

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A POLITICAL SCIENCE THEORY TRANSFORMED BY
MANAGEMENT STUDIES. HOW DID THIS HAPPEN, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

By

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Abstract

Transformational leadership is one of the most popular approaches to leadership today. These leaders stimulate and inspire followers to go above and beyond for their organisations with the hope that this will generate higher levels of performance, commitment, and satisfaction. While this can improve organisational performance, there is also a dark side. Transformational leaders can be narcissists who wield excessive power and can negatively impact organisations. I explore how this problem can be addressed by looking deeper into the origins of transformational leadership theory, which came from political science. The theory's originator James MacGregor Burns believed in the value of inspiring leaders with compelling visions, but he also argued these leaders needed to be held accountable by followers using democratic mechanisms. So, why was this overlooked by those who introduced transformational leadership to management studies? I explore this by employing the framework of intellectual history to bring a critical historical perspective to the translation of transformational leadership theory from political science to management studies. Investigating the social, economic, and political context surrounding this translation uncovers several explanations why this democratic component was overlooked by management scholars. I also propose implications for leadership education and practice today and in the future. If we teach transformational leadership in a way that is closer to Burns' original thinking, alternative and more democratic approaches to organisational leadership could emerge.

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Chapter One – Introductions

Transformational leaders inspire and act as role models, resulting in followers experiencing higher levels of performance, satisfaction, and commitment to the organisation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). It is one of the most popular approaches to leadership today, as evidenced by its consistent appearance in management and organisational behaviour textbooks (e.g., Buchanan & Huczynski, 2019; Clegg et al., 2019; Griffin, 2019; King & Lawley, 2019; McShane et al., 2019; Robbins et al., 2022; Schermerhorn et al., 2020; Williams, 2022). Its continued popularity is also made apparent by institutions such as the University of Cambridge (2022) running open programmes on transformational leadership, promising participants they will unlock skills and maximise employee potential.

While higher levels of performance, satisfaction, and commitment to the organisation sounds positive, the dark side of transformational leadership is realised when these leaders act in their own self-interest and push people who do not support the prescribed vision out of the organisation (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). Management textbooks sometimes touch on these negative traits of heightened self-interest and aversion to criticism. What they do not mention is that transformational leadership theory was originally developed in political science. The creator of the theory, James MacGregor Burns, was an American political science scholar, who was primarily interested in history, particularly the history of American presidents (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001). When Burns first wrote about what he called ‘transforming leadership’ in 1978, he argued that followers need to have the power to hold their leaders accountable through democratic mechanisms. This democratic component was a crucial part of the theory, but this got ‘lost in translation’ when it was introduced to management studies¹ by Bernard Bass and other early adopters. Recovering this lost democratic component of transformational leadership theory could allow us to think about leadership differently in organisations.

If we teach management students about Burns’ original thinking, then alternative approaches to leadership in organisations may emerge in the future. I am motivated to connect this case of transformational leadership theory to management education because of my own experience as a student. It was not until halfway through my undergraduate degree that I discovered a critical view of business and organisations. Perhaps this world did not have to solely focus on performance, profit, and

¹ *Management studies* refers to the body of management knowledge, rather than the practice of management.

productivity. Values of social justice, equity, and freedom could also be prioritised. This discovery allowed me to have a broader view of management studies and other disciplines from the commerce degree – shifting my perspective of what it could mean to be an employee in an organisation. Rather than just being a cog in a machine, my contribution to an organisation could be valued beyond mere performance. I think organisations could use more democracy. A more equal distribution of power in the workplace could positively impact the livelihood of employees and it has the potential to increase organisational performance (Doucouliagos, 1995). Teaching management students about the importance of democracy in organisations through the lens of transformational leadership theory could lead to changes in organisational structures in the future.

This introductory chapter will introduce or re-introduce you to transformational leadership theory. I provide a short overview of the theory and clarify my use of the terms ‘transforming’ and ‘transformational’ leadership. I will also introduce you to the critical nature of my research using the field of critical management studies. This body of knowledge is dedicated to challenging mainstream assumptions in management thinking (Alvesson, Bridgman & Willmott, 2009). I also make a case for ‘writing my thesis differently’. This responds to a growing call for more flexibility in thesis writing (Weatherall, 2019) and in academic writing more generally (Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Kara, 2013).

Introduction to Transformational Leadership Theory

You may have heard of, be familiar with, or have studied transformational leadership theory before. For those readers who are unfamiliar with the theory the following paragraph is a crash course on the conventional representation of transformational leadership.

Transforming leadership theory was developed by Burns in his book *Leadership* published in 1978. He introduced the dichotomy of transactional and transforming leadership. Transactional leadership, he explained, is like a politician who promises jobs in exchange for votes or subsidy agreements (Burns, 1978). Transforming leadership, he argues, is more complex and more potent. These visionary leaders seek to fully engage the follower by satisfying their higher needs (Burns, 1978). Management scholar Bass adopted the theory in his book *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* published in 1985. He branded the theory as ‘transformational leadership’ – rather than Burns’ transforming leadership

– and extended the distinction to what he called supervisory-subordinate relations (Bass, 1985a). Throughout this thesis, when I am referring to Burns’ conceptualisation of the theory I will use ‘transforming’ leadership, and when I am discussing Bass, management scholars, or the conventional representation of the theory I will use ‘transformational’ leadership. In addition to extending the theory to employee-manager relationships, Bass (2008) developed four key factors to characterise transformational leadership, these are:

- **Idealised influence** (relates to charisma) outlines the way a leader performs that makes a follower want to identify with them
- **Inspirational motivation** is the stimulating vision, goals, and high standards that the leader sets for the followers and the organisation
- **Intellectual stimulation** describes the leader’s ability to invite followers to question and challenge assumptions
- **Individual consideration** characterises the leader’s skill in appealing to the individuality of each follower by treating them as special and important

As mentioned previously, this is the conventional, dominant, and common-sense representation of transformational leadership theory. However, this representation is something I question and challenge in my research.

Critical Management Studies

I locate my research within the field of critical management studies. This field seeks to question the dominance of mainstream thinking and practice in business and organisations (Alvesson et al., 2009). Critical management studies usually characterise mainstream thinking and practice as ideas that uphold taken-for-granted, patriarchal, neo-imperialist, and capitalist systems (Alvesson et al., 2009). The Academy of Management’s critical management studies domain statement extends this to structural features of society that uphold “the profit imperative, racial inequality, and ecological irresponsibility” (Academy of Management, n.d.). The origins of critical management studies have connections to sociologists Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, as well as Critical Theory (a product of the Frankfurt School), and Foucauldian and poststructural thinking (Alvesson et al., 2009). The work of Michel Foucault is relevant to my research because of his scepticism of historical accounts that claim

to be 'truth'. He argues that if we free ourselves from these constraints, it allows us to 'think differently' (Foucault, 1985). Beyond Foucault, these origins share commonalities in their interest in critiquing work, labour, and organisation, and inspires critical management researchers to challenge oppressive and divisive management thinking and practice (Alvesson et al., 2009). Origins of critical management studies are also connected to the popular or 'classic' texts *Critical Management Studies* (1992) and *Making Sense of Management: A Critical Introduction* (1996) – these texts launched the more marketable "CMS" label (Alvesson, 2011; Alvesson et al., 2009).

I wanted to locate my research within the field of critical management studies to signify my commitment to challenging mainstream and taken-for-granted thinking in this research. My research questions the assumptions of mainstream leadership theory and practice, by exploring the role of democracy in transformational leadership theory. Thinking about making organisations more democratic is of interest to critical management scholars. Daniel King and Chris Land are keen researchers of workplace democracy. In their 2018 study they explored how to democratically introduce democracy into a small organisation with a history of negative experiences with hierarchical managerialism. Their work helped me discover the centrality of democracy to critical management studies. Critical management studies promotes values such as autonomy and democracy, and is concerned about the suppression of employee voice and the unrestrained power of managers (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Fournier & Grey, 2000). Burns (1978), the originator of transforming leadership shared this concern. Rediscovering the lost democratic component of this theory is an important contribution to critical management studies.

A common way for researchers to engage with critical management studies is using the concept of problematisation. Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) explain that the most common way of developing research is by identifying a gap in the literature where you can contribute; 'gap-spotting'. The authors are critical of the dominance of the gap-spotting approach because it fails to challenge a theory's assumptions; which they claim makes research exciting and influential. Instead, they offer the concept of problematisation. Problematisation generates research questions by asking *what* types of assumptions are relevant to the theory and *how* these can be identified (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Foucault explains this as "an endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of what is already known" (Foucault, 1985, p. 9). I wanted to employ the concept of

problematisation because it embodies critical management studies, and it is relevant to my research. As a management student I had learnt about transformational leadership theory in my MGMT101 course, but I did not know that the theory originated in political science until I read Burns' book *Leadership* (1978), and realised he was writing about political leaders and democratic institutions. In translating the theory from a political science context, management scholars had overlooked the democratic component of transformational leadership. This discovery led me to question the dominant representation of the theory. Problematisation is an appropriate concept for this as it allowed me to explore how we could think differently about transformational leadership and emphasise a new idea.

Research Questions

Having discovered that transformational leadership originated in political science and that Burns (1978) was talking about political leadership and democratic elections, I sought to explore the theory's transition to management studies to challenge our understanding of the theory. The research questions I address in this thesis are:

How and why did management scholars overlook the democratic component of transforming leadership theory when translating it from political science?

How might we recover the democratic component to think about, and do transformational leadership differently?

After outlining how I performed this critical historical analysis in chapter two, the third chapter titled *The Transformation of Transformational Leadership Theory* lays the foundation for my research question by offering evidence that the democratic component of transformational leadership theory was overlooked by management scholars, resulting in its subsequent *transformation*. The fourth chapter titled *How and Why did This Happen* directly responds to the first research question. I address the second research question in chapter five and offer some points on 'why it matters'.

Writing the Thesis Differently

You may have noticed at this point that my writing does not seem to follow the accepted norms of a thesis. You may have noticed indications of my non-traditional thesis structure or my more informal

writing style. The way I have chosen to write this thesis is inspired by Ruth Weatherall's (2019) experience of 'writing her thesis differently'. After completing her ethnographic study within a feminist domestic violence organisation, Weatherall (2019) was struggling to fit what she called messy and emotional research into the constraints of a traditional postdoctoral thesis. I take a value position in this writing. For example, where I said that "I think organisations need more democracy", this is a political perspective that I have decided to include in my researched. In addition to needing to carefully represent the approach of including personal perspective in your writing, I also struggled with fitting my findings into the standard expectations of a Master's thesis. It felt like there were different components of the narrative that needed to be represented step-by-step, rather than squeezed into a 'findings' chapter. The formal writing expectations also felt disconnected from my position on historical writing. I needed to connect this research to myself to demonstrate that this was one possible alternative representation of transformational leadership theory. Following a conversation with my supervisor about these concerns, I explored how I could write my thesis differently.

Weatherall's experience is just one of a much larger group of scholars who are challenging the "scientific" norms of academic writing (Gilmore et al., 2019). Writing differently encompasses many different arguments and recommendations. One recommendation is to produce writing that is enjoyable to read by avoiding unnecessary use of jargon and 'big words' (Grey & Sinclair, 2006). Using simplified language can include a broader group of people in the discussion; this is important for critical writers who are challenging power relations and oppressive practices (Grey & Sinclair, 2006). Abandoning the traditional structure – introduction, literature review, method, results, discussion, conclusion – can allow writers to develop a non-linear or unorthodox configuration of their research (Weatherall, 2019). Writers can also integrate personal feelings of emotion during the research process into their writing to demonstrate reflexivity and critical self-questioning (Kara, 2013). These approaches can create new possibilities for more critical and creative writing (Weatherall, 2019).

The reason I chose to 'write my thesis differently' is because of my commitment to thinking critically and questioning dominant ways of thinking, as I discussed earlier when connecting my research to the field of critical management studies. I have developed my approach to writing in three ways; using a personal voice, simplifying my language choices, and refusing the linear thesis structure.

Writing in the first person creates a personal and reflexive voice for my reader. It connects to my ontological standpoint and my assumptions on historical writing that I will explore in greater depth in the next chapter where I cover critical history. However, the preview of this discussion is that I believe historical accounts to be one possible representation of the past – it is subjective (Jenkins, 1991). So, to reflect this in my research I write in the first person to demonstrate that this research is my representation, and it is not the only possible representation; I do not claim this to be the “truth” of transformational leadership theory and its history.

Simplifying my language choices responds to Grey and Sinclair’s (2006) concerns about academic writing. These authors argue that critical writers often try to make up for lack of ‘empirical’ data by making their writing sound ‘academic’. Writing in this way creates laborious reading that will not keep people engaged. In addition, by trying to make your writing ‘seem scientific’ you risk shutting off a significant number of potential readers that may struggle to follow the jargon and complex synonyms. If the goal of writing is to make some impact with your research, producing jargon-ridden and indecipherable writing is going to limit this. It can also contribute to imbalanced power relations and oppressive practices that I am trying to think critically about. Another reason to simplify my use of language is that I do not want to try to represent my research as an exact science. Like Grey and Sinclair (2006) argue, critical writers may want to compensate for a lack of empirical data by making their writing sound smart. However, I reject the positivist belief system – that there is only one right answer – and reflect this in my writing by simplifying my language choices and not trying to over-compensate for a lack of empirical data by ‘sounding scientific’.

Refusing the linear, orthodox thesis structure of – introduction, literature review, method, results, discussion, conclusion – is beneficial for two reasons. First, it aligns with my method of data collection. While I will expand on this method more in the next chapter, the short version is that my data on transformational leadership theory is primarily sourced from literature. In a traditional thesis structure, the researcher would summarise what is known about a theory in their literature review. However, this literature is the basis of my research. Instead, I consistently draw on literature, engage in analysis, and offer findings throughout my thesis. Second, the non-traditional structure allows me to build a narrative that addresses each component of the research questions outlined above in a logical manner. Each chapter builds on the claims made in the one prior to generate a story for my reader. This

differs slightly to Weatherall's (2019) justification for refusing the widely accepted linear thesis structure. She wanted to reflect the messy and emotional nature of her ethnographic research in her writing. While this is not relevant to my research, I think it also relates well to Grey and Sinclair's (2006) call to make academic writing more enjoyable to read. Rather than desperately trying to fit my research into a prescribed structure, I built the structure around the research.

Thesis Structure

Based on this justification for my unorthodox or non-linear structure, the remainder of my thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter Two – Performing a Critical Historical Analysis

Before diving into my research, I outline how I performed this critical historical analysis. This starts with two opposing ontological views on history. I introduce critical history and its connection to management and critical management studies. After reviewing some established approaches to critical management history, I introduce two key bodies of knowledge for my research, new histories of management and intellectual history. Intellectual history outlines the scope for analysis and informs my method of data collection.

