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## **Leadership: the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose**

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## CHAPTER 6

### **Leadership: the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose**

*Rune Todnem By and Ben S. Kuipers*

*“Historically few leadership scholars have focused on purpose as the primary differentiator of leadership...” (Grint et al., 2017:9).*

#### **Introduction**

The year is 2022. We can just about see the end of covid-19, a pandemic having restricted the way we live our lives and conduct our business for years, brutally exposing global interdependency and inequalities. The recent 2021 United Nations climate change conference, better known as COP26 (Conference of the Parties) only served to confirm a global inability and unwillingness to collectively acknowledge and act sufficiently on the reality that is the climate crisis. A reality representing the biggest threat not only to future wealth creation, health, and prospects, but to the existence of humankind as we know it (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021).

Amid these exhausting challenges – to some a perfect storm – a renewed call for leadership to deliver for stakeholders *and* shareholders, society *and* markets, is emerging (Clegg et al., 2021; Freeman et al., 2020; Chambers et al., 2010; Ghoshal, 2005; Wilson & McCalman, 2017, Maak et al., 2021). To do so in any meaningful way, requires convincing alternatives to what is both a limited and limiting leadership orthodoxy, and a moral compass that goes beyond the individual (Burnes & By, 2012). As Rost (1995: 19) puts it, “The potential value of the leadership concept can be

realized only by taking it seriously,” and must involve intended and real change reflecting mutual purposes (Rost, 1995), hence linking it to questions of ethics and sustainability.

Against this rather bleak backdrop, the need “to enshrine the pivotal role of *purpose*” in leadership (By, 2021:30) becomes ever more pertinent. Because, simply put, nothing is worth doing if we don’t know why. However, truly embedding purpose in leadership orthodoxy requires nothing less than a shift in the prevalent leader-centric leadership paradigm so persistently focusing on the relationship between leader(s) and followers. The further development of leadership understanding, capacity, and capabilities is depending on our ability and willingness to let go of the ever-popular, simplistic notion, and matter-of-fact assumption that the activity and process of leadership is centred around a limited number of individual leaders (Raelin, 2016; Crevani & Endrissat, 2016).

To better understand, theorise, and practice leadership, it is important to move beyond the focus on individual leaders and their relationship with others, and direct further attention towards the collective efforts and responsibilities of leadership as a collective process aiming at delivering on purpose. From the public administration debate, the notion of enhancing public leadership as “leadership for the common good, for the purpose of creating public value... serving the public interest” (Getha-Taylor in Crosby and Bryson, 2018, p.1268) informs important questions:

1. How can the concept of leadership be reframed, separating it from the dominant focus on leaders?

## 2. What is the role of purpose in leadership?

Taking inspiration from this debate, we aim to contribute to an understanding of *leadership as the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose* (By, 2021:30) rather than *as a relationship where leaders are influencing people to follow a course of action set by them*. Departing from leadership orthodoxy, we draw on a newly established leadership lens based on the notion of Telos, the old Greek word for end goal - or purpose - also used by Aristotle to represent the inherent purpose of a thing or person. We explore the use and meaning of purpose for individuals and organizations and connect these to the principles of Telos in an attempt to help reframe leadership theory and practice.

### **How can the concept of leadership be reframed, separating it from the dominant focus on leaders?**

When problematising the field of leadership, one major restraint stands out, and that is one of definition: what exactly constitutes leadership (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993; 1995; Barker, 1997; 2001)? Rost (1995) suggests there are almost as many definitions as there are leadership scholars and practitioners, arguing that most of what has been written about leadership is addressing it as nothing more than good management. Although supporting the requirement for both in society and organisations to prosper, he is unambiguously clear about leadership and management being two vastly different concepts (see Table 1 below) (Rost, 1995).

Leadership	Management
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An influence relationship.	An authority relationship.
Done by leaders and collaborators (previously referred to as followers).	Done by managers and subordinates.
Involves leaders and collaborators intending real changes in an organisation.	Involves coordinating people and resources to produce and sell goods and/or services in an organisation.
Requires that the intended changes reflect the mutual purposes of the leaders and collaborators.	Requires coordinated activities to produce and sell the goods and/or services that reflect the organisation's purpose.

