

The Enduring Romance of Leadership Studies

Brad Jackson

Victoria University of Wellington

Books reviewed in this essay:

Keith Grint, *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 183 pages

Robert House, Paul Hanges, Mansour Javidan, Peter Dorfman and Vipin Gupta (Eds), *Culture, Leadership and Organisations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 818 pages

Thomas Wren, Douglas Hicks and Terry Price (Eds), *The International Library of Leadership* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004)

1. *Traditional Classic on Leadership*, 339 pages
2. *Modern Classics on Leadership*, 493 pages
3. *New Perspectives on Leadership*, 670 pages

It has been twenty years since James Meindl, Sanford Ehrlich and Janet Dukerich observed in their provocative article, 'The romance of leadership': 'it has become apparent that, after years of trying, we have been unable to generate an understanding of leadership that is both intellectually compelling and emotionally satisfying. The concept of leadership remains elusive and enigmatic' (1985, p. 78). Two decades further on, it would seem an opportune time to take stock of this diffuse and ubiquitous field by examining a few of the most significant leadership books to have been published over the past year. In reviewing these books I want to primarily ascertain what, if anything, may have changed in the intervening period.

Judging by the number of books on leadership that are currently on the market, there has never been greater interest in the topic. Grint (2005), for example, notes

Address for reprints: Brad Jackson, Victoria Management School, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand (brad.jackson@vuw.ac.nz).

that there were 14,139 items relating to 'Leadership' on amazon.co.uk on 29 October 2003. Just two months later this had increased to 14,610. Most of these publications probably fall into the trade press category but the number of academic publications on the subject is also noticeably on the rise.

Within the academic realm, the current undisputed heavyweight champion of leadership studies, *The Leadership Quarterly* has just celebrated its fifteenth year in existence. During that time it has established itself as a top-ranked management journal despite its speciality focus. The outgoing editor, Jerry Hunt recently concluded that the field is now 'light years away from the doom and gloom period of the 1970s and early 1980s' (2005, p. 5). In addition to a rapid increase in submission rates he notes that leadership scholars are beginning to organize around a leadership group within the Academy of Management called the 'Community of Leadership Scholars'. The incoming editor of *The Leadership Quarterly*, Michael Mumford (2005) remarks that, for the first time, interdisciplinary programmes in leadership studies are being established in major universities in North America. In parallel, leadership research centres and institutes are springing up on campuses throughout the world at an impressive rate.

In the red corner, a new European-based journal has entered the fray called, naturally enough, *Leadership*. The founding editors, David Collinson and Keith Grint observe in their inaugural editorial that, within business schools and management programmes, 'leadership has often remained a "Cinderella" subject, been neglected and/or underestimated by those keen to analyse and theorize the social, political, organizational and philosophical dimensions of human affairs. Consequently, the intellectual integrity of leadership as a legitimate and important field has remained open to question' (2005, p. 5). The new journal endeavours to tackle this question by stimulating interest in new methods and theories of leadership; encouraging interdisciplinary, diverse and critical analyses of leadership processes; and providing an international forum for leadership research.

It would be hard to conceive of a sub-field of management studies that has been written about or is being written about as much as leadership. Making a decision about what books to select for this composite review was, therefore, fraught with the overwhelming challenge of choice. In the end I decided to select the books that had peaked my interest either browsing through the publishers' catalogues or the publisher's stands at conferences, on the assumption that a significant number of other management scholars might also want to learn more about these titles. Rather than attempt a broad-based review, I've selected three publications that have the potential to make important and enduring contributions to leadership scholarship. They also illustrate the range and reach of this field as well as some of the intellectual promise that Meindl and his colleagues were searching for two decades ago.

Perhaps the single most impressive leadership study to have been conducted in the past twenty years has been conducted under the auspices of the Global

Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness research programme, memorably dubbed the 'GLOBE' study. While the study has already spawned an impressive array of journal articles, the publication in 2004 of the book, *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations* has been widely anticipated by leadership scholars around the world. Weighing in at a hefty 818 pages, the book edited by Robert House, Paul Hanges, Mansour Javidan, Peter Dorfman and Vipin Gupta does not disappoint.

