3 Leader/follower perspectives

Chapter aims

- ☐ Explore and critically discuss the foundations of charismatic, transformational & transactional leadership
- ☐ Explore similarities and differences in the concepts of charismatic and transformational leadership
- ☐ Understand the key components of Leader-Member Exchange theory
- ☐ Consider the role of followship in leadership from a critical perspective
- ☐ Focus on leadership in action: transformational leadership in a DMO, by Scott Taylor.

Leader/follower perspectives – entity-relational approaches

As we saw in the previous chapter, classic approaches to understanding leadership all shared the view that leadership is a specialised role – they focused on the individual and, whilst some of these theories looked at what other influences there may be (i.e. the situational context), they did so through the lens of the primary leader, carrying out leadership functions.

This then can be seen as their one key limitation – they are leader-centric and don't tend to recognise followers' characteristics or initiatives (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). This focus on the 'heroic leader' has, over the last 50 years, become increasingly criticised, as researchers began to look at leadership behaviours from a influence perspective, considering the dynamics of the leader- follower

behaviours and leadership styles that might influence or change the behaviours of their followers or work subordinates. As Burns (1978) suggested, at this point, we knew a lot about leaders, whilst knowing very little about leadership. The body of work that grew out of such observations was largely concerned with what became known as charismatic and transactional / transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). Here scholars had started to focus on *leadership styles* – what is it that leaders do that makes them effective – and on the impact the leader has on their followers.

In their review of the past 25 years of leadership research, Dinh et al. (2014) note that significant research is now occurring at the dyadic level. Dyadic means the interaction between two things, so in the case of leadership we mean the interaction between the leader and the follower. This body of work predominantly emerges through studies that focus on charismatic, transformational leadership or the leader-member exchange theories. So, with the ongoing criticisms of the heroic leader theories, scholars moved into what is often known as the 'post-heroic' phase (Badaracco, 2001). It was Bass's (1985, 1995) work in particular, that started a paradigm shift from viewing leadership as something someone is, or the things someone does, or the knowledge and skills someone has, towards the notion that leadership is an influential, dyadic process (Yukl, 1999).

Since the 1980s then, the focus of leadership research has shifted towards the relational aspects of leadership, as scholars consider how interpersonal relationships inform leadership practice. This represents a significant shift from the pure entity approaches to leadership studies, as described in Chapter 2 (i.e. those studies that focus on leadership as something someone special 'does') and those that look at the individual's interpersonal relationships, as described in this chapter (i.e. those studies that look at how leadership exists within relationships between two people – the leader, and the follower).

The overriding purpose of this chapter is to articulate the background to the current arguments existing in the literature, which suggest that leadership is too often reduced to a dyadic, influential, one-way (top-down) relationship and to highlight how these entity-relational perspectives are still predominant in event studies.

Charismatic leadership

From theories such as the trait or Great Man theory described in Chapter 2, the notion that charisma is an essential element of leadership emerged. Weber (1947) is widely credited with suggesting that charisma is a special kind of leadership trait, which helped to see people through times of crisis. Charismatic leaders, Weber suggested, emerged during periods of crisis with radical views that attracted followers. Whilst Weber is often credited as being the founder of charismatic leadership, it wasn't until the mid-1970s that it was developed in an organisational context. Key writers here include Bryman (1992), Conger (1989) and Conger and Kanungo (1987, 1998).

For these later scholars, charismatic leadership was broadly viewed through three different lenses (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018). The first was those who took a behavioural view of charismatic leadership, and suggested that charismatic leaders could be identified through what they did, and how they behaved (e.g. Bryman suggested charismatic leaders would be great orators). The second was those that viewed charisma as something that the followers bestowed on the leader, and therefore became highly committed to them (e.g. Conger and Kanaungo, 1987, 1998). The third view of charismatic leadership takes a relational perspective, suggesting that charismatic leadership is dependent on the relationship between leader and follower, and is based on shared ideological values.

The issue with charismatic leadership is that often leaders are chosen at a time when there is a problem that needs solving, or deep-rooted unhappiness. In other words, when we are in uncertain times, we are more likely to seek out leadership from charismatic leaders – those 'heroic' leaders, who have the charisma (which often implies the nerve or daring) to bring about the change people think they need. This may well be why we have seen Donald Trump and Boris Johnson elected to run countries at a time of clear uncertainty and disruption – their charisma entertains us, and it makes us feel good at a time when feeling good is in scant supply. They are leading through conviction – the conviction that their 'new' way is better than the one that has gone before – and with charisma, to convince the voting public that they are the same as them. Of course, these leaders do inevitably fail – when times