Chapter Three – The Transformation of Transformational Leadership Theory

As the title describes, the focus of this chapter is the transformation of transformational leadership theory. I explain how the theory was transformed when it was taken from its political science context and translated to management studies. Burns (1978), the theory's creator, held firm beliefs that transforming leadership was only moral when followers could select their leaders and hold them accountable for their actions. However, this democratic component of transforming leadership was not so important to the scholars, primarily Bass (1985a), who introduced the theory to management studies. They overlooked this component and focused on transformational leaders' ability to transform organisations from the top-down accompanied by visions or missions they prescribed the organisation. Interestingly, some critical management theorists also overlook Burns' crucial democratic component of transforming leadership (Tourish, 2013; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002).

However, some critical management scholars have separated Burns' and Bass' conceptualisations, and some have also re-discovered Burns' essential democratic component of the theory.

Chapter Four – How and Why Did This Happen?

To further investigate the transformation of transformational leadership theory, I ask how and why did this happen. This chapter explores these questions by looking at the social, economic, and political context at the time. This exploration focuses on the state of leadership research before the introduction of transformational leadership theory in the 1970s and 1980s. I investigate the social, economic, and political context in the 1980s and 1990s during the translation of the theory that shaped its evolution and subsequent transformation. I also ask what happened, or did not happen, after this transformation that allowed the management scholars' representation of the theory to become the conventional one. This exploration proposes answers to how and why transformational leadership was transformed, why the theory was so popular, and why the democratic component was lost in the process.

Chapter Five – Why Does It Matter?

Why does this critical historical analysis of transformational leadership theory matter? What is the point in outlining how the theory transformed when it was translated by management scholars? Why did I bother explaining why and how it happened? Well, transformational leadership theory remains influential. We could teach the theory to business students in a way that is closer to Burns' original thinking. If we teach the theory differently, perhaps alternative approaches to leadership can emerge. I think that organisations need more democracy. Rather than counting on a select few at the top of the food chain to drive the organisation, I believe employees should have a greater voice. I propose an alternative representation of transformational leadership theory based on Burns' original conceptualisation. This alternative representation prioritises his concern about the morality of the theory being rooted in followers' right to select their leaders and hold them accountable for their actions. By teaching this to business students, as future employees and managers they could create structural change in the organisations they will join.

Chapter Six – Conclusions

Here I draw several conclusions to bring my research on transformational leadership theory to a close. These conclusions include contributions, limitations, and future research possibilities. I offer a contribution that may be of interest to people who are not so concerned in the theory itself. I also outline more specific contributions to literature on new histories of management, intellectual history, and the ‘writing differently’ debate. The limitations and future research possibilities focus on origins of transformational leadership that I do not explore in this research.

Chapter Two – Performing a Critical Historical Analysis

In this chapter I review the literature on critical history and outline how I performed this critical historical analysis. I begin by highlighting a prevalent debate about history and how it is represented by historians. I connect this debate to critical management history and highlight some of the approaches management researchers use to perform critical historical analyses. In this section I cover Foucauldian analysis, ANTi-history, and Nietzsche's 'uses and abuses of the past'. Before explaining my selected approach to performing this critical historical analysis I connect my research to new histories of management, a body of work dedicated to thinking critically about management history to do management differently (Cummings et al., 2017). Following this, I explain my selected approach to performing this critical historical analysis. Intellectual history is the framework of analysis used to create scope for my work and define the ontological assumptions that are crucial to a study of this nature. I make references to the scope and assumptions underlying the framework of intellectual history to justify my use of certain texts and to remind my reader of their role in assessing my propositions. In addition, I take a closer look at the data collection process, zooming in on my use of books, monographs, journal articles, and in some cases management textbooks and the value of these as artefacts of management thinking.

The History Debate

As I 'previewed' in the first chapter of this thesis, I believe historical accounts to be one possible representation of the past. We now return to this debate for a fuller explanation of what this means. There is a view that history and the past are two different things. History is what has been written or recorded about the past by historians, and the past is what actually happened (Jenkins, 1991). This is also known as the past-history distinction. This view argues that rather than historians writing exact accounts of the past, these are stories, or narratives of what happened (Jenkins, 1991). This view acknowledges that historians, or any people that disseminate knowledge, are subject to preconceptions. Jenkins (1991) explains that "no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as a 'narrator'" (Jenkins, 1991, p. 14). However, the opposing view is that historians are objective writers and that their accounts of the past are accurate and even true (Jenkins, 1991). The problem is, there are not many historians who subscribe to the past-history distinction – that the past

and history are two different things – and these historians reject the argument that their historical accounts could be regarded as ‘fiction’ or one history of many possible histories (Jenkins, 1991). This more ‘traditional’ view of history relates to the positivist worldview or paradigm (a set of beliefs about knowledge). The historian is an impartial observer who conveys the ‘facts’ of the past (Munslow, 1997). I mentioned in chapter one when discussing my approach to writing differently that I reject this positivist belief system. I place myself firmly in the past–history distinction side of the debate.

Critical Management History

This past–history distinction relates to critical management history. Critical management history also sides with the argument that history and the past are not the same thing and similarly draws on the work of Jenkins (1991) and Munslow (1997) to illustrate this distinction. In addition, critical management history critiques mainstream theories of management and organisation from a historical perspective (Rowlinson, Jacques & Booth, 2009). While critical management studies has not always been concerned with these debates about history, greater emphasis is being placed on these discussions more recently (Rowlinson, Jacques & Booth, 2009). Jacques (1996) argues that history is often subject to inadequate treatment in mainstream organisational studies textbooks. This is interesting because textbooks can demonstrate what knowledge is deemed acceptable or favourable in a certain field of study. I will discuss this in more depth later in this chapter. History, Jacques (1996) explains, is treated as “linear, progressive, teleological, and truth-centered” (pp. 14–15) by these mainstream management textbooks. History is used to serve a purpose, often to construct an intentional narrative about the superior managerial knowledge of today. Instead, Jacques (1996) supports the archaeological/genealogical approach of Foucault.

Foucault, who I have already mentioned earlier, is an important pillar of critical management history. His archaeological and genealogical approaches instruct the researcher to go back in time until they locate a difference. The archaeological analysis deals with systems of thought and knowledge exclusively as discourse (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). This part of the analysis allows the researcher to investigate the dominant views in a certain body of knowledge. The genealogical component deals with the formation of discourse (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). This component of the analysis allows the researcher to explore the relationships that supported the dominant views over time. Foucauldian

analysis has been a popular approach in critical management history (e.g., Cummings et al., 2016; Cummings & Bridgman, 2011).

ANTi-History approaches critical history using actor-network theory (ANT) (Durepos & Mills, 2011). Actor-network theory is a tool to understand the composition of society and inherently critiques positivism, much like critical management history (Durepos & Mills, 2011). They argue that by engaging with actor-network theory historically, this offers a way to approach critical management history. This theory and its related approach to critical management history has been popular amongst management and organisation researchers.

Another approach to critical management history is Nietzsche's 'uses and abuses of the past'. Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher who was an early pioneer of the past-history distinction that I discussed earlier, he also believed that there was no such thing as objectivity in historical writing (Nietzsche, 2019) This 'uses and abuses of the past' approach outlines three relationships with history that researchers can investigate. It asks, who are the role-models (monumental history), what has been lost (antiquarian history), and what assumptions are being made in the conventional representation (critical history) (Pol et al., 2022).

New Histories of Management

New histories of management is a body of knowledge related to critical management studies that challenges the conventional histories of management to develop 'new histories'. These new histories uncover a broader understanding of management thinking than the widely accepted and often more conservative representations. The authors of *A New History of Management* believe that if we want to think differently about management and do management differently, we must start by rethinking management history (Cummings et al., 2017). To rethink management history, these authors recommend taking a critical stance: "encouraging people to think critically about the construction of management history will enable them to think more creatively about what management could be" (Cummings et al., 2017, p. 7). These works have explored a range of prevalent management thought.

Hassard (2012) sought to extend the retrospective discussion of the Hawthorne study results by engaging more closely with the social and political factors shaping the case study firm, Western

Electric. The author employed historical deconstruction and ethnographic history methodological approaches to offer an alternative representation; that the results of these experiments are not the 'discovery' they are commonly claimed to be.

Prieto and Phipps (2019) challenge the absence of Black American management theory in their book *African American Management History: Insights on Gaining a cooperative Advantage*. They encourage their readers to reflect on and utilise African traditions to achieve managerial and entrepreneurial success. The authors explain "it is important to learn about, and be proud of African traditions and philosophies because most business schools throughout the world only teach management from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, and highlight the contributions of the white pioneers" (Prieto & Phipps, 2019, p. 1).

Authors of *A New History of Management* (2017) Cummings and Bridgman have also broadly contributed to developing these alternative histories. Their investigation of Maslow's theory of motivation resulted in the discovery that Maslow never depicted his theory as a pyramid to represent a hierarchy of needs (Bridgman et al., 2019). Yet, Maslow's pyramid is regarded as a fundamental foundation of management studies and education. They develop an alternative history that highlights the negative outcomes of reducing academic work to simple visuals that look attractive in PowerPoint presentations. Cummings and Bridgman's (2011) review of the representation of Max Weber's work in management literature and textbooks employs Foucauldian approaches to investigate the superficial treatment of this sociologist's ideas. Kurt Lewin was also subject to superficial treatment from the emerging field of change management according to Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown (2016). While the well-known 'Change as three steps' framework is attributed to him, these authors discovered that Lewin wrote very little on this idea. Their Foucauldian analysis revealed how the context of the 1980s promoted the dominance of this framework and they present an alternative representation that highlights the importance of collective approaches to change and mathematical analysis. Pol, Bridgman, and Cummings (2022) employ Nietzsche's 'uses and abuses of the past' to recover the forgotten founder of 'groupthink' William H Whyte. These authors discovered that while the theory of groupthink is commonly attributed to Irving Janis, Whyte had come up with the idea almost twenty years earlier. Bridgman and Cummings not only investigate the most popular management thinkers and theories, they also investigate the unpopular ones. In their historical analysis of the exclusion of the well-known psychological experiments, the Milgram studies, they draw conclusions about why

these findings on power relations, obedience, and authority have been ignored by management and organisational behaviour education (Bridgman & Cummings, 2022).

As you can see there is no fixed way that new histories of management writers are required to engage with their historical research. These range from historical deconstruction, ethnographic history, Foucauldian analysis, and Nietzsche's 'uses and abuses of the past'. This is one of the challenges with new histories of management, it does not tell you how to do it. So, I would like to discuss one more approach, intellectual history. I wanted to introduce the field of new histories of management first to highlight my intent to bring together these two bodies of work that have formed independently of each other. This will also allow me to engage in a deeper discussion of how I am using intellectual history in my research, focusing on the data collection.

Intellectual History

Bert Spector's research on leadership theory inspired me to adopt intellectual history as the methodology for my study. Most relevant to my research, Spector (2014) investigated the origins of transformational leadership and their precarious connection to celebrated businessman – Lee Iacocca – arguing these foundations were 'flawed from the get-go'. In this critical assessment Spector concludes that the "use of Iacocca as a personification and embodiment of the transformational leadership construct was, at best, a highly romanticized take on an individual... at worse, the use of Iacocca was misleading and disingenuous" (p. 361). In addition to this, Spector has used intellectual history to reconsider the great man theory (2016) and have an imaginary conversation with sociologist Alvin Gouldner to reignite his contribution to critical leadership (2020). This study offers a historical appraisal of this rarely cited contribution by presenting findings in the style of an interview between the author and Gouldner (who has been dead for forty years). While these studies feel very familiar to new histories of management in the way that Spector constructs alternative representations, he does not connect his work to this field. Spector's book *Discourse on Leadership: A Critical Appraisal* (2016) is a wide-ranging critical analysis of how the concept of leadership has been articulated over time. In addition to this, it also offers a bite-sized starting point for beginning intellectual history research. There are several different components for the intellectual historian to consider; the power of ideas, the literature scope, the context of an idea, and one's ontological assumptions about history.

Ideas Have Consequences

The central premise of Spector's work is that ideas have consequences. Maciag (2011) explains that ideas are influential agents for change in human behaviour. His core message is that, what a person believes dictates the essential characteristics of their society. For example, Burns the political scientist and originator of transforming leadership theory was immersed in a political landscape where democracy was central to leadership – shaping his view of the essential characteristics of leadership theory. Bass the management scholar and extension of transformational leadership was occupied with business and organisations, influencing his translation of the theory for his managerial audience. By understanding that ideas are powerful and subjective forces that can either change or reinforce the status quo, the researcher can then ask how and why ideas occur when they do (Higham, 1961; Spector, 2014, 2016b). The 'how and why' elements are central to this study and directly inform the research questions outlined in the first chapter.

Defining the Literature Scope

Spector examines these ideas by exploring discourse, considering how the concept of leadership has been “articulated, studied, and debated by academics as well as practitioners, journalists, and those who sought to influence the thoughts of others” (Spector, 2016b, p. 1). Moreover, Maciag (2011) explains that intellectual history is applied broadly and includes all “people who produced writing, speeches, sermons, and other textual material intended for public consumption” (p. 744). This wide view of 'intellectual' allows the researcher to gain a more comprehensive insight into how an idea has travelled, rather than only focusing on academics. To effectively engage in a critical historical examination using intellectual history, the researcher should follow the literature trail wherever it takes them (Spector, 2016b). In my study, I started by examining the central texts; *Leadership* by Burns (1978) and *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* by Bass (1985a). I followed these authors' writing on transformational leadership theory over time, paying attention to who they were citing and acknowledging for their intellectual contributions. Spector (2014) notes that constraints to following the literature trail can include translation and accessibility. However, this was not a problem for my study because I was able to access every text in all literature trails I followed using my university library, Google Scholar, and Internet Archive. The discussion of transformational leadership was heavily focused in the United States, so all texts were available in English.

Context, Context, Context

To explore how the representation of the idea has evolved, the historian must pay close attention to the context in which an idea arises (Gordon, 2012). The context is explored broadly and includes “social, economic, political, intellectual, and other historical forces that have shaped the discussion” (Spector, 2016b, p. 1). The researcher can then connect the construction of an idea to the past. For an intellectual historian to understand the appeal of an idea, they must pay close attention to the ‘state of mind of the idea-generators’ in relation to the past context (Higham, 1961; Spector, 2014). In this case, the idea-generators are Burns, Bass and the other early adopters of transformational leadership theory. I pay attention to their backgrounds and subsequent worldviews to support my analysis.