The GLOBE project is described by Harry Triandis in the Foreword to the book as 'the Manhattan project of the study of the relationship of culture to conceptions of leadership' (p. xv). Certainly in terms of the scale of the project he is not far off the mark. The project involved 127 investigators from 62 nations, 20 of whom participated in the writing of this book. Between 1994 and 1997 data were collected from 17,300 managers based in a total of 951 organizations. Twenty-seven hypotheses were tested in the study, each linking culture to performance outcomes.

The book is organized into five sections. Part I discusses the history of the GLOBE project and what it has tried to accomplish. The idea for GLOBE came to Robert House in the summer of 1991. Having reviewed a wide array of research into charismatic leadership that had been conducted in a wide range of cultural contexts he had cause to believe that there might be a basis for believing that charismatic leader behaviour might be universally acceptable and effective. The GLOBE project provided him with the means to ascertain this on a grand scale.

Part II of the book provides an exhaustive review of prior literature on culture and organizational leadership as well as societal influences on organizational cultural practices. The two chapters provided in this section, especially the one written by Dorfman and House are expertly done and would alone, almost justify the purchase of the book. In Part III, the research methodology of the project is described. This section takes up a significant portion of the book (almost 20 per cent) and covers in copious detail such topics as the development and validation of the GLOBE culture and leadership scales as well as the regional and climate clustering of societal value scales and the statistical analyses. The editors are obviously anxious to be as transparent as they possibly can in the hope perhaps of facilitating replication in subsequent studies.

In Part IV, the empirical findings detail how each of 62 societies scores on the nine major attributes of culture identified by the GLOBE study. These are identified as being: Future Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Assertiveness, Humane Orientation, In-Group Collectivism, Institutional Collectivism, Permanence Orientation, Power Concentration versus Decentralization and Uncertainty Avoidance. When quantified these attributes are referred to as 'cultural dimensions'. Four of these were identified in Hofstede's landmark study (Hofstede, 1980), but have been renamed. It is readily apparent that the GLOBE project owes a great

deal to Hofstede's work. However, it is by no means meant to act merely as a big budget remake. As House notes, 'we have a data set to replicate Hofstede's (1980) landmark study and extend that study to test hypotheses relevant to relationships among societal-level variables, organizational practices, and leader attributes and behaviour' (House et al., 2004, p. xxv).

The GLOBE project also identifies six major global leader behaviours. The study found that there is a wide variation in the values and practices relevant to the nine core dimensions of cultures and a wide range of perceptions of what constitutes effective and ineffective leader behaviours. In all cultures leader team orientation and the communication of vision, values, and confidence in followers are reported to be highly effective leader behaviours. While some variation was found concerning participative leadership, the study found wide variation with respect to two major dimensions of leader behaviour: autonomous leadership and self-protective leadership. Autonomous leadership is characterized by a high degree of independence from superiors and is reported to slightly contribute toward organizational effectiveness in countries of Eastern Europe (except Hungary) and Germanic Europe (except the Netherlands). Self-protective leadership is characterized by self-centredness, status consciousness and narcissism. This type of leadership behaviour is seen to be slightly effective by managers in Albania, Taiwan, Egypt, Iran and Kuwait. These intriguing exceptions aside, one is struck overall by how little variation there appears to be in the ascribed values and practices of effective leaders between managers in the 62 countries surveyed.

Finally, in Part V the authors discuss the implications of the GLOBE project's work to both research and practice. What is clear from their assessment is that the job of investigating the relationship between leadership and organizational and societal culture has only just begun. As the editors humbly conclude, 'the wealth of findings provided in this book set the stage for a more sophisticated and complex set of questions' (House et al., 2004, p. 726). They acknowledge that, although the GLOBE findings have identified the various attributes of leadership, they have not identified the behavioural manifestations of such attributes. For example, it is clear from the study that integrity is a universally desirable attribute for leadership but does it mean the same thing to a Chinese employee as it does to an American? Moreover, while the GLOBE project provides a profile of cultural dimensions of each society, further research is required in order to build a subjective understanding of how people actually function and manifest these different cultural attributes. Finally, we also need to develop a more dynamic understanding of culture that can help us to make sense of the processes and consequences when leaders and followers from different cultures begin to connect and interact.

