Chris O'Riordan · Felicity Kelliher
Patrick C. Flood · Malcolm Higgs

Outsider Leadership
Insights and Interviews from Business Leaders

Outsider Leadership

"The genius of this book is in picking apart a taken-for-granted category in leadership research—'the outsider'—and mapping the terrain that comes with it. For 'succession professionals' such as Board Chairs, owners, private equity partners and the like, this book provides an invaluable tool in the form of a ready-reckoner of upsides and downsides that come with an outsider candidate."

—Anand Narasimhan, *Shell Professor of Global Leadership & Dean of Faculty and Research, IMD*

"The perspective of the outsider has generated great literature throughout the ages. It is rarely a comfortable position but it is one that has motivated great achievement in academia, the military and public life. In *Outsider Leadership—Insights and Interviews from Business Leaders*, Felicity Kelliher and her colleagues cleverly apply the perspective to the business world with a series of fascinating case studies."

—Louise Richardson, *Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford*

"Standing outside, never being quite part of what's going on, always looking in, observing, and trying to figure things out, can have many advantages. Outsiders are more likely to question what others would take for granted. As a first, Patrick C. Flood and his associates have looked at the question of outsider leadership, demonstrating how an outsider's eye on things can turn into a competitive advantage. Anyone interested in this topic would be wise to pick up this book."

—Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, *Distinguished Clinical Professor of Leadership Development and Organizational Change; The Raoul de Vitry d'Avaucourt Chaired Professor of Leadership Development, Emeritus, INSEAD*

"Leadership is widely studied, as is outsiderness. But surprisingly, we know relatively little about *Outsider Leadership*. How do they lead? What are the advantages and disadvantages of feeling like an outsider? Being seen as an outsider by followers? The world is seeing a resurgence of outsider leaders in recent years and Patrick C. Flood and his associates are doing us all a great service by helping us learn more about what is happening around us. Anyone interested in understanding more about leadership is best advised to read this book."

—Randall S. Peterson, *Academic Director of the Leadership Institute and Professor of Organisational Behaviour, London Business School*

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the help and support of a number of people without whom it would not have been possible to produce this book. First, we would like to thank Anthony Dinan who inspired us at the beginning of this project. We also wish to express our deepest gratitude to all of the leaders who so willingly gave of their valuable time to speak with us and to read transcripts and draft chapters. We have learned a lot from their stories and experiences, and we are very grateful that they were willing to share these with us and others.

We would like to thank our colleagues who, along the way, have helped us in a variety of ways. To Patrick Buckland (Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)), Dr Mick Rock (WIT) and Olive Maitha (Dublin City University), we appreciate and acknowledge your great support for this book.

We are very grateful to the publishing team at Palgrave Macmillan for all of their assistance and guidance in the development of this book. In particular, we wish to express our sincere thanks to Gabriel Everington, Maddie Holder and Liz Barlow for their very valuable help and expertise along the way. A special word of thanks also to Divya Anish of SPi Global for supporting us greatly through the final stages of production.

To our families and friends, we would like to pay a special tribute for their patience, assistance and all-round support over the duration of the project. Thank you all, and here's to the next book!

The authors would be pleased to receive any correspondence from readers about the book.

Contents

Acronyms

AIB	Allied Irish Bank
AIM	Alternative Investment Market
B2B	Business-to-Business
B Comm	Bachelor of Commerce
BES	Business Expansion Scheme
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DBA	Doctorate in Business Administration
DCU	Dublin City University
EGM	Extraordinary General Meeting
EMEAI	Europe, Middle East, Africa, India
ENTJ	Extroversion, Intuition, Thinking and Judgement
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
GM	General Manager
GPMU	Graphic Print and Media Union
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation

ICT	Information Communications Technology
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
IDG	Irish Distillers Group
IFSC	International Financial Services Centre
IMI	Irish Management Institute
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	Information Technology
IWP	Irish Wire Products
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KSG	Kylemore Services Group
LMI	Landmark Media Investments
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MBTI	Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
MD	Managing Director
NAV	Net-Net Assets Value
NCI	National College of Ireland
NIHE	National Institute of Higher Education
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
ODC	On Demand Communication
PA	Press Association
PC	Personal Computer
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Environmental and Legal
Plc	Public Limited Company
PR	Public Relations
RTE	Radió Teilifís Éireann
SCA	Speciality Coffee Associate of Europe
SE	Societas Europaea
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TCH	Thomas Crosbie Holdings
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States
VP	Vice President
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology
WLR	Waterford Local Radio

Biographies

Author Biographies

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Grace O'Shaughnessy MD of Java Republic, a founder-led Irish coffee roaster. She was previously Bakery Manager at Kylemore and Operations Manager of Lir Chocolates.