Ontological Assumptions

Outlining your assumptions on historical writing and constructing narratives is crucial for the reader (Spector, 2016a). As I have explained earlier in this chapter, critical historical researchers view history as a narrative representation of the past. Intellectual history is also placed firmly in the past-history distinction side of the debate and argues that historians recall the past in a personal and social context which can differentiate one researcher’s narrative from another’s. This aligns with my stance on ‘the history debate’. Shifting from the positivist perspective that history is an objective truth, Spector (2016a) illustrates this by outlining the difference between description and representation. A description is tangible, like a black cat or a tall tree. In contrast, representation is more like an idea. Transformational leadership is an example of a representation, subject to being recalled by a historian (or scholar) in a personal and social context. Following an understanding of this assumption on historical writing, Spector (2016a) argues the value of constructing narratives. Therefore, based on the opinion that historians cannot detach history from context, alternative narrative representations formulated from a critical historical perspective do not claim to be the truth (Spector, 2016a). Instead, these are more like propositions of how we could represent the past. Therefore, critical historical researchers acknowledge that there cannot be only one possible understanding; these propositions are to be judged based on plausibility (Spector, 2020). This is essential, or I risk repeating what may have already happened to transformational leadership theory: misrepresentation communicated as fact. Constructing a reasonable and probable representation relies on the critical historian acknowledging

the limits of historical writing and quality of analysis. As the reader, you will be required to judge the plausibility of the propositions I make throughout this thesis.

In constructing this alternative narrative of transformational leadership theory, I draw on a range of literature to develop the plausibility of this representation. I have already mentioned that I started by examining the central texts *Leadership* by Burns (1978) and *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* by Bass (1985a). In addition to this I would like to review my data sources in relation to intellectual history to demonstrate their value.

Data Collection

Before I began my data collection, I knew there were some important areas I needed to explore as part of following the literature trail:

- James MacGregor Burns' theorising on transforming leadership theory
- Bernard Bass' translation of transformational leadership theory
- Management studies early adoption of transformational leadership theory
- Management scholars' mainstream and critical analyses of transformational leadership
- Ideas indirectly related to transformational leadership to explore the context of the idea

Data sources I analysed to explore these ideas are primarily books, monographs, and journal articles. This is appropriate as these are the typical outputs of academic study. Transformational leadership theory was born out of academic study, so it makes sense that these texts are dominating my reference management software. Occasionally I supplement these data sources using interviews, news articles, obituaries, and organisational websites. Intellectual history permits the analysis of a varied styles of texts if they are material intended for public consumption (Maciag, 2011). These kinds of data sources can offer different insights that highlights how an idea is being represented outside of academic circles. Intellectual history is not confined solely to academia. I will go into further depth on the value of books, monographs, and journal articles as my primary sources of data. In addition, I present another argument on the value of management textbooks as a data source.

Books and Monographs

Using books and monographs was valuable as these are longer texts that provide more detail than journal articles. Moreover, monographs are particularly helpful here as these are lengthy and detailed accounts of a specialised subject. I would often focus most of my attention to the prologue, foreword, introduction, and early chapters as these often include arguments most central to the purpose of the text. Books and monographs usually have a single author, or two in some cases. This is particularly valuable in giving insight to the idea generator's state of mind (Higham, 1961). For example, in Burn's book *Leadership* (1978) he discusses what is important to him and what concerns him the most. Authors often contextualise their ideas in early paragraphs as well. These inclusions create new literature trails for exploring how and why ideas occur when they do (Higham, 1961). For example, Bass (1985) acknowledged Abraham Zaleznik's intellectual contribution to his work – creating a new literature trail for me to explore the antecedents of transformational leadership theory.

Journal Articles

While journal articles provide less detail than books and monographs, they are valuable because they not only represent the author/s' thinking, but the acceptance of a broader network of reviewers and editors. This is valuable because it demonstrates that the author/s' work is a view supported by management studies more broadly. For the intellectual historian, this may highlight that the research in question is part of a dominant or mainstream body of knowledge that needs to be challenged. In addition, there is generally a higher importance placed on connecting your work to others' work to support your claims and outline your contribution. This makes following the literature trail easier as there is usually a wealth of citations and references for the intellectual historian to pursue. While journal articles can sometimes have one author, they often have more. This could create the opportunity to investigate the influence a secondary author could have on a primary author when compared to their individual work.

While books, monographs, and journal articles are fairly conventional forms of literature to use as data, I also use textbooks as a data source which may require a bit more convincing to highlight their relevance. Management textbooks did not end up being as central to my research as I thought it might be in the beginning. This is because they were fairly consistent in upholding the managerial

representation of transformational leadership theory, and I did not discover any dramatic shifts. However, I weave some insights resulting from minor shifts in the author/s' representations of the theory into the discussion in later chapters.

Management Textbooks

Engaging in intellectual history allows the researcher to examine a broad application of texts (Spector, 2014). Within the inclusion of "people who produced writing, speeches, sermons, and other textual material intended for public consumption" (Maciag, 2011, p. 744) are management textbooks. Tertiary students are the main consumers of management textbooks. Textbooks are the primary instrument for students engaging in management studies (Stambaugh & Trank, 2010). Researchers investigating the sociology of scientific knowledge argue textbooks are "intrinsically important to the constitution and maintenance of a discipline" (Lynch & Bogen, 1997, p. 663).

Additionally, textbooks intend to socialise students into how they should behave in the workplace as employees, and for some, how they should operate as managers (Aguinis et al., 2019; Calás & Smircich, 1989; Stambaugh & Trank, 2010). I include the word 'intend' thoughtfully because I believe many textbooks will pass through a student's hands onto the next without being read entirely or at all. Intellectual history tells us it is more about the material *intended* for public consumption that can offer insight into the state of mind of the idea generators (Higham, 1961; Spector, 2014). Through understanding how textbook writers want students to think about the management field, inclusions, but more importantly, exclusions of ideas become more telling. Questioning what authors are saying and not saying and ultimately examining the impact of this is a crucial element of critically reflexive research (Cunliffe, 2016).

The reasons we give some ideas attention and not others are essential topics for research and theoretical explanation (Pfeffer, 2010). For example, in Jeffrey Pfeffer's study on why social sustainability has received little attention compared to environmental sustainability, he argues that this is because of "an ideology of the primacy of markets and shareholder interests" (Pfeffer, 2010, p. 36). The management discipline emphasises organisational performance and economic outcomes over social concerns (Walsh et al., 2003). The dominant perspectives underlying the management field may impact what we teach; textbooks offer a way to explore this (Pfeffer, 2010). Other researchers have

sought to gain insight into the ideological component of management teachings. In the article *Management Textbooks as Propaganda* published in the Journal of Management Education, several well-established and influential textbook authors offer their thoughts on this notion (Cameron et al., 2003). Stephen Robbins, whose *Organizational Behaviour* series will be a focus of this analysis, provides this response to a question on whether textbooks were propaganda or ideology:

“I see my books as supporting an ideology. But, of course, all textbooks sell an ideology. OB books (which will be the primary focus of my discussion), for the most part, support a managerial perspective. This reflects the market—business schools. We need to genuflect to the Gods of productivity, efficiency, goals, etc. This strongly influences the dependent variables researchers choose and the ones that textbook authors use. So we reflect business school values.” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 714).

This response supports Pfeffer’s (2010) argument that authors overlook some ideas because of the dominance of a particular perspective. Robbins lists productivity, efficiency, and goals as the perspective business schools value, often referred to as the managerial perspective (Cameron et al., 2003). Kim Cameron justifies Robbins’ response by saying:

"Making management textbooks propaganda publications, therefore, is a legitimate activity if the content of the propaganda (i.e., the information being espoused) is based on scholarly research from the management sciences. Persuading students to believe in the truth—no matter how propaganda-like—is still a virtue.” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 720)

Cameron (2003) ultimately justifies that management textbooks can act as propaganda because the authors virtuously espouse information based on scholarly research and are therefore true. This is where conflict arises between mine and Cameron’s ontological differences. Intellectual history rejects universality and the notion of there being ‘one right answer’ (Maciag, 2011). While Cameron views this knowledge as truth, I see it as one possible representation of an idea. This thesis intends to convince you of another plausible representation of the prevalent management idea, transformational leadership theory.

This study utilises textbook analysis in two ways, what I am calling horizontal analysis and vertical analysis. The horizontal analysis draws on recent publications of various management textbooks (between 2019–2022). This approach can indicate whether transformational leadership is still of interest to management studies and how the theory is being represented at present. The vertical analysis ‘goes in deep’ on one of these management textbooks to determine how a theory has been represented over time. For example, in their critical historical analysis of Max Weber’s bureaucracy theory, Cummings and Bridgman (2011) found that the way the theory was represented in management textbooks had changed over time. To determine whether transformational leadership had been subject to a similar treatment, I analysed eighteen editions of Robbins’ *Organizational Behavior* series. According to Robbins’ website, this is the world’s all-time best-selling organisational behaviour textbook (Robbins, (n.d). Since the first edition was published in 1979, seventeen editions have followed, the latest published in 2019. Notably, Robbins published the first edition only one year after Burns published *Leadership* (1978). However, transformational leadership theory was not included until the fourth edition published in 1989, shortly after Tichy, Ulrich, Bass, and Devanna (1985a; 1986; 1984) introduced the theory to management studies. This approach allowed me to analyse how transformational leadership was represented throughout the entire existence of the theory. Each edition acts as a time capsule of the managerial view of transformational leadership theory.

In sum, my research is conceptually located within new histories of management and intellectual history. I am developing a new history of management, using intellectual history as my framework for analysis. Critical management studies also connects well with new histories of management, where we are challenged to think critically about conventional histories of management, to do management differently. Intellectual history is the method I selected to perform this critical evaluation of the conventional history of management. This framework creates a broad scope of literature for analysis. Books, monographs, and journal articles comprise the majority of my data sources, but I also make a case for management textbooks which are valuable for revealing the dominant or conventional representation of an idea. The most important component of intellectual history that I want you to keep in mind is that I do not claim that my representation is the truth; it is a proposition to be judged based on plausibility. This is the task I set for the reader in the next chapter where I provide evidence that the democratic component of transformational leadership theory was overlooked by management scholars, resulting in its subsequent *transformation*.

Chapter Three – The Transformation of Transforming Leadership Theory

“Ultimately the moral legitimacy of transformational leadership, and to a lesser degree transactional leadership, is grounded in *conscious choice among real alternatives*” (Burns, 1978, p. 36).

Now that the previous chapter has outlined how to conduct a study of this nature using intellectual history, this chapter will explore how Burns the political scientist, Bass, and other management academics have represented transformational leadership theory. I aim to convince the reader that the democratic element of transforming leadership theory was important to Burns and that it got lost when translated from political science to management studies. Chapter four will focus on the second crucial element of intellectual history; the context (Spector, 2016a). I will look at the social, economic, and political context of the translation of transforming leadership theory from political science to management studies to determine why and how the democratic component of the theory was lost in this process. I outline three main arguments in this chapter to provide evidence for the *transformation* of transformational leadership theory. These are summarised in the following paragraphs.

First, the democratic element of transforming leadership was crucial to Burns. He was passionate about the morality of leadership. He argued that for transforming leadership to be moral, followers must be able to select their leaders and hold them accountable for their actions (Burns, 1978, 2003). The scholar represents these concerns in his seminal text *Leadership*, published in 1978. While Burns primarily focused on historical accounts of notable political leaders throughout history in his work preceding and following the release of his first book on transformational leadership, he continued to express interest in the democratic component of leadership in later publications.

Second, while democracy in leadership was an ongoing interest for Burns, this was not so important to the scholars who introduced transformational leadership theory to management studies (Avolio & Bass, 1985; Bass, 1985a, 1985b; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; Tichy & Ulrich, 1984). Most acknowledge Bass as the founder of transformational leadership theory in management studies. While Bass was not the first management scholar to publish on transformational leadership, he was

the first to significantly develop the theory. Before this, Tichy and Ulrich (1984) had only briefly touched on Burns' work. In 1980s America, management theorists were enthusiastic about the potential of transformational leaders to rescue organisations and businesses from economic decline. In examining these texts published by management scholars, it is apparent that they are much more interested in the theory's capacity to transform organisations than its essential democratic component, which they almost wholly overlook.

Third, critics have also overlooked the democratic component of transforming leadership theory. While researchers like Tourish and Pinnington (2013; 2002) make compelling arguments that highlight the many deficiencies of transformational leadership theory, they ultimately lump Burns in with Bass' representation. However, some critical researchers have been able to separate the two theorists (Burnes et al., 2016; Carey, 1992; Denhardt & Campbell, 2006; Ladkin & Patrick, 2022), and some have even picked up on Burns' lost call for democracy in leadership (Allix, 2000; Wilson, 2016). The origins of the theory are of interest to critical scholars. This analysis of existing critical assessments is important as it creates grounds for performing a deeper exploration of the democratic origins of transforming leadership theory.

James MacGregor Burns on Transforming Leadership Theory

Burns primarily published historical accounts of American political and presidential leadership. However, this portion of historical analysis focuses on all works published by Burns relating to transformational leadership theory. These comprise *Leadership* (1978), *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (2003), *Encyclopedia of Leadership* (2004), and *Leadership* (2005). Burns' book *Leadership* (1978) is regarded as a seminal text, gained a Pulitzer Prize, boasts over 36,000 citations on Google Scholar, and changed how people thought about leadership theory (Spector, 2014). An interview with Burns published in *The Leadership Quarterly* in 2001 also provides further support for this analysis. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, intellectual history permits users to engage with all means of discourse in their research (Maciag, 2011). Interviews are a particularly fascinating form of intellectual history that almost feel as if they are more personal to the interviewee subject to questioning, allowing the researcher to get a closer insight into the idea generator's state of mind (Higham, 1961). This selection of Burns' writing and thinking demonstrates the importance he places

on morality in leadership, particularly democracy. It is most apparent in *Leadership* (1978). However, Burns continues to raise these concerns about democracy in leadership in later publications and in the interview published in 2001. This section begins with Burns' stance on the relationship between power and leadership. This stance is how he contextualises his argument on morality being essential to the leader-follower relationship. I then explain what morality in leadership means to Burns and how this connects to what I call the democratic component of transforming leadership. This democratic component is rooted in competition and conflict between leaders and followers.

Burns on Power and Leadership

Burns was troubled by the turbulent relationship between power and leaders, primarily due to the devastation of World War Two. For example, Burns (2003) believed that Adolf Hitler ruled the German people but did not lead them. He often draws these distinctions between naked power (or 'ruling') and leadership and argues that one does not constitute the other (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001; Burns, 1978; Goethals, 2016; Spector & Wilson, 2018). For leadership to be moral, he argues that followers must be able to reduce the leader's power with democratic mechanisms. Burns wanted to create distance between his theory of leadership and the leadership of dictators and tyrants. Subsequently, the scholar's leadership theorising had a consistent theme of morality as its central premise.

Burns on the Relationship Between Morality and Democracy

The democratic component of transforming leadership was crucial to Burns (Goethals, Sorenson & Burns, 2004). Only four pages into his seminal text, *Leadership* (1978), he explains that he is most interested in the morality of leadership. He explains in three distinct points what moral leadership means to him (Burns, 1978). First, leaders and followers need to have a relationship built on mutual needs, aspirations, and values beyond brute power. For Burns, brute power is comparable to a dictatorship where leaders use a title or force to lead or 'rule'. Second, followers must know of different leaders and programs and be able to choose amongst these alternatives. Third, leaders must take responsibility for their promises and commitments. The fact that he includes this sentiment in his prologue, only four pages into the book, communicates that this is of great significance to the political scientist. Shortly after this, he summarises the sentiment in the first paragraph of his second chapter, *The Structure of Moral Leadership*:

“Ultimately the moral legitimacy of transformational leadership, and to a lesser degree transactional leadership, is grounded in *conscious choice among real alternatives*” (Burns, 1978, p. 36).

