2015

How Do Leaders Lead? Through Social Influence

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From 1933 to 1944 US President Franklin D. Roosevelt used a series of radio broadcasts—his famous "fireside chats"—to persuade Americans to remain calm through a continuing series of financial, domestic, and military crises. In the early 1980s IBM hired Bill Gates to write an operating system for that company's computers, but Gates convinced IBM to allow him to market the system through his own start-up company, which he named Microsoft. In 2013 Secretary of State John Kerry threatened Syria's leaders, warning them the US would launch a military strike against that country unless they curtailed their weapons program. In 1978 Jim Jones, the leader of a religious sect known as the Peoples Temple, ordered his followers to commit suicide, and nearly all complied with his deadly demand.

Leaders must have many skills. They must be able to organize complex tasks so that the efforts of each person are integrated in a collective enterprise. They must be able to identify the social and interpersonal needs of the group, and take steps to make certain their followers are relatively satisfied. They must envision future outcomes and events and put in place procedures that will facilitate the attainment of their organization's mission. But, among these myriad responsibilities, the one most crucial to the leader's success is the capacity to influence others. As Bass (2008, p. 19) explained, leadership is the "successful influence by the leader that results in the attainment of goals by the influenced followers." Yukl (2013, p. 7) considered leadership to be the "process of influencing others," as did Northouse (2013, p. 5): Leadership is "a process whereby an individual influences a group." Leaders are, as Gardner (1995, p. 6) concluded, "individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviors, and/or feelings of others."

Neustadt (1990, p. 150) describes successful US presidents as individuals who are skilled in wielding “personal influence of an effective sort on the behavior of men” and women, and US president Harry S. Truman put it this way: A leader is a person who “has the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do, and like it” (Truman, 1958, p. 139).

This chapter considers leadership to be a social influence process that derives from multifarious sources, manifests itself in a variety of forms, and generates outcomes both extraordinary and commonplace. However, it cuts through some of influence’s complexities by distinguishing between two oft-contrasted forms of influence: the direct and the indirect (Falbo, 1977; Kipnis, 1984). Military leaders, as legitimate authorities in the services, can and do issue orders to subordinates who are duty-bound to follow those orders. Politicians speak directly to their constituents, explaining their policies and asking for support. Team leaders identify the subtasks that must be completed by the group as it pursues its goals, and then assign different members of the team to each subtask. But other leaders influence their followers in more subtle and less perceptible ways. They rarely issue any orders or directives, but instead put in place organizational procedures and structures that constrain their followers’ actions in ways that often go unnoticed. Their persuasive messages convince listeners not by presenting rational arguments and information, but by appealing to their emotions and unconscious motivations. And some lead by setting an example that they hope others might follow. For every leader who orders, demands, and requires is a leader who persuades, cajoles, and maneuvers.

This chapter applies this basic assumption—that leaders influence others in ways that range from the direct to the indirect—to the analysis of influence in two stages. The chapter first reviews, albeit briefly, the historical antecedents of the scientific study of influence. Early investigators, intrigued by the sometimes surprisingly substantial impact of one person on many others, examined such topics as propaganda, persuasion, contagion, social climates, and suggestion. These investigations documented the many ways in which leaders influence others, but highlighted one of the paradoxes of influence: indirect forms of influence are often veiled within the situation yet they are just as powerful as direct ones. The second section of the chapter further explores this paradox by examining three topics that have attracted the enduring interest of contemporary social psychologists: persuasion, compliance, and obedience. Each of these forms follows its own path to influence; persuasion, for example, relies more on communication of information, compliance on extracting acquiescence, and obedience on acceptance of authority. But this chapter highlights their commonality: All three draw on both direct and indirect social influence processes to achieve results.

