Ruth Seliger

The Jungle Book of Leadership

A Navigation System for Leaders

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Translated from German by Julia Warner

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Acknowledgements

This book about leadership is the result of the many years I have spent working as an executive trainer and consultant. Everything that is presented and represented here came into being over the course of my personal and professional development, and it incorporates and integrates the many impulses I have received. So, my thanks go to those people who have accompanied and inspired me along the way.

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Preface

Should you, dear reader, be in a leadership position, or be preparing for such a role, then allow me to congratulate you: You have chosen to take on a truly impossible task.

Leadership is a jungle: diverse, impenetrable, demanding, sometimes surprising, sometimes scary – you never know where or when danger can strike. You have to deal with a variety of people, with organizations and sub-organizations, with responsibilities and targets, with cultures and rules. How are you supposed to know your way around? How are you supposed to find your way through it?

I am guessing that your bookshelf displays a collection of great guides that promise to show you the "right" way, or offer the "right" answer to your questions. Most of these guides have singled out a specific aspect of the many complex and multifaceted conditions found in the leadership jungle: one aspect that can explain and solve all leadership problems. At the moment, current trends focus on "personality", "character" and "charisma", i.e. the individual leader. That means: *You* will be made solely responsible for any successes or failures in leadership.

Most further training programs for leaders address the "leader-personality": your performance, your potential, your attitude. With that, the entire responsibility for any leadership accomplishments is placed on the shoulders of the leaders. At the moment, "personality" is what counts as the key to successful leadership.

Yet, it seems naive to assume that one single explanation and a few tools are enough to orient oneself in an impenetrable jungle full of strange creatures, complicated laws, and constantly changing living conditions. The way through the jungle is better found with a good map that gives you an overview of the territory and its many facets.

In my practical experience as an executive consultant, trainer and coach, and in my work with organizations, I have had the opportunity to gain insight into the world and issues of leadership and leaders. In those years, many models, concepts, and instruments came into being to support leaders with their difficult and sometimes even impossible tasks.

The *Leadership-Map* that is presented in this book is a compilation of theses models, concepts, and instruments.[1]

You can use this model like a GPS: it will help you discern where you are, in which direction you could go, and what you currently cannot see. A good map always shows you what you can see and what you cannot see: your blind spot. That is what I mean by overview. The signpost (in the exact description of the map – as of p. 49) in the upper-right corner will always tell you where you are presently located.

You do not have to read this book from front to back – you would not do that with an atlas either. You can start anywhere; you can choose the area of leadership that is most important for you at the moment. I had to write this book from the beginning to the end, but you do not need to follow that order.

There are some disappointments, however, that I have to confront you with right from the start:

1. This map does not contain anything new.
   You are likely to have already heard of a few things in this book and find yourself thinking, I know that. Maps are not instruments for finding new territories, but for reconfiguring certain areas, for setting up new perspectives – e.g. a street map is different from a geological or a political map. The leadership model *Leadership-Map* can encourage you to gain new perspectives on leadership, and I am assuming that every new viewpoint can create new impulses for your professional practice.
2. This map does not contain any magic formulas.
   This book will not fulfill your expectations if you are hoping to find magic formulas for all of your leadership ailments. This book is definitely prescription free. It offers you a solid theoretical foundation with regard to leadership, feasible models, and several suggestions for your professional practice. It should serve as an orientation aid within the leadership jungle and not as an instruction manual. What you should do when and in which situation is something you will have to decide for yourself.

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1 To download a template for a three-dimensional model of the *Leadership-Map* see www. carl-auer.de/machbar/the_jungle_book_of_leadership.

3. This map does not contain any truths.
   You will not find any ultimate or irrefutable truths about leadership in this book. Too many texts try to define what leadership "really" is – and that certainly is open to dispute. What I can offer you are my pictures and invite you to decide which ones seem useful, plausible, or inspiring to you – and which ones do not.

With this book, I would like to contribute to the idea that the sole responsibility for successful leadership should be taken off the shoulders of individuals and be divided up "fairly" amongst leaders and their organizations. One single person alone cannot be held responsible for the quality of leadership. Leadership is a complex procedure taking place in a complex environment – namely organizations – in which several people as well as various circumstances always play a part. This book would like to put leadership into context so that it can be "de-personalized". Leadership is more an organizational phenomenon than a personality phenomenon.