This book reports on Phases 1 and 2 of the GLOBE Project. The third and final phase is currently underway. In this phase, House and his colleagues will be investigating the impact and effectiveness of specific leader behaviours and style on subordinates' attitudes and performance. Specifically, the researchers will be

looking at the impact over 3 to 5 years of the leadership behaviour of CEOs on organizational effectiveness. Of particular interest, I believe will be the examination of the consequences of CEO behaviours that violate societal cultural norms or leadership expectations represented by a culture's culturally implicit leadership theory.

Harry Triandis observes in the foreword to the book that, 'in a book that contains thousands of findings one can easily find things to criticize' (p. xix). He helpfully provides three examples. My major concern is the lack of attention given to sub-national cultural heterogeneity. For example, to what extent does the culturally implicit leadership theory of a 'New Zealander' reflect those of a Māori or a Pacific Islander or an Asian immigrant? Overall, however, I was left with a sense of admiration for a project of this magnitude that is relatively common in the realm of the sciences, but exceptional in management research. The authors have endeavoured to make this a truly cross-cultural and collective project and, given the number of authors involved, go a long way towards achieving their goal of a 'seamless book'. I believe that a major challenge for leadership researchers is to develop much more cultured understandings of leadership than we currently tend to come across in mainstream publications. A project with this profile and with this much methodological rigour does us an important service by putting the question of culture front and centre in leadership research. We will, however, need to branch out before we can move on.

In the composite book review that preceded this one, Eric Guthey observed that, 'management researchers need to move beyond the kind of cultural analysis that seeks to isolate and measure supposedly static and objective cultural determinants accurately and scientifically' (2005, p. 463). This would require crossing what he describes as the 'great divide' and occasional antagonism, between humanities-based research into culture on the one hand and the management research rooted in the social sciences that is based primarily in business schools and well exemplified by the GLOBE project. The next two books in this review do an exemplary job of crossing this divide.

The *International Library of Leadership* is a three-volume collection that has been edited by Thomas Wren, Douglas Hicks and Terry Price, all three of whom are on the faculty of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond in the United States. The editors note that the term 'leadership studies' has generally been associated with a relatively narrow corpus of social science analyses, primarily from the fields of social psychology and management science. While this work has made some important contributions to the understanding of the leadership phenomenon, they believe it has been too limited in scope and purpose. By contrast, the trade press leadership books have been comparatively more ambitious and wider in scope, yet invariably simplistic and shallow in their analyses. The editors argue that, 'leadership is too important and too complex to leave the field to these champions alone' (2004, p. xi).

For this reason they cast their editorial net wide enough to encompass writers in this collection who might not normally be considered leadership thinkers per se, but who have nonetheless mined some very important insights about the phenomenon. They note that, 'leadership has occupied centre stage throughout human history. It embraces far more than the running of modern formal organizations, and it is much too complex to summarize neatly in one short paperback' (2004, p. xi).

Volume 1 of the collection, *Traditional Classics on Leadership*, contains the editors' vision of the most insightful and important writing on leadership from ancient times to the dawn of the twentieth century. The selections are arranged according to what the editors believe to be the key leadership issues of the pre-industrial age. These include: What is the moral purpose of leadership? What is the nature of leadership? What constitutes legitimate authority? What is the role of followers? How might one go about challenging authority? While the writers featured in this volume include many of those we would expect to see in such a volume (e.g. Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, Machiavelli, Freud and Hume), the editors have taken care to include the voices that have been left out of the mainstream: women such as Christine de Pizan, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Virginia Woolf, as well as 'men of colour' such as David Walker and W. E. B. Du Bois.

The second volume, *Modern Classics on Leadership*, presents the articles and chapters that have shaped the modern field of leadership studies. These include scientific management, which we would not normally associate with leadership studies as well the chestnuts such as trait theory, behaviour theory, contingency theories of leadership, transformational leadership charismatic leadership, cognitive approaches to leadership and studies of power. The editors note that in the twentieth century the field of 'leadership studies' took a dramatic turn so that it came to be narrowly defined in terms of its focus (i.e. formal organization) and method (i.e. social science methodology, chiefly derived from the disciplines of social psychology and management science). The editors have chosen to include only 'seminal' writings from this field. That is, those writings that marked a new departure for the field and have been cited by subsequent scholars as the starting point for further inquiry. One certainly gains a new respect for what these writers accomplished by reading their original work rather than the highly processed and selected forms that are customarily presented in leadership texts.