Investigating Influence: Historical Foundations

Philosophers and political theorists down through the ages have concluded leadership is a form of influence. Homer’s great leader Odysseus relied on his status as a warlord and king to take command over his crew, but he also made use of guile and cunning to overcome adversity during their long journey home. Shakespeare’s plays are filled with vivid descriptions of the way leaders use coalitions, strategic initiatives to influence others. Centuries ago political savant Niccolo Machiavelli insightfully analyzed when leaders should use indirect (the fox) rather than direct (the lion) influence styles. The social psychological analysis of leadership, however, is scarcely a century old, for it originated in the field's earliest empirical explorations of suggestibility, propaganda, and contagion.

Crowds and Contagion

The scientific study of social influence began near the end of the 19th century when a number of scholars in a variety of fields simultaneously expressed a shared fascination with crowds, mobs, and masses. Le Bon (1895/1960), for example, undertook one of the first systematic analyses of the forces acting within crowds. He noted that, in many cases, the mob's influence can be traced to its leader: a charismatic individual who exhorts a large mass of followers to act in ways that run counter to accepted practice: "as soon as a certain number of living beings are gathered together, whether they be animals or men, they place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief" (p. 117). Leaders of such groups, he believed, influence the masses through affirmation—they make claims without any supporting proof or evidence—and repetition—they repeat their message over and over again. But even though Le Bon concluded "the multitude is always ready to listen to the strong-willed man, who knows how to impose himself upon it" (pp. 118-119), he also recognized a second unifying process operating within large groups: contagion. Unlike a leader's direct exhortation of the crowd, contagion is a more subtle, localized process, for it generates uniformity in members' actions and outlooks as emotions, ideas, and information are passed from one member to the next. The result: "the heterogeneous is swamped by the homogenous" (Le Bon, 1895/1960, p. 29).

Le Bon's speculations stimulated the development of more rigorous analyses of influence, particularly in psychology (e.g., Freud, 1913, 1922) and sociology (e.g., Weber, 1921/1946). Freud (1922), in his characteristic search for the hidden motivators of human behavior, described the psychologically binding relationship between the leader and followers who identify with the leader and so develop strong libidinal ties to one another. Weber (1921/1946), in contrast, identified three distinct, but potentially overlapping, pure types of influence: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. Traditional leaders, such as priests, monarchs, or patriarchs, can influence others because their followers recognize and accept their legitimate right to exercise authority. Legal-rational leaders derive their influence from the impersonal rules of social order that define rights and responsibilities. But Charismatic leaders, in contrast, inspire and motivate others more directly: "Every charismatic authority . . . preaches, creates, or demands new obligations—most typically, by virtue of revelation, oracle, inspiration, or of his own will" (Weber, 1921/1946, p. 243).

Attitudes and Opinions

Whereas Le Bon and other crowd theorists studied how leaders influence people who are massed together, other early researchers explored the leader's influence on widely-dispersed followers. Studies of rumor transmission, propaganda, and mass persuasion all suggested individuals, in seeking information about their world, are significantly influenced by the opinions of other people, but particularly leaders (Lasswell, 1927). Studies of propaganda, for example, examined the way leaders in business, government, politics, and education systematically influenced others' attitudes and opinions, often by using methods that appealed more to emotion and bias rather than rationality and critical analysis. As Biddle (1931, p. 283) explained, many types of influence "create emotional disturbance in the coerced, resentments, over-compensations or desires for revolt. Propaganda is different in that it controls without occasioning antagonistic emotions. Each individual behaves as though his response were his own decision. Many individuals may be coerced to behave alike, each apparently guided by his or her own independent judgment." Leaders, he concluded, sometimes make clear their intent to persuade, but more frequently their ultimate intent is kept hidden as they exploit emotions, related attitudes, and slogans.