We are always going to stay at a certain altitude in this book, which means that we will place more emphasis on the overview than on singular details as we fly over each region. That is why it will not always be possible to take a closer look at certain areas or sites. For this reason, you will always be able to find recommendations for further reading on any particular topic, and you can decide for yourself what you would like to learn more about.

Before we set out on our journey, I would like to point out that for the sake of easier reading I have decided to only use male pronouns. The female is always included. I ask my female readers for their understanding.

And now, let us set out on our journey: Off to the jungle we go!

Ruth Seliger
Vienna, June 2014

1 In the Leadership Jungle

Why do I call leadership a jungle? What is jungle-like about leadership?

Leadership displays jungle-like features because it deals with living things. We are not talking about how to drive a car or steer a ship. Leadership is concerned with trying to influence other living systems.

> Leadership is an attempt to influence living systems.

We can only speak of "trying" because that is the nature of this phenomenon we call leadership.

1.1 The Dilemmas of Leadership

Leadership is a phenomenon that everyone is talking about but nobody can define, and anyone who has spent some time on this topic will be familiar with its entangling contradictions and numerous dilemmas. Here is a selection of some of the inconsistencies and stumbling blocks surrounding leadership.

1.1.1 Leadership is Invisible

Let us begin with some simple questions: What is leadership; how can we observe and describe this phenomenon? Who has ever seen leadership? And what exactly did they see?

For example: A gives B an order; B carries it out. Afterwards, you can say: B carried out the task because A ordered it; so, A led B. However, B could have had a variety of reasons for following the order: because he had felt like it? He had a personal interest? B had been planning on carrying out the task anyway? There was some other inner-impulse? Who knows? Who can read B's mind?

Leadership is an *explanation* for why B behaved the way he did. This explanation creates a connection between A's order and B's reaction. If we say that B's behavior is the result of A's order, then one could call the behavior of both parties concerned an occurrence of leadership.

> Leadership is an explanation for people's behavior.

Whether we are talking about leadership depends on how we explain the behavior and, especially, the intentions of the participating parties.

Leadership is, therefore, a phenomenon that takes place between visible manifestations: in our case between two people – Christian Morgenstern (1964) describes it in his poem about a picket fence (translated into English by Max Knight):

> "There used to be a picket fence
> with space to gaze from hence to thence.
>
> An architect who saw this sight
> approached it suddenly one night,
>
> removed the spaces from the fence,
> and built of them a residence.
>
> The picket fence stood there dumbfounded
> with pickets wholly unsurrounded,
>
> a view so loathsome and obscene,
> the Senate has to intervene.
>
> The architect, however, flew
> to Afri- or Americoo."

With regard to leadership, we are dealing with a phenomenon that nobody can directly observe but that everybody still talks about. So, it is no surprise that leadership has become a blind spot to leaders and organizations.

> During a coaching session with a manager, we were discussing a situation that was disconcerting to my client: One of his employees had embezzled a large sum of money. "What could I have done?" my client asked. I asked in return: "Have you thought about giving leadership a try?" – "Leadership?" my client asked astounded, "no, actually, not yet."

When we talk about leadership in this book, we are talking about a phenomenon that originates out of interpretations of observations. Someone has to observe A and B and explain their interaction as *leadership*. The observers can also be the participating parties themselves. Leadership is, therefore, an invisible phenomenon that takes place in the minds of the observers.

> The observers decide what leadership is.

Indeed, leadership has many observers. Every organization, institution, or association has members and, with that, many observers of leadership. As citizens we observe our political and economic leaders and comment on their work. In doing so, we include our own ideas and standards into our evaluations.

This book is about leadership in organizations; here leadership can be observed by employees, customers, owners, competitors, and the public – and last but not least, also by consultants. From all of these different perspectives, leadership can be commentated and interpreted. The numerous descriptions and opinions of leadership are causing leaders to feel increasingly insecure. It is becoming harder and harder for them to define what their job is, and whether they are doing it well.

