Leadership: An Alienating Social Myth?

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of deeply ingrained cultural assumptions, approaches to the study of leadership usually start with the idea that leaders are unquestionably necessary for the functioning of an organization. Belief in hierarchy and the necessity of leaders represents an unrecognized ideology which takes its power chiefly from the fact that it is an undiscussable aspect of reality based upon epistemological and ontological beliefs outside of conscious awareness (Anthony, 1977; Neumann, 1989; Gemmill, 1986). Campbell (1977) is quite accurate in pointing out that discussion of the purposes and problems for which leadership concepts and data are to be used is notably absent from studies in the field. Why is a leader really necessary? What problems or issues in an organization indicate a real need for a leader? Exactly what underlying existential needs or problems the concept of a leader is meant to address has not been clearly articulated.

Some of the confusion around the concept of leadership seems to stem from the process of reification. Reification is a social process which converts an abstraction or mental construct into a supposed real entity. Through reification the social construction of leadership is mystified and accorded an objective existence. It is a social fiction that represents a form of what Fromm labels "false consciousness" which refers to the content of the conscious mind that is fictitious and has been introjected or assimilated without awareness through cultural programming. With reification, social progress is viewed as "caused" by or "determined" by a leader, a cadre of leaders, or "leadership." It is assumed by researchers and practitioners that because there is a word ("leader" or "leadership") there must be an independent objective reality it describes or denotes. Reification functions to trap such labeled individuals within a mode of existence that serves to meet various unconscious emotional needs of members of an organization and of a society.

The leadership myth functions as a social defense whose central aim is to repress uncomfortable needs, emotions, and wishes that emerge when people attempt to work together (Gemmill, 1986; Jacques, 1955). Stated somewhat differently, when members of a group are faced with uncertainty and ambiguity regarding direction, they often report experiencing feelings of anxiety, helplessness, discomfort, disappointment, hostility, and fear of failure. Frightened by these emerging emotions and impulses, which are ordinarily held in check by absorption into the prevailing social system, they collude, largely unconsciously, to dispel them by projecting them onto "leadership" or the "leader" role. The projection allows organizational members to avoid directly confronting the emerging emotions and regress to a form of social order with which they are familiar. As Hirschhorn (1988) states, social defenses are rituals that induce mind-

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lessness and: ". . . by not thinking, people avoid feeling anxious" (p. 2). The undiscussability of the myth is rooted in the lack of questioning of the alienating consequences and resultant reification of the social forces that position "leadership" as a healthy concept.

The tendency of social groupings and individuals to create social defenses and mindlessly act out rituals results in a flawed process of reality construction. Morgan (1986) points out that while individuals create their reality, they often do so in confiding and alienating ways. People create worlds out of mental constructs, or psychic prisons, in which they become trapped by their own ideas. The thesis examined here is that the concepts of "leader" and "leadership" have become psychic prisons. While leadership is viewed as having a positive connotation, we suggest that contrariwise it is a serious sign of social pathology, that it is a special case of an iatrogenic social myth that induces massive learned helplessness among members of a social system. Learned helplessness is characterized by an experienced inability to imagine or perceive viable options, along with accompanying feelings of despair and a resistance to initiating any form of action (Seligman, 1977). It is our thesis that much of the current writing and theorizing on leadership stems from a deepening sense of social despair and massive learned helplessness. As social despair and helplessness deepen, the search and wish for a messiah (leader) or magical rescue (leadership) also begins to accelerate. We argue that the current popular writings and theories of leadership clearly reflect this social trend. When pain is coupled with an inordinate, widespread, and pervasive sense of helplessness, social myths about the need for great leaders and magical leadership emerge from the primarily unconscious collective feeling that it would take a miracle or messiah to alleviate or ameliorate this painful form of existence.

We further argue that the major significance of most recent studies on leadership is not to be found in their scientific validity but in their function in offering ideological support for the existing social order. The idea of a leadership elite explains in a Social Darwinistic manner why only certain members of a social system are at the apex of power and entitled to a proportionably greater share of the social wealth. So-called leader traits are woven into a powerful social myth, which while serving to maintain the status quo, also paradoxically sows the seeds of its own destruction by accentuating helplessness, mindlessness, emotionlessness, and meaninglessness. The social myth around leaders serves to program life out of people (non-leaders) who, with the social lobotomization, appear as cheerful robots (Mills, 1956). It is our contention that the myth making around the concept of leadership is, as Bennis asserts, an unconscious conspiracy, or social hoax, aimed at maintaining the status quo (Bennis, 1989).