In the 1940s and 50s Hovland and his colleagues (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953; Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949) conducted their groundbreaking experimental studies of persuasion and propaganda to understand how leaders could influence the nation's opinions during wartime. Their learning model was based on the three elements of any persuasive encounter: the source of the persuasive message, the nature of the message, and the characteristics of the receiver. Their work confirmed what previous studies only suggested: that persuasive communications are influential when they capture listeners' attention, offer convincing arguments, and leave a lasting impression. But they also discovered that persuasion does not depend only on these overt and more obvious aspects of the source, message, and receiver, but also on relatively subtle aspects of the persuasion setting. They discovered, for example, that listeners were sensitive to cues that helped them estimate the source's credibility. Listeners were also more accepting of a message from a communicator who was similar to them in some minor, even trivial, way. Moreover, some carefully crafted messages that provided listeners with the information they needed about an issue proved to be remarkably ineffective, because they triggered fear and denial. They concluded the most effective, persuasive messages were ones that sought to change people's attitudes using a combination of both direct and indirect methods.

Normative Social Influence

Le Bon (1895/1960) suggested a relatively quotidian process—social influence—was responsible for the sometimes extraordinary behavior of crowds, but it remained for Sherif (1936) and Newcomb (1943) to verify this process empirically. Sherif studied this subtle form of social influence by asking individuals seated in a darkened room to publicly report their estimates about of the distance a dot of light appeared to move (the autokinetic effect). Sherif found that, in this ambiguous situation, people gradually aligned their judgments until a consensus spontaneously emerged. His procedures provided a paradigm for subsequent studies of social influence, such as Asch's (1955) investigations of conformity.

Newcomb's (1943) field study of attitude change among the students at Bennington College yielded corroborating evidence of the ubiquity of social influence. Newcomb noted that many students at Bennington changed their political attitudes during the time they were students at the college, becoming more liberal in their political outlook. This change, Newcomb concluded, was not brought about by some direct campaign to influence the students. Instead, it resulted from what became known as normative social influence—the tailoring of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions to match those displayed by others. The Bennington community at that time was a relatively liberal one, and many of the new students unwittingly accepted this outlook as their own. The more liberal attitudes created by the group remained a part of the beliefs of many of the graduates some 25 years later (Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks, & Warwick, 1967). Newcomb's work stimulated subsequent studies of two closely related social influence processes: reference groups (Hyman, 1942) and social comparison (Festinger, 1950, 1954).

Autocratic and Democratic Leaders

At about the same time that Hovland and his colleagues were studying persuasion and attitude change Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) were investigating the differential impact of three forms of leadership on group productivity and morale. They studied boys working in small groups on hobby projects. A young man was appointed the leader of each group, and this leader was trained to adopt one of three different styles of leadership. The autocratic leader was highly directive; he gave the boys orders, criticized them, and remained aloof from the group. The democratic leader, in contrast, adopted a more indirect, participatory leadership style; he explained long term goals and the steps to be taken to reach the goals and rarely gave the groups orders. The laissez faire leader's style was the most restrained of all; he provided information on demand but did not offer advice, criticism, or guidance spontaneously.

All three types of leadership generated changes in group behavior. A leader who influenced other directly—by issuing orders and monitoring the group's actions—created a leader-centered, work-focused atmosphere. His groups worked more diligently than groups with a laissez faire leader, although in some cases this productivity declined when he was not physically present to monitor their actions. Some of the autocratically led groups also resisted their leader, but others accepted his authority without question. Overall, however, followers were more involved with their groups and more satisfied when their leader's influence style was democratic rather than autocratic and, in some respects, more indirect rather than direct.

Direct and Indirect Influence in Persuasion, Compliance, and Obedience

How did Roosevelt garner support for his relief, recovery, and reform efforts? How did Bill Gates convince computer manufacturers to install his software rather than his competitors' on their machines? How did Secretary of State John Kerry gain international support for sanctions against Syria for human rights violations? How did Jim Jones convince his followers to take their own lives? How do leaders influence others?

As we have seen, the earliest studies of leadership conducted by pioneering psychologists and sociologists provided partial answers to these questions. Le Bon (1895/1960) and Weber (1921/1946) described leaders who guided their constituents' thoughts, actions, and emotions through spoken and written communications. Work inspired by Hovland and the Yale Communications researchers indicated that the leader, as the source of the message, determines the magnitude of the message's impact on recipients (Hovland et al., 1953). Sherif (1936) and Newcomb (1943) confirmed people's willing acceptance others' responses as a normative guidelines, and Lewin and his colleagues (1939) changed the actions and emotions of task-focused groups simply by changing the leadership style of the leader.