The final volume, *New Perspectives on Leadership*, brings us up to the present. These writings are organized around the questions and themes that the editors believe most pertain to the postmodern age. These include: how leadership should be conceptualized; the role of power and authority; and questions of values, morality, and ethics. Again many of the usual suspects are featured such as Howard Gardiner, Robert Greenleaf and Peter Senge. However, these are joined by a number of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire and Benjamin Barber whom we

would not normally associate with leadership scholarship but who obviously cast a critical light upon the leadership question.

Not all of the included works are recent. Some date back to the middle of the last century (e.g. Hannah Arendt, Bertrand Russell and Isaiah Berlin). These authors have been selected because the editors believe they frame to good effect the issues that will preoccupy leadership scholars during the twenty-first century. What is striking from reading the articles collected in this volume is how much more they have in common with those featured in the first volume as opposed to those featured in the second. They share a wider socio-political view informed by philosophy and fired by a humanities-inspired imagination. Indeed the editors note that, 'readers of Volume 1 of this series will recognize that many of the issues that occupy contemporary writers are remarkably similar to those that have drawn the attention of commentators since the beginning. This should not be surprising: some leadership challenges are indeed perennial' (2004, p. xv). I certainly found myself being more intrigued and compelled to read the pre-modern readings than those included in the last two volumes, perhaps due in part to an over-familiarity with more recent work as well as an unbridled faith in the wisdom of earlier ages.

The editors should be commended for undertaking this initiative. They have certainly succeeded in accomplishing one of their objectives which was to 'provide easy access to the best thinking of the great minds of past and present' (2004 p. xiii). I applaud the inclusion of substantial portions of each writer's argument so that the reader can gain a firsthand appreciation of the author's position. I was also pleased to see that in Volumes 2 and 3, the original typefaces of the articles and book chapters are maintained as this improves the aesthetic appreciation of the work and facilitates fast and accurate citation. It is unfortunate that idiosyncratic editorial decisions required the content of Volume 1 to be set in a different type.

With respect to the second objective, namely that of integration, the editors do a reasonably good job in the brief commentaries they provide in each volume preceding the writings. These commentaries provide competent and engaging summaries of the key arguments of each contribution. The interlinking of these contributions into a historical argument is less convincing, however. At the end of the day, the authors perhaps wisely elect to let the writers speak for themselves and leave the integration to the readers. As to who the reader might be, this collection is obviously ideally placed to become a valuable desk reference book. It could also form the basis of a first-rate graduate seminar on leadership, although the total price for the three volume set, £350, would likely prove prohibitive to most students.

The problem with any collection like this inevitably revolves around not what the editors include but rather what they exclude. The editors make it clear at the outset that the selections they feature originate solely from Western traditions.

They recognize that many works from other cultural traditions would obviously be relevant but space constraints preclude anything but merely anecdotal treatment. The editors rightfully note that these works deserve a much fuller treatment in a separate collection that Edward Elgar and other publishers would do well to consider pursuing. Most European scholars will likely point out that, despite the editors' obvious best intentions to be inclusive, the balance of writing, especially the more recent writing, is perhaps weighed too much in favour of the United States. This would call into question the wisdom of calling the three volume set, the 'International' Library of Leadership, the obvious marketing appeal notwithstanding.

In explaining the genesis of their three volumes, Wren and his colleagues question what can really be said about leadership within the constraints of a short paperback. As if to refute this, Keith Grint's most recent book, *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities* does manage to pack an awful lot into a relatively modest 183 pages.

In many respects we can see this book as a logical companion piece to his earlier book, *The Arts of Leadership* (Grint, 2000). In that book Grint made the case that leadership is not accessible to scientific approaches because it is essentially a constitutive process. Instead, he suggests we should think of leadership as an art because, 'it appears to have more to do with invention than analysis, despite claims to the contrary; it operates on the basis of indeterminacy, whilst claiming to be deterministic; it is rooted in irony, rather than the truth; and it usually rests on a constructed identity but claims a reflective identity' (2000, p. 6).

