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# Changing Conceptions of Leadership

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*Edited by*  
*C.F. Graumann and S. Moscovici*

Springer-Verlag New York Berlin Heidelberg Tokyo

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*Carl F. Graumann and*  
*Serge Moscovici*



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## Editorial Note

This volume is the second in a series of three dealing with changing conceptions in social psychology. The chapters contained in these volumes originated in symposia which were organized by the editors with the help of members and guests of the Study Group "Historical Change in Social Psychology." The work of this group has been made possible by a grant and the hospitality offered by the Werner-Reimers Foundation, Bad Homburg, Federal Republic of Germany, with the assistance of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, France.

### *Further volumes:*

Changing Conceptions of Crowd Mind and Behavior  
Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy

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## Chapter 1

# Changing Conceptions of Leadership: An Introduction

*Carl F. Graumann*

The present volume is a companion to *Changing Conceptions of Crowd Mind and Behavior* (Graumann & Moscovici, 1985). The order of the books reflects a historical sequence: When the crowd was discovered as a social problem for close scrutiny by the new sciences of psychology and sociology, leadership almost from the beginning became an essential topic, if not a significant feature, of mass psychology—although perhaps one should say leaders rather than leadership. Because the general and scientific interest in crowds—due to the “rise of the masses”—had a political origin, mainly in France, the prototypes were the historically decisive crowds of the French Revolution, of the Paris Commune, and of the strikes, the new weapon of an awakening working class or labor force. Hence, the question of who led the revolting or striking masses, or, at least, who might have been the agent or agents behind the “mob,” was felt as most important, if not politically much more urgent than the inquiry into the nature of crowds.

Also theoretically the topic of leadership, albeit in different terms, became closely related to that of the mind of the crowd. It was customary in the nineteenth century (and for many has remained so), to regard crowds as primitive, instinct-driven, emotional, irrational, subconscious, and so on. The individual, however educated, rational, and disciplined he or she might be, once submerged in the crowd, took on all its attributes as a result of contagion and/or suggestion. Accordingly, it was to the fields of epidemiology and psychiatry that mass psychologists looked for models and theories. Animal magnetism (mesmerism) and hypnotism served as the first explanatory paradigms for the mental change individuals undergo when merging with a crowd. Hypnotism, however, requires a hypnotist, whose relationship with the subject or patient is transferred to the leader and the crowd. As the hypnotized (conventionally female) patient, half-conscious, half-awake, is open to the suggestions of the hypnotist, so the crowd was said to be in relation to a leader (for well-documented reviews of early crowd psychology see Barrows, 1981; Nye, 1975).

For Le Bon the suggestibility of crowds was the counterpart of the hypnotic or at least very persuasive power of prestigious leaders. Their power was mainly seen as executed in speeches—the highly suggestive, rhetorically artful addresses of political leaders, demagogues, or evangelists who were able to enthuse, enrage, madden, and mobilize crowds. This was one of the messages that mass psychology succeeded in getting across to the orator-leaders of the twentieth century, that to lead the masses is essentially to talk to them in mass assemblies or by radio and televised messages. Not only did leaders such as the *Duce* and the *Führer* learn this lesson well (although not always acknowledging the sources); the message is still widely acknowledged in mass democracies, revised and refined by mass communication experts who act as consultants and stage directors to many of those in power and those who aspire to be (cf. Chapters 9 and 10). Yet the study of leadership as we find it in the context of contemporary social psychology is no longer a study of the mighty, of the personalities and behaviors of the outstanding figures of modern society, but of the many minor heads, bosses, and superiors of everyday, mainly institutional, life.

This shift of interest from the Great Man to petty leadership is closely connected with the shift from crowd to group psychology. This lowering of aspiration and narrowing of focus has several reasons, the most conspicuous and debatable of which is methodological convenience. Experimentation is still the principal method of social psychology, and petty leaders and small groups are much more accessible to scientific research than are socially eminent leaders and large crowds. However, accessibility and availability are not the best heuristic of scientific procedure, nor should a method, however privileged, be crucial for the decision whether a problem should be treated or discarded. In the history of psychology it has happened that problems were abandoned for methodological reasons; so it was both after the behaviorist revolution, and in the wake of the cognitive turn. Yet despite today's research preferences and reluctances in social psychology, not only leadership and groups but also leaders and masses have remained crucial problems to be dealt with scientifically, and that, we believe, includes psychology.

The interdisciplinary Study Group on Historical Change in Social Psychology, from whose symposia the contributions to this volume are taken, inquires into the nature of this change. Is it the phenomena under investigation that have changed, or is it our conceptions, or is historical change a covariation of both? As we did with crowds we asked again whether leaders and leadership have changed from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century: changed in character, in functions, in role, in the ways they emerge or are created. To answer such questions presupposes that our instruments are sharp enough to measure any differences. But are our concepts so well-defined and practicable that we are able to compare, say, Napoleon's charisma with Hitler's or de Gaulle's? Are they discriminative

enough to decide whether it is legitimate to ascribe charismatic leadership to John F. Kennedy or Ronald Reagan?