LEADERSHIP AND ALIENATION

The radical humanist perspective on leadership incorporates a deconstructionist approach (Parker & Shotter, 1990). Deconstructionism is an approach to the philosophy of knowledge that aims to demonstrate how a discourse (leadership) is undermined by the very philosophy on which it is based (Culler, 1982). To deconstruct a discourse is to unravel hidden assumptions, internal contradictions, and repressed meanings. For example, by uncovering the underlying assumption that a leader or leadership is necessary in discourses on leadership, hidden presuppositions are identified, examined,

and made visible in order to reveal the hidden political and social beliefs implied in the text.

Within the radical humanist paradigm alienation is viewed as a central concept, a concept Burrell and Morgan (1979) define as: "The state in which . . . a cognitive wedge is driven between man's consciousness and the objectified social world, so that man sees what are essentially the creations of his own consciousness in the form of a hard, dominating, external reality" (p. 298). Controversy exists concerning the nature of the relationship between reification and alienation (Marx, 1973). The radical structuralist viewpoint, represented by theorists such as Karl Marx, views forms of social structure as primary in the formation of alienation. From a Marxist viewpoint, changes in social structures result in changes in personal alienation and awareness. Radical humanists, on the other hand, view alienation as primary in forming social structure and social consciousness. Changing personal awareness, social structure, and social consciousness concurrently can result in lessening alienation.

Max Pages articulated the radical humanist viewpoint on alienation in his view of organizational change where change is seen as: " . . . a different kind of relationship with people. They [organization members] want to have the opportunity to express their needs and be able to pursue them. They want not to be bossed; they want to enter into relationships that will not be possessive. This is what I wish to mobilize when I work with people . . . I believe I can be more useful if I help people destroy the organizational forms in which they are imprisoned" (Tichy, 1974, pp. 9–10). Our viewpoint of this epistemiological issue is that alienation and reification are codeterminant and that changes in personal awareness of the process of reification is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for changes in experienced alienation, social structure, and social consciousness.

Erich Fromm (1955) and R. D. Laing (1967) have cogently argued that a statistical concept of "normal" can be pathological since it reflects only false consciousness. Alienation is seen as the dominant reality of modern man—an unauthentic existence resulting from the false consciousness of ideologies and norms imposed from outside the individual and resulting in social and organizational behaviors that are characteristically pathological and neurotic (Fromm, 1955). Laing has pointedly stated, "What we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection, and other forms of destructive action or experience . . . the condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man" (pp. 27–28). Fromm (1955) expressed a similar diagnosis when he stated: "the danger of the future is that man may become robots. True enough, robots do not rebel. But given man's nature, robots cannot live and remain sane . . . they will destroy themselves because they cannot stand any longer the boredom of a meaningless life" (pp. 312–313).

Erich Fromm (1955) approaches alienation as a social as well as an individual issue. Alienation in organizations and society as a whole is viewed by Fromm (1955) as caused by the powerlessness and paralysis experienced by individuals as a result of their experiences in industrial societies which make it difficult to lead meaningful, self-directed lives. In Fromm's view, the socialization process in industrial societies has stripped us of our ability to take initiative due to the false belief that happiness comes as a result of material comfort and high levels of consumption. The false belief

is reinforced by reified institutions, lifestyles, and ideologies that necessitate social organizations with a high degree of centralized control. In this alienated state, individuals disclaim responsibility for their lives by believing that their fate is not under their own personal control. In a similar vein, Steiner (1975) elaborates on the social factors operating in alienation. He views alienation as a form of social deception, in which the majority of people are mystified into believing that society is not depleting them of their humanity and vitality, and even if it were, there are good reasons for it. The net effect is that the average person, instead of sensing his oppression and being angry by it, decides that her feelings of emptiness and despair are her own fault and own responsibility. When this happens, the person feels alienated, since she is unaware of the social deception.