Effective leaders, Grint argues, need to develop and learn from an ensemble of arts. From the philosophical arts, they can learn to create a compelling sense of identity for their organization by asking the question 'Who are we?'. From the fine arts they can learn to forge a powerful strategic vision for the organizations they lead by asking the question 'Where are we going?'. The martial arts can help leaders learn to develop smart organizational tactics by asking the question 'How will we achieve this?'. Finally, from the performing arts, leaders can learn to persuasively communicate to their followers the organization's identity, its strategic vision as well as its tactics.

Grint illustrates his argument by providing a number of rich and fascinating portraits of well-known leadership figures including Horatio Nelson, Henry Ford, Florence Nightingale, Martin Luther King and Richard Branson. However, instead of highlighting their heroic exploits he points to the number of occasions that they did, in fact, mess up, in a number of cases, quite badly. Based on these historical analyses, he concludes in his inimitably deadpan style that, 'the trick of the leader is to develop followers who privately resolve the problems leaders have caused or cannot resolve, but publicly deny their intervention' (2000, p. 420). In coming to this conclusion, Grint suggests that leadership should be returned to its talismanic origins as 'it performs a ritual that followers appear to require . . . As long as followers need leaders, leaders will be necessary' (2000, p. 420).

In the current volume, Grint (2005) carries on exactly where he left off five years previously. In subtitling this book, 'Limits and Possibilities', he wants to highlight the limits of our understanding of leadership. He also wants to underline the limited impact that leaders can actually have, despite the pervasive belief that getting the right leader is the solution to all manner of problems. On a more optimistic note, the 'Possibilities' component of the book's sub-title reflects his view that the power of leadership should not be underestimated. Indeed, the book's unofficial mission is neatly encapsulated in the epithet, 'putting the "ship" back into leadership' (2005, p. 2). This is something that Grint achieves to elegant and persuasive effect in this volume.

The GLOBE project arrived at a definition of leadership at a meeting of 54 country co-investigators representing 38 cultures that was held at the University of Calgary in August 1994. Leadership was defined by that group as 'the ability to motivate, influence, and enable individuals to contribute to the objectives of organizations of which they are members' (2005, p. xxii). Being a sole operator, Grint has the luxury of taking the opposite tack. He begins the book by outlining a heuristic model that features 'ideal types' that he hopes will enable us to not only understand the leadership phenomenon better but also its attendant confusions and complexities. The four ideal types encapsulate the four different ways that people have tended to understand leadership as well as the primary questions they have posed:

- Leadership as Person: is it WHO 'leaders' are that makes them leaders?
- Leadership as Results: is it WHAT 'leaders' achieve that makes them leaders?
- Leadership as Position: is it WHERE 'leaders' operate that makes them leaders?
- Leadership as Process: is it HOW 'leaders' get things done that makes them leaders?

In his view, each of these ways of thinking about leadership has some merit and has made a contribution to our understanding of leadership. However, the fact that we look at leadership in these different ways goes some way towards explaining why we have so much trouble explaining leadership, trying to understand it and trying to teach or reward it. In light of this fact, he suggests that leadership should join the ranks of 'Essentially Contested Concepts' identified by Gallie (1955–56). This would put it alongside equally elusive yet compelling concepts such as 'power', 'performance', 'sustainable development' and 'security'. This is not to rule out any attempts at definition. In fact Grint believes that defining leadership must be contested within the organization because, 'the lack of clarity as to which definition of leadership is being used can inhibit organizational success' (2005, p. 31).

Taking each of the four definitions in turn he shows through a mixture of theoretical argument and empirical illustration the possibilities and limits that are presented when each definition is adopted.