**Table 1:** Leadership vs Management (Adapted from Rost, 1995).

Furthermore, Burns (1978) and Rost (1993; 1995) highlight the lack of a clear school of leadership - theoretical or practical - arguing that without such a school of thought we do not know what we are studying nor how to practice it. With Burns (1978:1) suggesting that "If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about *leadership*", Barker (1997) argues that we have learned very little since Burns. He goes as far as arguing that "the study of leadership is in shambles", hijacked by an obsession with leaders and their traits, characteristics, styles and abilities, as well as with power, manipulation, and economic success (Barker:1997:346).

One of the challenges, then, restraining the further development of leadership theory and practice is the relentless leader-centric focus on the relationship between leaders and followers (or similarly, stakeholders and collaborators), neglecting the collectivity of both leadership and purpose (Kempster & Jackson, 2021). This focus is to be found not only in leadership orthodoxy, but also in many alternative theories and interpretations. For instance, despite Rost's later suggestion to replace "followers"

with “collaborators” (1995), he defined leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (1993:102). Burns (1978:19) used similar phrasing when he defined leadership as “...leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and the needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers”. In other words, notwithstanding their focus on purpose, Burns (1978) and Rost (1993; 1995) actively contributed to the sustained focus on leaders through their own definitions.

However, applying different words to the roles of leaders and followers in this well-established, arguably unequal, dysfunctional us-and-them relationship does nothing to help augment the collective act as well as the collective responsibility of leadership. Hence, Kempster and Jackson (2021:4) suggest replacing “leaders and followers” with “people” to avoid the hierarchical perspective and “to embrace collective, distributed, shared and community leadership relationships”. Using the word “leader”, in their view, is still useful to refer to the formal role in organizations (Kempster & Jackson, 2021).

Scholars and practitioners are making headway towards addressing the fundamental question of what is leadership. For example, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) and Clarke (2013) have explored leadership as a relational process engaging with exchange mechanisms. These developments of shared and distributed leadership represent a clear move towards focusing on what is leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; and Sweeney et al., 2018). Carson et al. (2007) emphasize several dimensions of the internal (team) environment fostering shared leadership by team members in which a shared

purpose (to “have similar understanding of their team’s primary objectives”) is considered essential.

Another developing concept is that of responsible leadership where views of stakeholder engagement are expanded upon to include societal considerations (Maak & Pless, 2006). Moving the focus from a relationship between leaders and followers to one between leaders and stakeholders - acknowledging the purpose of leadership in terms of serving a ‘common good’ (Maak & Pless, 2006) and good dividends (Kempster et al., 2011) - is an important step away from an exclusive focus on short-term profit maximisation (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008).

Elements of these developments are captured by the leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) movement (Raelin, 2016: 3) that sets out to

“...upend our traditional views of leadership because it does not rely on the attributes of individuals, nor does it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, which historically has been the starting point for any discussion of leadership. Rather, it depicts immanent collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, sometimes recurring and sometimes evolving patterns in the moment and over time among those engaged in the practice”.

Challenging status quo, Raelin (2016) describes the current focus on the initiator – usually referred to as the leader - as a fallacy where we assume one actor in the leader-follower relationship to be active and the other to be passive: “...people tend to already be in motion and are not necessarily static until activated by others (Raelin, 2016:5).

Although these developments, amongst others, represent a real opportunity to reframe leadership discourse in support of addressing challenges faced in the 21st century, the individual initiatives – many of which remain stubbornly and persistently leader-centric - may be perceived as competing and peripheral alternatives only appealing to smaller congregations. For example, L-A-P with all its good intentions is arguably currently positioning itself as an alternative movement competing for attention at the fringe of the leadership theory and practice debate. Consequently, mainstream leadership theory and practice remain dominated by a focus on leaders (individual) rather than leadership (process), thus leaving considerable scope for further development (cf. Barker, 1997; 2001; Kempster et al., 2011; Yukl, 2012).