THE SOCIAL MYTH OF LEADERSHIP

According to Fromm (1960), each society becomes caught up in its own need to survive in the particular form in which it has developed. This is accomplished by fabricating a repertoire of fictions and illusions. The effect of society acting to preserve itself is not only to funnel fictions into consciousness, but also to prevent the awareness of reality that might threaten the existing "natural order." Because the social fiction of the leaders is inculcated outside of awareness, reality-testing is blocked and the development of genuine insight into social issues is threatened, as is any experimentation that might lead to more vital ways of relating in a work setting.

There exists a strong tendency to explain organization outcomes by attributing causality to "leadership" (Pfeffer, 1977; Calder, 1977). This attributional social bias creates the illusion that "leaders" are in control of events. The use of leadership as a cause or social myth seems to stem, in part, from the natural uncertainty and ambiguity embedded in reality which most persons experience as terrifying, overwhelming, complex, and chaotic (Pedigo & Singer, 1982). The terror of facing feelings of helplessness and powerlessness can lead a society, as Becker (1973) speculated, to focus emotions on one person who is imagined to be all powerful ("the leader"). The attribution of omnipotence and omniscience allows the terror to be focused in one place instead of it being experienced as diffused in a seemingly random universe.

The major function of the leader myth is to preserve the existing social system and structure by attributing dysfunctions and difficulties within the system to the lack, or absence of "leadership." The dysfunctional and destructive aspects of the social system itself and the corresponding personal behavior of the members go unexamined, as does the collusion among members in creating and maintaining the social myth of leadership. Because the myth is undiscussable by members, self-sealing nonlearning about the dynamics of the myth is constantly reinforced. As long as faults, imperfections, and hopes can be attributed to leadership, the social system itself remains unexamined and unchanged.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE GREAT LEADER MYTH

The recent fascination with leadership characteristics and traits in the management literature is reminiscent of a ghost dance, an attempt to resurrect and revive the spirit of

a time gone by. Ghost dances were a predominant expression of religious movement that gained popularity among native American tribes in the latter half of the nineteenth century in reaction to the impending destruction of their way of life (Hultkrantz, 1987). The ghost dance was performed to receive the spirits of the ancestors in the hope that this would lead to a restoration of the past and prevent further disintegration of their dying civilization. Similarly, the revival of the "traitist" approach to leadership seems a "ghost dance" aimed at restoring and preventing disintegration of our own civilization. Increasing alarm and concern with the defection or total absence of leadership is a sign of increasing social despair and massive learned helplessness.

The current reemergence of the "traitist" approach to leaders and "charisma" is embodied in recent books by Bennis and Nanus (1985), Zaleznik (1989), and Tichy and Devanna (1987). The traits they attempt to identify are in a sense a different form of abstracted traits than the earlier studies done on leadership traits. For example, Zaleznik (1990) writes: "For a leader to secure commitment from subordinates he or she has to demonstrate extraordinary competence or other qualitites subordinates admire" (p. 12). In the same vein, Bennis and Nanus (1985) impute almost magical qualities to leaders: "leadership can move followers to higher degrees of consciousness, such as liberty, freedom, justice, and self-actualization" (p. 218).

"Charisma" is the leadership trait most often examined by members of the "leadership mafia." Charisma is a social phenomenon similar to the illusionary aspects of the reported U.F.O. phenomenon in the sense that it is viewed as of divine origin beyond our material world. Weber's (1968) most frequently cited definition is: "Charisma is a quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities" (p. 48). The mistake in theory building and research on "charismatic" leaders is the belief that "charisma" is a measurable attribute of the person who it is attributed to that is entirely independent from the perceptual distortions of those attributing the "charisma." While leadership studies on charisma have largely been oriented toward identifying individual traits, Wasielewski (1985) has recently proposed it be considered an interactional relationship that is the product of an emotional interaction between charismatic leaders and followers. We argue along similar lines that the importance of "charisma" is to be found in its meaning as a social fiction or social delusion that allows "followers" to escape responsibility for their own actions and inactions. The label "charisma" is like the term leader itself; a "black hole" in social space that serves as a container for the alienating consequences of the social myth resulting from intellectual and emotional deskilling by organization members.

