

# Annals of Theoretical Psychology

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Craig W. Gruber, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Jaan Valsiner, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

Matthew G. Clark, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Sven Hroar, Klempe, Department of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

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Matthew G. Clark • Craig W. Gruber  
Editors

# Leader Development Deconstructed

 Springer

*Editors*

Matthew G. Clark  
Northeastern University  
Boston, MA, USA

Craig W. Gruber  
College of Professional Studies  
Northeastern University  
Boston, MA, USA

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# Preface

Warren Bennis stated, “*Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.*” For all leaders, regardless of where you have led, having clarity of vision and purpose is universal. Whether it’s Jim Collin’s BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) or Peter Drucker’s pointed and inspirational mission statement that fits on a t-shirt, the common expectation is that leaders must have a clear concept for what the future looks like when they are fulfilling their purpose. This vision for a future and a clarity of mission have been repeatedly reinforced in leadership studies as critical for leaders.

Likewise, who is going to invest in a company that doesn’t have a clear and compelling business plan? While the answer depends somewhat on the type of investor, broad investment will be limited if there is no clear plan for how the company leadership will convert investment into a return. This is the case because the perception is that a leader without a plan is destined to fail. Even if the plan isn’t followed exactly, the process has value as the activity of planning builds capacity.

The problem is that leader studies and business are effectively operating today with limited clarity of vision or understanding of mission and virtually no business plans. In the United States alone companies spend tens of billions of dollars investing in leader and leadership development. The military also spends an incredible amount of time and resources developing and mentoring leaders. And yet, the structures and plans for leader development are poor to nonexistent. If we will not accept leaders without a vision, clarity of mission and purpose, or at least a plan, then why do we accept that approach when it comes to leader and leadership development? Unless people serve in large hierarchical organizations, the concept of focused planning to grow and develop leaders is generally far from the minds of leaders and managers.

Fortunately, leadership theories provide leaders a simple vision for what leadership can or should look like. Effectively, in a scientific sense, these “grand theories” of leadership, like Transformational Leadership, Authentic Leadership, or Adaptive Leadership (to only name a few), present a concept that some leaders research and attempt to employ. Yet, when it comes to leader and leadership development, more focused theories are not being employed. There are only a handful of theories for leader or leadership development, most of which are also more like grand theories

that are difficult to implement. The problem this presents is that there are issues translating from concept to reality. In scientific terms, there is a lack of “middle range theories” for the areas of leader and leadership development. In more practical terms, leaders are not able to go from a vision to mission to a business plan that can lead to tangible results. This leaves organizational leaders and managers on their own for figuring out how to develop others.

This volume is not intended to solely highlight the faults with leader and leadership development or to be disparaging in form. Instead, the purpose of this volume is to start a conversation around the topics of leader and leadership development. Specifically, we feel that there is a compelling need for more focused attention to the vision, mission, and business plans that can produce exceptional leaders of character in a complex and dynamic world. Because this volume is only starting a conversation, it will not address every issue related to leader and leadership development. Instead, this volume provides examples of the challenges and opportunities surrounding leader development as well as possible solutions for creating innovative and meaningful development and building better leaders regardless of the starting material. An additional challenge is doing this while simultaneously recognizing possible ends, ways, and means for creating positive change in a volatile and uncertain environment involving multiple domains.

The editors and authors of this volume invite further dialogue, discussion, and constructive debate around these important topics. Only through your positive engagement in this process can we find meaningful ways to tackle what is broadly accepted as a “wicked problem.” Bringing your insight, ingenuity, and expertise from academia or business to a shared conversation can help us all build better middle range theories that can promote the vision, mission, and business plans of leaders in all types of industries. We look forward to your participation.

For their courage in participating in this conversation around leader development, we are deeply grateful to all of the contributors of this volume. They are passionate and committed individuals who wish to make a difference so that all can benefit from the fruits of that labor. We are also grateful to the families of these authors because, as we discuss at various points in the book, leader and leadership development can begin when people are very young. Therefore, leader development begins with families. We are grateful to the families involved. This same gratitude extends to our own families. Katie and Heather, first and foremost, for their incredible support, and secondarily to our children for the times we were away to explore these ideas and the people who create them. We look forward to using what we learned through this project with all those involved in developing quality leaders and followers. Lastly, we are incredibly grateful to you the reader for your interest in leader development and for joining us in making innovation in leader and leadership development a priority. Your engagement on this topic and participation in the dialogue is what is truly needed to move this topic forward in the complex world of today and tomorrow. Thank you.