A shift of focus of research interests in leadership has been noted before: from emphasis on theory to emphasis on research, from unidirectional to interactional or reciprocal conceptions, from individual-centered approaches to individual  $\times$  group or person  $\times$  situation conceptions (cf. Stogdill, 1974; Bass, 1981; Hare, 1976). These are general trends that may be found in other areas of psychological research as well.

If one is interested in the modern social psychology of leadership and examines the more recent theories or models, another narrowing of scope becomes evident. There is a preference for conceptualizing leadership as "a set of group functions which must occur in any group if it is to behave effectively to satisfy the needs of its members" (Gibb, 1969, p. 205). Although this proposal for conceiving of leadership psychologically is not a proper definition, it gives, mainly in its normative conditional clause, the direction of most recent theorizing and research: the parameters contributing to the *effectiveness of leadership* or of groups in general, part of which may be the *efficiency* of leaders. Most of the contingency approaches (cf. Fiedler, 1967), the path-goal theory (House, 1971), and the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1974) are primarily effectiveness oriented. Even when the focus is on leadership styles or patterns of interaction between leaders and subordinates, the overall perspective of such studies is with a view to the effectiveness of styles of interaction. This holds for the so-called Ohio and Michigan studies of leadership (e.g., Fleishman & Bass, 1974; Fleishman & Hunt, 1973; Hill & Hughes, 1974), for the managerial grid (Blake & Mouton, 1964), as well as for the four-factor theory of leadership (Bowers & Seashore, 1966). The field of application and validation of such models is the task-oriented group or organization, and the fostering disciplines are organizational and personnel psychology and business and administrative science rather than "pure" social psychology.

Because presentations and critical discussions of the various competing models of efficient leadership are offered in many places, on the handbook, the critical review, and the textbook level, they are not taken up here. The Study Group and, hence, this volume remain committed to the idea of historical change in social psychology. One recurrent phenomenon in the history of the social and behavioral sciences is the apparent "loss" and "recovery" of a problem. The problem may be a large one such as language or the crowd, or it may be relatively small such as the relation between intelligence and leadership performance. Loss and recovery may be terms at once too emphatic and too broad to cover the various forms of the disappearance and reappearance of theories, problems, and methods from professional journals, textbooks, or the minds of researchers. Disproof, invalidation, lack of progress, but also satiation due to overresearching an area are the most frequent motives for the discontinuous nature of historical

change in the sciences. Their counterparts are the discovery that turns out to be a rediscovery, the belated insight that a disproof or invalidation in itself was invalid, the fresh look at an old problem, a new urgency to resume work in a deserted field, and, frequently, a new method enabling us to tackle problems formerly considered too complex for the instruments then available. Considering that science is always in a state of tension between risk and security, between exploration and proof, we sometimes observe and appreciate a return from the safer ground of multiply confirmed results to a still-uncharted area previously bypassed as unsafe. The new look then implies fresh courage. The reconsideration of Kurt Lewin's and the Lewinians' contribution to the topics of power and leadership (as in Chapter 6) was not undertaken in a merely historical attitude nor as a ritual homage to one of the pioneers of leadership and small-group research. It was rather the discontinuance of the Lewinian approach that motivated this retrospect and reassessment as an "interrupted task" in the Lewinian sense. Resuming this unfinished task does not mean merely picking up the thread where Lewin had to drop it, but reassessing an approach that in its factual research never quite matched the Galilean mode of thought in which it was undertaken. The field-theoretical key construct of *interdependence*, important as it is for the conception of leadership, requires that the mutual behaviors of leaders and followers be taken as seriously as their mental representations of one another and their mutual (social) knowledge. The present cognitive trend has, mainly in social psychology, strengthened the tendency to underrate real behavior and environment in favor of their representation. That this tendency also invigorates the theoretical and methodological *individualism* prevalent in social psychology (Graumann, 1986) may serve as a monitory signal, at least for those who like to view social psychology as a social science and to communicate more freely and profitably across the boundaries between the social sciences.

A growing faction of social psychologists in Europe and America has been working since the late sixties for a reintegration of their discipline into the social sciences (cf. Israel & Tajfel, 1972). Since our Study Group was founded as an instrument to promote and practice the dialogue among psychology, social history, and other social sciences, there has always been a strong interest in the social context in which disciplines, theories, and research topics emerge. We can really understand neither the crowd psychology of the *fin de siècle* nor its conception of mass leadership without knowing the political, social, economic, and partly even the military situation of France. The same holds for the rise of *Völkerpsychologie* in nineteenth-century Germany, or, for that matter, the dependence on the post-World War II intellectual climate of the Lewinian conception of group and leadership "climates." Nor is it mere happenstance that the attempts at liberalizing and "socializing" social psychology were begun in the very years when the wind of change rose in many fields. In the meantime the wind itself has changed, but the few changes brought about in social psychology

are there to work with. Otherwise, we would experience another instance of discontinuity.

