LEADERSHIP, ETHICS AND TOXICITY

CHAPTER AIMS

- Introduce and critically discuss the link between leadership and ethics, responsibility, sustainability, altruism and authenticity
- Explore the differences and similarities between these concepts
- Critically discuss the link between leadership and toxicity, and explore ideas around bad and destructive leadership
- Introduce a debate around the enactment of leadership and ethics in a community context

Watch the following videos at https://study.sagepub.com/studyleadership3e to reinforce your understanding of the aims of this chapter:

- Ethical Leadership
- What is Sustainability Leadership?
- Professor Stephen Reicher Defines and Discusses Toxic Leadership
- What Defines Authentic Leadership?
- Peter Northouse, PhD, Discusses the Dark Side of Leadership
- Narcissistic Disorder
- Why is the Mode of Transition so Violent for Personalist Leaders?
So far in this textbook, we have looked at questions like ‘What is leadership?’ (Chapter 1), ‘Who is the leader?’ (Chapter 2) and even ‘Where is leadership?’ (Chapter 9). We have not asked, however, ‘What is leadership for?’ or ‘What is its purpose?’ The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to explore the reasons behind leadership. We will thus explore ethical leadership which includes issues of sustainability, altruism, duty of care, responsibility and authenticity. Then we explore the ‘flip side’, writing and theory concerning narcissism and leadership and recent theory concerning toxic, bad or destructive leadership. Finally, we will explore some more critical comments in this area of research and ponder the future, including work on linking ethical leadership to notions of community.

Hemphill (1958) has provided three stages to the leadership process:

- **attempted leadership** – an act by which an individual intends to influence a group for the purpose of solving a mutual problem;
- **successful leadership** – an attempted leadership act that has been followed; that is, an individual has influenced the group toward solving a mutual problem;
- **effective leadership** – has not only influenced the direction of the group but also contributed to the group’s solution to the problem.

The challenge is that this appears to be the extent to which the purpose of leadership has been studied up to and including the ‘new leadership approaches’ described in Chapter 4. Our challenge in this chapter is that there are elements outside the basic (and sometimes ill-defined or undefined) idea of effectiveness that one needs to consider. Longer-term issues such as ethics also appear to be fundamental to the idea of leadership (Ciulla, 2004) and may provide ideas as to the purpose of leadership in and across organisations, cultures, communities and countries. First, however, we briefly discuss a similar issue, that of sustainability.
REFLECTIVE QUESTION 13.2

What is sustainability in and outside of organisations? How do we define and measure sustainability? Can we, and if so should we, measure sustainability?

LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Bolden et al. (2011) raise the issue of leading responsibly and link this to issues in saving our planet. They suggest an agenda for leadership that is sustainable, that takes the ethics of leadership further by suggesting a responsibility of leaders for engendering sensitivity to the environment. This view is challenging traditional business models of profit orientation and wealth creation towards more sustainable and environmental agendas. Others also highlight a need for leadership that is focused more clearly on sustainability (e.g. Hull et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2017; Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). Indeed, Nicholson and Kurucz (2019) offer a leadership for sustainability framework from moral theory that takes into consideration relational notions of leadership (discussed in Chapter 6) and an ethics of care discussed below. New forms of business education epitomise the contemporary view that links leadership responsibility to ethical considerations, which is explored below.

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Ethical leadership is increasingly being seen as an important area to consider within wider leadership studies (see the reviews of Brown and Mitchell, 2010; Ciulla and Forsyth, 2011; Ko et al., 2018). Ciulla (2004) equates the central issues of ethics with those of leadership, hence providing a strong link between the two. She goes on to suggest that the issue of morals or morality is magnified by issues around leadership (Ciulla, 2012). However, Mendonca and Kanungo (2007) suggest that it is an increasing societal concern that it is unacceptable for leaders in organisations to be unaware of the moral responsibility and unethical behaviour that drives an interest in ethics and leadership or ethical leadership. Mendonca and Kanungo go on to suggest that effective leadership occurs when the leader’s behaviour and leadership influence are consistent with ethical and moral values. In her work, however, Ciulla (2004) concentrates on understanding ethical leadership as being linked to the challenges of being ethical, which she connects to the challenges of authenticity, self-interest and self-discipline as well as the moral obligations that are related to notions of justice, duty, competence and the greatest good. Ciulla (2005) suggests that there are three categories of ethical leadership:
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- **intentions** – the ethics of leaders themselves: the intentions of leaders; their personal ethics;
- **relational** – the ethics of how a leader leads or the ethics of the process of leadership; the means by which a leader gets things done and/or the relationship between the leader and other stakeholders;
- **the ends** – the ethics of what a leader does: the ethics of the outcomes of the leader’s actions.