UNCONSCIOUS ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP

The meaning of leadership in contemporary organizations can be discovered by examining the socially constructed meanings and behavior patterns that emerge from perceptions and reactions to the concept of leadership. In many organizations, a stable dichotomy exists between the leaders and the followers, with the leaders being viewed by their followers as performing both protective and nurturance functions, much as parents are viewed by their children. In this relationship, leaders are unconsciously

perceived by their followers as providing protection against external threats and preventing internal infighting and destructive acts within the organization. By projecting their anxiety and aggression onto the leaders, followers perceive themselves as freed from the anxiety and responsibility of taking initiative, seeking autonomy, taking risks, or expressing their own fears and feelings of aggression and destructiveness. When organization members accept and act these feelings unreflectively, they adapt the authoritarian personality as described by Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), and in much of the classical sociology literature such as Whyte's "organization man," C. Wright Mill's "cheerful robot," or David Riesman's "lonely crowd" (Mills, 1956; Riesman, 1961; Whyte, 1956). In contrast, those attracted to a leader role have an exaggerated narcissistic need to project their fears of inferiority and inadequacy onto persons of inferior social status and gain satisfaction from the enhanced power, superior status, and material rewards that accompany leadership positions (Schwartz, 1987).

A more complete understanding of the meaning of leadership in organizations can be gained by examining the collective unconscious assumptions about leadership and authority. Collective unconscious assumptions (basic assumptions) are formed concerning leadership and authority which affect both individual and group behavior (Bion, 1961). As Bion points out, under the influence of the pairing basic assumption in groups, members become preoccupied with the thought that sometime in the future a person (leader) or idea (leadership) will surface that will eventually solve all their problems without any effort on their part. There is a messianic hope that in the future everything will finally work and members will be delivered from their anxieties, fears, and struggles. The predominant emotions are manic-like forms of hope, faith, and utopianism. According to Bion (1961), these emotions can only persist as long as the leader or idea remains "unborn" and unmaterialized. Due to the unreality of the omnipotent and magical idealization, it is impossible for a person or idea ever to live up to the expectations. Eventually, the faith and hope of members is shattered, opening the door to despair, disappointment, and disillusionment, the emotions lurking behind the more manic ones such as hope. The manic emotions constitute a defense against depression (Winnicott, 1987). It is when the group is caught in a manic defense that members are least likely to feel they are defending against depression. At such times, they are most likely to feel elated, happy, busy, excited, humorous, omniscient, zestful, and are less inclined to look at the seriousness of life with its heaviness and sadness.

Bion (1961) describes another basic assumption that occurs in groups, the dependency basic assumption, as a social fiction that impairs work on the real issues in a group or organization. The dependency basic assumption group comes into operation when members act as if they were joining together in order to be sustained by a single leader on whom they depend for nourishment and protection. The essential aim of the dependency assumption group is to covertly attain security through establishing a fantasy that members of a group are coming together to be nurtured and protected by "a leader." Members act as if they know nothing, as if they are inadequate and helpless. Their behavior in this regard implies that the leader by comparison is omnipotent and omniscient. In over-idealizing the leader, members deskill themselves from their own critical thinking, visions, inspirations, and emotions.

In the emotional state of dependency, the members want extremely simple explanations and act as if no one can do anything that is difficult. A person in a leader role functions as an emotional container for other members that results in an alienating intellectual and emotional deskilling in them. The person designated as the leader can function as a central figure for containing both positive and negative projections of followers. As Muktananada (1980) states: "there is a great mirror in the Guru's eyes in which everything is reflected" (p. 34). There is similarly a great mirror in the eyes of the leader in which the intrapsychic conflicts of the group members at large are reflected. However, in projecting their own senses of completeness and incompleteness onto a leader, people become alienated and caught in an illusion of helplessness and failure without realizing that they limit the leader's power as well as their own by their denial, projection, and passivity.