John Teeling Renowned entrepreneur and founder of Kenmare Resources, Connemara Mining, Cooley Distillery and Teeling Whiskey. Before this, he was an academic at UCD.

Dennis Van Booma CEO and co-founder of Procentec, a Netherlands-based SME and a key player in the network solutions market.

1

Introduction

"The best leaders tend to be outsiders who don't have a great deal of experience"
(Mukunda 2012, p. 30)

According to Anthony King (2002, p. 435), "Some of the most significant political leaders of recent decades have been outsiders." Can we say the same about business leaders? What does being an outsider mean to the business leader, and what special value does the outsider perspective bring? This is what we seek to explore here, as we believe that these questions remain incompletely answered in the corporate world.

Arguably, we are living now in an era where the concept of an "outsider" has taken on increased prominence in the public psyche. King's words above are perhaps even more relevant today than they were when he initially wrote his paper, where he used the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's career as a basis for trying to understand

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This chapter is written by Chris O'Riordan; Felicity Kelliher; Patrick C. Flood; Malcolm Higgs

the outsider concept in the political world. This is evidenced by the more recent electoral successes of outsiders such as Donald Trump in the USA and Emmanuel Macron in France in shaking up the political establishment. Indeed, Macron's closest challenger—Marine Le Pen—was also an outsider relative to the traditional parties who had long dominated French politics. The UK's Brexit vote will see it leaving the European Union to become part of a select group of outsider, non-member nations within the continent. While one side to the ongoing debate surrounding this divisive issue argues that this will bring great opportunities and rewards, the counter argument raises fundamental issues and fears. Moving beyond politics, Leicester City Football Club's success in winning the English Premier League in 2016 surprised the sporting world. Considered rank outsiders, the club had odds of 5000/1 to win the league at the outset, having narrowly managed to avoid relegation in the previous season. In spite of having a regular squad that cost less than had been spent on individual players in some of the bigger clubs, they prevailed where others failed.

In this sense, one might suggest that the world has perhaps become if not more accepting of outsiders then at least more curious about them. One can reasonably acknowledge that they offer something different, less predictable, and have the potential to deliver positive outcomes in the right circumstances. However, they may also be risky, unknown and laden with unforeseen challenges. Whether this applies to the circumstances of the business world needs further exploration and understanding. The thinking behind this book stems from our own knowledge of—and previous interactions with—leaders of different organisations who have been, in some way, an outsider leader. Being viewed as an outsider may relate to someone's culture, background, previous activities, training, family membership, gender and so on.

What is very much of interest to us are the implications of being an outsider. Challenges and difficulties are likely to be faced by virtue of being an outsider, but what are these and how are they addressed? How do outsiders manage the transition process of becoming leader? Additionally, how does the outsider benefit the organisation and how can we foster such benefits? Do outsider leaders yearn to be an insider? Why do some choose, or end up in, positions where they are an outsider when

the easy option might be to stay on the inside in their existing roles and organisations? Do they remain always an outsider, or does their status change with time? What can those who become outsiders learn from the experiences of others who have preceded them? From our research, these issues have not been fully explored in academic or practitioner texts, yet they are important and interesting topics to business practitioners, leaders, students and academics alike.

We believe that to understand these perspectives we, as researchers, are required to speak directly with successful and established outsider leaders to hear their stories and capture their voices. Being an outsider is something that is experienced and lived. In our book, using interviews, these lived experiences are presented as separate narratives initially. Each leader and their leadership story is presented in standalone chapters, supplemented with other available sources as appropriate. Subsequently, we distil commonalities and themes from across these chapters to present our understanding of their experiences. This allows readers to access the stories as well as some of the broad lessons to be learned from these reflections.

We have interviewed seven outsider leaders from the broad business world—across sectors, organisation sizes and cultures. This allows for an effective blend of profiles, backgrounds and contexts. The qualifying feature for inclusion is that we could identify—in advance—at least one way in which the leader could be construed as an outsider. That said, we entered into each semi-structured interview as interpretivists, open to identifying other features.