Furthermore, Ciulla (2012) has also developed a discussion of ethics and effectiveness and proposes that the distinction between the two is not necessarily a clear one. She suggests that sometimes being ethical is effective and sometimes being effective is ethical. She therefore also suggests that ethics is effectiveness in certain circumstances. Here, she uses the Secretary-General of the United Nations as an example and posits that because the power and resources of this position of UN Secretary-General are low, it is difficult to uphold the position without acting ethically. Indeed, Treviño et al. (2003) have highlighted previously the responsibility of leaders at the top of the organisation in setting the tone of ethical behaviour. They also go on to suggest that executives must engage in socially salient behaviour in order to ensure that they stand out as an ethical figure. In trying to understand how to be an ethical figure, the literature on ethical leadership seems to take differing perspectives, such as morality, altruism, authenticity, responsibility and care. We will explore each of these in turn below.

**MORAL LUCK**

Ciulla (2012) brings into the ethical leadership discussion the term ‘moral luck’. She uses Bernard Williams’ (1982) description of moral luck, which suggests that there is an aspect of how well one thinks through a decision and the extent to which this thought process turns out to be ‘right’, while also accepting the extrinsic factors that leaders have little or no control over, such as bad weather, accidents and so on. Ciulla (2012) suggests that moral luck is important for leadership studies as it helps us to reconcile issues of decision-making, risk assessment and moral accountability. Ultimately, she goes on to point out, some leaders are ethical but unlucky, while others are not as ethical and very lucky. It is because of the issues surrounding moral luck that Ciulla (2012) advocates more study in the area of the decision-making processes of leaders and the ethicality of such processes.

**THE MORAL MANAGER**

From the literature on ethical leadership that has been discussed so far, there appears to be a descriptive focus: how leaders ought to behave – what do leaders need to do to be ethical? In response to this focus, some scholars have offered a view on ethical leadership from a social learning perspective (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Brown et al.,
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2005). From a social learning theory perspective (Bandura, 1977), the proposition is that for leaders to be seen as ethical by their followers, they need to be credible role models. Further to this, ideas regarding the moral manager (Treviño et al., 2000, 2003) suggest that ethical leadership is represented by a leader’s proactive efforts to influence followers’ ethical behaviour. Here, therefore, there is a prominent link to leaders developing followers along an ethical or a moral path. One aspect that appears to be an enduring question within the ethics and leadership literature is that of the tension between self-interest and collective good (Ciulla and Forsyth, 2011). It is this tension that the chapter now discusses by exploring altruism, authentic leadership, narcissism and toxic or bad leadership.

**ALtruism**

Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) make an explicit link between ethical leadership and altruism in their three-dimensional framework. In a later version of their book, Mendonca and Kanungo (2007) suggest that ethical leadership comes about when a leader fulfils obligations because of their moral principles as opposed to considerations of media impact, and the leader fulfils these moral obligations because of virtue. They see it as essential for leaders to be altruistic. This resonates with earlier ideals of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), which suggest that a leader’s responsibility is to serve those who follow. Similar to servant leadership, Mendonca and Kanungo go on to explain that if a leader is consumed with self-interest, they are prevented from being sensitive to the concerns of others. Effective leaders, therefore, are those who can consider followers’ needs and aspirations and have a concern for the welfare of the organisation.

Avolio and Locke (2002) initiated an interesting discussion regarding altruism and debated the level to which leaders are actually motivated by altruism as opposed to egotism. Edwin Locke, for example, asked how realistic it is to find a leader who ultimately has a selfless pursuit of goals. This links to Manfred Kets de Vries’ (2003) work around the narcissistic leader, which we discuss in more detail below, but before we do, a discussion of authentic leadership would be useful.

