override the other discourses but embraces them. The layers and the foundations already exist, and are not easily changed. The task of Eco-leaders is to excavate, to expose the layers, see where these assumptions came from, and the purpose and meaning they hold now for the organization.

Developing Discourse Awareness

Developing awareness of the leadership discourses helps leaders to be more strategic and see beyond the rational. So often leaders will try to create change, without paying attention to the unconscious assumptions that create resistance to change.

When I teach leadership I invite participants to undertake a leadership discourse questionnaire[1] which indicates their discourse preferences. The questionnaire reveals personal preferences across all four discourses, rather than selecting a singular discourse. Participants discuss why their preferences are weighted more towards a certain discourse than others, and the balance between them. In companies we invite individuals, teams and whole organizations to undertake a review of how the leadership discourses play out across their departments and the whole organization.

The discourses become immediately recognizable to participants and 'light-bulb' moments often occur, as they realize how the tensions arise between leadership rhetoric and practice. For example, a senior female leader representing the Middle East in a global bank meeting sat

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[1] Wild Leadership Questionnaire www.hiddenleadership.com.

through a leadership talk by her boss about company values and their desire to move towards the Eco-Leadership discourse. She later spoke to me privately, saying that her region was dominated by the Controller Leadership discourse, that it was patriarchal and hierarchical, and that this was such a cultural norm that distributed leadership was not yet a reality or feasible. For a long time she had felt trapped between selling the rhetoric of the company whilst knowing the reality on the ground was completely different. She found a way to articulate this to her senior manager using the discourses as a frame for discussion, and we then worked openly with this challenge between global aspirations and regional cultures.

Developing discourse awareness helps leaders to take a critical and strategic stance.

Global Leadership Discourses

The four dominant leadership discourses emerged from my doctoral research on westernized leadership approaches. This led to a curiosity and requests from many people to research how these dominant discourses played out in non-westernized countries. I was also interested in how leadership emerges differently in diverse countries depending on cultural, social and historical factors. I therefore undertook research that involved a discourse analysis on 20 accounts of how leadership had emerged in 20 diverse regions and countries (Western, 2018a: 204–18). There were two major overall findings:

1. The research showed that each of the four leadership discourses appeared in all 20 countries and regions (a finding that I didn't expect).
2. That other and new forms of leadership occurred that couldn't be accounted for within the four discourses in each country/region. This led to a new research approach and the discovery of each country having a 'leadership symptom' (see Chapter 16 in this book and Western, 2018a: 218–66).

The collective results (Figure 13.4) showed that the leading discourse across all countries/regions was Messiah Leadership, with a strong showing of 31%. Therapist Leadership with 26% and Controller Leadership with 25% were very close together in second and third place, followed by the emerging discourse, Eco-Leadership, on a healthy 18% (Western, 2018a: 206).

The individual country/region results can be seen in Figure 13.5a/b.

The leadership discourse which dominated in most countries/
regions was the Messiah discourse; it led in 7.5 countries/regions (it
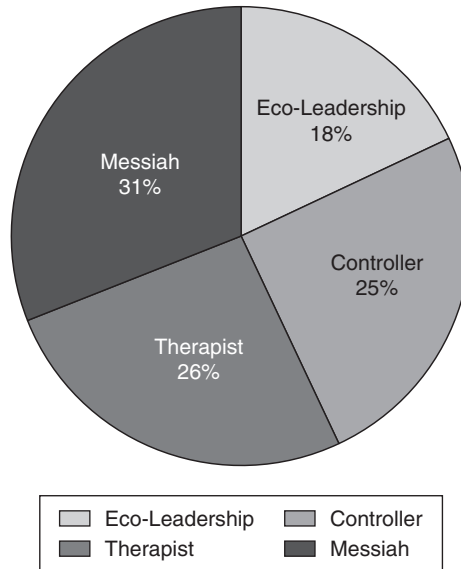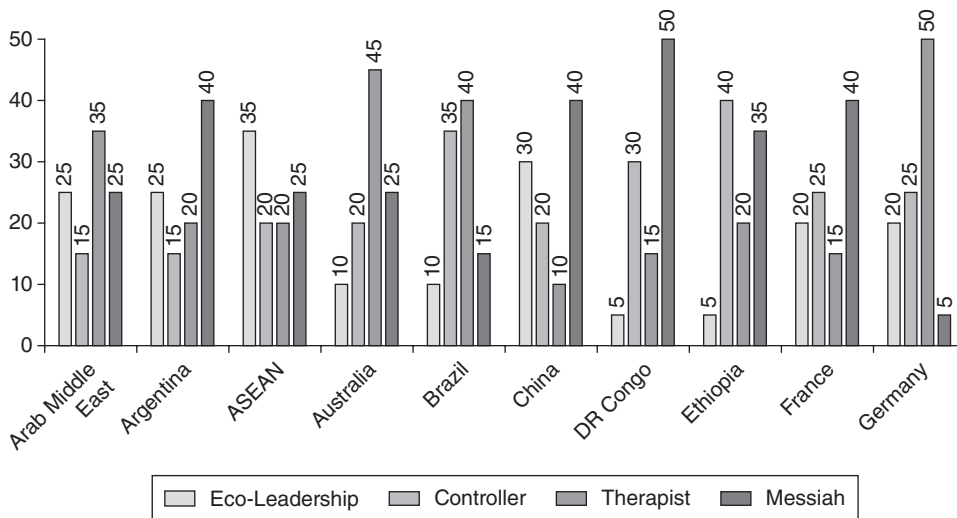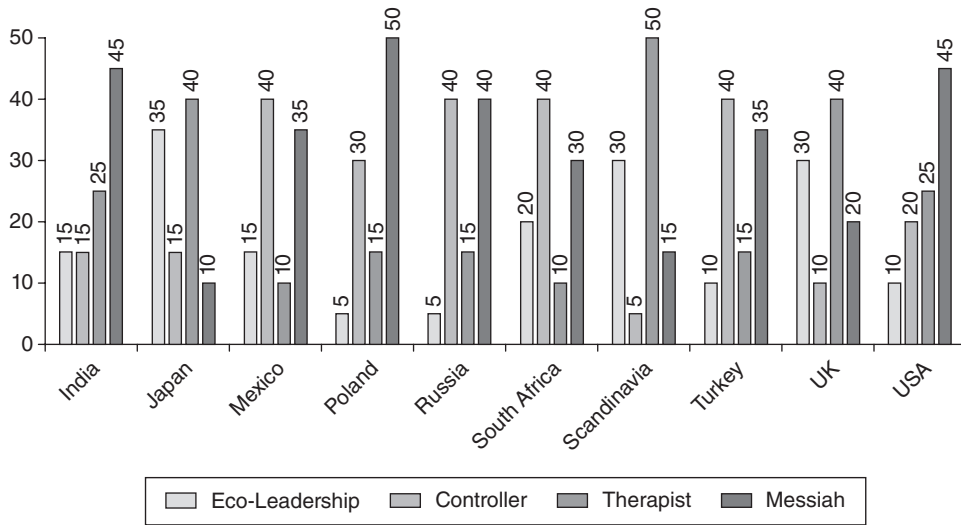dominated in 7 countries, and was equally dominant in one, Russia).