Looking toward people in authority to define what is meaningful work activity occurs without much conscious thought and reflection. The childlike dependency basis of the leader myth is seen clearly in the writing of Smircich and Morgan (1982) who view leadership as a process whereby "followers" give up their mindfulness to a "leader" or "leadership." As they state: "Leadership is realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others" (p. 257). Milgram's (1974) classic studies on obedience to authority as well as studies on cult groups such as Jim Jones' "People's Temple" (Ulman & Abse, 1983) attest to the primitive unreflected acceptance and unconscious compliance with an authority figure's definition of what aspects of reality are to be given conscious attention. The unreflected acceptance of the authority figure's or power elite's definition of how the world of work is to be enacted is the infrastructure of false consciousness.

In addition to providing a focus for dependency issues, the person assigned a leader role often represents and acts as a voice for the intrapsychic conflicts of followers and is unconsciously used to act our a shared collective issue. For example, repressed anger is often projected onto someone in a leader role who then acts it out for the group in such a way that group members become vicariously satisfied. Projecting violent, aggressive, and hostile feelings onto a leader allows people to reduce the discomfort of having to openly confront these feelings either in themselves or with each other. From the standpoint of projecting away positive attributes and emotions, people engage in a deskilling process that leaves them feeling empty, helpless, and powerless. Maslow (1971) seems to capture well the underlying dynamics of the deskilling process that accompanies alienation with what he termed the "Jonah Complex." He used the term in reference to an individual evading and running away from his or her undeveloped potential for creativity and greatness. He believed that people paradoxically fear not only their worst qualities but also their best qualities. With the projective numbing and relinquishing of their abilities to create and nourish themselves, they experience confusion, feel overwhelmed, and feel helpless. When this happens, alienated members of an organization willingly submit themselves to spoon feeding, preferring safe and easy security to the possible pains and uncertainty of learning by their own effort and mistakes. In this respect, Freud (1960) believed that members of a group desperately seek illusions to protect themselves from emotional truths and avoid reality.

THE CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership theories espousing "traits" or "great person" explanations reinforce and reflect the widespread tendency of people to deskill themselves and idealize leaders by implying that only a select few are good enough to exercise initiative. This view of leadership must be questioned in light of the dysfunctional and alienating consequences perpetrated by this social myth. The deconstruction of leadership and the creation of alternative definitions necessitates placing a value on inverting and debunking cultural assumptions that hold in place the current leader myth. Proposing alternative realities in organizations is often viewed as taking a dangerous risk since it challenges prevailing perceptions of reality held by the current leadership. Throughout history, successful challenges have been made by persons acting in the role of the sage-fool (Kets de Vries, 1990). Traditionally, the sage-fool's role has been institutionalized in the roles of court jester, clown, and anti-hero. In these roles, sage-fools balance the hubris of the kings or other powerful persons by parodying the foolishness and stupidity of the leader's false consciousness and misuse of power by using humor to cushion the impact of uncovering unspeakable truths and other information considered to be socially destructive (Kets de Vries, 1990). In contemporary organizations, this role is often taken up by outsiders such as O.D. consultants. From the radical humanist perspective, however, an O.D. consultant cannot succeed just by presenting his or her version of the alternative reality to the organization's members and their leaders. Real change occurs only when members can learn to liberate themselves through expanded awareness and self-created programs of action (Tichy, 1974). As noted psychoanalyst Alan Wheelis (1975) so poignantly expresses it: "Freedom is the awareness of alternatives and the ability to choose" (p. 15).

Increasing awareness of alienation and reification in work settings means finding ways to examine consciously the beliefs about existing structures and attitudes concerning power authority. Neumann (1989) proposes that many people automatically adopt a traditional "work ideology" and subsequently feel uncomfortable with organizational interventions designed to increase participation in decision making. This commonly occurs because of the widespread acceptance of organizational norms that promote abdication of decision-making authority to those above. In recent years, empowerment has emerged as an idea designed to increase involvement and participation in decision making by those perceived as working in environments where taking orders and being told what to do is the norm and self-management is not practiced. The idea of empowerment has gained popularity in corporate and academic circles due to the widespread perception that by delegating more decision-making authority to organization members, productivity and performance will be enhanced (Bennis, 1989; Kanter, 1979; Lawler, 1986; Manz & Sims, 1980; Peters & Austin, 1985).