**Vignette 13.1**

Extract from Case Study 5 highlighting the importance of understanding leadership and altruism

June started the Pierian Centre in a quiet, evolutionary kind of way, without a big vision or big plan. As June describes it, ‘I don’t think I started with a vision! I
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started with principles and values and the sort of idea that it would be nice to set up a place that ran along different principles and philosophies from what I had experienced elsewhere. If that was the vision well then ... I wanted to set up something where the growth of the individual was the focus, that something could be part of the community and that was there to open the door ... that framework ... I guess the way we got people to see what the place was all about was one of the challenges: it was to live it and be it as the leader ... and it was challenging ... so there were [sic] never any doubt for me that if you stand up and say these are the principles, that you must live and breathe them. There is no choice and I think that what goes wrong in the world is that leaders pontificate but then don’t live it. That’s fundamentally where things in this world go wrong. To live and be what we say is a very deeply challenging process. And it means almost every day something happens where I think what shall I say ... if every time we have a decision to make we think about how our decision will have the best impact on the most marginalised in our society we cannot go wrong. That’s about making an altruistic as opposed to a selfish decision ... it will always be a better decision.'

June’s approach to leadership clearly starts from the premise of her own deeply held personal values which include authenticity, social justice, service and creativity. June feels these are manifested in the belief that everyone is remarkable; the principle that every organisation is part of the community in which it exists; and an ethos of welcoming and taking care of everyone who comes through the door.

1. To what extent is June being altruistic?
2. What impact does this have on her leadership? How is she able to lead?

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Developed from the transformational leadership paradigm (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Price, 2003), an alternative response to the question of ethics and leadership highlights the need for authenticity as a leader (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004; George, 2003; Luthans and Avolio, 2003). The theory and research around authentic leadership and authentic leadership development have proved popular and often been linked to contemporary organisational issues regarding how leaders conduct themselves (Caza and Jackson, 2011; Gardner et al., 2011). The theory around authentic leaders has been dichotomised into three types or levels and has assumed an important role in contemporary discussions regarding leadership (Caza and Jackson, 2011). Caza and Jackson (2011) go on to highlight the three levels of authentic leadership described in the literature (Gardner et al., 2005; Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Yammarino et al., 2008):
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- individual personal authenticity – the level to which one know’s one’s self and acts in accordance with that notion of self (see Harter, 2002 and Kernis, 2003 for wider discussions regarding definitions of authenticity);
- a leader’s authenticity as a leader;
- authentic leadership as a phenomenon in itself.

There is a suggestion (Gardner et al., 2005) that these levels are hierarchically ordered, in the sense that authentic leadership is not possible without an authentic leader and it is not possible to be an authentic leader without first being an authentic person (Caza and Jackson, 2011). From a behavioural perspective and drawing on the work of Kernis (2003), Caza and Jackson highlight how the literature (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008) defines authentic leaders through their exhibiting certain behavioural tendencies:

- **self-awareness** – an accurate knowledge of one’s self – strengths, weaknesses and qualities;
- **relational transparency** – a genuine representation of self to others;
- **balanced processing** – the collection and use of relevant and objective information, which in some circumstances challenges pre-existing beliefs;
- **an internalised moral perspective** – self-regulation and self-determination.

The authentic leadership literature and the link it has with self-awareness are also connected to ideas around leadership development (Avolio and Gardner, 2005), which we discuss in more detail in Chapter 11.

In their chapter, Caza and Jackson (2011) go on to describe the theoretical claims (antecedents, consequences and mechanisms of authentic leadership) and research findings from the area. We would therefore recommend this as further reading. Finally, Caza and Jackson point out some potential disadvantages with the authenticity perspective, one of which is the almost pervading viewpoint that authenticity is wholly desirable and that it always has positive outcomes (Caza and Jackson, 2011). This is contended by some writers and researchers (Harter, 2002; Kernis, 2003). Caza and Jackson go on to suggest that this is a possible area for future research. Another criticism of the authentic leadership literature is the development of theory from an acontextual standpoint (Liu et al., 2015). Liu and colleagues show how the authentic leader is co-constructed by CEOs and the media, and mediated by the context in and around the global financial crisis. They go on to conclude that the idea of authentic leadership is romanticised and that a discursively constructed context can reinforce or diminish leader narratives of authenticity. In a previous paper, Liu and colleagues have also shown that narratives that conform to gender stereotypes are often depicted as authentic (see Liu et al., 2015). More recent papers have also continued the critique of authentic leadership, suggesting that too much is placed on ideas like authentic leadership to solve problems in organisations (Alvesson and Einola, 2019), and hence it is...
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too romanticised (see Iszatt-White and Kempster, 2019). Iszatt-White et al. (2021) delve further and question the actual relevance of authentic leadership through their exploration of how it is narratively constructed. It would seem, therefore, that notions of authentic leadership are currently in dispute. With this in mind, we now turn towards notions of responsible leadership.

**RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP**

In this section, we discuss the notion of responsible leadership, which is seen as a multi-stakeholder concept by Maak and Pless (2006). They suggest that this multi-stakeholder perspective takes leadership theory away from the leader–follower in the organisation frame which has been the norm, they suggest, for some time. They go on to say that responsible leadership should be seen as a social-relational and ethical phenomenon that is an interaction between multiple followers inside and outside the organisation and is the art of building and maintaining relationships with these stakeholders. To do this, Maak and Pless (2006) suggest that responsible leaders should undertake certain roles to ‘weave’ their network of inclusion, such as being a steward, citizen, visionary, servant, coach, architect, change agent, storyteller and meaning enabler. Maak and Pless go on to suggest that this introduction to responsible leader roles is just a starting point and that further research is needed to elaborate on the relationship between the roles. Further reflections on responsible leadership can be found in a useful review by Miska and Mendenhall (2018). An idea linked to responsible leadership is that of caring leadership which we now go on to look at in the next section.

**CARING LEADERSHIP**

In this section, we discuss links being made in the literature between leadership and a duty of care (e.g. Ciulla, 2009; Gabriel, 2015; Tomkins and Simpson, 2015; Tomkins, 2020b, 2021). Ciulla (2009), for example, suggests that part of the job of a leader is to take care of others, taking responsibility for them particularly in times of crisis. Gabriel (2015) goes on from Ciulla to describe the ‘caring leader’ from the follower perspective. He suggests that followers expect leaders not only to be competent but also moral, and that leaders tend to be judged more harshly on morality than others. Gabriel argues that this is owing to the way leaders are judged through fantasy and myth as well as early life experience. One of the archetypes this creates is the caring leader who offers personalised attention and is willing to go beyond the call of duty. Gabriel goes on, however, to discuss the difficulties leaders face in trying to respond to this archetype. These difficulties include the time and energy needed to act with care, and that an ethic of care tends to go against the equal treatment of all and is at odds with itself and with the individualised nature of contemporary organisational
life. Gabriel suggests that despite these difficulties, the ethics of care in leadership maintain a vibrancy and vigour that mean that it endures, and that if leaders do appear to care for their followers they are unlikely to be seen as moral leaders. Tomkins and Simpson (2015) go on to take a Heideggerian perspective on caring leadership and suggest that this helps to ground caring leadership in notions of ‘leaping-in’ and ‘leaping-ahead’ as modes of intervention in world affairs and the efforts of others. From Heidegger, Tomkins and Simpson describe ‘leaping-in’ as a dominating type of care that is concerned with the present and the immediate, whereas ‘leaping-ahead’ is future orientated and a more complex term that involves anticipation, autonomy and advocacy. From this perspective, Tomkins and Simpson (2015) suggest that caring leadership has little to do with compassion, kindness or niceness, and more to do with fundamental organisation and self-leadership which involve balancing stepping in and stepping back and wrestling with what we know and what we can only glimpse. This more critical notion of caring leadership takes us nicely towards the more critical notions of ethical leadership generally. But before we go on to look at some of these ideas, we will first look over the flip side of ethical leadership – toxic, bad and destructive leadership.

VIGNETTE 13.2

Extract from Case Study 3 highlighting the importance of understanding ethics and authenticity

One day in May, there was a flurry of excitement as Frank, on one of his rare visits to the department, called everybody together to welcome Michael Langer, the new head of Procurement. Mike was a fresh-faced young man who, having started in consumer goods, had moved into heavy industry, and had just spent three years as head of outsourcing in a steel company owned by a private equity firm. He made a brief presentation to the department, detailing his background and his delight at being asked to head up such a prestigious unit as Lowe Power’s Procurement department. He was polite and well-mannered and made a good first impression.

Frank’s brief to Mike had been simple and direct: ‘Shake ’em up, Mike. A lot of them have been here a long time, and have got very used to the comfortable life.’