The Leadership as Person view perceives leadership as a consequence of a person who embodies the personal characteristics traditionally associated with leaders. Grint argues that the reduction of leadership to the individual human is analytically inadequate because it excludes followers. Leadership might be better construed as a function of the community – ‘the god of small things’ – rather than the result of superhuman individuals. Drawing on Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1993), he seeks to go beyond this relational view of leadership by exploring the viability of approaching it beyond its normal individual embodiment and beyond a collective form towards a notion of hybridity comprised of humans, clothes, adornments, technologies, cultures, rules, etc. The dizzying array of exemplary leadership hybrids that Grint provides – ranging from the obvious Hammer and Sickle and the Atomic Bomb to the considerably less obvious 2002 Renault Mégane II and a set of traffic lights – fire the imagination and crackle the synapses. Unfortunately, the more detailed case study of the leadership hybrids, such as the landing craft, that were deployed by the Allies on D-Day serves to only further muddy the waters. That said, I do believe that Grint has unearthed a potentially new and exciting line of inquiry in leadership studies that requires further exploration because, as he opines, ‘traditional analytic approaches to understanding and predicting leadership have proved inadequate because hybrid leadership is a performance to be achieved not a script to be rolled out’ (Grint, 2005, p. 32).

The Leadership as Results perspective takes results as the critical aspect of leadership. It was particularly prevalent toward the end of the twentieth century with the rise of performance management and auditing systems. Grint takes this perspective to task on two fronts. First, he questions the extent to which results can, in fact, be realistically traced back to the actions of leaders. Second, he analyses the significance of results-behaviour on ethical behaviour by gently challenging our well-entrenched assumptions about two beacons of ethical leadership: Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa. Exposing the sacred cows of leadership is a key weapon in Grint’s intellectual armoury that he consistently uses to good heuristic effect in this and his earlier books.

He further bolsters his case by using the slave revolts led by Spartacus in the Third Servile War against Rome together with the rebellions and resistance organized against Nazi slave labour to make his case. Based strictly on the results they achieved, these movements can be judged to have failed. However, the fact that they have inspired anti-oppression movements throughout the world gives us pause for thought. From these case studies, he concludes that, ‘any simple notion of assessing leadership by its alleged “results” is doomed to fail: the results of leadership are as contested as the definitions, and we would be better served by con-

sidering leadership as a subjunctive verb – as something that may, or may not, have results, rather than something that definitely does or does not’ (2005, p. 65).

With respect to the third perspective, Leadership as Process, Grint makes the point that, although we can recognize the leadership behavioural processes that differentiate leaders from followers, this does not mean we can simply list the processes as universally valid across space and time. In fact, in line with the guiding assumptions of the GLOBE Study, Grint notes that, ‘it remains the case that most of our assumptions about leadership relate to our own cultural context rather than someone else’s’ (2005, p. 28).

Grint decides to focus his attention on the processes by which leaders learn to lead. Drawing a thought-provoking parallel between the ways parents learn from their children to become parents, Grint argues that leadership must be appropriately learned from one’s subordinates. He notes, ‘I want to suggest further, in an inversion of our common assumptions about this relationship, that it is followers who teach leadership to leaders’ (p. 102). Moreover, because leadership is essentially a social activity, that is, it is not affected through isolated individuals and their atomized group of followers, it is best learned through a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). The case study that is brought to bear in order to bring these two arguments to life is a detailed exposition of two RAF leadership courses that Grint observed during a two month period in 2003. Through several vignettes from these two courses, we are shown the various ways in which learning to lead is both created (i.e. through the courses’ well-honed learning philosophy) and inhibited (i.e. through the formal hierarchy of rank) by the community in which it is practiced. Paraphrasing Edmund Burke, he notes that, ‘it only requires the good follower to do nothing for leadership to fail’ (Grint, 2005, p. 133).

The final perspective that Grint tackles in the book, Leadership as Position, is the way that leadership has been most traditionally thought about. It suggests that leadership can be found in a spatial position within an organization, most frequently at the top of the organization. Leadership along positional dimensions differs according to the extent to which it is formally or informally structured, and vertically or horizontally constituted. Grint distinguishes between ‘Leadership-in-Charge’ which implies some degree of centralizing resource and formal authority and ‘Leadership-in-Front’ which is informally constituted through a network or a ‘heterarchy’ (i.e. a flexible and fluid hierarchy).