This section examines the work of subsequent researchers who, building on these foundational investigations, examined three types of influence: *persuasion*, *compliance*, and *obedience*. Roosevelt speaking to Americans during the Great Depression and Gates explaining to IBM's executives why they should use his operating system are examples of persuasion: the use of facts, arguments, and information in a deliberate attempt to influence other's attitudes, beliefs, or outlooks. Compliance, like persuasion, can result in a change in thoughts, feelings, and action, but in most cases compliance is behaviorally focused: it seeks first and foremost acquiescence rather than private acceptance. Obedience, in contrast, results when leaders draw on their power and authority to change others. The devotee who drinks the poisoned punch and the accountant who follows the boss's order to doctor the failing company's ledger are obeying a leader whose influence they cannot resist.

The analysis will not only detail how leaders persuade, seek compliance, and extract obedience, but also consider the two sides of each of these forms of influence: the direct and the indirect. Leaders can, for example, persuade their followers in one of two ways: through a direct, central route that involves communicating reasons and arguments but also by a more indirect, peripheral route that exploits the listener's emotions and motivations. Similarly, although compliance and obedience are generally considered to be direct, obvious means of influence, in many cases followers comply and obey not because they are the targets of direct forces, but because compliance and obedience are taken-for-granted requirements in the situation where they find themselves. As we will see, these basic social response forms—persuasion, compliance, and obedience—are sustained by both direct and indirect social influence processes.

Two Sides to Persuasion

Studies of persuasion and propaganda, in explaining when a listener will be influenced by a persuasive message, assumed that people learn new ways of thinking by listening to a message's content, processing and understanding its meaning, and then evaluating the strength of its arguments. But, in many cases, people change their attitudes but do not remember or understand the content of a message. In some cases, leaders persuade people not by presenting cogent messages, but by appeals to followers' emotions, biases, and unconscious motivations.

Several theoretical models account for these two kinds of persuasion. Petty and Cacioppo's (1984) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), for example, distinguishes between the central route and the peripheral route to persuasion. Central route processing requires cognitive elaboration of the message. If this elaboration generates favorable thoughts then people are persuaded, but if the message stimulates negative thoughts then the original attitude may become even stronger. If people lack the motivation or ability to examine the message closely, then peripheral cues in the situation—vivid images, emotionally charged phrasings, slogans, and so on—influence their attitudes. Chaiken and Eagly's heuristic-systematic model (HSM) similarly suggests that systematic processing requires careful analysis of the message but that heuristic processing relies on rules-of-thumb that are accurate enough for most purposes (Chaiken, Liberman,& Eagly, 1989).

Both routes lead to persuasion, but they do so through very different mechanisms. The leader who takes a central route to persuasion assumes followers will consider the quality of the arguments, search their memories for information on the subject, and revise their attitudes if these processes generate pro-attitudinal cognitions. A message that leads to negative responses, however, may produce a boomerang effect: the listener may become strongly opposed to the advocated position. And a message that generates neutral thoughts or a mix of positive or negative thoughts may prompt the listener to rely more such peripheral route cues as voice tone, warmth, attractiveness of the speaker, and so on. Thus, what matters most during central processing is the listener's cognitive response to the message. People who can list all the claims made by a leader may still resist his or her message, but followers who respond with many positive thoughts about the speaker, the message, or the situation will likely do what the leader suggests even if they can't remember the substance of the leader's message (Mackie & Asuncion, 1990).