Much has arguably happened in the field of leadership since Burns (1978), Rost (1993; 1995) and Barker (1997). However, utilising Rost's (1993:3) framework of categorising leadership theory as either peripheral elements ("traits, personality characteristics, 'born or made' issues, greatness, group facilitation, goal attainment, effectiveness, contingencies, situations, goodness, style, and above all, the management of organizations – public and private"), content ("what leaders need to know about a particular profession, organization, or society in order to be influential in it"), or the essential nature of leadership (What is leadership?), it is clear that the vast majority of leadership theory and practice still fall within the two first categories (cf. Kempster et al., 2011; Yukl, 2012). Simply put, we are still leader-centric in our focus and approach, obsessed with skills, traits, characteristics, and styles. Even Rost's contribution concerning leadership as distinct to management focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers/collaborators.

The overall and pressing leadership challenge – as we see it – is that *definitions of current and future problems and solutions are resulting from a leadership orthodoxy based on assumptions and fallacies*. Hence, we suggest that a combined effort should be redirected from a position of tinkering at the peripheral edges of orthodoxy to altering the very core of this orthodoxy. Attending to what we may call or how we may describe the relationship between leader(s) and followers arguably only reinforces the very orthodoxy that many of us seem to agree needs reframing.

### **The role of purpose in leadership**

From the work on leadership as a utilitarian consequentialist process emerges an overarching emphasis on purpose (Burnes et al., 2018; Burnes & By, 2012). McKnight and Kashdan (2009:242-243) define such purpose as

*“...a central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviours, and provides a sense of meaning. Purpose directs life goals and daily decisions by guiding the use of finite personal resources. Instead of governing behaviour, purpose offers direction just as a compass offers direction to a navigator; following the compass (i.e. purpose) is optional. Living in accord with one’s purpose, however, offers that person a self-sustaining source of meaning through goal pursuit and goal attainment... Purpose is at the highest level of analysis and provides some degree of centrality in a person’s identity...”*

Damon, Menon and Bronk (2003:121) provide a somewhat shorter definition suggesting that purpose is *“...a stable and generalized intention to accomplish*

*something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self*". Purpose is concerned with the search for meaning and a desire to be MAD (By, 2020) – to Make A Difference to matters beyond that of the individual (Damon, Menon and Bronk, 2003) and the individual organisation (By, 2021).

According to McKnight and Kashdan (2009), the concept of purpose exists as either religiosity, spirituality or meaning. Differentiating purpose from meaning, they suggest that the former does not necessarily drive the latter (McKnight and Kashdan, 2009). Rather, meaning contributes to the development of purpose, and once developed, a sense of purpose drives meaning. In their own words: "purpose and meaning have a temporal, bidirectional relationship" (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009:243). Reker et al. (1987:44) further explore purpose in relation to meaning, and state that "Meaninglessness has been recognized as a modern day malaise that, if left unresolved, can lead to symptoms of anxiety, depression, hopelessness, or physical decline."

Whilst Frankl (2004) proposes that purpose is at the very core of what makes a good life providing meaning, fulfilment, and sense, Savolaine and Granello (2002) suggest that if an individual's sense of meaning is intact it is less likely that uncertainty will arise or indeed persist. They argue that meaning can counterbalance discouragement and support existing positive behaviour and the initiation of new ones. They propose that "It often takes an additional element of motivation to begin a new activity, and a sense of purpose or meaning could be a deciding factor. This could happen by mentally associating the target behaviour to an element of higher purpose" (Savolaine & Granello, 2002:181). An example of such higher purpose is illustrated by

Dale (1991, in Neck & Milliman, 1994:9) in the story about a reporter visiting a construction site:

*The “reporter asked three brick masons what they were doing. The first answered gruffly, “I’m laying bricks.” The second replied, “I’m earning a week’s pay.” But the third mason said enthusiastically and with obvious pride, “I’m building a cathedral.”*

### **The role of purpose in organisations**

Within the context of organisations, and particularly in one of organizational change, Karp and Helgø (2008) explain the importance for individuals to be part of the common meaning making. When people believe in the fundamental purpose of why the organization exists and can relate the contribution of their own tasks to it, they are much more motivated to adjust their behaviour accordingly (Karp & Helgø, 2008).