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# About the Editors

**Matthew G. Clark, Ph.D., P.M.P** is a Research Psychologist (behavioral neuroscientist) and program manager in the United States Army and an independent consultant on neuroscience and leadership topics. He is also a Lecturer for Northeastern University and is the former Director of the Eisenhower Leader Development Program and Professor at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. In that role he implemented a novel leader development certificate program with Columbia University focused on better preparing noncommissioned officers for developing leaders of character. He has conducted research or published on leader development, support for military families, developmental language disorders, learning, motivation, psychopharmacology, and medical product development. He also has numerous publications and professional reports and is active in strategic leadership of a large nonprofit organization.

**Craig W. Gruber, Ph.D.** is the lead faculty and Director of Security and Intelligence programs at Northeastern University. He has written on courage and presented nationally and internationally on security, intelligence, and forensic science. He developed Northeastern University's master's degree programs in Homeland Security and Strategic Intelligence and Analysis, and is based at the Kostas Research Institute for Homeland Security. He also serves on the board of the Order of the Sword and Shield, where he is the Director of Academic Advancement. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Annals of Theoretical Psychology* and has written an introductory psychology textbook and numerous articles.



# About the Contributors

**Hubert Annen, Ph.D.** is the head of Military Psychology and Military Studies at the Swiss Military Academy at ETH Zurich and the head of the assessment centers for career officer, career noncommissioned officer, and general staff officer candidates. His research interests include the evaluation and validation of assessment and selection procedures for military leaders, motivational aspects in the military context, military values and virtues, and the trainability and measurability of individual resilience.

**Erin S. Barry, M.S.** is Uniformed Services University LEAD Research Associate and a Research Assistant Professor at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences. She is a biomedical and biobehavioral scientist with expertise in research design, planning, logistics, data management, and statistical analyses. Her role in LEAD is to work on all aspects of Research and Development, to conduct scholarly reviews of relevant literature, and to translate scientific materials and evidence to be effectively taught and disseminated.

**Jason E. Beck, M.A.** is a doctoral student in Positive Organizational Psychology at Claremont Graduate University. In 2016, he received his master's degree in Positive Organizational Psychology with a co-concentration in evaluation. His research focuses on mindfulness and leadership development. Overall, he is interested in applying research to help organizations modernize the workplace for greater adaptability, engagement, and well-being.

**Melissa K. Carsten, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor of Management at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Her research seeks to understand how followers' role beliefs and behaviors affect leaders and leadership processes in organizations. Dr. Carsten has written several book chapters on leadership and followership and has published her research in referred journals such as *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, and *Organizational Dynamics*. She also has over 10 years of experience consulting on leadership development programs.

**Steven J. Condly, Ph.D.** is a Personnel Psychologist at the United States Military Academy at West Point. He has worked on a wide variety of projects, both at the Academy and in his capacity as a Senior Associate with HSA Learning & Performance Solutions, concerning Army branch selection, program evaluation, certification examination development and design, the incorporation of software testing into computer science education, and the cognitive psychology of human performance improvement. He has secured public and private grants and contracts and is presently working on a book detailing the training and education of officers in the US Army.

**Marco R. Furtner, Ph.D.** is Associate Professor of Psychology, dean of studies, and vice dean at the Faculty of Psychology and Sport Science, Leopold-Franzens University of Innsbruck. Additionally, he is lecturer for leadership, organizational behavior, and human resource management at the Department of Entrepreneurship, University of Liechtenstein. His research interests include self-leadership, self-regulation, motivation, and leadership.

**Courtney L. Gosnell, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor at Pace University. She earned her PhD in Social Psychology from the University of California-Santa Barbara and worked as a visiting professor at the University of North Florida and the United States Military Academy before arriving at Pace. Her research examines the role of positive and negative event social support in close relationships and how a variety of relationship processes influence well-being and personal, relationship, and organizational outcomes.

**Neil E. Grunberg, Ph.D.** is Uniformed Services University LEAD Director of Research and Development at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences. He is a medical and social psychologist who has studied and taught about leadership for 35 years. He coauthored the FourCe-PITO framework that is used by USU LEAD. His role is to ensure that the LEAD program and sessions are based upon sound evidence and scholarship and to oversee original research relevant to leadership education and training.