The prevalent literature gives little orientation. Leadership is a relatively young area of research, and as such is always a reflection of its time. Leadership will never be examined impartially or free of ideology. How leadership is defined and interpreted, which topics are emphasized, and what expectations are attached to it says more about the observers of leadership than about the leadership itself.

> Literature on leadership is a reflection of its time and, therefore, also of its ideology.

So one could say, leadership is invisible, but it can be observed nevertheless.

1.1.2 Leadership is Housework

Fritz B. Simon (cf. Simon/CONECTA 1992, p. 49 et seq.) compares two types of activities in organizations: the "artistic" work, which is creative, and oriented towards change and the unexpected, and the "housework", which maintains the existing system and secures a sense of normality.

Not only is leadership invisible, but it only gets noticed when it does not take place. That is one of the features of housework. Housework has two characteristics: Firstly, you only notice it when it does not get done, when the dirty dishes that are normally tidied away are left standing around. Only then does one realize that the

> Housework only gets noticed when it is not done. It is a monotonous, routine task.

housewife (or sometimes house husband) has not done the work that she normally does. Housework is also invisible to a certain extent, and it is usually because nobody is watching. Secondly, housework is a continuous endeavour: a standing order; a perpetual restoration of one's living space. No exciting hunt and no adventure.

Leadership is a continuous process; it is a series of many large and small activities that hardly get noticed and, as a result, hardly get rewarded. In fact, these activities do not get noticed until they stop. It is not until the dishes are left undone, that anyone realizes that this

work is normally taken care of. Leadership is not a project that has a specified outcome that one can be proud of. Consequently, none of the typical male attributes apply to leadership. One could say that leadership is the "feminine" task in organizations, whereas "management" in contrast appears to be the "masculine" task. Perhaps that is the reason why this term was invented.

This is sad news for leaders as many of you have striven for this task because of the heroic and powerful image that goes along with it. Leaders are lured into this function because of the apparent opportunity to create something new and to be taken seriously – and then this: housework!

1.1.3 Leadership is, in Principle, Impossible

The third dilemma revolving around leadership is the most serious. Leadership is often described with pictures and metaphors of proud captains steering big ships through vast bodies of water. These pictures are not only misleading, but they are also a part of the problem. Leaders compare themselves to such pictures and ask themselves why they are having trouble running their little boats while others are operating gigantic steamers. These leaders then feel inept, like failures. The problem is: The picture is inaccurate. In the end, even the biggest steam ship is just a machine: a machine that can be steered, a machine that was constructed for that very purpose. Granted, one does need to know the machine well, know how it functions – or have the appropriate technicians on hand – then you can operate the many buttons, wheels, and levers, and it will work. That is because it is a machine.

Leaders, however, do not lead machines, but people and organizations. Both are living systems that exhibit a few idiosyncrasies that

Machines can be controlled, but living systems cannot.

make leading practically impossible: they are willful, behave unpredictably, and follow their own sense of logic. Living systems have the peculiarity of leading themselves and hardly allowing anyone to control them from the outside. That is the worst news of all. Now you might be asking yourself: Well, what am I good for then? What am I getting paid for? The answer is quite easy: So that it works anyway – even though it is impossible.

1.2 Archetypal Leadership Concepts

The previously described dilemmas regarding leadership are nothing new. Ever since people have started concerning themselves with the phenomenon of leadership, they have been confronted by its limits and sought to surpass them. For generations, solutions have been sought within the human character and in role models that serve as examples of the ideal leadership-personality. These leadership ideals are tied to certain personal features and archetypal images, which have left their mark on the ideal of leadership while legitimizing it at the same time. They still imply that being able to succeed as a leader depends on features of personality. This portrayal follows the psycho-analytical model by Fritz Riemann (1984). I have compiled a list of some of the most important archetypal leadership concepts that leaders are often guided by.

1.2.1 The Master: Leadership through Expertise

This old concept of leadership originated from the tradition of craftsmanship. The Master is empowered to lead due to his advanced knowledge and experience compared to his apprentices. The Master is smarter, more competent, and more experienced than the others and legitimizes his entitlement to lead because of this difference. The wisest is the leader.

Fig. 1: The Master leads because he knows more and is more capable.

In modern organizations that work in a differentiated manner, in which employees work in a decentralized environment and on highly complex projects, this concept of leadership turns out to no longer be practical.