McKnight and Kashdan’s (2009:249) work on purposeful living provides several hypotheses of interest to leadership and organization studies: people pursuing a purpose ought to be less susceptible to avoidance behaviours such as procrastination compared to those merely goal-directed; purpose motivates people to persist rather than quit in face of difficult situations; purpose enhances rebound capacity through more efficient resource allocation; the refractory period following any stressful event will be shorter for those with purpose; people who live with a purpose will be less prone to illness and report fewer symptoms even when ill; stress and satisfaction will be dictated by the level of congruence between purpose and the opportunity to fulfil

that purpose; and purposeful living produces longer-term, durable benefits as compared with nonpurposeful living.

These hypotheses support the importance of purpose and the belief that having a clear and aligned purpose between organisations and organisational members (including those we traditionally refer to as leaders) can support sustainable success. Kempster et al. (2011) believe purpose to be intrinsic in all human beings, a notion McKnight and Kashdan (2009:243) disagree with suggesting that just as much as “A person who is unable to grasp abstract concepts might find it difficult to generate a purpose since purpose requires insight, introspection, and planning” (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009:243). As such, it can be argued that organizations can be as unable to generate and sustain a purpose.

Anchored to the work of Burns (1978), Rost (1993; 1995), Damon, Menon and Bronk (2003), MacIntyre (1984; 2004), and Kempster et al. (2011), By (2021:34) defines purpose as the pursuit of a worthy idea and activity, the outcome of which goes beyond the individual and the individual organisation. This definition suggests that corporate and societal purposes are not necessarily mutually exclusive but inclusive, and that what is good for society at large is what is good for organisations and individuals within them in the long-term.

### **The purpose of organisations**

Kempster and Jackson (2021:7) propose that “the purpose of organizational leadership is to enhance the world”, and Collins and Porras (2005) first offered *purpose beyond profit* as the single common denominator explaining the sustained

success experienced by what they identified as enduring great companies back in 1994. Emerging from their longitudinal study of 18 private sector organisations was a philosophy of purpose *and* profit, the ‘magical’ word being *and* rather than the dictatorial *or*. With few exceptions, their recommendation to focus on organizational purpose beyond profit is yet to be adopted, developed, explored, or even acknowledged in mainstream leadership studies, study programs, or practices. One can only wonder why that is.

Drawing on their study, Collins and Porras (2005) proposed that what great companies have in common is a core ideology based on purpose and core values. Defining purpose as “The organization’s fundamental reason for existence beyond just making money – a perpetual guiding star on the horizon; not to be confused with specific goals or business strategies” they also outlined core values as “The organization’s essential and enduring tenets – a small set of general guiding principles; not to be confused with specific cultural or operating practices; not to be compromised for financial gain or short-term expediency” (Collins & Porras, 2005:73).

The same year as Collins and Porras’ 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition was published, Chouinard, founder and owner of the outdoor apparel company Patagonia, provided an example of core values and enduring purpose in his book ‘Let my people go surfing’ (2005, in Chouinard, 2016): Patagonia exists to do no harm to the environment. Indeed, the company’s purpose was later refined to state that it is to do good and contribute towards decreasing the environmental crisis. Introducing his own 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, Chouinard (2016:1) stated that “Patagonia exists to challenge conventional wisdom and present a new style of responsible business”. Although

being a private sector organisation, seeking to generate profit, growth and expansion are not core values to the business (Chouinard, 2016).

### **Internal and external goods**

However, Patagonia and organisations like it are still the exception to the rule, as Kempster et al. (2011) argue that organisational vision, mission, objectives, and targets are typically concerned with corporate purposes with the aim to deliver external rather than internal goods. Differentiating the two, MacIntyre (2004) defines internal goods as common good - to what is good for the whole community, society, nation, and globe - and focuses on areas of for example education, health, equality, peace, saving lives, sustainable development etc. External goods, on the other hand, are concerned with seeking to increase power, influence, money, and status as ends in themselves.