For Burns, a political scientist, the capacity to choose amongst alternative leaders and programs meant voting for a democratically elected political representative. Like an election campaign, Burns argues that followers must be “exposed to the competing diagnoses, claims and values of would-be leaders” (p. 36) so that they can determine their true needs. For Burns (1978), followers’ true needs are defined by their motives, values, and goals.

Burns on Conflict and Competition

Burns (1978) believes that leaders should be opposed and contested by followers and other leaders and that competition and conflict are central to leadership, rather than brute power. He argues that this process is what makes leadership moral. He reiterates the importance of conflict in *Transforming Leadership: A Pursuit of Happiness*:

“As leaders encourage followers to rise above narrow interests and work together for transcending goals, leaders can come into conflict with followers' rising sense of self-efficacy and purpose. Followers might outstrip leaders. They might become leaders themselves. That is what makes transforming leadership participatory and democratic.”
(Burns, 2003, p. 26).

Burns clarifies that mobilising people to participate in change may create conflict that results in the follower surpassing the leader; this is the democratic process. Furthermore, Burns believes charismatic leadership is confusing and undemocratic at its best and tyranny at its worst (Burns, 2003). He explains that charisma disrupts the empowerment process between leader and follower, resulting in obedient followers with no mechanism or desire to give feedback to their leader. Charisma, or idealised influence, is one of the key factors of Bass’ conceptualisation of transformational leadership theory. Burns is steadfast in his belief about democracy being essential to moral leadership, but he is also critical of leadership theory that overlooks these components. In 2001, when asked whether his

thinking on the nature of leadership had evolved since the publication of *Leadership* (1978), Burns says he has become even “more impressed by the role of conflict, which tends to be downplayed in much of the literature by people who are more interested in consensus” (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001, p. 115). Here Burns highlights and dismisses the tendency of leadership scholars to favour consensus over conflict. In addition, Burns informs the interviewers that he stands by his 1978 definition of leadership and reiterates that he believes the most crucial elements of leadership are “the notions of competition and conflict, leaders and followers, the reciprocal process, mobilization” (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001, p. 115).

By analysing Burns’ writing on transformational leadership, I hope to have convinced the reader of his unshakable belief in the democratic component of the theory. Nevertheless, as described in the previous chapter, it is up to the reader to judge the plausibility of this proposition. The seminal text *Leadership* (1978) communicates that transformational leadership is only moral if followers can make a fully informed selection of their leader. The interview with Burns illustrates how steadfast these beliefs are, as shown by his ability to bring up moral leadership in almost every question. Furthermore, his subsequent book *Transforming Leadership: The Pursuit of Happiness* published in 2003 reiterates his certainty that competition and conflict are essential to the democratic component of transforming leadership. Building on this analysis, the following section will propose that management scholars overlooked Burns’ essential democratic component of transforming leadership when introducing the theory to their respective field.

Management Scholars on Transformational Leadership Theory

While the democratic component of transforming leadership was an ongoing interest to Burns, it was not so important to the management scholars who introduced the theory to their field. This selection of text draws on those who are commonly considered to be early adopters and prolific writers on the theory. In reviewing the early work of Tichy, Ulrich, Devanna, Bennis, Nanus, and Avolio, it is apparent that these early adopters were more interested in how the theory related to change management and the transformation of organisations due to their concern about the economic decline in the United States. Specifically, Bass’ work is key to understanding the translation from political science to management studies as he seemed to attempt the most meaningful engagement with Burns’ theory and is commonly referred to as an originator of the theory of transformational leadership. Despite this

meaningful engagement, Bass and the other management scholars almost entirely overlook the democratic component of transforming leadership theory.

Transformational Leaders to the Rescue

Management academics Tichy and Ulrich were the first to express enthusiasm for the potential of transformational leaders in their article, *The Leadership Challenge—A Call for the Transformational Leader* (1984), published in *Sloan Management Review*. The authors argued that a new brand of leadership, transformational leadership, would be the key to revitalising large corporations like General Motors, AT&T, and General Electric (Tichy & Ulrich, 1984). They predicted that pressure for organisational change would intensify in the coming years and transactional leaders, or managers, were not up to the challenge. I will elaborate on the connection between transactional leaders and managers in the next chapter which discusses the controversial manager-leader distinction. Their threat to readers was that if this breed of leader is not on the national agenda, they are not optimistic about the revitalisation of the United States economy. I discuss the relevance of the economic climate in greater depth in the next chapter, which explores the context of the theory's translation.

In 1986, Tichy returned to the subject alongside Devanna to further their call for the transformational leader. The first sentence of their book *The Transformational Leader* sets the tone for the rest of the text; “this book is about corporate leadership, America’s scarcest natural resource” (Tichy & Devanna, 1986, p. vii). The authors claim that organisations need a new type of imaginative leadership to successfully guide them through the recent ‘upheaval and transformation’ in the economy, industrialised work, and new competitors, rather than blaming these factors (Tichy & Devanna, 1986). They argued, “what’s needed, in historian James MacGregor Burns’ terms, is not the old style transactional leadership but a new *transformational* leadership” (Tichy & Devanna, 1986, p. viii).

Management scholars Bennis and Nanus also used this popular manager-leader distinction as a foundation for their theorising on transformational leaders and are often recognised as early adopters of the theory. The front cover of their book states, “managers do things right... leaders do the right thing” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). The authors thank Burns for his intellectual inspiration and seminal theorising that contributed to their work. Bennis and Nanus refer to transformational leadership theory as the ‘new leadership’ and are enthusiastic about its potential to guide America through a time

of change and uncertainty (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). This common idea of transformational leaders needing to take sole responsibility for rescuing American organisations from peril was consistent across these early adopters. Moreover, it illuminates the theme of favouring top-down change, where the leader decides what happens and pushes the agenda down through the ranks.

A Theme of Top-Down Change

Tichy and Ulrich (1984) called upon potential transformational leaders to respond to the call to rescue corporate America in three steps; create a vision, mobilise commitment, and institutionalise change. Tichy and Devanna (1986) also refer to this three-step process. This process indicates the authors' interest in top-down change rather than mutual stimulation, Burns' primary interest. Burns (1978) believed that followers should be able to *subscribe* to a change proposed by potential leaders that aligns with their interests. In contrast, management scholars represent the theory as a powerful position where leaders are solely responsible for creating the vision for change and disseminating it to their followers to enact. The focus on morality was largely replaced by "transformation as change" (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006, p. 556). In my next paragraph, you will see that some management scholars even argued that to enact change, transformational leaders need unobstructed power.

Advocating for Leaders' Need for Power

The notion of power is of interest to management scholars as well as Burns – but for different reasons. Burns (1978) believed that the power of leaders should be reduced using democratic mechanisms. This perspective is how he tried to distance his theory from the behaviour of dictators and tyrants. Conversely, early adopters Bennis and Nanus (1985) argued that power was actually the missing element in new age conceptualisations of leadership. They explain that although power has negative connotations and is a widely distrusted human behaviour, leaders *need it* to provide "the basic energy to initiate and sustain action translating intention to reality, the quality without which leaders cannot lead" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 15). Burns' thinking was different. He would probably argue that transforming leadership is rooted in conflict and competition, distinguishing it from brute power (Burns, 1978). Furthermore, Burns (1978) believed that transforming leadership was only moral if followers had access to democratic mechanisms to hold their leaders accountable.

Followers Holding Leaders Accountable – To an Extent

The textbook analysis performed as part of this research unveiled an interesting finding relating to Burns' democratic conceptualisation of transformational leadership. This discovery came from the vertical analysis that compared all eighteen editions of Robbins' *Organizational Behavior*. The representation of transformational leadership theory in the fourth (1989) and fifth (1991) editions of *Organizational Behavior* are relatively similar (recall the first mention of the theory was in the fourth edition). Robbins introduces the transactional-transformational leadership distinction and defines both theories. In the fifth edition (1991), Robbins states that charismatic leadership and transformational leadership are, in essence, essentially the same concept. This connection was not made in the fourth edition (1989). However, in the sixth edition (1993), Robbins argues that transformational leadership is more than charisma:

“The purely charismatic [leader] may want followers to adopt the charismatic's worldview and go no further; the transformational leader will attempt to instil in followers the ability to question not only established views but eventually those established by the leader”
(cited in Robbins, 1993, p. 392).

This quote was included in all following editions of *Organizational Behavior* (1996, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005; 2007, 2009, 2011) up until the fifteenth edition (2013) where it mysteriously disappeared. This notion of followers questioning their leader was not mentioned in any of the editions that followed (2015, 2016, 2018). While I am not able to explore why this was introduced and subsequently excluded from the *Organizational Behavior* series, this finding demonstrates how the representation of a theory can change over time.

Following the citation trail back to the original source revealed that this quote is from a working paper by Avolio and Bass called *Transformational Leadership, Charisma, and Beyond* (1985). In comparing charismatic leadership theory to transformational leadership theory, Avolio and Bass argue that transformational leaders will instil the ability to question the leader in followers. Unfortunately, Avolio and Bass do not reference another text in these claims, so there is no way of knowing whether they came up with it themselves, were inspired by Burns' democratic concerns, or something else entirely. Ultimately, this less potent democratic sentiment also seems somewhat standalone in this paper. For

example, when the authors conclude the paper and discuss future research possibilities, they are concerned about “at what point will followers ‘burn out’ on the transformational leader and rebel against the leader’s vision” (Avolio & Bass, 1985, p. 49). Avolio and Bass (1985) do not seem clear on whether followers should rebel against the leaders’ visions or not. Bass and Steidlmeier, in *Authentic Transformational Leader Behavior* (1999), promote follower questioning, encouraging them to challenge assumptions to come up with more creative solutions to problems. In addition, Bass includes in *The Handbook of Leadership* (2008) that “radical dissenters may contribute to transformations by disrupting fundamental assumptions and beliefs of the mainstream majority” (p. 632). So, while Bass acknowledged that there might be ‘radical dissenters’ in an organisation, they were only valuable if their opposition contributed to the transformation. It seems that for Bass, dissent is encouraged so long as it contributes to the leader’s established vision and rebellion against the leader’s vision is undesirable. But rebellion was essential for Burns. He argued that followers might surpass their leaders and become leaders themselves and that this is what makes transformational leadership participatory and democratic (Burns, 2003). In the conventional representation of transformational leadership, resistance to change became something that needed to be stamped out (Burnes et al., 2016). Questioning the leader’s vision is only desirable when it could strengthen the prescribed change.

The Rise of Morality (But Not Democracy) for Management Scholars

In the seminal *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (1985a), Bass lists ways his conceptualisation of transformational leadership theory differs from Burns. One of the differentiations he identifies is his stance on the morality of transformational leadership theory. Bass dismisses Burns’ argument that transformation must be ‘elevating’ (Bass, 1985a). Burns (1978) wanted to reserve transforming leadership for the forces of good and used the actions of Hitler to exemplify everything he believed leadership was not. Conversely, Bass argued that while Hitler was an immoral and brutal leader, he was transformational in the sense that he created change and transformed Germany. Burns (1978) would probably firmly disagree with this dismissal, as he believed end-goals of liberty, justice, and equality were essential to transforming leadership and had already tried to clearly create separation between dictators like Hitler and transforming leadership through democratic mechanisms. While Bass does not explicitly dismiss Burns’ essential democratic component of transforming leadership theory, he dismisses Burns’ notion that the theory is grounded in morality.

Bass' stance on the morality of leadership began to shift from his earlier dismissal of Burns' argument. In the article *From Transactional to Transformational Leadership: Learning to Share the Vision* (1990). Bass primarily focuses on the advantages of transformational leadership in organisational contexts like recruitment, training, development, and structure. While Bass does not acknowledge the essential democratic component of transformational leadership, he raises some of the theory's limitations that critics often label 'the dark side of transformational leadership'. For example, in discussing the transformational leader's role in the differences between success and failure, he acknowledges that leaders' efforts are not always 'prosocial' and that some will attempt to fulfil 'grandiose dreams' at their followers' expense (Bass, 1990). Similarly, in discussing leadership education, Bass (1990) argues that some leaders may misuse their training to further their self-interest and values, labelling this 'pseudo-transformational'. Burns (1978) argued that transformation had to be prosocial and used the end values of liberty, justice, and equality to characterise this.

In the article *Authentic Transformational Leader Behavior* (1999), Bass develops this new line of thinking alongside management scholar Paul Steidlmeier. The authors argue that genuine transformational leadership must be grounded in moral foundations (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). When leaders act consciously or unconsciously in 'bad faith', this is what they call inauthentic or pseudo-transformational leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Notably, this article seeks to correct Bass' earlier claim that transformational leaders could be 'virtuous or villainous' by stating that he was mistaken (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The authors argue that pseudo-transformational leaders are less likely to listen to conflicting views and are intolerant of differences of opinion between them and their followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). While this sounds promising, in addressing critics of transformational leadership who argue the theory "is antithetical to organizational learning and development involving shared leadership, equality, consensus and participative decision-making" (p. 132-139), the authors are critical in return (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

"For human relationists, the coming together of the values of the leader and followers is morally acceptable only if it comes about from participative decision-making pursuing consensus between leaders and followers. Whether a leader is participative or directive, however, is not a matter of morality. It is a matter of the naiveté or experience of the followers and many other contextual considerations (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). In many

cases, directive leadership is more appropriate and acceptable to all concerned (Bass, 1990)” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, pp. 202–203).

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) ultimately dismiss the need for democratic and participatory decision-making. However, contrary to Burns, they argue that this is not a matter of morality and that most contexts justify the need for directive leadership. This kind of thinking is not standalone; in an article published by Bass and management practitioner John Hater (1988), they comment that while both transactional and transformational leaders display varying amounts of participative decision-making approaches, this is only feasible when leaders have an educated workforce. Burns would probably disagree with this and argue that no matter the followers’ level of education, it is essential that they have the power to select and dismiss their leader if they have not sufficiently fulfilled their commitments and responsibilities. Much like a democratic political system, everyone over a certain age has the right to vote for their representative, no matter their level of intelligence. In these articles, it is apparent that Bass and his colleagues not only overlook Burns’ essential democratic component of transformational leadership theory, they reject it.

This array of writing produced by management scholars, primarily Bass, highlights how they translated transforming leadership theory from political science to management studies. More importantly, the reader now must judge the plausibility of the claim that management theorists overlooked Burns’ essential democratic component in this translation. Many articles refer to transformational leaders as saviours who will transform and rescue organisations from economic decline. These leaders achieve this rescue by establishing a vision, getting followers to commit to it, and institutionalising change. These management scholars are more focused on top-down organisational change for profit than the social outcomes Burns advocated. Some go as far as to say that transformational leaders *need* to have power so that they can enact necessary change. Participation, dissent, and questioning of the established vision are encouraged only when it will strengthen the proposed change. While Bass’ stance on morality evolved to account for criticisms of his theorising, he remains steadfast in his beliefs that democratic mechanisms do not have a place in transformational leadership theory. Bass did not only overlook Burns’ essential component of transforming leadership theory; he rejected it.