When should a leader use a central route rather than a peripheral route? The ELM offers two answers. First, the likelihood of cognitive elaboration decreases when followers are not motivated to process information systematically. Younger workers, for example, may not be persuaded by a leader who stresses retirement benefits, whereas this issue may substantially influence older workers' attitudes. Second, if followers lack the cognitive resources and abilities needed for elaboration, then the leader may find more persuasive success by shifting to the peripheral route. When people are distracted, have a prior opinion, or just can't make any sense out of the message they are less likely to think carefully about the information. In such cases they instead shift to a heuristic mode of thought that sacrifices precision but improves processing efficiency. Followers who trust their leader do not try to pick apart the arguments in a persuasive message, but just assume that their leader knows what he or she is talking about. Past experience with leaders has taught them that, in general, "leaders can be trusted," "my leader cares about me," and "my leader is effective," so they rely on these rules-of-thumb to reach a conclusion or decision.

Dual-process models of persuasion predict that when followers rely on heuristics rather than systematic processing they will respond differently to the same persuasive appeal. Axsom, Yates, and Chaiken (1987) tested this assumption by asking college students to listen to a tape-recorded debate in which one speaker argued that probation programs are more effective than imprisonment methods. The researchers, to prompt some people to use heuristic rather than systematic processing, manipulated the listeners' involvement in the issue. They created high involvement by stressing the importance of the debate and its relevance for their community, and low involvement by telling listeners to just "sit back and relax" since this study was just a preliminary analysis of the idea. They also varied the strength of the arguments in the message and audience's reaction to the message. Subjects could hear, in the background of the tape-recording, the apparent response of the original audience. In some cases the audience responded with great enthusiasm—bursts of clapping and cheers of approval—but in others the audience rarely clapped and even heckled the speaker.

A dual-process model argues that these two factors—the quality of the arguments and the audience's reaction to the speech—should have very different effects on the listeners who are processing information systematically rather than heuristically. Systematic thinkers should agree more with a speaker who presents strong rather than weak arguments, but they shouldn't be influenced by the audience's responses. Heuristic thinkers, in contrast, should respond more favorably when the audience responds positively. After all, the consensus heuristic argues that "if other people think a message is correct, then it probably is correct" (Axsom et al., 1987, p. 31). The results provided considerable support for the heuristic model. People who were involved in the issue (and presumably were processing information systematically) were more persuaded by a speech with strong arguments rather than weak ones. They weren't influenced to any great extent by the audience's response to the speech. People who weren't involved in the issue (and presumably were processing information heuristically), in contrast, were more likely to agree with a strong speaker whose ideas were well-received by the audience. These heuristic thinkers weren't completely oblivious to the quality of the arguments—they didn't agree with a low-quality argument even if the audience liked it—but they nonetheless let the audience's approbation guide their conclusions when the speech was sound.

Leaders need not choose, however, between direct and indirect approaches in their persuasive messages, for astute communicators structure their presentations so they appeal to both engaged and less engaged followers. Olson and Haynes (2008), for example, examined the persuasive methods used by former US vice-president Al Gore in his climate change film *An Inconvenient Truth*. This documentary seeks to convince viewers of the need to support environmental reforms and makes ample use of facts and information to support its case. Gore presents findings from climate science research in both numeric and graphic form and offers a detailed account of the effect of greenhouse gases on temperatures. But Gore does not use only strong, compelling arguments in his message. He also guides the viewer's emotional reactions by presenting dramatic images of glacier meltdown and a catastrophic prediction of the impact of rising seawater on large population centers. He continually reaffirms his credibility by frequently referring to his close association with leading climate scientists and his long-term personal commitment to environmental issues. He capitalizes on audience cues to increase the acceptance of his message, for much of his presentation was filmed with a live audience that responds very enthusiastically to his message. This skillful combination of direct and indirect persuasive tactics means that both engaged and unengaged viewers will find his arguments compelling and so may, in consequence, change their minds and agree with the position he advocates.

Two Sides to Compliance

The executive who constructs a fact-filled report about a new corporate initiative, the politician who appeals to his constituents' commitment to their political party, and the propagandist who convinces others to take up a cause by delivering emotionally arousing speeches are influencing through persuasion. In other cases, however, leaders are more interested in changing their follower's behaviors rather than their minds. The police officer requires others to obey the law; the safety compliance specialist puts into place regulations to reduce risk in the workplace; the team leader requires every member of the team to attend the daily briefing sessions. Compliance, unlike attitude change, requires acquiesce that is in some cases relatively transitory and may or may not be driven by individuals' privately held beliefs.