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature surrounding the outsider concept and the outsider leader. We note that gaps exist and that further research is warranted. Subsequently, we present seven chapters, one for each of the leaders interviewed. Each chapter consists of a literature section that precedes the leadership story, which is specifically relevant to the story. In this respect, each leader-based chapter can be used to explore and to further one's knowledge of outsider leadership and also to contemplate leadership more broadly. Each of these leader-based chapters closes with a conclusion and reflection section and a summary of some of the key findings, to help the reader to think more deeply about the story and what this means in a wider, perhaps even per-

sonal, context. We close with Chap. 10, where we present a conclusion that brings together key themes that, we believe, require articulation and discussion in the context of existing literature. In doing this, we attempt to contribute to the debate surrounding the meaning of outsider business leadership and various aspects related to and stemming from outsider leader presence in organisations.

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2

The Outsider Concept and Outsider Leader: A Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

In this book, we are exploring the role of the outsider as a leader within organisations. This has been prompted by the extent to which we see—in the business and national media—interest in the impact (both positive and negative) that outsiders joining an organisation can have on that organisation and the people who work there, as well as—in many cases—the wider society. The literature on leadership is vast. Indeed, it has often been suggested that leadership is the most studied of any organisational phenomena. Despite this attention, this is an area of study where research findings are often contradictory, inconclusive and incomplete. The focus of the majority of these studies is clearly on elucidating the components of leadership that will result in positive organisational outcomes. In this

quest, academics point to the challenges of complexity that are growing in today's volatile, ambiguous and uncertain world. At the same time, practitioners are seeking simple solutions—a search for the Holy Grail of leadership—to a complex issue. It is perhaps this search for a simple means of achieving improved organisational performance that lies behind the view that an outsider can provide the leadership required to produce results. Given this, it is surprising that research has paid little attention to exploring the nature of outsiders as leaders and more specifically what we mean by the term "outsider."

In this chapter, we examine the nature of an outsider in a leadership role within the literature and hope that by expanding our understanding of the term we can make sense of the role of outsider leaders and the way in which they can contribute to an organisation.

2.2   Background and Rationale

Ever since the dawn of social science, scholars have wrestled with the complicated and ambiguous nature of leadership. As a result, agreed upon clear and definitive definitions of the concept have largely remained elusive (Mullins 2010). Yukl (2010) attributes this difficulty to leadership having a different meaning for each individual, depending on their perspectives and situations. Therefore, leadership may be described as a social construct that exists only in the mind of followers and other stakeholders and cannot exist independently from the follower's perceptions (Winkler 2010). Effective leaders craft an environment where individuals consistently perform to the best of their ability (Cooper 2009; Studer 2013; Yukl 2010). By influencing the perceptions of followers on an emotional level, leaders persuade them to suppress their individual short-term interests in the pursuit of a joint objective that is in the best interest of the group (Hogan et al. 1994). By "setting the direction of change," leaders play the crucial role in determining the strategic direction of an organisation, and therefore they have a substantial bearing on organisational outcomes—whether that be the survival, growth or deterioration of an organisation (Conger and Kanungo 1998; Kotter 2001, p. 4).

An emerging critique of leadership theorising and research is the dominance of the "heroic model" (Avolio et al. 2009; Higgs and Rowland 2011). Within this discourse, it is argued that the diversity of contexts precludes an unambiguous understanding of the nature of effective leadership due to the leader-centric focus. As a result, the literature abounds with contradictory and inconclusive findings in terms of the nature of effective leadership. Responding to this critique, scholars have suggested that the adoption of a relational approach to understanding leadership may be more promising (Uhl-Bien 2006). This could certainly provide a useful frame for the consideration of outsider leadership as one of the challenges that they face is to develop effective relationships with followers when they move into the leadership role.

Although research in the field of leadership has been expansive and wide-ranging over the last number of decades (Rusliza and Fawzy 2016), it is still undetermined whether leaders who originate on the outside—be that at organisational, industry or sectoral level—perform differently to those who originate elsewhere. To date, much of the available literature investigates the outsider leader through the narrow lens of CEO succession events, while defining the outsider leader as one merely being from outside the organisation (Borokhovich et al. 1996; Chung et al. 1987; Dalton and Kesner 1983; Davidson et al. 2002; Ocasio 1994; Jiang et al. 2013). This limited approach fails to comprehend the broad and undulating nature of "outsiderness" as a concept and the fact that it is more nuanced than this simple positional view. Furthermore, the empirical studies that have been conducted have been of varying quality (Giambatista et al. 2005). Existing research has produced mixed results when attempting to establish whether insiders or outsiders deliver better corporate outcomes. For example, Zajac (1990) maintains that insiders provide better post-succession outcomes, while Shen and Cannella (2002) find that outsider successors are negatively associated with operational performance after appointment. On the other hand, Lauterbach et al. (1999), Karaevli (2007) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (2016) have found that outsiders can perform better.