Critical Scholars on Transformational Leadership Theory

Overlooking the democratic element of transformational leadership was not unique to the theory's proponents. Critics of the theory often lump Burns' and Bass' conceptualisations of transformational leadership together and disregard the democratic component. This tendency is demonstrated by the work of Dennis Tourish and Ashly Pinnington, notable critics of transformational leadership. *The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership: A Critical Perspective* (2013) and *Transformational Leadership, Corporate Cultism and the Spirituality Paradigm: An Unholy Trinity in the Workplace* (2002) boast over 800 citations combined on Google Scholar. This section explores how Tourish and Pinnington (2013; 2002) are critical of both Bass and Burns' transformational leadership. However, some critical writers have noticed the difference between the two conceptualisations and treated them as such. Moreover, Wilson (2016) and Allix (2000) identify the crucial democratic component of Burns' original theorising.

Critiques of Transformational Leadership

In this critical piece published in 2002 in the *Human Relations* journal, authors Tourish and Pinnington (2002) argue that transformational leadership theory is overly concerned with achieving cohesive corporate culture at the expense of internal dissent. Their research labels transformational leaders as narcissists who will push 'vision sceptics' out of the group to protect their overly sensitive egos (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). They explain that the problem with the model is that it does not leave room for corrective feedback. Internal dissent, they say, is crucial for effective decision-making, and they ultimately recommend more inclusive and participatory leadership models. In a later book, Tourish (2013) comments that "most leadership theories pay far too little attention to the need for counterbalancing mechanisms, in which, for example, leaders receive much more critical 'upward' communication on their behaviour... and where clear limits are placed on their power" (p. 10). While this is a compelling argument highlighting the deficiencies of the conventional representation of transformational leadership theory, the one developed by management theorists, the argument is not so effective against Burns' original representation.

Critics Unsympathetic to Bass and Burns

Tourish and Pinnington (2002) are unsympathetic towards Burns and Bass. For example, in their article, they include a quote from Burns on leaders representing the "collective good or pooled interests

of leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 426). They are critical of this because ‘collective good’ is subjective and difficult to define, ultimately labelling the model proposed by Burns as a ‘problematic process’ (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). However, this critique does not account for Burns’ democratic component of transforming leadership theory. According to Burns, if followers felt that their leader had not satisfactorily represented their shared interests, they could hold them accountable through the ballot box (Burns, 1978). Tourish and Pinninton (2002) critique Bass and Burns and ultimately recommend more participatory models and counterbalancing mechanisms. However, Burns (1978, 2003) was also an advocate for counterbalancing mechanisms, critical bottom-up feedback, and reducing the power of leaders. These critics are unsympathetic to both Burns and Bass. Burnes et al. (2016) argued that the greatest failure of the development of transformational leadership theory is that the misrepresented version is attributed to Burns on both the mainstream and critical sides. These critiques illuminate the fact that it was not only those in favour of transformational leadership who overlooked the democratic component of the theory. The representation that is more regularly accepted and employed is Bass’ version of transformational leadership (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006). However, some critical writers have been able to spot the difference.

Burns and Bass: Critics Spotting the Difference

Some critics have been able to spot the difference between Burns’ and Bass’ conceptualisations of transformational leadership theory. This array of writing is not a fully exhaustive list of all cases in which the differences between the two representations have been identified; it intends to show that Burns’ democratic component of transformational leadership is not consistently documented by critical management scholars. The reviewed articles were able to identify that there is a difference between the way Burns and Bass wrote about transformational leadership theory (Allix, 2000; Burnes et al., 2016; Carey, 1992; Denhardt & Campbell, 2006; Ladkin & Patrick, 2022; Wilson, 2016). Denhardt and Campbell (2006) argued for the value of Burns’ original moral conceptualisation in a public sector context due to his emphasis on democratic values like liberty, equality, and justice. However, they do not draw on Burns’ (1978) notion of “conscious choice among real alternatives” (p. 36), which I feel was a missed opportunity. In analysing Burns’ work in comparison with Bass’, Carey (1992) draws on two key themes; first, the mutuality of values and needs between leader and followers, and second, the distinction between leadership and power. But he does not highlight the crucial democratic component that encompasses these two themes. However, in their analysis of the origins of transformational

leadership, Burnes et al. (2016) mention that for Burns, participation and democracy were central to the morality of the theory.

Most notably, Allix (2000) and Wilson (2016) explicitly engage with Burns' (1978) original theorising on democracy and his notion about "conscious choice among real alternatives" (p. 36). Allix's (2000) critical evaluation of Burns' conceptualisations of transforming leadership explicitly includes Burns' use of the words 'conscious choice'.

"Unlike traditional conceptualizations, which did not admit of competition or conflict, and hence *engagement* between leaders and followers, Burns claimed that the moral and democratic legitimacy of his conception of transforming leadership rested in embracing and incorporating these very elements, for it is only when there are competing diagnoses, claims, values and prescriptions on offer from would-be leaders, and hence the possibility of '*conscious choice among real alternatives*', that followers can define their own '*true*' needs, and thereby make informed decisions for addressing these requirements" (Allix, 2000, p. 7).

While the author has picked up on Burns' interest in moral and democratic engagement, shared visions, and collective purpose, he is ultimately critical of Burns' conceptualisation, arguing it fails to measure up "with corresponding implications for administrative theorizing and practice" (Allix, 2000, p. 8). Similar to critiques of Tourish and Pinnington (2013; 2002) included earlier; the author warns their readers of the dark side of 'unchecked' transformational leadership. Explaining that "the absence of adequate social machinery for interrogating, testing and constraining the prescriptions of transforming leadership" (Allix, 2000, pp. 17–18) leaves room for leaders like Hitler to wreak havoc and destruction in support of their self-interest. Allix (2000) is correct in saying that Burns did not explain how followers could execute their right to 'choose' their leader in an organisational context. However, this author may have forgotten that Burns was writing in an American political context, where democratic mechanisms are already in place to allow people to vote for their chosen representative.

Moreover, critical management scholar Wilson identifies Burns' essential democratic component of transforming leadership theory. When discussing Burns' book *Leadership* (1978), she explains that his

fundamental assumption was that followers have sufficient knowledge of alternative leaders and possess the capacity to choose between these alternatives (Wilson, 2016).

“A key assumption at this early stage is that ‘followers have adequate knowledge of alternative leaders... and the capacity to choose among those alternatives’. An expectation that leaders and followers have common interests is thus an important feature of Burns’ original thinking, as is the assumption that followers can choose their leader. These assumptions, in turn, provide a basis for expecting that the ethical conduct of leaders will accord with what followers would expect and deem acceptable. Should it not, follower support can and will be withdrawn.” (Wilson, 2016, p. 134).

This quote offers an excellent explanation of Burns’ fundamental assumptions about transforming leadership theory that other scholars have largely overlooked. While Wilson (2016) does address *how* and *why* the conceptualisation of transformational leadership transformed over time, the democratic element of Burns’ theory was not her primary focus. That is the task I set for myself.

This selection of texts demonstrates that mainstream management scholars were not the only ones to overlook the democratic component of transforming leadership theory. Tourish and Pinnington (2013; 2002) make thoughtful critiques that apply well to Bass’ representation of the theory, but they lump Burns in with this. Many of their criticisms actually aligned with Burns’ initial concerns illustrated earlier in this chapter. Some critical theorists have recognised the differences in Burns’ and Bass’ representations and offer an argument supporting Burns’ original conceptualisation. However, they still overlook the fundamental democratic component (Carey, 1992; Denhardt & Campbell, 2006). Burnes et al. (2016) pick up on Burns’ interest in democracy and transformational leadership but go into slight detail. Critics Wilson (2016) and Allix (2000) explicitly discuss Burns’ original theorising. What is clear is that the democratic component of transformational leadership theory is not consistently important to critical scholars in their assessments of transformational leadership theory.

I aim to have convinced the reader that the democratic component of transforming leadership theory was lost when translated from political science to management studies. Burns, the originator of

transforming leadership theory, was concerned about morality in leadership. He was adamant that a powerful theory like this was only moral if followers could be fully informed, select their leader, and hold them accountable for their commitments and responsibilities. He returned to these themes in later publications, arguing that competition and conflict were essential, making transformational leadership participatory and democratic. This aspect of the theory was crucial for Burns. But when theorists introduced it to management studies, the democratic element got lost.

Management theorists deemed other aspects of transforming leadership theory to be crucial. They argue transformational leaders are charismatic people who inspire their followers to look past their own self-interest and go above and beyond for their organisation. Many claimed it would be transformational leaders who would create visions, overhaul their organisations, and rescue the American economy from its state of decline in the 1980s. Influential management theorist Bass attempted to balance the theory due to criticism of his stance on morality. While he did change his tune to argue that transformational leaders should be virtuous rather than villainous, he rejected the need for democratic mechanisms. However, managerial theorists were not the only ones to overlook this democratic component.

The theory's critics have also overlooked the democratic component of transformational leadership in their analyses of its faults. Key critical theorists Tourish and Pinnington (2013; 2002) even recommended that the theory needed to allow room for corrective feedback, not realising that Burns had advocated for the same. However, this is not always the case. Researchers Allix and Wilson have also identified that the democratic element of the theory was overlooked in management studies. The following chapter is dedicated to exploring the context of the emergence of transformational leadership to propose an answer to why and how the democratic element of the theory was lost when translated from political science to management studies.

Chapter Four – How and Why Did This Happen?

Hopefully, having convinced you that the democratic component of transforming leadership was lost in the theory's translation from political science to management studies, this chapter is dedicated to exploring "why" this happened. I will primarily focus on the context of the theory's translation from political science to management studies. Context is a crucial element of intellectual history, and intellectual historians are encouraged to question why ideas occur when they do. Context includes social, economic, and political forces that shape the evolution of an idea. This analysis will propose a series of reasons why transforming leadership theory gained such popularity and why the democratic component was lost in this process. I generated these explanations by exploring literature both directly and indirectly related to transformational leadership theory. The texts that are directly related to the theory explicitly discuss transformational leadership. The texts that are indirectly related do not explicitly discuss the theory and focus more on the context. By following the literature trail, common themes emerged that offer answers to how and why this idea occurred when it did. As mentioned in the methodology section, I do not claim that these answers are the 'truth' or the only possible account of the lifespan of transformational leadership theory. It is up to the reader to assess the plausibility of my representation. This chapter analyses the historical context of transformational leadership theory in three stages: before, during, and after. The state of leadership research before Burns' publication of *Leadership*. The social, economic, and political context during the translation of the theory that shaped its evolution. What happened, or what did not happen, after the translation that allowed the representation of the theory by management scholars to become the 'conventional' one.

In the 'before' section of this chapter, I propose two events that paved the way for the managerial adoption and subsequent translation of transforming leadership theory. First, the state of leadership research was not regarded to be as exciting as it is now. Researchers needed an exciting new idea to refresh interest in leadership theorising. Second, charismatic leadership theory had garnered some interest and contributed to the managerial adaption of transformational leadership theory. As part of the 'before' section, I also look back at Bass' theorising on management before transformational leadership was on the radar (these findings may surprise you). The 'during' section of this chapter primarily focuses on the time that scholars were adapting transforming leadership theory for their management audience. There are several interlinking contextual elements at play here explaining

management scholars' attraction to transforming leadership and why the democratic component of the theory was not as crucial to the early adopters as other components. These contextual elements include the American economic decline, the problematic distinction drawn between managers in comparison to leaders, the growth of the field of change management, management schools' enthusiasm for the theory, and the unattractiveness of organisational democracy to managerial researchers. Finally, I propose the reasons why I believe Burns did not come forward to criticise management scholars' translation of his theory. At this point, you will be able to evaluate the plausibility of these propositions. But first, you will need some more detail.

Before: Research Prior to Transformational Leadership Theory

The focus of this section is the state of leadership research before the rise of transformational leadership theory. Some scholars believed that leadership research needed something novel to revitalise interest in the subject, and notions of charismatic and heroic leadership were already generating interest amongst management academics. The most peculiar finding to be uncovered as part of the analysis was Bass' vastly different research interests before discovering transforming leadership. It illustrates a dramatic shift in leadership theorising between the 1970s and 1980s.

Revitalising Leadership Research

In the 1970s, leadership research was not what it is now. The research was trivial and contributed little (Spector, 2014). In Robbins' first three editions of the management textbook *Organizational Behavior*, before the first inclusion of transformational leadership theory, he said the state of leadership research was voluminous, confusing, and contradictory (Robbins, 1979, 1983, 1986). In addition, Spector (2014) explains that leadership research was primarily focused on individual and group behaviour, and scholars were looking for a grand idea to establish the study of leadership. The publication of Burns' book *Leadership* (1978) turned attention to "the statesmen who moved and shook the world" (Bass, 1993, p. 375). By connecting leadership theory to leaders at the *top*, Burns unknowingly created an exciting and seemingly much-needed shift for management scholars to refresh their focus.

Charismatic Leadership

Management scholar Robert House's charismatic leadership theory was a research trend that paved the way for transformational leadership theory, according to Bass (1993). Bass draws on House's charismatic leadership theorising in his seminal book *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, published in 1985. Some scholars believe charismatic and transformational leadership are synonyms (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Dinh et al., 2014; Spector, 2014). According to House (1977) followers trust in the correctness of their leaders' beliefs, followers have unquestioning acceptance of them, and followers have faith in the success of the mission. There is a high degree of emotional involvement where affection and obedience toward their leader results in increased performance. This theory was published shortly before Burns' seminal text *Leadership* in 1979. However, Burns does not reference House's work, and I do not think he would have agreed with it either. Burns would have been exceptionally wary of the unquestioning follower devotion that is encouraged in House's theory. Burns did not favour charismatic leadership and wished to keep it separate from transforming leadership (Burns, 2003). He said that "at best, charisma is a confusing and undemocratic form of leadership... at worst, it is a type of tyranny" (Burns, 2003, p. 27). Research like House's charismatic leadership theory likely influenced Bass' early attraction to the theory. Bass (1993) argued that charismatic leadership theory was a precursor to the paradigmatic shift in leadership studies, stating that the time was right for transformational leadership. James Downton's (1973) rebel leadership theory is also identified as a precursor to transformational leadership theory, according to Bass. Many texts introduce transformational leadership theory with a statement along the lines of 'Downton coined the phrase transformational leadership...' (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burnes et al., 2016; Hater & Bass, 1988). These 'origins' need to be traced because it is unclear where Downton actually 'coins' this phrase in his book *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process* (1973). Nevertheless, it is apparent that the idea of inspiring leaders who can generate increased productivity was already on the minds of theorists like Bass.