1. What could Mike do to ‘shake ’em up’?
2. What ethical issues may Mike need to consider and how might he overcome them?
3. Can Mike remain authentic – and, if so, how?
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In this section of the chapter, we will look at the opposite of ethical leadership and explore toxic and bad leaders. The leadership literature is not just concerned with ‘heroic’ or charismatic leaders but also with the dark side of leadership: those leaders that could be termed as toxic (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), bad (Kellerman, 2004) or destructive (Krasikova et al., 2013). Below, we highlight the literature that discusses these topics, but we start with the links between leadership and narcissism.

LEADERSHIP AND NARCISSISM

The concept of narcissism comes from the Greek myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection. This has been linked to leadership through the work of Manfred Kets de Vries (2003). He recognises the narcissistic leader as exhibiting an uninhibited behaviour filled with self-righteousness and arrogance. He goes on to explain that leaders considered to be narcissistic have a selfish and individualistic outlook on life, to the extent that they display an inattention to the organisational processes and structures they are supposed to be leading to heighten their own self-gain. What Kets de Vries found interesting was that these types of leaders were found frequently at the top of organisations. Research by Boddy et al. (2010) supports Kets de Vries’ initial observations. They discuss the ‘corporate psychopath’, described as ‘ruthless employees’ who enter organisations and get promoted to positions within senior management. Boddy and colleagues’ research suggests that these individuals are again found frequently at the top of organisations. This self-serving behaviour appears to be a powerful force in climbing the career ladder. If so many top leaders can be described as self-serving, narcissistic and psychopathic, then this, in turn, brings into question the purpose and image of leadership in and for organisations. This notion has been explored in a growing literature on toxic or bad leadership.

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Toxic leadership was a phrase coined by Jean Lipman-Blumen (2005) in *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*. In this book, she highlights the role some leaders play in attracting and then ultimately destroying followers, defining these leaders as toxic. She also highlights the psychological need for leadership and suggests that in some cases, followers tolerate toxic leaders and even aid and abet their toxic endeavours. This book has developed a critical discussion regarding the moral and ethical guidelines for leadership. The issue has also been described as the Hitler problem by Joanne Ciulla (2004), in asking students whether Adolf Hitler was a good leader. Indeed, in classes students tend to have a heated discussion regarding this question and it relates to the word ‘good’ having two connotations – ‘good’ as competence or effectiveness as a
leader and ‘good’ as morally ethical. These reflections regarding toxic and bad leaders usually lead to a further discussion with regard to psychological drivers and the followers’ part in the process of bad, toxic or unethical leadership. In addition, a similar piece of literature discusses bad leadership and highlights the dual role of leaders and followers in bringing about this form of leadership. Before going on to talk about bad leadership, however, it is worth drawing attention to a more contextual approach to understanding bad or destructive leadership through the toxic triangle (Padilla et al., 2007). Padilla and colleagues suggest that the leader (through charisma, personalised power, narcissism, negative life themes and an ideology of hate) is not the only route to destructive leadership. They also point to conducive environments (epitomised by instability, perceived threat, certain cultural values and a lack of checks and balances) and susceptible followers (categorised as conformers [having unmet needs, low self-evaluation and low maturity] and colluders [having ambition, similar world views and bad values]). It is also worth noting here, in relation to conducive environments, some literature that looks more closely at the culture of organisations and the part that plays in the development of toxic leadership (see Edwards et al., 2019; Matos et al., 2018). Both these papers highlight issues with an overly masculinised contest culture as a primary area to consider in the emergence of toxic leadership. Indeed, Thoroughgood et al. (2018) highlight the more general need to explore destructive forms of leadership with a wider lens than just concentrating on the leader. It is Padilla et al.'s latter point around followership, however, which is also highlighted by Kellerman (2004) in her writing on bad leadership, discussed below.

BAD LEADERSHIP

Bad leadership is a similar concept to toxic leadership and was developed around the same time in a book by Barbara Kellerman (2004). Kellerman suggests that bad leaders exhibit a number of characteristics or orientations. These include:

- *incompetence* – the leader and at least some followers lack the will or skill (or both) to sustain effective action (with regard to at least one important leadership challenge, they do not create positive change);
- *rigidity* – the leaders and at least some followers are stiff and unyielding – although they may be competent, they are unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information or changing times;
- *intemperance* – the leader lacks self-control and is aided and abetted by followers who are unwilling or unable to intervene effectively;
- *callousness* – the leader and at least some followers are uncaring or unkind – ignored or discounted are the needs, wants and wishes of most members of the group or organisation, especially subordinates;
- *corruptness* – the leader and at least some followers lie, cheat or steal – to a degree that exceeds the norm, they put self-interest ahead of the public interest;
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- **insularity** – the leader and at least some followers minimise or disregard the health and welfare of ‘the other’; that is, those outside the group or organisation for which they are directly responsible;
- **evilness** – the leader and at least some followers commit atrocities; they use pain as an instrument of power; the harm done to men, women and children is severe rather than slight; and the harm can be physical, psychological, or both.