**Harry H. Jones, Ph.D., Lieutenant Colonel** is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the United States Military Academy at West Point. He aims to equip leaders with the conceptual tools they need to become innovators and expert creative problem solvers. In addition to a teaching focus on ethics and critical thinking, he also leads design thinking at West Point. He sees creativity as an essential skill for leadership in the twenty-first century.

**Melinda Z. Kalainoff, Ph.D., Colonel** is an Assistant Professor and Deputy Department Head in the Department of Chemistry and Life Science at the United States Military Academy at West Point. She supervises all General Chemistry courses and leads efforts in developing faculty professionally with respect to teaching and learning. Using an ethnographic perspective with roots in anthropology and sociolinguistics, she conducts natural studies of how disciplinary content

knowledge is socially co-constructed through discourse. She holds a PhD in Education, Teaching and Learning with emphasis in Science Education, from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

**Hannah G. Kleber, B.A** is Uniformed Services University LEAD Administrative Assistant at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences. She previously worked in education at the high school level culminating as a teacher and Assistant Dean. Her role in LEAD is to assist in curriculum development and teaching design, to synchronize team members' efforts across multiple professional schools and sites, and to explore new and innovative ways to deliver content to students.

**Chris P. Long, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor of Management and the Paul Naughton Research Fellow at the Tobin School of Business, St. John's University. Dr. Long concurrently also serves as an officer and a Research Psychologist in the United States Army Reserve. In his research, he examines the actions that leaders take within complex and dynamic business environments to accomplish a variety of key performance objectives. He holds a PhD in Management from Duke University and has previously held academic positions at Georgetown University, Washington University in St. Louis, and Duke University.

**Thomas Maran, M.Sc** is Researcher at the Universities of Innsbruck and Klagenfurt (Austria). His central research field is the investigation of cognitive and emotional processes during different arousal states and their relevance for clinical and forensic psychology as well as communication in leadership.

**John E. McManigle, M.D., F.A.C.P., Col. (Ret.)** is USU LEAD Director of Curriculum at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences. He is a retired Air Force Pulmonary and Critical Care physician who has served as faculty, course director, student affairs dean, vice dean, and acting dean of the School of Medicine. He uses his experience as an officer, physician, and educator to ensure that LEAD curriculum is relevant and impactful to the development of uniformed physician leaders.

**Jay P. Poitras, M.A** is a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Northeastern University. In 2002, he received his master's degree in Criminal Justice Administration. As the Associate Director of Homeland Security/Intelligence Studies at Northeastern University he develops course work for the modern security/intelligence practitioner. The scope of his research is within leadership models inside Homeland Security, the Intelligence Community, and Law Enforcement. Overall, he is interested in applying research to leadership models that can adapt to keep pace with cultural expectations.

**John F. Rauthmann, Ph.D.** is currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Wake Forest University (USA). He completed his PhD at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin where he also acted as the interim chair of personality psychology. His research interests include personality structures, dynamics, and processes;

person-situation transactions; voluntary personality change; and multi-method assessments of personality and individual differences.

**Rebecca J. Reichard, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at Claremont Graduate University. She concurrently serves as the Director of LeAD Labs, an evidence-based, nonprofit leader development consultancy. Her broad research interest is in the area of leadership development. More specifically, she is interested in understanding the processes of self-awareness, self-regulation, and leader self-development.

**Eric B. Schoomaker, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.C.P, LTG (Ret)** is Director of Uniformed Services University LEAD at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences. He has served in many clinical, academic, and leadership roles, including U.S. Army Surgeon General; commander of a community hospital, academic medical centers, and a deployable medical brigade; program director in internal medicine; and director of medical education for the Army. He applies his experience to ensure that LEAD research, content, and curricular offerings align with uniformed health leadership roles.

**Angela M. Yarnell, Ph.D.** is a United States Army Research Psychologist. As Deputy Chief of the Behavioral Biology Branch, Center for Military Psychiatry and Neuroscience Research, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, Silver Spring, MD, her research focuses on psychophysiology of stress and sleep. As an Assistant Professor in the Military and Emergency Medicine Department, Uniformed Services University, Bethesda, MD, she contributes to improving the development and training of the nation's uniformed medical leaders.