Bernard Bass Before Transformational Leadership Theory

There is a surprisingly stark difference between Bass' theorising on leadership in the 1970s and the 1980s. One of his research interests in the 1970s was industrial democracy and participative management, which was fashionable in the 1970s. My understanding of industrial democracy is that it

is a system that gives formal authority to employees to make decisions in the workplace, while participative management is a more informal approach where employees are invited to participate in organisational decision-making (Simon, 1983). Burns' theory should have contributed to the popularity of industrial democracy because of the shared interest in follower, or employee, participation in decision-making. Burns (1978) believed that followers' and leaders' interests must align for leadership to be moral. This directly relates to the concepts underpinning these participative approaches. But because of the way the theory was interpreted, industrial democracy was left behind, and transformational leadership as we know it took off.

Only one year after Burns published *Leadership*, Bass and Shackleton published *Industrial Democracy and Participative Management: A Case for Synthesis* (1979). They were enthusiastic about the future of shared decision-making in management studies. The authors place the trend of industrial democracy and participative management in context by setting the scene of the late 1970s (Bass & Shackleton, 1979). They argue that there was increased interest in shared decision-making in management-worker relations following World War Two. It is interesting to see Bass and Shackleton contextualise the theory in response to growing concern about the dangers of unrestrained leadership, similar to Burns. Their research aimed to compare and synthesise the American and European representations of participative management and industrial relations (Bass & Shackleton, 1979). They conclude that industrial democracy is more formal and possibly has a legal element, while participative management is more informal. The authors explain that the two approaches can complement each other; industrial democracy is suited to organised worker representation, and participative management is a more face-to-face collaborative approach between managers and employees (Bass & Shackleton, 1979). In addition, they ultimately argue that "it is unlikely that the trend toward industrial democracy and participative management is a passing fad" (Bass & Shackleton, 1979, p. 402) and that "in the coming years, we expect increasing attention to be paid to industrial democracy and participative management as ways to achieve such optimisation" (Bass & Shackleton, 1979, p. 403). For someone like Bass, who supported shared decision-making because of anxieties about unchecked leadership following World War Two, it is surprising and almost ironic that he rejected Burns' mutual concern regarding this when promoting transformational leadership theory after advocating for it so passionately only years earlier. Perhaps his newfound success researching transformational leadership theory had changed his mind.

Leadership researchers needed a new theory to revitalise interest in the subject, and they got it. Here we can see why there was such enthusiasm for transformational leadership theory. Charismatic leadership garnered interest, but it was quite different to Burns' conceptualisation of transforming leadership theory. House's (1977) theory prioritised unquestioning acceptance of the leader, obedience, and increased performance. Bass (1993) responds positively to House's (1977) theorising, and we can see parallels between charismatic leadership theory and Bass' conceptualisation of transformational leadership theory. This is almost ironic considering his excitement for the future of industrial democracy and participative leadership. This section begins to highlight why transformational leadership theory gained such popularity and why the democratic component was lost in this process. The section to follow moves away from intellectual antecedents and considers social, political, and economic factors that shaped the translation of the theory.

During: Translating Transformational Leadership Theory

The 1970s were a difficult time for the American people. President Richard Nixon responded to increasing inflation by implementing wage and price freezes (Bridgman & Cummings, 2021). Two years later, the price of oil increased dramatically and tipped the economy into a recession. This was of great concern to management theorists who were busy figuring out what could rescue the American economy (Bridgman & Cummings, 2021). For many, transformational leadership was the answer. The theory was translated so that this new breed of leader could enact change from the top-down to increase their competitive advantage and rescue organisations from decline. What was once a democratic theory constructed by a left-wing political scientist became a theory of top-down change to improve organisational performance.

American Economic Decline

You may recall from chapter two that many early adopters of transformational leadership theory were greatly concerned about the fate of the American economy. They argued that if this new and improved style of leadership was not a national focus, it was unlikely that American organisations would survive this period of economic hardship (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; Tichy & Ulrich, 1984). In Spector's review of the origins of transformational leadership theory, he comments that in the 1970s, the American people were poor, and the economy was struggling (Spector, 2014). In a later

interview, he argues that transformational leadership theory was a response to the socio-economic crisis in America. When the theory was introduced, it flourished in the social context of an economic decline. The notion of a skilled leader, a saviour, was comforting. For example, Tichy and Ulrich (1984) use the case of Lee Iacocca, the chairperson of Chrysler Corporation at the time, as the personification of transformational leadership in action. They claim Iacocca “provided the leadership to transform a company from the brink of bankruptcy to profitability” (Tichy & Ulrich, 1984, p. 59). However, in his critical historical review of the origins of transformational leadership, Spector (2014) argues that Iacocca’s approach to leadership was more ‘macho bully’ than transformational. Instead of translating the theory to champion social change born out of the aligned interests of followers and leaders as Burns (2005) had intended, management scholars deemed these leaders responsible for transforming organisations to be more profitable and to rescue the American economy from peril. In addition to this, not only are these leaders regarded as saviours, but managers became the villains, the cause of organisational failure.

The Manager-Leader Distinction

The critical broadcaster of this message was psychoanalyst Abraham Zaleznik. In a seminal *Harvard Business Review* article published in 1977, Zaleznik introduces the idea that leaders and managers are not only different, but they conflict with each other. The central argument is that the conditions of society, including business organisations, favour the development of managers and are stifling to leaders who exhibit creativity and imagination (Zaleznik, 1977). The article describes managers as impersonal, passive, risk-averse, anxious people who can tolerate mundane work, and whose work is primarily an enabling process that conserves and regulates the existing order (Zaleznik, 1977). On the other hand, leaders are personable, active, risk seekers and takers, who develop fresh approaches to problems and work for organisations but do not necessarily belong to them (Zaleznik, 1977). This is an arbitrary distinction that contributes little to leadership theorising. Collinson (2014) argues that dichotomisation is a strategy regularly used in mainstream leadership studies to reduce ambiguity and complexity. This strategy makes leadership theory and practice easier to comprehend. However, by favouring these binary arguments, the nuance and meaning are lost. Rather than qualifying leaders as ‘good’ and managers as ‘bad’, Collinson (2014) argues that leadership can be viewed as one component of the broader construct of management. While I am critical of the manager-leader distinction

popularised by Zaleznik (1977), the distinction was prevalent, and it was not long until other researchers picked up the idea.

In 1980 researchers Robert Hayes and William Abernathy also published an article in the *Harvard Business Review* warning readers that corporate America was managing its way to economic decline. The featured sentence on the front page of the article states, “modern management principles may cause rather than cure sluggish economic performance” (Hayes & Abernathy, 1980, p. 67). Like Tichy and Devanna (1986), they say that organisations lack technical competitiveness and growth compared to Europe and Japan, and we should blame this on managers instead of external forces like inflation, government regulation, and tax policy (Hayes & Abernathy, 1980). They encourage their readers to ask themselves; what American managers have been doing wrong, what are their critical weaknesses in managing technological performance, and what is wrong with their long-unquestioned managerial policies and practices (Hayes & Abernathy, 1980). According to Hughes (2022), the perception was that managers had it all wrong; they had been managing instead of leading. Hayes and Abernathy (1980) argue that managers' analytical detachment and cost-reducing tendencies are incompatible with innovation. In the words of Zaleznik (1977), managers are risk-averse, whereas leaders are risk-seekers. The distinction was far-reaching and made its way into management education.

The manager-leader distinction was compelling, signified by its featured inclusion in the fourth and fifth editions of Robbins' *Organizational Behaviour* textbooks published between 1989 and 1991. As you might recall, the first mention of transformational leadership theory was also published in the fourth edition of *Organizational Behaviour*; the ideas of transformational leadership theory and the manager-leader distinction share a connection. Bass even used Zaleznik's distinction to explain transactional and transformational leadership styles. He said Zaleznik's 'managers' are transactional leaders, and “they tend to survey their subordinates' needs and set goals for them on the basis of the effort they can rationally expect from their subordinates” (Bass, 1985a, p. 13). Intellectual historian Spector says that before this, 'manager' and leader' were synonyms and that Zaleznik's article was seminal, shifting the way scholars theorised about leadership. There were other contextual forces at play during this time that spurred this shift in leadership theory.

Japanese Management

Another theme that emerges when exploring the discourse surrounding the American economic decline and the manager-leader distinction is the competition presented by Japanese businesses (Hayes & Abernathy, 1980; Tichy & Devanna, 1986). The perceived inability of American firms to compete with Japanese companies was also blamed on managers for ‘managing’ rather than ‘leading’ (Hughes, 2022). As Zaleznik (1977) argues, managers are too concerned with maintaining the status quo, while leaders are much better suited to innovation because of their risk-seeking and creative tendencies. Researchers and practitioners were looking elsewhere for new ideas. The relative success of Japanese companies compared to American companies generated widespread interest in their management practices (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1982). Japanese companies were extolling the importance of having shared values, moving away from mechanistic views of organisations, and focusing on shared beliefs, behaviour, knowledge, values, and goals (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). As discussed earlier, the conventional or managerial representation of transformational leadership is also about shared visions and goals. Transformational leaders generate visions for the future and persuade followers to commit to these goals. Transformational leadership theory fit well with the Japanese management trend because of the focus on engaging the ‘full person of the follower’ by influencing their values and goals (Bass, 1985a). However, this trend was not the only one of interest to management and organisational behaviour scholars.

Change Management

In the 1980s, the field of change management was also being created (Cummings et al., 2016). Cummings et al. (2016) make this point in their historical analysis of the ‘Change as three steps’ framework commonly attributed to Lewin. They argue that field of change management was finding its feet during this time and this framework commonly attributed to Lewin gave the discipline legitimacy. In Bass’ (1993) analysis of the paradigmatic shift in leadership studies, he references John Kotter’s *The Leadership Factor* published in 1988 and claims that the industry was ‘rediscovering’ the importance of leadership in management. Spector (2014) also identifies this connection between change management and leadership theorising. He highlighted that Kotter was also convinced by Zaleznik’s claim that managers and leaders are different and helped popularise this dichotomy (Spector, 2014). Kotter went on to establish some of the most well-known theories about change in the

1990s; eight steps of change and resistance to change framework. Kotter's eight steps of change theory is very similar to Tichy, Ulrich, and Devanna's (1986; 1984) three steps for transformational leaders, as I have outlined in Table 1 below. Cummings et al. (2016) generate a similar diagram on a much larger scale that highlights the similarities between seven models of change management, including Kotter's (1995) eight steps of change and Tichy and Devanna's (1986) three-step process. Both theories have a theme of top-down change, where skilled leaders create visions and inspire followers to act on them. Transforming leadership morphed into a theory about change management rather than a moral concept rooted in democracy (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006). This shift fitted with the interests of management and organisational behaviour scholars. The simultaneous creation of the change management field and transformational leadership likely contributed to the development and popularity of this new style of leadership.

Table 1. Comparing Transformational Leadership to Eight Steps of Change

Tichy, Ulrich, & Devanna (1986; 1984)	Kotter (1995)
1. Create a vision	1. Establish a sense of urgency 2. Form a powerful guiding coalition 3. Create a vision
2. Mobilise commitment	4. Communicate the vision 5. Empower others to act on the vision
3. Institutionalise change	6. Plan for and create short-term wins 7. Consolidate improvements, produce still more change 8. Institutionalise new approaches

Business Schools

Transformational leadership became widespread in business school curricula in the United States and the United Kingdom, the Master of Business Administration programmes were busy setting a transformational agenda for future managers, soon to become transformational leaders (Spector, 2014). It seems as if Tichy and Ulrich's (1984) call to action was successful. The way Bass had represented transformational leadership suited business schools well. You may recall from chapter two that textbook author Robbins acknowledged that his textbooks must reflect business school values; productivity, efficiency, goals, etc. (Cameron et al., 2003). It is unlikely that Burns' original conceptualisation of transforming leadership theory would have been attractive to business schools

without Bass' selective tweaking in his translation. While there was hope for industrial democracy and participative management in the 1970s, Burns' democratic component of transforming leadership theory is more radical. Burns was theorising in a political context where citizens can vote for their political representatives. Applying this to an organisational context, where employees can vote for the managers, senior leaders, and CEOs, is relatively unheard of in organisations. The promise of *performance beyond expectations*, as Bass coined it, more closely reflects the business school values of productivity and efficiency.

Universalising Management Theory

In an interview with doctoral candidate Nicole Ferry, Spector explains that ideas like transformational leadership theory are often taken from their historical and political contexts to make the concept more universal. For example, Burns' (1978) notion that transforming leadership theory is only moral if followers have a conscious choice between real alternatives, makes sense in a political science context. The democratic mechanisms that allow followers to select their leaders already exist in the form of a general election. Yet this notion is unattractive to management studies because it acknowledges that employees may have different interests in organisations. Some may prioritise values other than productivity and efficiency. This is problematic for the mainstream, managerialist view that focuses on aligning the goals of the organisation into one shared vision. So, researchers universalise the theory, and through this process, it gets to the point where it is no longer the same idea.

Bill Cooke's historiographical review of change management discourse *Writing the Left out of Management Theory: The Historiography of the Management of Change* (1999) offers a political perspective on the universalisation of management theory. Cooke (1999) explains that the 'left' often refers to interests in egalitarianism, the working class, democracy, reform, revolution, opposition to hierarchy, a desire for social justice, and rebellion against the status quo. In this historiographical review, the author claims, "change management's very construction has been a political process which has written the left out and shaped an understanding of the field as technocratic and ideologically neutral" (Cooke, 1999, p. 81). The way transformational leadership theory has evolved has also "written out the left", as Cooke (1999) coins it. An obituary of Burns mentions his politics were left-wing (Weber, 2014). He ran for congress as a Democrat in 1958 and commented that another party member's supporters attacked him for being an "atheistic communist, etc." (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001,

p. 114). Burns was passionate about democracy due to his concern about leaders having too much power and using it for corrupt ends. The moral element of transforming leadership is what concerned him most (Burns, 1978). This morality, he explains, is defined by whether followers have “conscious choice amongst real alternatives” (Burns, 1978, p. 36). These concerns directly align with the interests that Cooke (1999) argued characterise ‘the left’.

Similarly to the assumptions about knowledge outlined in the methodology section of this thesis, Cooke (1999) also believes in the subjectivity of history and draws on Jenkins’ argument that history is always crafted ‘for someone’. Jenkins (1991) explains that history is shaped by society, power relations, and their associated ideologies. I would like to apply a similar argument to Bass and other management scholars who introduced transformational leadership theory to management studies. Burns was a left-wing political scientist who was passionate about democracy and concerned about the abuse of power. These concerns influenced his work and can be identified throughout his seminal book *Leadership* (1978). However, his work was co-opted by management theorists to further their interests in top-down change and employee performance beyond expectations. As you may recall from the previous chapter, Bass even actively dismissed critics’ concerns about unchecked power and argued that, in most cases, directive leadership is more appropriate (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The popularised version of transformational leadership had the ‘left’ written out of it.