In their work, Kempster et al. (2011:322) argue that

*“Purposes that are pronounced in dominant leadership discourses reflect objectives, mission and vision. Aligned to the delivery of these forms of purposes are discourses oriented towards performance management in the form of key performance indicators, action plans and a balanced score card. The outcome is the production of external goods and practices oriented to the production of these external goods”.*

Further developing this line of thought, they observe that leadership practices in all sectors have “...succumbed to the corrupting influence of money, status and power” (Kempster et al., 2011:323).

As suggested by Frankl (2004), MacIntyre (2004), Collins and Porras (2005), and Kempster et al. (2011), a worthy purpose based on internal goods aiming at contributing to the good of humankind can lead to happier individuals with a clearer sense of meaning and fulfilment and sustained corporate success. Purpose can be about what best serves the interests of the human condition, and it can be beautiful (Ladkin, 2008). Based on this understanding of purpose there is a strong business case to be made for establishing stronger links between leadership and contributing towards a common good purpose such as for example sustainable development.

### **Exploring the Telos Leadership Lens (TLL)**

Based on the seminal work of Burns (1978) and Rost (1993), and more recent contributions of Kempster et al. (2011) on leadership as purpose, Burnes et al. (2018) and Burnes and By's (2012) on organisational change and leadership as a utilitarian consequentialist process, and Raelin's (2016:4) statement that “The effort [of leadership] is intrinsically collective”, By (2021:30) constructed a new theoretical lens consisting of three elements in support of the further development of leadership theory and practice:

- 1) Leadership is a responsibility of the many, not a privilege of the few
- 2) Leadership is the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose

- 3) Leadership purpose is to be guided by internal goods (exemplified by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals).

Named the Telos Leadership Lens (TLL) after MacIntyre's (2004) Aristotelian definition of Telos as an overarching and ultimate goal of contributing to the good of humankind, its aim is to add value to existing leadership theories and practices. Through its application, it provides an opportunity for leadership theory and practice to be reframed and further developed with a focus on *collective doing* (utilitarian consequentialism) rather than *individual being* (virtue ethics). TLL has the potential to help establish leadership as *the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose* rather than re-enforcing leadership as an influencing relationship between leaders and followers and/or stakeholders.

Adopting the notion of Telos - a word traditionally linked to virtue ethics and traditional leadership traits (Rost, 1995) - as an overarching and ultimate goal of contributing to the good of humankind, the TLL stipulates that the importance of individual leaders in the traditional sense is secondary to that of the process of leadership, and that such leadership provides purpose, a certainty in an otherwise uncertain world.

Although scholars and practitioners seem to agree on the importance of clear organisational direction, the current position of purpose in leadership studies is one of all-too-often-being-taken-for-granted (Kempster et al., 2011). Burns' (1978:3) notion that "...leadership is nothing if not linked to collective purpose...", and Rost's

(1993) definition of leadership clearly linking it to purpose, have gone rather unnoticed in leadership theory and practice.

Rost (1995:140) argues that “The major transformation needed is to replace the individual frame embedded in virtue ethics with a communal frame”. Hence, although adopting its name from Aristoteles and MacIntyre’s (2004) work, the TLL clearly differentiates itself from virtue ethics and the focus on *being* (Knights & O’Leary, 2006) and on a person’s (or agent’s) virtues of mind and character (Knights & O’Leary, 2006). According to Knights and O’Leary (2006: 130) “...virtue-based ethical systems centre on the agent, the character and dispositions of persons...” Hence, virtue ethics supports the current leader-centric leadership orthodoxy with its focus on individuals’ skills, traits, and characteristics. Rost (1995:140) argues that such “virtue ethics is not sufficient for the postindustrial world. A holistic, large group, organizational, community, global approach is needed.”