This research addresses widely held business perceptions that CEOs of large, publicly quoted companies do not stay in the role for long, constantly seeking lucrative new opportunities (Tonello et al. 2009). The

resulting movement of such CEOs is likewise confirmed in academic research in a US context (Murphy and Zabojnik 2007). In relation to the movement of CEOs, the mode of recruitment is analysed, with practitioners promoting external recruitment as a panacea (Karaevli and Zajac 2013). However, more recent research in the UK (Rejchrt and Higgs 2014)—in a study of the FTSE 350 companies—has found that the majority of succession events involved internal appointments: up to 64% of FTSE 350 CEO appointments were internal. Rejchrt and Higgs argued that as the mean age of current CEOs was 52.5 years, this offered support for the concept of boards continuing to favour the appointment of new CEOs with a similar age profile and perceived values characteristics in an expectation of strategic continuity. With internal being the preferred mode of recruitment and retirement (or the portfolio career option of a non-executive directorship) as the probable move following CEO service, they hypothesised that similarity-attraction is the dominant paradigm in which boards operate in CEO successions (Schneider 1987). Furthermore, they found no significant performance differences between the internally and externally appointed CEO successors. However, the general findings are that similarity-attraction (Davidson et al. 2006; Zajac and Westphal 1996) appears to continue to be dominant, as boards seek to appoint successor CEOs on the basis of similar demographics and perceived values congruence. This tends to contradict the popular belief that outsiders provide a clear basis for improving organisational performance outcomes. However, it does suggest that the common reality is that even outsiders are not so outside in terms of desired values and characteristics when contemplating organisational leadership.

These contradictions in empirical findings are a common theme throughout the topic. The mixed results are in part due to the performance consequences of outsider versus insider having been measured in various ways, such as organisational change (Villadsen 2012), productivity (Liang 2016), stock price (Chung et al. 1987), strategic change (Karaevli 2016) and return on investment (Shen and Cannella 2002). Although different metrics were used in these studies, much of the empirical research narrowly measures the performance of new leaders in terms of financial performance, neglecting other important factors such as the

cultural implications of an outsider assuming a leadership role (Georgakakis and Ruigrok 2017; Liang 2016; Shen and Cannella 2002).

Little has changed in succession research since Carlson (1961, p. 227) described the insider/outsider "variable of origin…as gross and unrefined." This leads some commentators to believe that the outsider/insider leadership dichotomy is still viewed in "overly simplistic" and "binary terms" (Hogan et al. 1994; Karaevli 2007, p. 682; Louis 1980, p. 234). Additionally, most of the empirical research has been centred in North America and focused predominantly on very large firms. As a consequence, these outsider leader studies may be less pertinent to smaller firms or in a European or global context.

Within the leadership literature, there is a continuing debate around the impact that leaders have on an organisation's performance. The view that the impact is direct has been widely challenged (Higgs and Lichtenstein 2010; Kempster and Parry 2011). The "relational" leadership paradigm has found that the leaders' impact on performance is more indirect, resulting from relationships with followers and the creation of a positive psychological climate (Uhl-Bien 2006). However, there is a measure of agreement that the effect of leaders on performance is real. Despite the profound influence leaders can have on the performance of their firms, it is surprising how little theoretical development and empirical research has been conducted on the concept of the outsider leader, and the implications of introducing these individuals into a commercial setting (Kesner and Sebora 1994; Miller 1993; Villadsen 2012). Confronted with the current state of enquiry, some authors maintain that more in-depth and detailed research on the topic of outsider leadership is warranted (Giambatista et al. 2005; Karaevli 2007). It is this call for more understanding of outsiders as leaders that we explored in the research that underpins this book.

2.3   "Outsiderness"

Above we have looked at the debates around the issue of outsiders as leaders. We now turn to an exploration of what is meant by "outsiderness." This is particularly important given that, above, we have seen that the

CEO literature explores outsiders as CEOs but then suggests that similarity-attractiveness theory operates in terms of ensuring that outside appointments share similar characteristics, attributes and values/norms as the insiders. This apparent paradox seems to warrant establishing greater clarity around what is meant by an outsider.