Figure 13.4   Overall discourse analysis findings

Figure 13.5   Individual country/region discourse analysis

The second most common discourse was the Therapist discourse, in 7 countries/regions. The Controller discourse dominated in 4.5 countries/regions (4 plus Russia as above) and Eco-Leadership dominated in only one region (Western, 2018a: 208–9).

A full account of the findings can be found in *Global Leadership Perspectives: Insights and Analysis* (Western and Garcia, 2018). Some unexpected discourse combinations bucked common perceptions of cultural forces and leadership in countries, e.g. the Eco-Leadership discourse was dominant in only one place, the ASEAN region at 35%, and was strongly represented in second place in Japan at 35%, and China, the UK and Scandinavia at 30%.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarized each of the four discourses and begun to describe how these work together in practice. The future lies in the Eco-Leadership discourse taking a meta-position – not to replace the other discourses, but to ensure that each specific organization, department and team finds the right balance.

More research and theorizing is required to develop and support new practices of leadership. Working with all four discourses, and observing the trends and patterns in the external environment, will enable a more coherent and creative leadership – one that is fit for the twenty-first century.

Suggested Readings

- For this chapter the reading required is the four previous chapters in this book.

Reflection Points

The four discourses of leadership are all present today, interacting in our organizations. Usually one is the dominant leadership discourse.

Leaders and organizations have valences (unconscious preferences) for certain discourses.

When discourses operate together tensions can be created if an overview is not taken to facilitate the whole.

The Eco-Leadership discourse is a meta-discourse, offering a leadership that oversees how the discourses are enacted, to optimize their strengths and compatibility.

The following reflection points will help you develop 'discourse awareness', to make sense of your own individual leadership practices and the leadership around you:

- What is your personal leadership valency, i.e. your internalized assumptions about leadership? Which leadership discourses do you prefer?
- What is the dominant leadership discourse in your organization?
- Does the leadership discourse you prefer fit with the dominant organizational leadership discourse?
- How does your leadership practice match with your leadership assumptions? Do you practise your preferred leadership discourse, or do pressures pull you into another discourse?
- Observe others and try to identify the leadership discourse/s they inhabit.
- Does the dominant discourse empower or disenfranchise employees?
- What happens to those who resist the dominant leadership discourse?
- Try to identify different leadership discourses in different parts of your organization, e.g. in the finance department and the sales department. If there are differences, why is this and what effect do these have?
- Watch the news and read the newspapers and try to identify the different leadership discourses well-known political and business leaders operate from.

Sample Assignment Question

Reflect on an organization you know well (perhaps your current workplace, or place of study) and discuss the dominant discourses you observe and experience.

Hypothesize why a specific discourse is dominant or weak, referencing the organization's output, its history, etc. In conclusion write a one- or two-page 'Consultancy Report', making a recommendation as to which leadership discourse/s would be preferable for this organization to take it into the future and why.