Compliance is in many cases achieved by the direct imposition of the leader's will on followers. Leaders can and do issue orders, promulgate and enforce regulations, and punish noncompliance. Compliance tactics also include more indirect, even stealthy, means of influencing others. These indirect forms of influence, Pratkanis (2007) suggests, work by creating a favorable cognitive response in listeners, so that their thoughts when they consider the proposed course of action are positive ones, and any negative thoughts that might warn them against following the suggestion are disrupted. Taxonomies of compliance-inducing tactics have generated substantial lists of the many and varied ways leaders influence their followers, including complaining, building coalitions, exchanging favors, making demands, manipulating moods, persisting, enacting fait accomplis, manipulations, supplications, evasion, lying, and so on (Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2010; Yukl, 2013). These tactics can be arrayed on a continuum from direct to indirect, as suggested here, but other dimensions of difference are also important to consider. Raven and his colleagues (Pierro, Kruglanski, & Raven, 2012), for example, distinguish between hard and soft tactics, as does Nye (2004). The harder tactics limit the "freedom an influence recipient is allowed in choosing whether or not to comply with a request or a demand" (Pierro, Kruglanski, & Raven, 2012, p. 41). Bullying, enforcing or invoking standards, punishing, and delivering contingency-based rewards are examples of hard tactics. Soft tactics, in contrast, exploit the relationship between the influencer and the target to extract compliance. When individuals use such methods as collaboration, socializing, friendships, personal rewards, and ingratiation, they influence more indirectly and interpersonally. Hard tactics are often described as harsh, forcing, or direct, but they are not necessarily more powerful than soft ones; threatening people with exclusion from a group or public embarrassment may lead to substantially greater change than the threat of some material deprivation or corporal punishment (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007).

Soft compliance methods are not just noncoercive, but subtle and indirect rather than forceful or threatening. When researchers led students to believe that they had administered painful electric shocks to other students, the students felt guilty for what they had done and so were more likely to comply with a request to donate their time to a worthy cause (Carlsmith & Gross, 1969). Leaders who phrase their request in an unusual way pique their follower's interest in the request, thereby short-circuiting the default "I refuse" response (Santos, Leve, & Pratkanis, 1994). Norms of fairness and reciprocity, too, can be exploited by leaders to increase compliance, for individuals who receive something from another person—a gift, a favor, a reward, or even a smile—tend to feel obligated to give something back in return, even if the item that was received was unsolicited and not even desired. Across a number of studies, researchers have confirmed that people are more likely to comply with another person's request—to help with a task, to make a monetary donation to a charitable cause, to serve as a volunteer—if the person making the request previously did something that provided a benefit to the target of the request (e.g., Boster, Rodriguez, Cruz, & Marshall, 1995). Individuals who are negotiating a deal are more likely to offer a concession if the other party in the negotiation has previously offered one (e.g., Burger, 1986) and followers are more cooperative if the leader has acted in a cooperative, rather than coercive manner, in previous interactions (Komorita, Parks, & Hulbert, 1992).

Not every leader uses the full range of tactics. Those who are more concerned with being accepted and liked by their followers use more indirect and rational tactics than direct and nonrational strategies, but those who enjoy manipulating others instead use indirect and nonrational as opposed to direct and rational ones. Men use more of the tactics than women do, and they are the ones who are most likely to rely on the more direct strategies (Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983). In general, people who use more rational methods of influence, such as reasoning, compromise, expertise, bargaining, or persuasion to influence others are better liked than those who use less rational influence tactics, such as deceit, evasion, or threats (Falbo, 1977; Yukl, 2013).