2.3.1   The Social Group

Humans are profoundly social creatures who typically have an incessant yearning to belong and develop meaningful relationships with other individuals within various social groups (Williams et al. 2014). Being part of social groups is therefore an inescapable feature of human society (Sacco and Bernstein 2015). We all belong to various groups: families, work groups, religious groups, sports teams, formal and informal groups (Ivancevich 2017). Membership in social groups has been found to have positive outcomes on the wellbeing of an individual, including positive implications for both physical and mental health, as well as helping individuals acclimatise to difficult life transitions (Buckingham et al. 2013; Reicher 2006; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Insiders are also most likely to be successful and motivated when they develop a strong sense of belonging, relatedness and kinship with other members of the group (Faircloth and Hamm 2005).

Membership in social groups is "central to the way people experience and respond to change because they furnish them with a sense of social identity" (Haslam et al. 2008, p. 672). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) argues that membership in a social group is not extraneous to an individual's sense of identity. We tend to define ourselves by the groups of which we are members or to which we have an emotional attachment. By being involved with and having regular interaction with a group, an individual may begin to speak and act like other group members and adopt the values, beliefs and norms of the group in order to be accepted as an insider (Furnham 2015). This assimilation of a group's culture affects how individuals perceive themselves and others around them (Haslam et al. 2008; Oakes et al. 1987). Furthermore, as members of a group, individuals tend to pigeonhole other groups and their

members—they compare other groups values against their own to gauge their social classification. These classifications can often be exaggerated by individuals to "maximise" both the similarities of the in-group and the differences of the out-group and their outsider members (Buckingham et al. 2013, p. 1132). This would suggest that insiders may exaggerate the difference between outsiders and themselves when in reality the differences may be minor or not exist at all. However, group research has frequently established that the in-group/out-group dynamic can lead to a range of negative outcomes that can impair overall group performance (Higgs and Lichtenstein 2010).

2.3.2   The Outsider in Society and Popular Culture

The concept of an outsider has been a common feature throughout much of the world's history, literature and popular culture (King 2002). From accounts of prejudice towards lepers, tax collectors and Samarians in the Bible (Talmage 2016), through the tales of Shakespeare's *Othello* and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and, more latterly, in the Harry Potter books, Hermione Granger who was ostracised by her "pure blood" peers as an outcast because of her non-magical parents (Rowling 1997), the outsider appears prominently. There are many other examples of this theme in literature, film, art and music which present a romantic conception of the outsider—one who is a misfit, a rebel who does not fit society's expectations, such as Mersault in Albert Camus' French novel *L'étranger* or James Dean's character in the 1955 movie *Rebel Without A Cause*. Such images of an individual who does not follow the same rules as anyone else have resonated with many audiences, especially young people who frequently identify as outsiders as they grow emotionally and physically (Yep 2005). We are even seeing the outsider concept becoming a prominent one in Western politics, with the recent elections of candidates to powerful leadership positions who would be viewed as not part of the traditional establishment and, in some cases, less than conventional in their approach. However, despite its prevalence in society and popular culture, the social construct of the outsider remains mostly obscure and unexplored in social science (King 2002; Williams et al. 2014).

2.3.2.1   Outsider Factors

To date, little is known about what makes individuals in social groups consider themselves insiders or outsiders (Stamper and Masterson 2002). Factors that have been identified include culture, nationality, social class, race, education, gender, religion, family background, previous experience and tenure, attitude and perspective, personality, and importance to and position in an organisation (Cormier 2006; Eagly 2005; King 2002; Moore 1988; Stamper and Masterson 2002; Thorndike 2012; Unger 2000). According to Thorndike (2012), not only are outsiders different from insiders but they are also different from other outsiders. In this respect, an individual can be an outsider on multiple dimensions (Adler 1997; Mayo et al. 2006). Furthermore, the practical consequences of the dimensions themselves may change over time. For example, during the process of socialisation, newcomers to a group will likely be perceived and feel like an outsider. However, this will usually change over time as they become socially accepted and valued by their peers (Thomas and Anderson 1998). The significance of the various outsider factors themselves may also change over time. For example, within an organisational setting, birthplace and religion have become less critical as distinguishers in the twenty-fist century while education has increased in relevance (Mayo et al. 2006), suggesting that the concept of the outsider also has an evolutionary dimension.

2.3.3   Outsider Types

A number of types or categories of outsiders have been suggested in previous academic works. King (2002) highlights the social outsider (outside the group), the psychological outsider (feels personally that they are an outsider) and the tactical outsider (a conscious choice) in a political context. There may also be other types of outsiders (Furnham 2015; see Sects. 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 below) depending on how they react to the situation(s). However, further research is needed to determine if additional types or sub-types exist. Interestingly, King (2002) suggests that outsider types are not mutually exclusive, indicating that a complex blend of outsider types exist in reality and that it may be a mistake to pigeonhole individuals,