In addition, Kellerman highlights the importance of taking a relational perspective on this theory in the sense that leaders are not the only ones to blame, as the followers also have a responsibility in moderating the behaviour of leaders. This is similar to concepts discussed in Chapter 6 where Shamir et al. (2007) discuss the relational perspective on leadership and followership. In some writing in this area, the phrase ‘destructive leadership’ is also used, for example, in the toxic triangle discussed briefly above. We therefore now describe this area of the literature to conclude our discussion of the dark side of leadership.

**DESTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP**

According to Krasikova et al. (2013), destructive leadership includes such behaviours as abusive supervision, petty and managerial tyranny, personalised charismatic leadership, strategic bullying and pseudo-transformational behaviour. They argue, however, that this area of the leadership literature lacks a unified definition, and has too many differing constructs, such as those highlighted in the previous sentence, and the lack of a theoretical framework. In their review paper, they go on to make 14 propositions that, they suggest, help to alleviate these issues in the field. They conclude by proposing a theoretical model of destructive leadership that they suggest helps in understanding the manifestations of destructive leadership and its antecedents and consequences. They go on to suggest that future research in the area should look at differential predictors and outcomes in how destructive leadership manifests, explore leaders’ choices in engaging with destructive leadership practice and how destructive leadership plays out over time, and examine the role of followers in the roles underlying destructive leadership and the broader social context affecting destructive leadership.

Although toxic, bad and destructive leadership theories have provided a particular critical comment on the leadership literature, there are some writers who go further and we explore these writers below.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTION 13.3**

Think about a toxic or bad leader you have known. What did they do? How did they act?
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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

THE PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUALISM AND DECONTEXTUALISATION

Ethical leadership has been criticised recently for being too individualised, decontextualised and power neutral (e.g. Knights and O’Leary, 2006; Liu, 2017a). There have subsequently been calls for more relational (e.g. Knights and O’Leary, 2006; Rhodes, 2012) and corporeal (e.g. Liu, 2017b) approaches. Knights and O’Leary (2006), for example, suggest that an obsession with the self seems to be pervading the leadership literature and this has an impact particularly on models and theories of ethical leadership, as discussed above. Knights and O’Leary go on to suggest that if one is too concerned with one’s self-image – a criticism aimed at MBA students and programmes particularly – then the danger is that it is likely to be problematic for ethical leadership ideas, as there is a potential lack of acknowledgement of the ethical responsibilities of leadership. We highlight this topic in more detail in the section on community and ethics below.

FUZZY TOXICITY

Edwards et al. (2015c) use film to highlight the fuzzy nature of toxicity. They ultimately challenge the notion of toxic leadership being a static entity that one can prescribe without understanding the power and political aspects linked to organisations, cultures and communities. This paper discusses the relational basis of toxic or bad moral and ethical standpoints and uses the film *Batman: The Dark Knight* as a basis for exploring the fuzzy nature of toxicity. This fuzziness is also evident in other recent explorations into questionable leadership actions (see Sanders, 2016).

The use of film is becoming an increasingly popular and useful way of exploring leadership, both in classroom situations and as a research methodology (Comer, 2000; Harrington and Griffin, 1990; Islam, 2009; Komaki, 1998; Warner, 2007). Billsberry and Edwards (2008) have highlighted other films that can be used to explore the notion of toxic leadership in organisations. They suggest films such as *Path to War*, *The Bounty*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, *Swimming with Sharks*, *The Smartest Guy in the Room*, *Erin Brockovich* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

REFLECTIVE QUESTION 13.4

Reflect on the last film you saw. What messages of leadership (good or bad) did it engender?
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ETHICS, LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY

From the theories discussed above, the issue of individualism in leadership studies and research and especially ethical leadership, appears to be problematic. Therefore, developing a more community perspective on ethical leadership is an avenue some researchers are taking. For example, as Knights and O’Leary suggest:

[Ethics is not only choosing what to do as individuals, but also, and essentially, discovering who we are in relation to others – in short our membership of organizations, communities and societies. (2006: 133, referring to the work of MacIntyre, 1991)]

Local communities [as opposed to political or cultural communities] are important vehicles for the recovery and expression of moral recognition and the building of personal identities. (Delanty, 2003: 71)

The link between ethics and community is not necessarily a new avenue for theoretical or empirical consideration (see Chapter 9). Donaldson and Dunfee (1994), for example, developed a framework based on integrative and social contracts theory which attempts to blend the community-based perspectives of ethics and universal norms (Cunha et al., 2010). The model suggests that a norm would be: (1) created within a given community; (2) generally accepted by the members of that community; (3) abided to by the majority of the members of that community; (4) in line with universal indisputable ethical principles; and (5) subject to prioritisation by rules previously agreed upon. Cunha et al. (2010), however, criticise this model for being functionalist in nature and therefore as not adding much more than those models and theories highlighted above. In addition, this would highlight the lack of a theoretical consideration of community and the differing perspectives and fluidity of concepts associated with community (Delanty, 2003). Cunha et al. (2010) go on to suggest that notions of ethics and leadership need to be developed along five motives: (1) avoid ‘black and white’ views of ethical leadership and appreciate the ‘grey areas’ (Bruhn, 2008) or ‘twilight zones’ (Nel et al., 1989) of ethics; (2) adopt a process/relational approach (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000) to ethical leadership; (3) avoid dispositional and situational deterministic explanations; (4) present ethical leadership as a social construction; and (5) incorporate the role of ambiguity in the process of ethical leadership (Cunha et al., 2010: 200).

REFLECTIVE QUESTION 13.5

Think about your community. What does leadership look like? To what extent does this differ from organisations you have experienced?
SUMMARY

In this chapter, we responded to the question of what leadership is for. To do this, we reviewed the literature and research on core concepts of sustainability, ethical leadership, morality, altruism, responsibility, caring and authenticity. This literature suggests that leadership needs to include all of the above and these tend to be quite prescriptive regarding what a leader should do to be ethical, authentic and altruistic. In addition, we discussed the opposite to these positions and looked at the contemporary literature around toxic, bad and destructive leadership, which highlights issues of narcissism, incompetence in the role as a leader, rigidity, intemperance, callousness, corruptness, insularity and evilness. Again, this body of literature also appears prescriptive, saying that leaders should not do all of the above. In response to these essentialist views, we have suggested a presupposition with the self, the individual that appears to pervade the literature in this area, and suggested a need to take a more social, relational and community look at these ideas and concepts in further research. This highlights the relational and contextual nature of ethical and toxic leadership: what is seen as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ leadership is dependent on the relations between leaders, followers and the context.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How might one reconcile the idea that self-confidence and self-assertion are important for career progression to the top of organisations and the leadership of others?
2. Who might we categorise as toxic leaders? And why?
3. What examples of fuzzy toxicity can we identify in organisations and society?
4. Who are authentic leaders? And what might we recognise about them?
5. When is one exhibiting ethical leadership? And what does this look like?
6. How might we make leadership more sustainable for organisations and society?

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. From Case Study 2, a leadership development programme in Iraq, highlight how this development programme might be a factor in avoiding toxic and bad forms of leadership. What specific factors will help?
2. Read carefully through Case Studies 3 and 4. To what extent can you identify differing forms of toxic (Lipman-Blumen, 2005) or bad (Kellerman, 2004) leadership? And how do these forms of leadership manifest?
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3. Read carefully through Case Study 5, which looks at a self-development organisation. Critically reflect on the literature above regarding ethical, authentic and morally based leadership: to what extent does this case study embody these forms of leadership? How might these be effective? How might these be ineffective?

4. Reflect on Case Studies 1 and 6. To what extent is leadership behaviour being driven by sustainable and ethical issues? What evidence is there for a moral basis for leadership behaviour in these case examples, and why?

Visit the companion website at https://study.sagepub.com/studyleadership3e for multiple-choice questions that test your understanding of the concepts and theories introduced in this chapter, and for links to online videos and interactive questions that engage you in further reflection on the subject.

FURTHER READING

SAGE ARTICLES ACCESSIBLE THROUGH THE ONLINE RESOURCES


OTHER KEY READING ON LEADERSHIP, ETHICS AND TOXICITY