Leaders also use different tactics depending on their level of authority and their degree of power relative to their followers. A leader, for example, will more likely use such direct tactics as demands, threats, or promises when dealing with a subordinate, but indirect ones when trying to influence a superior. Also, when the target of the influence resists, people shift to more direct tactics (see Kipnis, 1984). However, some direct tactics are also harsh tactics, and so generate a range of negative emotions (e.g., hostility, depression, fear, and anger), whereas indirect tactics are often softer tactics, and so elicit compromise and cooperation (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). Hence, although coercive leaders may be successful initially, influence becomes more difficult over time as their followers' anger and resistance to pressure grow. Followers will, however, tolerate the use of coercive methods when the group is successful, the leader is trusted, and the use of such tactics is justified by the group's norms (Forsyth, 2013).

Two Sides to Obedience

In many everyday situations leaders nudge rather than push; they suggest rather than pressure. But in other cases their influence can be extraordinarily strong. Rather than subtly shaping opinions and choices, leaders can compel obedience even when their followers resist that influence. Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939), by finding that most of the young boys submitted to the autocratic leader's requirements, hinted at the power leaders could wield, but it was Milgram's (1963) behavioral study of obedience that fully confirmed it. This study, which is one of the most widely known studies in the social sciences, tested the limits of a leader's authority by creating a situation in which a legitimate authority ordered subordinates to do something they would usually not do—in this case, significantly harm another person who was innocent of any wrongdoing. Through a series of subterfuges and manipulations, Milgram arranged for unwitting participants to take the role of the teacher in a simulated learning situation. As the teacher, subjects were told to deliver shocks of increasing intensity to another participant—the learner—each time the learner made a mistake on a simple task. The learner was, however, actually part of the research team, deliberately made mistakes to test the teacher's willingness to obey, and did not actually receive any shocks.

The situation was a realistic one for participants, and served as a laboratory analog to real-world settings where leaders give orders to subordinates. Milgram expected few would follow the authority's orders, and that most would refuse when the shocks reached dangerous levels, yet 65% of the participants he tested were fully obedient. Even when he altered aspects of the situation to make the learner's suffering more salient, and limited the apparent credibility of the experimenter, participants still exhibited surprisingly high levels of obedience. Replications of Milgram's study using different procedures and participants have generally confirmed his initial findings (Burger, 2009) and studies of obedience in natural settings suggest that the levels of obedience that Milgram documented in his laboratory matches levels found in medical, military, organizational, and educational settings (Fiske, Harris, & Cuddy, 2004).

So extraordinary a human capacity—to compel others to do one's bidding even though they wish to resist—seems to require an extraordinary explanation. Freud (1922), for example, believed obedience resulted from an unconscious identification with the father figure and a psychological merging with the primal horde. Milgram (1963, 1974) posited a transformational psychological condition, which he labeled the agentic state, where normal cognitive functioning gives way to a mindless subservience to another. Yet obedience, like persuasion and compliance, is sustained by both direct and indirect processes. Followers' obedience springs, in part, from coercion and fear, but also from a cooperative orientation that recognizes that following maximizes both the follower's and the group's well-being. Milgram's experimenter commanded participants to continue and many participants obeyed—but only because the experimenter forced them to do so. Others, however, continued because they trusted the experimenter, respected his authority, and wanted to help the researchers achieve what they thought were scientifically laudable goals. In Milgram's experiment, as in many leadership situations, a variety of social forces—some direct and some more indirect—combined to create a situation where obedience was probable and disobedience improbable.

Blass (2000) examined this possibility by asking a group of unbiased observers to review a 12-minute videotape of Milgram's procedures before ranking possible reasons for why the participant obeyed. Blass drew the reasons for obedience from French and Raven's (1959) seminal analysis of the five bases of power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Two of the bases of power in the French and Raven model—reward and coercive power—can be considered direct forms of influence. Leaders with reward power extract obedience from followers because they control the distribution of rewards given or offered, including tangible resources but also intangible, personal types of rewards. Leader with coercive power have the capacity to threaten and punish those who do not comply with his or her requests or demands. Tangible threats and punishments include noxious physical events, such as abuse, fines, low grades, and firings, whereas intangible, social threats and punishments include disapproval, insults, and expressions of contempt. When the experimenter in the Milgram (1974) told participants "The experiment requires that you continue" and "You have no other choice, you must go on" he was relying on coercive power.