To some, the idea of empowerment has become another magic solution designed to promote widespread changes in organizational perceptions and practices. Without an examination of deeply held beliefs about leadership constructs and power and authority relationships, however, it is unlikely that fundamental change will occur. Encouraging subordinates to take increased responsibility for outcomes and managing themselves may have little impact if intellectual and emotional deskilling and other

problems arising from constructs around leadership are not directly addressed. Under present conditions in organizations, many of the changes involving empowerment may be seen as an attempt to shift blame and responsibility for organizational problems from the top management to other organization members without a corresponding change in actual power relationships. Alternatively, implementing empowerment programs may also be viewed by other organization members as an attempt to co-opt them by creating the illusion that a decrease in top management control and an increase in self-monitoring is equivalent to equal participation in decision-making processes (illusionary power equalization). Focusing attention on the leader myth and its role in shaping individually- and collectively-held beliefs can create awareness of choices and the predisposition for risk and experimentation necessary for changing behaviors and creating new paradigms.

EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW PARADIGMS

Chris Argyris (1969) points out that one danger in conducting only "naturalistic" and "descriptive" research on behavior within organizations is a tendency to view what exists at the present time as inevitable or immutable. Truly, if only the prevailing human conditions in organizations were studied, the risk would be one of reinforcing a concept of a person whose "natural" behavior is concealing feelings, playing games, mistrusting, being bored with work, being passive, feeling powerless, and not taking risks (Argyris, 1990). The basic danger of descriptive research is failing to consider alternative systems in which meaninglessness and powerlessness are minimized or eliminated. With limited awareness and lack of experimentation with alternative realities, resignation in accepting as human nature the pathological status quo evidence in the descriptive data is likely.

Acceptance of the leader myth promotes alienation, deskilling, reification of organizational forms, and dysfunctional organizational structures. Contrariwise, the dynamics of leadership, when viewed as a social process, are quite different from the idea of a leadership elite, where acceptance of a leader requires abdicating authority to a power outside the self. Leadership as a social process can be defined as a process of dynamic collaboration, where individuals and organization members authorize themselves and others to interact in ways that experiment with new forms of intellectual and emotional meaning. Experimenting in this sense is similar to Weick's (1977) concept of enactment, where proactive behavior occurs and is not necessarily linked to specific goals. The presence of well-defined leaders often decreases the ability of a group to experiment, whereas a revolt against leaders and efforts to work without them may give rise to new, more amorphous forms of leadership where organization members work at their boundaries through a process of dynamic collaboration (Smith & Gemmill, 1991). Working in dynamic collaboration requires individuals to change their perceptions and develop new norms and structures which create a variety of new options and increases the possibility that new structures will be found which are better suited to the current environment (Ashby, 1970; Bronowski, 1970).

An alternative view of leadership has emerged in recent decades from the expanding body of feminist theory on the nature of power and authority. Radical feminists

view power as exercised in contemporary society as "power over," representative of a masculine, or patriarchal worldview in which social relationships originate from primary relationships defined by male "power over" women and children (Rich, 1976). Alternatively, a feminist conception of leadership re-defines power as the ability to influence people to act in their own interests, rather than induce them to act accordingly to the goals and desires of the leader (Carroll, 1984). Feminists envision new paradigms that reconceptualize leadership and power relationships based on supportive and cooperative behaviors. Feminist theory, therefore, points to the need for new forms of leadership by re-defining the meanings attached to leadership behavior, as in Bunch and Fisher's (1976) definition of leadership as "people taking the initiative, carrying things through, having ideas and the imagination to get something started, and exhibiting particular skills in different areas" (p. 3). Unawareness of viable alternatives to present behavior associated with leadership, and limited experimentation have been, perhaps, the greatest impediments to creation of less alienating work relationships.