A recent spate of leadership books have endeavoured to advance heterarchically-based leadership models in which leadership is distributed throughout the organization rather than centralized at the top. Most notably, Joseph Raelin (2003), in his book, *Creating Leaderful Organizations*, argues with infectious passion that, ‘in the twenty-first century organization, we need to establish communities where everyone shares the experience of serving as a leader, not sequentially, but concurrently and collectively’ (2003, p. xi). Taking this one step further, Jeffrey Nielsen, in his book, *The Myth of Leadership*, makes the case for ‘the end of leadership as we

commonly know it – that is, rank-based management – and introduces a method for developing an organization into a true society of peers. I call this model the peer-based organization’ (2004, p. x).

Grint recognizes that, while Distributive Leadership may be attractive to people who are inhibited by idiosyncratic leaders or who are being suffocated by stultifying bureaucracies, simply wishing away leadership, ‘the big pink elephant’ as he colourfully characterizes it, may result in some grossly ineffective and inefficient organizations that can become susceptible to takeover by authoritarian leaders. Distributed leadership also generates the means by which liberal democratic societies can be destabilized by small and unrepresentative groups or even individuals. By way of graphic example, Grint brings us bang smack up to date with a sobering and trenchant account of the rise and persistence of the hydra-like terrorist group, al-Quaida. He concludes that Distributed Leadership presents us with a serious paradox: ‘it provides something of a blueprint for making us face the terror of the pink elephant, for *inhibiting* authoritarian leaders, but it also provides terrorists with a blueprint for *cohabiting* with what seems to be leaderless authoritarianism’ (2005, p. 145).

With his latest book, Grint has provided us with a powerful heuristic framework for making sense of the various ways in which we tend to make sense of leadership. He reveals with surgical poise the limits of each of these perspectives but, in the process, he also reveals new and exciting possibilities for investigation. While there is no doubt Grint provides us with a fuller treatment of the limits than the possibilities of leadership, the real lasting effect of this book may well come about as a result of the take-up of a number of the strands he has teased out. If I have one regret about this book it is that the author has a tendency to become bogged down in some of the historical details when, in fact, more attention could have been given to the theoretical development of some of the new lines of leadership inquiry that he has opened up.

From the perspective of the practitioner, assuming that they are willing to wade through the complex yet invariably engaging theoretical web he weaves, I believe Grint has some important advice that is drawn from well known and some not so well-known historical events. The most pertinent of these is to move one’s focus away from leaders to leadership. In my discussions with leaders who are feeling over-scrutinized and over-pressurized, Grint’s unsentimental follower-centric perspective provides a welcome counter-balance as well as some measure of relief.

The father of modern leadership studies, James MacGregor Burns has recently noted two striking developments in the field of leadership studies. The first is the internationalization of the study of leadership. Noting the blossoming of leadership as a discipline in the mid- and late-twentieth century, he comments that ‘theoretical work and practical application in non-American contexts will inevitably move leadership theory away from its overly American emphases and bias toward a more international perspective’ (2005, p. 11). The GLOBE project represents a

bold and ambitious step towards broadening the empirical net of leadership research but its theoretical base is still firmly rooted in American soil. We gain a great deal in methodological rigour but lose something in philosophical acuity. House's intentions are unquestionably honourable when he states that, 'Hopefully, GLOBE will be able to liberate organizational behaviour from the U.S. hegemony' (p. xxv). However, I feel that, somewhat perversely, American supremacy in this field is strengthened by this project not challenged. Similarly, for all the cross-disciplinary reach of the International Leadership Library project, it cannot seem to free itself from the shackles of modern leadership theory and its American domination. These are promising developments but the field is still a long way from becoming a truly international field.

The second major development that Burns points to is the role of leadership research as an interdisciplinary endeavour that invigorates related disciplines. Obviously, leadership theory draws heavily from established disciplines but it can also vitalize those disciplines. Burns notes, however, 'but leadership, in common parlance, is a 'good'. When people call for leadership, or deplore the lack of leadership, they see it not as a needed spur to human progress but, as in itself, a moral and ethical entity and a necessary gauge of action. Leadership, in short, becomes an activity as well as an academic enterprise' (Burns, 2005, p. 12). The International Leadership Library project will undoubtedly provide a valuable resource in this regard and may help to persuade non-management scholars that there is, in fact, a place for their work in leadership studies. Likewise, Grint's work might well encourage and inspire other critically-minded scholars both from within management and beyond to engage in leadership research.