Did Blass's (2000) observers think the experimenter in the Milgram experiment used direct methods to influence the participants? Yes, but they emphasized his coercive power more than his reward power in their analyses. These observers also suggested, however, that much of the experimenter's capacity to influence participants derived from the more indirect sources of power identified by French and Raven: legitimate power, expert power, and referent power.

Unlike reward and coercive power, legitimate power stems from the influencer's recognized right to require and demand the performance of certain behaviors. The employer has a legitimate right to require a certain level of productivity because of the contractual relationship between employer and employee. Similarly, the teacher can insist that students refrain from using cell phones in class if both the students and the teacher recognize that this demand is among the teacher's prerogatives. Legitimate power arises from an internalized sense of duty, loyalty, obedience, or normative obligation rather than a desire to gain rewards or avoid punishments. Many subjects in the Milgram study felt that when they agreed to participate in the study they had entered into an oral contract that obliged them to obey. In consequence, the experimenter had a legitimate right to control their actions and the learner had no right to quit the study. Unlike reward or coercive power, which diminishes when the authority loses control over the resources, authorities who achieve their position through methods that the group considers fair or proper generally find that their decisions are accepted, without resistance, by others in the group (Tyler 2005).

The remaining two bases of power identified by French and Raven (1959), referent and expert power, can also generate obedience but do so in nonobvious ways. Leaders who are well-liked or admired possess referent power, for others look to them to define their beliefs and behavior. Bosses who enjoy the unswerving loyalty of their employees may be able to increase productivity simply by looking at a worker. Teachers who are high in referent power—the friendly teacher who all the students like and the tough but well respected teacher—may be able to maintain discipline in their classes with little apparent effort because the students obey every request. The participants in Milgram's study respected the experimenter, because he worked at a major university and was conducting scientific research. He was not particularly likable, however, so this source of referent power was likely relatively weak (Blass, 2000).

When followers believe that their leader is an expert—perhaps because of his or her special training, experience, or aptitude—then that leader enjoys expert power. An employee may refuse to follow the suggestion of a younger supervisor, but comply with the same request made by someone who is older and thought to be more experienced. Similarly, students may be reluctant to disagree with a teacher who seems to be an expert in his or her field. Milgram's experiment, because it involved electricity, placed many subjects at a disadvantage in terms of expertise, since few understood the effect of high voltage on humans. Because they considered the experimenter to be an expert, they believed him when he said "Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage" (Milgram, 1974, p. 21).

Conclusions

Leadership is one of the great mysteries of social life. Most people, in most situations, proclaim their independence and individuality, yet they often sacrifice their autonomy and accept a leader's influence. But even though the word *follower* suggests to some a person who is weak or insecure, accepting a leader's influence is an adaptive process that helps people deal with situations that vary from the cooperative and collaborative to those rife with conflict, tension, and animosity. As an evolutionary account of leadership suggests, people accept influence from others because such behavioral responses are adaptive (Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008). When people join forces to achieve an outcome, individuals must step forward and guide the group towards it goals and others must accept that guidance. Followers struggle, in some cases, against their leader's influence, particularly when that influence takes the form of heavy-handed, exceptionless mandates, orders, and decrees. But, rare is the leader who relies only on direct forms of influence to keep followers persuaded, compliant, and obedient. Most mix the direct with the indirect, and as a result leaders' influence is often so subtle that it is scarcely noticed by their followers. So long as leaders are motivated by collective goals and not seeking their own selfish ends, then their followers will benefit when they accept their leaders' guidance (Tiedens, Unzueta, & Young, 2007). Homo sapiens thrive through the skilled use of, and judicious response to, social influence.

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