Michels' (1915) iron law of oligarchy could easily be recast into the iron law of nonlearning in organizations or social systems. According to Michels, organizations that start out with egalitarian or anarchistic political values tend to become as, or perhaps more authoritarian and alienating than the organizations they were designed to reform or replace. The issue seems to be that people cannot simply will themselves into a new way of operating. They inevitably end up enacting and reacting the prior structures because experientially and behaviorally they are unable to transcend them. Awareness of alienation, social defenses, and false consciousness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for changes in a social system or organization (Hirschhorn, 1988). For example, Argyris (1990) suggests that executives are often aware of ineffectual interpersonal behavior in other executives they perceive as ineffectual, yet they themselves exhibit the same ineffectual behavior. Even when they become aware of their own ineffectual behavior, however, it is not enough to effect change in their behavior. For change to occur, it is necessary to experiment with new paradigms and new behaviors to find more meaningful and constructive ways of relating and working together. While such social experimentation is a process marked by uncertainty, difficulties, awkwardness, disappointment, and tentativeness of actions, it is indispensable if people are to experience a non-alienated mode of existence in a work environment or in society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Jung (1958), in writing on the phenomena of reported flying saucers, seems accurately to describe how illusionary social processes perpetuate such social myths and reflect the pervasive sense of helplessness. He hypothesizes that the reports of U.F.O.s, flying saucers, and alien beings represent an intrapsychic longing for wholeness and unity which seems impossible to accomplish in our existing world. In a Sartre-like drama (Sartre, 1955), people become alienated from their true creative and vital life force and project it outward so that they see it coming to them in an alien form. The longing or wish is projected via a quasi-hallucinatory process where it is perceived as alien to the

self, or extraterrestrial. Jung (1958) contended that aside from whether the U.F.O.s objectively exist, it seems clear that they psychologically exist in the experience of many humans in a wide variety of cultures.

Similarly, we speculate that leadership as a social myth symbolically represents a regressive wish to return to the symbolic environment of the womb: to be absolved of consciousness, mindfulness, and responsibility for initiating responses to our environment to attain what we need and want. The womb represents a protected environment that we have all experienced where we did not have to take risk, experience angst and pain, feel frightened, and expose our inadequacy or incompetence. To become completely infantilized is the ultimate form of deskilling and learned helplessness. Jung (1957) may have had this in mind when he wrote:

> Where there are many, there is security; what the many believe must of course be true; what the many want must be worth striving for, and necessary, and therefore good. In the clamor of the many there lies the power to snatch wish-fulfillments by force; sweetest of all, however, is that gentle and painless slipping back into the kingdom of childhood, into the paradise of parental care, into happy-go-luckiness and irresponsibility. All the thinking and looking after are done from the top; to all questions there is an answer, and for all needs the necessary provision is made. The infantile dream state of the mass man is so unrealistic that he never thinks to ask who is paying for this paradise (pp. 70–71).

It is a fact of existence that everyone has had a unitive experience of being completely taken care of without any conscious effort on their part. Hence, the regressive wish is not just something spun out of thin air but is borne of an actual experience with a symbiotic environment, albeit prelinguistic and preverbal. The unitive experience of a symbolic environment is the basis for the regressive wish.

Members of a social system often behave as alienated robots in work relationships. They often seem paralyzed by their fears and cannot bear to experience their work relationships as a changing process in which nothing is ever really fixed. The work process is imbued with meaning by every individual; therefore it has no objective meaning of its own. At times, the creative possibilities of events and experiences carry us in directions and toward goals of which at the time we are only dimly aware. This process can be fraught with both fascination and fright since these is no fixed end point or closed system of behavior, actions, or unchanging set of principles by which work relationships develop creatively and constructively. In reality, there are multiple ways of being together in the work process. Members of an organization can be free to relate to each other in the work process any way they choose. They are limited only by their fears, imagination, cultural programming, and psychohistories. Admittedly, these are significant limitations, but not necessarily insurmountable.

Hopefully, we have provided a foundation, a beginning, in our analysis that can serve to both encourage and guide much needed future research on leadership and alienation. Interventions designed to demythologize leadership and lessen alienating consequences need to be more precisely developed and tested in the crucible of experience. At present, the Tavistock group relations-type conference can be used as a powerful intervention for demythologizing leadership as well as a research methodology for investigating unconscious behavior associated with leadership. Making discussable what is typically undiscussable about leadership and alienation is a step toward

demythologizing and personal "reskilling." Amplifying personal awareness of the leadership myth and its social function allows one to examine their own projective identification and ways of deskilling themselves unnecessarily. It is our contention that only disenchantment and detachment from the central social myth and ritual of dependency on leadership can promote the change necessary for opening up new possibilities for creativity and change in the ways we structure life at work so it loses the toxicity associated with alienation.

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