Instead, drawing on utilitarian consequentialism, the TLL focuses on the effort of *doing*, emphasising the consequences of any action and inaction, and on achieving the best possible outcome for the largest number of people (Burnes et al., 2018; Burnes & By, 2012) - or maximising goodness in society (Knights & O’Leary, 2006). As such, the TLL acknowledges the act of leadership as a collective responsibility not to be abdicated from. As opposed to the dominant leader-centric orthodoxy, TLL is a leadership-centric lens, and its core principles are further outlined in Table 2. These principles address the L-A-P movement’s focus on leadership as an effort of collective action, and Kempster et al.’s (2011:318) concern that the omission of discussing purpose in the context of leadership studies has “profound implication for practicing

leaders”. Furthermore, the principles outlined identify leadership as a utilitarian consequentialist process, addressing Yukl’s (2012) concern that the current orthodoxy fails to engage in any wider societal accounts of leadership.

<p><b>Principle 1</b></p>	<p><b><i>Leadership is a responsibility of the many, not a privilege of the few.</i></b>  Leadership is about doing, process, and collective action rather than being, relationship, role, and function. It is a verb rather than a noun, and a collective responsibility who is no ones’ prerogative, and which no one should abdicate from.</p> <p>Leadership activities are simultaneous, interdependent, and equal which can be performed simultaneously.</p>
<p><b>Principle 2</b></p>	<p><b><i>Leadership is the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose.</i></b>  Purpose is defined as the pursuit of a worthy idea and activity, the outcome of which goes beyond the individual and the individual organisation.</p> <p>Purpose and core values should not be compromised for financial gain or short-term convenience. It is what should not change in a changing world, but rather provide meaning, consistency, certainty, and sense in an otherwise volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. It should be the engine of proactive, innovative and risk embracing change. Organizational mission, vision, targets and behaviour should align to organisational purpose and core values.</p> <p>Whilst purpose is not to be confused with specific business strategies, goals or targets, core values are not to be confused with cultural or operating practices.</p>
<p><b>Principle 3</b></p>	<p><b><i>Purpose driven by internal goods.</i></b>  Internal goods being what is good for the whole community, society, nation, and globe, focuses on areas of for example sustainable development, education, health, equality, preventing war, saving lives etc. This in contrast to external goods exemplified with seeking to increase power, influence, money, and status as ends in themselves. As a result, purpose must go beyond short-term profit.</p> <p>The focus is on utilitarian consequentialism, emphasising the consequences of any action and inaction, and on achieving the best possible outcome for the largest number of stakeholders.</p>

**Table 2.** The Telos Leadership Lens (informed by Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993; 1995; Barker, 1997; 2001; MacIntyre, 2004; Collins and Porras, 2005, Crevani et al., 2010; Kempster et al., 2011; Yukl, 2012; and Raelin, 2016)

Although drawing on the purpose-focused leadership tradition attempted by Burns (1978) and Rost (1993; 1995), the TLL diverges from their focus on the roles of leaders and followers, and the relationship between the two.

Suggesting a move away from a leader-centric, relationship-obsessed understanding of leadership, the TLL acknowledges leadership as interdependent and equal activities undertaken simultaneously by individuals involved in the leadership process. Some will perform different activities or roles at different times in the process of leadership – and there will be a leadership activity continuum - but all individuals have a potential active role to play in the overall collective process towards delivering on a common purpose. Depending on context there will be different leadership configurations, but leadership remains everyone’s societal and organisational responsibility.

### **Applying the Telos Leadership Lens**

By conceptualising the TLL, By’s (2021) intention is to contribute to the process of further developing the leadership concept by suggesting a new direction of travel. Elements of what is proposed already form part of existing theories. For example, ethical leadership puts an emphasis on the ethics of *what*, *how* and *why* leaders do what they do (Kempster & Jackson, 2021). However, this existing theory is very much leader-centric focusing on the leader-follower relationship. Through applying the TLL, leadership orthodoxy can emphasise its development with a focus on collective *doing*

(utilitarian consequentialism) rather than *being* (virtue ethics) and transform its emphasis towards becoming *the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose* rather than stubbornly holding on to the limited and limiting focus on the *relationship between leaders and followers*. The intention is not for the TLL to be categorised as a contribution to the development of any one singular theory, practice, or movement - that being ethical leadership, critical leadership studies, shared or collective leadership, or L-A-P.