Tichy and Ulrich (1984) set transformational leadership as the national agenda. Management studies responded. The prevalent and problematic manager-leader distinction blamed managers for lack of competitiveness against new players like Japan. Transformational leaders were the visionary heroes who were going to apply top-down transformation to their organisations. Business schools were on board and began educating students on how to become transformational leaders rather than managers. Transforming leadership theory was taken out of a democratic context and lost its original meaning. The next stage of my analysis explores the response, or lack of response, to the universalisation of transformational leadership theory.

After: The Response to Transformational Leadership Theory

While the discussion of transformational leadership is ongoing, I was most interested in investigating one specific area of this discussion: Burns' response to the managerial transformation of his theory of leadership. While he was quick to defend the essential morality of the theory, reserving transforming leadership for the greater good, Burns also overlooks the democratic component that he once held dear.

James MacGregor Burns' Softening Stance

Both Burns and Bass were around to witness the great tidal wave that was transformational leadership. So, you may wonder whether they discussed their respective theorising. The foreword of *Transformational Leadership*, published in 2006 by Bass and Ronald Riggio, highlights the academic relationship shared by Burns and Bass. This book was a second edition and intended to introduce new findings, consolidate previous work, and introduce new real-life leadership situations (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However, the foreword describes a meeting of leadership scholars at the University of Maryland nearly a decade earlier. The topic for debate was whether Hitler was a transformational leader. Academics often referred to this prevalent debate as 'the Hitler problem'. The authors of the foreword include comments from Dick Couto stating that "Bass initially considered transformational leadership to be any fundamental social change without regard to moral values" (cited in Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. vii). Leaders like Hitler and Jim Jones of the Jonestown Massacre met Bass' definition of a transformational leader, but not Burns' (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978). The foreword describes that "after three days of intense debate, Burns, the scholar, took a bold stand: from his perspective, the term 'leadership' should be reserved for the forces of good" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. viii). The text said that Bass went away and challenged his basic assumptions following this and came up with the notion of 'pseudo-transformational' and agreed with Burns that the likes of Hitler and Jones were not transformational leaders. This instance inspired Bass' work on authentic and inauthentic transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This section is signed off by Burns and Georgia Sorenson of the Burns Academy of Leadership. While we see Burns staunchly defending his stance on the essential morality of his transforming leadership theory, there is no mention of his fundamental democratic and participative values. These values are critical to his notion of moral leadership because many critics comment that no single person can ultimately decide what is moral, making the group decision-making element even more crucial (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002).

There are two reasons I could discern that Burns did not defend his essential democratic component of transforming leadership. First, he felt it was not his place to comment on management's conceptualisation of transformational leadership. Second, transformational leadership's relative success in management studies compared to political science.

Based on the statements Burns made in the interview with Bailey and Axelrod (2001), I propose that he felt it was not his place to comment on management scholars' conceptualisations of transformational leadership. Burns was a scholar of political science. Bailey and Axelrod (2001) ask Burns what it takes to be a great organisational leader and to comment on the challenges business leaders face. He responds by saying, "I do not pretend to be an authority, or even deeply informed, on organizational leadership aside from reading some of the work that has been done in this area" (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001, p. 116). In the same interview, Burns is complimentary toward Bass and his associates and thinks they will be remembered fifty years from now as great leadership theorists (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001). I think that Burns, the political scientist, felt it was not his place to comment on Bass' conceptualisations of transformational leadership because that was not his arena. He wanted to leave it up to the management scholars, whom he believed to be the experts on the discipline. However, it still feels like there is something missing from this story.

For a theory that made such a significant impact in management studies, you come to wonder if it was similarly 'seminal' in its original field of political science. Tintoré and Güell (2015) analysed the one hundred most-cited leadership articles in politics, business, and education. They found that "transformational" was the most commonly occurring word (beyond the words "leadership" and "school"). However, "transformational" was not mentioned in any of the political science articles. All the occurrences were in the business and education articles. This indicates that transformational leadership theory was not nearly as popular in political science, the discipline it originates from. Gillian Peele offers some reasons that transformational leadership seems to have minimal relative success in political science compared to management. Peele (2005) acknowledges that these leadership styles are powerful images that are "hard to dispel... the late 20th century saw a resurgence of the charismatic leadership 'complete with all the accoutrements of biblical charismatics, including visions, missions and zealotlike disciples'" (cited in Peele, 2005, p. 189). Political theorists have neglected the issue of

leadership because of greater concern for democratic government and ideas of 'equality, justice, and community' (Beerbohm, 2015; Peele, 2005). Burns tried to stay true to these foundational political science values, but he was attracted to leadership studies. Peele identifies Burns as a bit of an outlier in political science, calling his work wide-ranging, influential, and idiosyncratic (Peele, 2005). An outlier in political science but a seminal, paradigm-shifting scholar in management studies. He made such an impact that The University of Maryland named its James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership. This expanded across borders with the opening of the Møller Centre at the University of Cambridge, the official home of James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership. Following this newfound success in management schools, perhaps it was easier for Burns to ignore how this translation transformed his theory into a powerful force with no democratic mechanisms.

These two factors in combination might have softened Burns' stance on what he once said was the most crucial element of transforming leadership: democracy. While Burns seemed to have been successful in changing Bass' mind about morality defining the actions of transformational leaders, he was not so quick to raise the role of democratic mechanisms in this process. This might have been because Burns was hesitant to comment on management scholars' conceptualisations of transformational leadership. The success of transformational leadership theory in management studies compared to political science, where he was seen as an outsider, could have been more attractive. Fighting for democracy in transformational leadership theory could have risked this success because Bass and his associates had already rejected it.

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to give insight into the state of mind of the generators of transformational leadership theory as we know it. Whilst scholars were interested in leadership research, it seems the field of study had little to offer. Leadership theorists were looking for a grand theory to revitalise leadership research. Burns' transforming leadership provided this. Better yet, charismatic leadership theory had already gained some interest, setting the stage for the impending arrival of its superior sibling, transformational leadership. Bass seemingly forgot his excitement for the future of industrial democracy and participative management and decided to share transformational leadership with the management world. There was already demand for transformational leadership due to his colleagues' perceived faith its ability to clean up the mess 'managers' had made and rescue American organisations from economic turmoil. Meanwhile, the

young field of change management was coming to similar conclusions about the role of leaders in organisational transformation. Business schools jumped on the bandwagon with the goal of developing future transformational leaders. Fortunately, the conceptualisation that Bass popularised championed organisational performance, and there was no need for any pesky democratic mechanisms. Following what Bass called a great tidal wave of research on transformational leadership, he and Burns got together to discuss their shared interest. However, it seems Burns also forgot his passion for democracy and failed to raise his concerns about this element of the theory. Perhaps he felt it was not his place to comment on management theorists' conceptualisation of transformational leadership, or he was enjoying his newfound success in the management discipline, no longer the outlier. The conventional representation of transformational leadership theory became one that championed performance and profit by inspiring followers to go above and beyond for their organisation. The democratic component was forgotten.

Now that you have the means to evaluate my claim that transforming leadership theory was transformed when it was translated from political science to management studies and the proposed reasons for why this happened, the next step is for you to assess the purpose of this historical analysis. Chapter five will address these reasons and answer the question, "why does it matter"?

Chapter Five – Why Does It Matter?

“The modern industrial firm amounts to a system of arbitrary and unaccountable ‘private government’ and ‘dictatorship’” (Macedo, 2017, p. xi).

In this chapter, you will assess the purpose of this critical historical analysis of transformational leadership theory. So far, you have evaluated my claim that this theory was transformed when it was translated from political science to management studies. Following this, you went back to the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to gain insight into the minds of the idea generators who were collectively responsible for this translation. Now we come to the story's purpose, for you to decide whether it is something that matters. This chapter explores three main arguments. First, it matters because transformational leadership theory remains influential. This is evidenced by its continued appearance in management textbooks, in discussions of leadership in business and popular press, and in executive education programmes at universities. Currently, researchers are showing a growing interest in authentic, responsible, ethical, servant, and positive leadership theories. New theories like authentic leadership are essentially the same concept as transformational leadership and come with the same problems, making this theory a crucial one to examine. Second, we could teach the theory to business students in a way that is closer to Burns' original thinking. Third, if we teach the theory differently, perhaps alternative approaches to leadership can emerge. Connecting this alternative representation of transformational leadership theory to the literature on workplace democracy presents a way we could think about doing management differently.

Transformational Leadership Theory Remains Influential

This analysis draws on a broad range of literature and texts to support my claim that this review of transformational leadership matters because the theory remains influential. Management textbooks provide an example of this. Their continued inclusion of transformational leadership theory highlights the discipline's ongoing interest in the idea. I summarise how transformational leadership theory is discussed in a selection of management textbooks to demonstrate the persistence of the managerial representation. Transformational leadership also remains influential outside of academic circles as journalists use the theory to describe leader behaviour in news articles. Some scholars have spent time highlighting the similarities between transformational leadership theory and other new theories of

leadership. This way of thinking about leader behaviour is still influential in academic circles. Management theory tends to emulate the fashion process to maintain the perception of being 'cutting edge' (Bridgman & Cummings, 2021; Huczynski, 2006; Reinmoeller et al., 2019). We must be critical of claims to originality with theories like authentic leadership.

Transformational Leadership in Management Textbooks

Transformational leadership theory was included in all mainstream and critical management textbooks that I sampled. By focusing this analysis on textbooks published recently, between 2019 and 2022, it demonstrates that the management discipline is still interested in transformational leadership theory. For the most part, there is consensus on what transformational leadership theory is. These textbook authors explain to their readers that transformational leaders are visionaries who enact change by inspiring their followers to go beyond their own self-interest and perform above expectations (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2019; Clegg et al., 2019; Griffin, 2019; King & Lawley, 2019; McShane et al., 2019; Robbins et al., 2022; Schermerhorn et al., 2020; Williams, 2022). This closely resembles Bass' version of the theory, which I have already argued was quite different to Burns' original conceptualisation in chapter three. Some of the textbook authors acknowledge the essential moral element of transformational leadership that Bass came to accept later in his career (Schermerhorn et al., 2020; Williams, 2022). Moreover, some textbooks explore the dark side or the negative traits of transformational leadership (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2019; Clegg et al., 2019; King & Lawley, 2019; McShane et al., 2019). This inclusion mirrors the development of the theory to include some of the negative aspects of transformational leadership. Not only does transformational leadership theory remain influential, but the managerial version of the theory is the one that persists in both mainstream and critical management textbooks.

Transformational Leadership in the Media

The managerial representation of transformational leadership also persists in the media. For example, last year, New Zealand news website *Stuff* published an opinion piece titled *Jacinda Ardern is Truly a Transformational Leader*. Fascinatingly, this columnist's perception of a transformational leader is a person willing to be unpopular, therefore risking their chance at re-election, for the sake of change; "with each passing month it is becoming evident that Ardern does not merely want to be re-elected,

she wants to leave behind a very different country to the one she inherited” (Grant, 2021). However, Burns’ conception of transforming leadership theory would suggest that leaders like New Zealand Prime Jacinda Ardern should be thinking about what voters want because mutual interests and participation in democracy is what makes leadership moral. This columnist’s perception of transformational leadership aligns with the conventional representation of the theory, that skilled leaders are solely responsible for creating and implementing change. I think Burns (2003) would argue that this should be a collective effort (Burns, 2003).

More recently, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has come into the spotlight as a transformational leader following his response to the Russian attacks. Fox (2022), a *Forbes* contributor argues Zelensky is *The Master of Transformational Leadership*. It seems that Zelensky’s ability to rise and embrace his identity in the face of doubt makes him a master of transformational leadership (Fox, 2022). Fox concludes that “when a leader embraces an evolution of his identity, a shift in his form so colossal and complete in response to a need, then massive transformation happens organically and overwhelmingly all around him” (2022). This conclusion is similar to the discussion of authentic leadership, which I will soon argue is essentially the same as transformational leadership. According to the latest edition of the textbook *Organizational Behavior*, “authentic leaders know who they are and what they believe in, and they act on those values and beliefs openly and candidly” (Robbins & Judge, 2018, p. 411). But, like the *Stuff* columnist’s description of transformational leadership concerning Prime Minister Ardern, it is all too individualistic. I think Burns (2003) would argue that the leader is not at the centre of a transformation and that the collective enacts social change. This demonstrates that transformational leadership remains influential outside of academic circles as journalists use the theory to describe leader behaviour in news articles. These examples also highlight that the managerial representation of the theory also persists in the media, rather than Burns’ original conceptualisation.

Transformational Leadership in Disguise

Leadership researchers are showing a growing interest in authentic, responsible, ethical, servant, and positive leadership theories (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Robbins & Judge, 2018; Spector, 2014). However, as I mentioned previously there is an argument that these newer theories and transformational are all essentially the same. For example, in a critique of authentic leadership, Alvesson and Einola (2019) explain that their evaluation will apply to transformational, servant, ethical, and spiritual leadership

theories. They label these as a newer genre, moral approach, or positive form of leadership. These new fashionable theories fall into the same family. They too, over-emphasise the leader and overlook the realities of organisations (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Moreover, a qualitative review of leadership theory helpfully categorises transformational leadership as a neo-charismatic theory, relating it to other relevant theories like charismatic leadership, inspiring leadership, and transactional leadership (Dinh et al., 2014). They explain that these theories historically emerge from charismatic leadership theory and a branch of path-goal theory before this. These 'new' leadership theories are relatives and share familial dysfunctionalities.

The Fashion of Management Theory and VUCA

The recycling and repackaging of these 'new' leadership theories is a common theme in management theorising. The cyclical nature of management ideas parallels the fashion process (Bridgman & Cummings, 2021; Huczynski, 2006; Reinmoeller et al., 2019). People lose interest in these ideas that were once popular, and they are replaced by these new concepts. A possible reason for this recycling of management theory is the widespread 'VUCA' claim that we live in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous world where change is the only constant. Therefore, scholars must constantly develop new theories to keep up with this ever-evolving climate. You may recall from chapter three; that those early adopters of transformational leadership were concerned about changes in the American economy threatening the welfare of businesses and called for a "new type of leadership" (p. vii) to rescue these corporations (Tichy & Devanna, 1986). But these claims are always being made. The Victoria University of Wellington Professional Development team has published a brand-new prospectus that claims, "organisations are faced with an increasing pace of change affecting the need to train, retrain, refresh and retain industry-ready staff" (Kāpuhipuhi Wellington Uni Professional, 2022). They offer a leadership course that offers to teach prospective students how to "identify your authentic leadership style and strengths". Authentic leadership is one of the fashionable leadership theories right now. So, we see the VUCA claim that organisations face an increasing pace of change and that you must enrol in these courses to evolve with the times. Change sells! However, a critique of the VUCA claim is that the business world is not changing faster than ever before. Economist Robert Gordon (2016) argues that the world has not changed as much in the last seventy years as it did in the seventy years before; electricity and the internal combustion engine changed everything about how we work and live. Comparatively, we are not experiencing as transformative change as dramatically as they did in the

industrial revolution. Perhaps the world is not as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous as we make it out to be. Therefore, we must think critically about claims to originality in leadership and management theorising.