Grint also graphically demonstrates the value of conducting good old-fashioned historical research in the name of leadership scholarship. In this respect he joins the perennially colourful leadership scholar, Manfred Kets de Vries, who has taken a strong historical turn with his two most recent books, *Are Leaders Born or are They Made? The Case of Alexander the Great* (Kets de Vries and Engellau, 2004) and *Lessons on Leadership By Terror: Finding Shaka Zulu in the Attic* (Kets de Vries, 2004).

Returning to the observation made by Jim Meindl and his colleagues at the beginning of this review, we might well conclude that, based on this review, the field of leadership remains elusive and enigmatic twenty years on. However, we might also conclude that, while the quest may still be elusive, some encouraging progress has been made in generating an understanding of leadership that is genuinely intellectually compelling and emotionally satisfying. The chronic optimist in me thinks that this progress may have been made not merely in spite of, but because of, the elusive nature of the quest.

In the same article Meindl and his colleagues also noted with some degree of resignation that, 'the concept of leadership is a permanently entrenched part of the socially constructed reality that we bring to bear in our analysis of organizations. And there is every sign that the obsessions and celebrations of it will persist'

(1985, p. 78). Based on the review of these books and the state of the field of leadership studies in general, the romance of leadership is likely to endure for a long time to come. However, the degree to which is romanticized is culturally contingent! The GLOBE study found that Americans, Asians, English, Eastern Europeans, French, Germans, Latin Americans and Russians tend to romanticize the concept of leadership and consider leadership to be important in both political and organizational arenas to be important. By contrast, many people of German-speaking Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia are sceptical about leaders for fear that they will accumulate and abuse power.

Perhaps, at the end of the day, a healthy blend of romantic affliction and suspicious scepticism is what is required in our deliberations regarding leadership. Leadership can provide a powerful source of inspiration to take action but it can also blind us in our desire to believe in leaders as well as our deeply felt need to be well led. It is all the more important then to bear in mind Keith Grint's chilling remarks in reference to the Herculean efforts of the US-led coalition to establish democracy in Iraq, 'Leadership, then, is not just a theoretical arena but one with critical implications for us all and the limits of leadership – what leaders can do and what followers should allow them to do – are foundational aspects of this arena. Leadership, in effect, is too important to be left to leaders' (2005, p. 4). This is an important intellectual and moral message that all leadership scholars would do well to heed.

REFERENCES

- Burns, J. M. (2005). 'Leadership'. *Leadership*, **1**, 1, 11–12.
- Callon, M. (1986). 'The sociology of the actor network'. In Callon, M., Law, J. and Rip, A. (Eds), *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology*. London: Macmillan.
- Collinson, D. and Grint, K. (2005). 'Editorial: The leadership agenda'. *Leadership*, **1**, 1, 5–9.
- Gallie, W. B. (1955–56). 'Essentially contested concepts'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, **56**, 167–98.
- Grint, K. (2000). *The Arts of Leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guthey, E. (2005). 'Management studies, cultural criticism and American dreams'. *Journal of Management Studies*, **42**, 2, 451–66.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences*. London: Sage.
- Hunt, J. (2005). 'Explosion of the leadership field and LQ's changing of the editorial guard'. *The Leadership Quarterly*, **16**, 1, 1–8.
- Kets de Vries, M. F. R. (2004). *Lessons on Leadership by Terror: Finding Shaka in the Attic*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Kets de Vries, M. F. R. with Engellau, E. (2004). *Are Leaders Born or Made? The Case of Alexander the Great*. London: Carnac.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.
- Meindl, J. R., Ehrlich, S. B. and Dukerich, J. M. (1985). 'The romance of leadership'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **30**, 78–102.
- Mumford, M. (2005). 'Something old, something new: the mission of the leadership quarterly'. *Leadership*, **16**, 1, 9–15.
- Nielsen, J. (2004). *The Myth of Leadership: Creating Leaderless Organizations*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.
- Raelin, J. (2003). *Creating Leaderful Organisations: How to Bring Out Leadership in Everyone*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.