Leaders no longer possess more knowledge and expertise than their employees; on the contrary, they are often dependent on them for information. Consequently, the leader's power to lead diminishes. As a result, both sides can become perplexed.

1.2.2 The Hero: Leadership as an Act of Heroism

This concept of leadership comes from the Western Judaeo-Christian tradition and the idea of the Creator. The act of the ONE has created the world. Leadership and authority legitimize themselves through
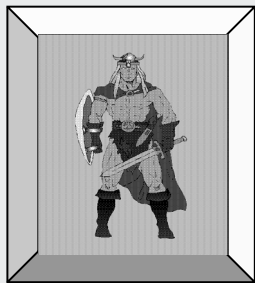
the exceptional courage and remarkable acts of a single prominent personality. HE (usually it is a man) stands out from the crowd: a guru; a savior.

The entitlement to lead comes from distinguishing between an individual and the masses. The prominent individual is a central figure and a point of orientation for others. The Hero exists and thrives in the acknowledgement of others and their willingness to follow him. The image of the Hero is still one of the most popular leitmotifs of leadership today. Examples of successful managers, politicians, athletes, and other public figures are described and depicted on a regular basis. Managers also have their heroes: Jack Welch and many more. Yet, at the same time, these idols and heroes are scrutinized and brought into question again and again. Huge crises of confidence can take place, when their "ordinariness" becomes visible.

Fig. 2: The Hero leads because he is extraordinary.

Modern organizations like having heroic figures at their forefront: founders, pioneers, and turnaround-managers. However, the majority of the managers in these organizations are not allowed to be heroes. For them, their daily routine consists of cooperation. Can you imagine an organization in which all of the leaders are like Steve Balmer? This leitmotif of the Hero contains a paradoxical message: "Be like me, but be totally different!"

1.2.3 The General: Leadership via the Position

This image of leadership can be found in hierarchical systems which reduce the complexity by means of structures with clear positions and defined roles: the church, military, hospitals, schools, and businesses. Typical characteristics relating to this concept of leadership are structures of power, position, authority, and compliance. Leadership is legitimized by differences in levels of authority and power: high beats low. This image of leadership has been around for at least 2,000 years in our society. Not only

Fig. 3: The General leads because he is authorized to do so.

was this concept of leadership a guiding principle in organizations, but it was also prevalent in families, sports, and in politics.

It was ... for in the past few decades social values have changed massively – not lastly due to criticism by the '68 generation. Above all, necessary changes towards more flexibility and dynamic in organizations have dissolved old-fashioned and rigid hierarchical patterns. Projects, networks, strategic alliances, and process as well as customer orientation are not compatible with rigid hierarchy. Changes in the job market have also led to a growing number of freelancers, who participate in various projects and do not demonstrate unconditional compliance. The leadership concept of the General has lost its appeal and no longer fits into modern organizations.

1.2.4 The Father: Leadership through Emotional Commitment

This picture developed within family businesses and farming enterprises, where the role of the patriarch was identical to the role of the corporate leader. Family businesses today still have to deal with this commingling of roles. Leadership is legitimized as a result of an individual's membership in the system, which is represented by a "father" or a "mother" and by way of that individual's emotional commitment to the system. The "father" or "mother" is often the founder of the organization and a guarantor of this commitment. They are also eligible to lead because

Fig. 4: The Father leads because he decides who belongs to the family.

they have the power to exclude, or to excommunicate people from the system. Deciding who belongs to the system and who does not is the content and profile of their leadership.

In general, modern organizations are no longer a suitable context for this type of leadership because this model requires, or enables, a particular psychodynamic constellation: the willingness of adults to not only behave like children, but to allow themselves to be treated as such within the scope of their work. This readiness is decreasing and giving way to employees who expect professional leadership.

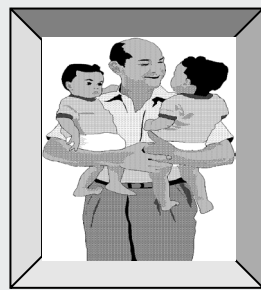When old leadership role models are no longer suitable, where can today's leaders turn to in order to find orientation?