Interest in transformational leadership is ongoing, and the conventional representation of the theory seems to have extended past academia and into public interest. The examples from journalists describe a leader who makes change happen while the followers watch it unfold. Similar problematic conceptualisations of authentic leadership are developing where the focus is placed on the individual leader rather than the organisation. These new theories are essentially the same idea and come with the same problems, hence the importance of analysing the history of these leadership concepts. When the 'next best thing' is introduced because we must keep up with the 'VUCA' world, we can be critical of these claims of originality.

Teaching Burns' Transforming Leadership

The second reason this critical historical analysis matters is because we could teach transformational leadership theory to business students in a way that is closer to Burns' original thinking. Now that I have problematised the theory, the next step is to build something new to complete the argument (Alvesson et al., 2008). This section outlines an alternative way of thinking about transformational leadership theory based on this historical analysis. Creating an alternative representation of the theory offers a new perspective for management education.

An Alternative Representation

Burnes et al. (2016) summary of their work reimagining organisational change leadership inspires Table 2 below. The first column headed Conventional Representation is a simplified version of what I believe to be the common-sense understanding of transformational leadership theory. This summary was generated using my findings from chapter three, which explored how the theory was translated by management scholars, supplemented by my textbook analysis. The purpose of the table is to depict how the theory stands in its current state and the alternative representation I am proposing. I argue this alternative representation should return to Burns' original conceptualisation of transforming

leadership theory that lost favour once it was introduced to management studies due to contextual factors discussed in chapter four.

Table 2. An Alternative Representation of Transformational Leadership Theory

	Conventional Representation	Alternative Representation
Morality	Transformational leadership theory is grounded in moral foundations, and leaders must act in good faith (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).	Transforming leadership theory is only moral if followers can select their leader from several options (Burns, 1978).
Democracy	Directive leadership over participatory is more appropriate in most cases (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).	Competition and conflict are essential components of the democratic element of the theory (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001; Burns, 1978, 2003).
Power	Power is necessary for transformational leaders to have the ability to make changes (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).	Power is not leadership, and mechanisms must exist to reduce the power of leaders (Burns, 1978, 2003).
Conflict	Transformational leaders should listen to views that conflict with theirs to benefit the vision (Avolio & Bass, 1988).	Opposition and contestation from other potential leaders and followers are essential (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001; Burns, 1978, 2003).
Role of Followers	To be inspired to look past their self-interest and go above and beyond for their organisation (for example Robbins, 1989, 1991).	To make informed choices about who they want their leaders to be and hold them accountable (Burns, 1978).

There are many key shifts between the conventional and alternative representations. However, there is one common theme: democracy. Burns argued democracy is what makes leadership moral. Followers could be able to select their leader and hold them accountable by engaging in competition and conflict in their organisations. This idea made sense in a political science context but was not something that was valued when the theory was introduced to management studies. The managerialist view favours consensus over conflict and prioritises the shared vision over divergent interests in organisations. However, there could be value in teaching management students about these notions of democracy, competition, and conflict in organisational and management contexts. These values are often

overshadowed by the mainstream management values of profit, productivity, and performance when these ideas are introduced to students.

Management Education

In the first semester of my first year of my undergraduate degree, my MGMT101 lecturer taught us that transformational leadership was “magical”. The PowerPoint slide on transformational leadership read, “[the] leader creates a vision and work environment in which followers are motivated to elevate the good of the group or organisation above their own self-interest”. How we teach leadership and management theory to students socialises them into how they should behave as employees and, for some, how they should operate as managers (Calás & Smircich, 1989; Stambaugh & Trank, 2010). In my case, I was being taught that I should disregard my own interests and fully commit to the goals of the organisation. Instead of teaching students and future employees to blindly follow transformational leaders’ visions and go above and beyond for their organisations, I think we should teach them the importance of questioning, competition, and conflict as to create structural change (Alvesson, 1989), just as Burns had advocated.

This alternative representation could positively affect how we teach management and leadership in business schools. As future employees, they should be encouraged to be critical of their employers, just as Burns argued followers should be critical of their political leaders. As future managers and business owners, they could do management differently by implementing and upholding democratic mechanisms in organisations. Teaching students about democratic mechanisms could address the power imbalances in the organisations they will join in the future.

Teaching and Doing Leadership Differently

Alvesson et al. (2008) explain that the reconstruction of an idea should focus on rebalancing and reframing voices subject to oppression and creating space for them. This process illuminates what was previously excluded from the discussion. In the case of transformational leadership theory, critics argue the oppressed voices are employees or ‘followers’. Organisations are consistently in the news for their poor working conditions, for breaching employee rights, and a long list of unethical behaviours. If employees had a say in how their organisations operated, this could reduce corruption in

organisations stemming from decisions made by high-up and out-of-touch managers. Connecting this alternative representation to the literature on workplace democracy (e.g., Clarke, 2011; Doucouliagos, 1995; Estrin et al., 1987; Kanter, 1981; Sabatini et al., 2014) and past interest in industrial democracy and participative management could be a useful addition to this field of interest.

Workplace Democracy

Organisations need more democracy. Jeff Bezos of Amazon was featured in the sixteenth edition of *Organizational Behavior* as an exemplar of a modern leader. The authors outline his success in increasing the value of Amazon stock, his nineteen billion dollar personal net wealth, and applaud his recent endeavour into private space travel (Robbins & Judge, 2015). However, the textbook does not mention Amazon's notorious reputation for working its employees into the ground. A slew of issues are regularly reported; underpayment of workers, workers more prone to injury, extreme physical exertion in fulfilment centres, brutal corporate culture, and a series of fatalities in the workplace. Macedo (2017) refers to the private firm as a "system of arbitrary and unaccountable 'private government' and 'dictatorship'" (p. xi). If workers object to their employment conditions, they can quit, but the exit cost is high (Macedo, 2017). So, workers at places like Amazon need to continue working in these conditions. When there is a power imbalance in organisations between managers and employees, employment legislation attempts to level out these imbalances, but this can only go so far. Undefended authority exists in organisations and is a problem (Singer, 2018). Employees should have a greater say in how their workplaces are organised; they need to have a voice and some share of autonomy in workplace decisions (Macedo, 2017). Bass identified these issues before his fascination with transformational leadership theory when he expressed concern about unchecked leadership in light of World War Two. Perhaps we should return to Bass and Shackleton's (1979) original call to action and pay increasing attention to optimising shared decision-making practices in the workplace. There is already literature on workplace democracy; this alternative representation of transformational leadership theory could be a useful addition to this.

This chapter aims to have convinced you that this critical historical analysis of transformational leadership theory matters. First, I have argued that transformational leadership remains influential because of its continued appearances in management textbooks, in discussions of leadership in business and popular press, in executive education programmes at universities, and the continued

academic interest in similar theories like authentic, ethical, and responsible leadership. It highlights that we need to be critical of VUCA claims to justify the need for 'new and improved' theories. Second, following the deconstruction of the conventional representation of transformational leadership in chapters three and four, I proposed an alternative representation based on Burns' original conceptualisation of the theory. This representation champions democracy, competition, and conflict as the theory's creator had once intended. Educating management students about this alternative representation and other theories that have been subject to critical historical analysis may help them question their leaders as future employees of organisations and implement democratic mechanisms as future managers of organisations. Third, most organisations wield a lot of power over their employees, and workplace democracy could balance this out. Returning to Bass' early interest in industrial democracy and participative management, and connecting this alternative representation of transformational leadership to the existing literature on workplace democracy could be an interesting area for future research.

Chapter Six – Conclusions

The democratic component of transforming leadership theory was crucial to Burns. However, it was unimportant to those who introduced it to management studies and was ‘lost in translation’. Bass, the person primarily responsible for this translation, even rejected it in favour of directive leadership. Critics of the theory have also overlooked the democratic component of the theory, and often ironically recommend more participative approaches to decision-making. The social, economic, and political contextual factors in 1980s America contributed to the theory’s swift uptake and its subsequent translation. Looking deeper into the origins of transformational leadership theory matters because the theory remains influential. If it is taught differently to management students, it could impact how we undertake leadership in organisation. A more democratic approach to organising could positively impact future organisations.

Contributions

To offer some conclusions for this research I outline my contributions to new histories of management, intellectual history, and the ‘writing differently’ debate. Merging new histories of management and intellectual history offers new considerations and approaches to research for both bodies of knowledge. In addition, intellectual history may also benefit from the increasing interest in using textbooks as a source of data. The way I chose to ‘write differently’ is also an important consideration for intellectual historians who wish to represent their contribution as an alternative representation rather than the ‘correct version of history’. While I aim to conclude my research in this chapter, there are still some loose ends and unanswered questions emerging from this discussion. I have outlined these as limitations and possibilities for future research.

Extending Transformational Leadership Theory

This research contributes to our understanding of transformational leadership. Recovering the democratic component of the theory adds to the discussion of transformational leadership by extending our understanding of the theory. There may be many other students and researchers like myself who learned about transformational leadership in the context of management studies, never realising that the theory originated in political science and that the originator of the theory was talking

about political leaders and democratic institutions. By recovering the democratic component of the theory, it creates new directions for the discussion of transformational leadership.

The Importance of Context

Beyond the theory itself, there is an additional consideration to take away from this study of transformational leadership. We need to pay attention to the context in which theorists are writing. For Burns, management scholars did not take the context in which he was writing into consideration when translating his theory for their management studies audience, in some instances this context was deliberately ignored. Burns did not need to explain how followers would enact their ‘conscious choice’ because he was theorising in a political context where these democratic mechanisms already exist. It seems that paying attention to the context of an idea is particularly important, especially when you are adopting a theory from another discipline.

New Histories of Management and Intellectual History

New histories of management and intellectual history have developed largely in isolation from each other, but they have many similarities. At their core, both new histories of management and intellectual history are on the past-history distinction side of the debate. They argue against the positivist perception of historical writing. These two bodies of knowledge support the argument that historical writing is a narrative construction and that researchers can generate alternative histories.

One of the difficulties that exist within new histories of management is that there is no set way to engage in the research. This can be a good thing, allowing the researcher to select an approach that is most suitable to their study. Some common methods to approach new histories of management can be employed, such as Foucauldian analysis and Nietzsche’s ‘uses and abuses of the past’ (Cummings et al., 2016; Pol et al., 2022). While these are perfectly appropriate methodological approaches, they are highly complex and theoretical, and the original sources are difficult to comprehend. I think the simplicity of intellectual history is its greatest selling point, particularly for a Master’s student or early career researchers such as myself. Here I offer a contribution to the new histories of management literature by connecting it to intellectual history. These bodies of knowledge have developed largely in

isolation so by developing a new history of management and using intellectual history as my approach to critical historical research I am bringing them together.

While intellectual history offers value to new histories of management, there is also value offered vice versa. New histories of management highlight the importance of generating alternative representations to allow us to think differently about management, to do management differently. The authors of *A New History of Management* encourage researchers to be critical of the construction of management history in order to think more creatively about what management could be (Cummings et al., 2017). Intellectual history allows the historian “to offer a critical weighting of the focal idea’s tenability” (Spector, 2014, p. 362). While intellectual history encourages us to think critically about the conventional representations of management history, it does not really tell you “why” this has value. Critical management studies highlight the importance of reconstructing the idea or making something new. In Spector’s (2014) investigation into the origins of transformational leadership and their connection to Lee Iacocca, he concludes that this businessman was not the ‘transformational leader’ who early proponents of the theory claimed he was. His research ends with deconstruction and critique, but he does not build something new. This may be related to the restrictions of intellectual history. Gordon (2012) argues that intellectual historians should seek to understand ideas rather than evaluate or promote them. This may act as a counter argument for my emphasis on building something new. However, this is an important aspect of the ‘so-what’ component of research. It is not enough to merely critique a theory or idea. Positive social change could emerge from extending a critique one step further to highlight how we can think creatively about leadership, or management more generally. Connecting new histories of management to intellectual history offers a contribution to the latter by encouraging intellectual historians to take their examination a step further and explore the implications of their critique.

Intellectual History and Textbook Data

Analysing management textbooks was a smaller component of my research but it presented some interesting insights. First, by examining recent editions of management textbooks, I was able to conclude that transformational leadership theory remains influential, evidenced by its consistent inclusion in these texts. Second, the eighteen editions of *Organizational Behavior* have informed the analysis of how the conventional representation of transformational leadership theory has travelled

over time, as well as providing additional insights throughout my research. This use of textbooks as data is well-suited to intellectual history. Each edition is effectively a time capsule of management thinking that can be compared over an extended period. Using textbooks as data sources already has growing interest in new histories of management research (Cummings et al., 2016; Pol et al., 2022). Intellectual historians should also take advantage of these texts because, in addition to acting as a time capsule, they also represent a dominant way of thinking in a particular field. Inclusions, and more importantly, exclusions of certain ideas tell us how the authors and their respective fields want to socialise their students. Hopefully, others will continue to utilise management textbooks as data in future research.

Writing the Thesis Differently and Intellectual History

Weatherall (2019) already extended the growing discussion of writing differently in academia (e.g., Gilmore et al., 2019; Grey & Sinclair, 2006; Kara, 2013) to thesis writing. The way Weatherall (2019) wrote her thesis differently was by abandoning the traditional thesis structure and including emotion in her writing. I extended the writing the thesis differently argument by using a personal voice and simplifying my language choices. I encourage any student to consider how they should write their thesis and call to supervisors to be supportive in thinking differently about academic writing. In addition to thesis writing, I think this is also an important consideration for intellectual history researchers. As I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, using a personal voice and simplifying your language choices helps to demonstrate that you do not believe your new history is the actual truth or scientific fact (Grey & Sinclair, 2006). Instead this writing style demonstrates that you have developed an alternative narrative that may be connected to the your personal values and experience (Weatherall, 2019). Intellectual history does not dictate “how” you should write these alternative narratives. I think this is an important contribution to this literature.

Limitations and Future Research

My thesis only looks at a narrow aspect of transformational leadership theory, the lost democratic component. Some may be critical of my favouring Burns’ conceptualisation of the theory when he was silent on other aspects like gender and race, which is an important part of any discussion of leadership. Other narratives are still possible. Future research may seek to explore the origins of Burns’

transformational leadership, focusing on these aspects. In addition, further research into how this alternative representation of transformational leadership fits in with existing literature on workplace democracy would add value to the discussion.

To bring my research to a close I look to the beginning of my thesis. I reflected on my experience as a first-year management student and expressed a desire to connect my research to management education. I am motivated to share this alternative representation of transformational leadership theory with students and teachers of management studies in the hope that may broaden their understanding of leader-follower relationships in organisations. Persuading people who educate management students to adopt this alternative representation is easier said than done. It is challenging to convince textbook authors to rework the content. The top-down hierarchical nature of organisations is deeply ingrained, and democratic mechanisms are not commonplace. This being said, the nature of work evolves and there is an opportunity to use transformational leadership theory as a lens to teach management students about democracy and participation in organisations. This alternative representation could allow management students as future employees and managers, to create structural change and make organisations more democratic.

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