Table 3 outlines how the application of the TLL may help reframe future leadership development. Offering scholars and practitioners guiding principles, the lens has the potential to point leadership development efforts in an alternative direction, helping the field becoming unstuck and fit for purpose.

	<b><i>Current Leadership orthodoxy</i></b>	<b><i>Applying the Telos Leadership Lens</i></b>
Leadership definition	<p>According to Rost (1995), one of the problems in leadership theory and practice is the great number of different definitions.</p> <p>Leadership is typically defined as a noun: the hierarchical role or position of being a leader; leading and influencing followers.</p>	The collective pursuit of delivering on purpose.
Relationship vs Action	<p>Focus on being (leader-centric); The relationship between leaders and followers (or stakeholders; collaborators etc).</p> <p>Leadership as the prerogative of formal/ordained leaders.</p>	<p>Focus on collective doing (leadership-centric); Leaders emerging from the action of leadership.</p> <p>Leadership as a collective activity and responsibility not to be abdicated from.</p>

	<p>Leaders are important/special/in limited numbers.</p> <p>Leaders differentiated from and privileged over followers.</p>	<p>The importance of leaders is secondary to that of leadership. Leaders are not important - Leadership is.</p> <p>Leadership and followership as simultaneous, interdependent, and equal activities.</p>
Role of Purpose	<p>Rarely defined. Mission statements often linked to the pursuit of external goods such as increasing power, influence, money, and status as ends in themselves.</p>	<p>Purpose becomes the focal point of leadership. Defined as the pursuit of a worthy idea and activity, the outcome of which goes beyond the individual and the individual organisation.</p> <p>Focus on internal goods such as sustainable development, education, health, equality, preventing war, saving lives, world peace.</p>
Ethics	<p>Often emphasising virtue ethics with a focus of defining the individual's virtue of mind and character as a positive trait that makes someone a good human being (or not).</p>	<p>Utilitarian consequentialism emphasising the importance of consequences of any action or inaction, and on achieving the best possible outcome for the greatest number of people/stakeholders.</p>
Role of education	<p>Focus on leader-centric training (skills) and development (traits and characteristics). Ordaining the chosen few. Elite activity.</p> <p>Moulding 'leaders' based on Great Man Theory and more recent incarnations of this theory.</p>	<p>Focus on leadership-centric education acknowledging leadership as a collective responsibility not to be abdicated from. Not an elite activity.</p> <p>Focus on common/greater/internal good – on achieving what is good for society (the greatest number of people), planet, and sustainable (long-term)</p>

	Focus on short-term profit maximisation and efficiencies.	profitability.
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**Table 3.** Applying the Telos Leadership Lens (informed by Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993; 1995; Barker, 1997, 2001; Yukl, 2012; Burnes et al., 2018; Burnes & By, 2012; Raelin, 2016; By, 2021)

### Leadership as a collective pursuit

The existing leadership related terminology is a barrier to the further development of theory and practice. Whilst the word ‘leadership’ with its leader-centric connotations keeps reinforcing the current orthodoxy, the word ‘followership’ can be perceived as weak or even submissive. Although Rost (1995) suggests replacing the word ‘followers’ with ‘collaborators’ there is still a leader-centric focus on the relationship between what is suggested to be two distinctively different roles. Furthermore, synonyms suggested for the word ‘collaborators’ include ‘traitors’, ‘turncoats’, ‘spies’, ‘agents’, and ‘grasses’ – words hardly more positive than ‘followers’ nor conducive of anyone wanting to undertake the activity.