In a different sense Fred Fiedler tries to retrieve a topic that had been laid aside for a while: the role of intelligence in leadership performance (Chapter 7). Have we not heard repeatedly how little personality traits in general and intellectual traits in particular contribute to effective leadership? At least, the tests designed to measure intellectual differences have not been very predictive of the selection of leaders; experimental studies have yielded contradictory or inconclusive evidence. The fresh look presented in this volume is a differentiating reevaluation of parameters in both the leader and the group, accomplished by means of a new theoretical model.

A new theoretical approach is also offered by Mario von Cranach (Chapter 8). Whereas the idea that leadership is determined by the nature of the group and the problems it means to solve can be traced back at least to Bogardus (1918) and was central to all group-dynamic conceptions of leadership since Brown (1936), the fresh look von Cranach invites us to take is from a sociopsychologically adapted theory of action. Recalling what was said about continuities and discontinuities in the history of science, we have here a conceptual and methodological innovation emerging or construed from the convergence of two traditions.

Although it makes sense to analyze leadership in the context of groups and group actions and to understand group activities as always implying some kind and degree of leadership, we must not forget the lesson from history: There are leaders of the masses who are not primarily leaders of small groups (the favorite units of social psychological analysis). The leader of a nation or of a mass movement and the idol of a generation may be members of small groups, but their leadership role derives from the feelings and the responses of the masses. In full analogy with the group-psychological approach we are held to study mass leadership in its social context. There may be similarities, but there will also be differences. And who dares to generalize from small-group research to the study of crowds and mass movements? Although we know that some do, we preferred to look into some of the specifics of collective leadership.

One remarkable phenomenon is the patent contradiction that arises in social movements that, while resenting hierarchical structures, and above all dominating leader figures, are in urgent need of direction and structure. Leaders are needed but unwanted, or at best tolerated as necessary evils as was the case in the German socialist movement in late nineteenth century, as demonstrated by Groh in Chapter 3. This problem continues to be faced by contemporary grassroots movements like the West German Green Party, who resent the existence of those partisans to whom they owe a good part of their public appeal, prestige, and constituency. It is the figures against the more homogeneous ground of the masses that make up the public image of social movements, and the image may become an essential part of a social representation.



One of the modern means of creating, building up, shaping, and strengthening the prestige of leading figures is by the design and rehearsal of media events. Leadership at the top levels of modern mass society has become unthinkable without its regular or intermittent presentation to the public by means of the mass media. In Chapter 9 Katz and Dayan contribute a brief study on the different social functions served by the rehearsals of contests, conquests, and coronations. The questions behind this demonstration remains: What is the need for heroes in a democratic society? Is it the need to identify? to adore? to be carried away? Whatever the proper answers may be, we are back in the psychology of the crowd rather than the group. In any case, the media of modern mass communication are an integral part of the social context in which leadership is realized.

In a similar vein—partly more extreme, partly more down-to-earth—Nadav Kennan and Martha Hadley demonstrate how political leaders are made and marketed like other consumer goods with the help of modern marketing research and strategy (Chapter 10). This contribution was bound to receive more than mere praise. As perhaps the most prosaic text in our discourse on leadership it came closest to the ideal of experimental design: control all the variables but the ones you want to vary in accordance with your intention (hypothesis). On second look, however, it is less an experiment in conditioning than a well-designed training program. As such it is in line with a long tradition of training candidates to become political, ecclesiastical, business, or military leaders. At the far modern extreme from the original conception of the Great Man manipulating the masses, we have now the irony of a quasi-inversion: The leader-to-be is the leader to be manipulated according to the expectations and hopes of the masses who, in yet another aspect of the interactions, are regularly or intermittently being told what they may expect or at least hope for. The social context in which such leadership occurs is truly complex in its reciprocal nature and a challenge for better theory and methodology.

The present volume contains the revised papers presented to the Study Group. It does not reflect the group discussions except in a much digested form in this introduction and in the epilogue by Serge Moscovici. A few comments on the vicissitudes of our communication are in order. The Study Group is interdisciplinary as well as international; its *lingua franca* is English, the second language for the majority of speakers (and authors). It is in this language that we have tried, mostly with success, to communicate differences that sometimes were difficult to convey because of the need to translate into a common language. Only superficially can the difficulties be called linguistic, however. They were also cultural in many respects. I daresay that our exchange on the changing conceptions of leadership was as cross-cultural as it was cross-disciplinary. Cross-culturally we have several problems that make comparisons difficult. Most comparisons may involve differences in political culture and tradition, for example between France,