Consequently, we propose that leadership is reframed as a process in which all actors play a leadership role and perform leadership activities and agency in some way. Hence, further focus on words, language and terminology facilitating the application of the TLL could prove essential. Having said that, an increased focus on *collective doing* and *purpose* rather than *individual being* and *influence relationships* may quickly

replace the current relational focus, and new words referring to such a relationship may therefore prove irrelevant in the future.

To clarify, the TLL does not suggest a move towards anarchy or non-hierarchical structures as there will still be a requirement for formal responsibilities and leaders whose task is to support and facilitate the process of leadership. However, it is suggested that leadership is not the prerogative of a small number of ordained individuals. On the contrary, the TLL proposes that we have a much larger pool of people who can contribute to leadership than what the current orthodoxy assumes.

To further emphasise the main implications of applying the TLL to existing theory and practice, Table 4 provides a comparison of the application of the lens with Rost's (1995) leadership elements.

Rost's essential leadership elements	Leadership when applying the Telos Leadership Lens
An influence relationship (individual being).	The collective pursuit of delivering on purpose (collective doing).
Done by leaders and collaborators.	Done by everyone. Leadership is a responsibility of the many, not a privilege of the few. Leadership is a collective activity and responsibility not to be abdicated from.
Involves leaders and collaborators intending real changes in an organisation.	Involves leadership as simultaneous, interdependent and equal activities by all involved in the process.
Requires that the intended changes reflect the mutual purposes of the leaders and collaborators.	Requires a purpose, defined as the pursuit of a worthy idea and activity, the outcome of which goes beyond the individual and the individual

	organisation.
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**Table 4:** Rost’s Leadership vs Leadership applying the Telos Leadership Lens (Adapted from Rost, 1995; and By, 2021).

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored how the concept of leadership can be reframed, separating it from the dominant focus on leaders, and the role of purpose in leadership. Emerging from the developments of leadership as purpose, a utilitarian consequentialist process, and an effort that is intrinsically collective, the TLL has been introduced to assist the reframing. Through the application of the three core principles (1) Leadership is a responsibility of the many, not a privilege of the few; (2) Leadership is the collective pursuit of delivering on purpose, with purpose defined as the pursuit of a worthy idea and activity, the outcome of which goes beyond any individual and individual organization; and (3) Purpose to be driven by internal goods such as sustainable development, the TLL can contribute to the further advancing of existing theory and practice with a focus on collective doing (utilitarian consequentialism) rather than individual being (virtue ethics).

Moving the leadership focus beyond *individual being* to *collective doing* and linking this *doing* to a clear notion of *purpose*, the TLL provides existing and new leadership theory and practice with an opportunity to further develop in a meaningful way. As a theoretical lens it goes beyond the challenge of leadership. It implies further

interdisciplinary work is required to explore and re-establish how we socialise our children and grandchildren in support of them defining current and future environmental, societal, cultural, and economic challenges and solutions. Some fields that spring to mind in addition to leadership and ethics are sustainable development, education, language, psychology, equality and diversity, innovation and entrepreneurship, politics, finance, economics, and accounting to mention a few.

We may already represent a lost generation - lost to the current fallacy of leadership indoctrination stipulating leadership as something centred around individual and often ordained leaders with a focus on the relationship between them and their followers. In support of future generations' health, wealth, and prospects, TLL principles can be included as an integral part in education at all levels and subject areas. The overarching focus in future research should be on *purpose* – *why* do organisations including businesses exist (to maximise short- or long-term profit for owners and/or stakeholders? To contribute to the development and survival of planet and humankind? To support equality cradle to grave?)? Only when we have further explored *why* can we move on to *how* – *how* do we collectively deliver on these existential foundations? Although we are currently observing a growing environmentalist movement (for example Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion at time of writing) and political rhetoric has changed, it can be argued that action has not. As Greta Thunberg argues, we will only solve a crisis when we treat it like one.

Leadership should no longer be studied and practiced in isolation. If we agree that leadership is about *collective doing* rather than *individual being*, then (1) we should all be made aware of this responsibility from the earliest possible age; and (2) we need

to develop an ability to define and act on challenges and solutions together, across disciplines and practices.

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