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Leading for Innovation

Prof.dr. Daan Stam



Leading for Innovation

Library of Congress Classification (LCC)

http://lcweb.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco/lcco_h.pdf

Mission: HF 5001-6182
Programme: T 58.5-58.64
Paper: HD45-45.2
HD58.7-58.95

Keywords GOO

Mission: Bedrijfskunde /
Bedrijfseconomie
Programme: Informatiemanagement
Paper: Innovatie, Leiderschap

FREE Keywords

Paper:, Leadership, Innovation, Creativity,
Vision communication, Identity

Journal of Economic Literature (JEL)

http://www.aeaweb.org/journal/jel_class_system.html

Mission: M
Programme : L 15, O 32
Paper: O32, L29

Classification GOO

Mission: 85.00
Programme: 85.20
Paper: 85.08, 83.62, 85.15

Erasmus Research Institute of Management - ERIM

The joint research institute of the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) and the Erasmus School of Economics (ESE) at the Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
Internet: www.irim.eur.nl

ERIM Electronic Series Portal

<http://hdl.handle.net/1765/1>

Inaugural Addresses Research in Management Series

Reference number EIA 2019-077-LIS
ISBN 978-90-5892-556-5
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Layout

www.panart.nl

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Leading for Innovation

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Address delivered at the occasion of accepting the appointment as Professor of Leadership for Innovation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam on Friday 21 June 2019.

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Leading for Innovation

Abstract

There is a wide agreement amongst scholars, practitioners and the general population that innovation matters. But how should innovation be managed? This is still not completely clear. In this inaugural lecture, I focus on what I believe to be a critical factor in managing innovation: Leadership. I would like to present three ideas. First, I posit that leadership and innovation are inextricably bound; they are two sides of the same coin. Second, I propose that leadership for innovation has two faces: the corporate catalyst and the innovation incubator. Finally, I strongly promote the idea that research on leadership for innovation can be significantly strengthened by taking inspiration from innovation management literature (and practice) and by applying diverse and rigorous methods and designs.

Leading for Innovation

Samenvatting

Het idee dat innovatie belangrijk is wordt breed gedragen in de wetenschap en in de praktijk. Maar hoe kun je innovatie managen? In deze inaugurele rede richt ik me op wat volgens mij een cruciale factor is voor het managen van innovatie: leiderschap. Ik maak drie kernpunten. Ten eerste stel ik dat leiderschap en innovatie onlosmakelijk verbonden zijn: het zijn twee zijdes van dezelfde medaille. Ten tweede beargumenteer ik dat innovatiegericht leiderschap twee gezichten heeft: de "corporate catalyst" en de "innovation incubator". Ten slotte bied ik twee handvatten voor het verbeteren van onderzoek naar innovatiegericht leiderschap: onderzoekers moeten zich meer laten inspireren door de innovatiemanagement literatuur (en praktijk) en onderzoekers moeten gebruik maken van een breder scala aan rigoureuze onderzoeksontwerpen.

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1. Introduction

**Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus,
Geacht College van Decanen,
Distinguished colleagues,
Dear family, friends, and students,**

When people think of innovation – as I have often witnessed in my classrooms – they quickly think of Steve Jobs, Elon Musk or Henry Ford. Interestingly, when I show the faces of these people and ask what people think, the most mentioned word is **leadership**. Apparently, many great innovators are also seen as great leaders. This is the topic of today's address. Innovation leaders, those who are the faces of innovation – a concept that has become a narrative, a demand, a marketing tool, and the *primus inter pares* of organizational performance in recent decades.

Those who know my academic background are probably not surprised by the title of my inaugural address: Leading for Innovation. After obtaining a PhD in Organizational Behavior on the topic of Leadership, I transitioned to an Innovation Management group in which I have happily worked for the last decade, teaching and investigating innovation. In the first years, I was often asked why a leadership scholar moved into an innovation group and I struggled to find a good answer. My address today will finally provide an answer to that question: Why would one want to study leadership and innovation management in combination? I will do so by claiming that leadership and innovation management are not as different as one might think. In fact, they share essential features to such extent that one could think of them as very similar. Indeed the title of my dissertation on leadership – managing dreams and ambitions – could just as likely have been the title of an essay on innovation management.

For those of you who cannot wait to find out what I am going to present to you next, I would like to introduce my three main points before delving into each of them in greater detail:

1. leadership and innovation are inextricably bound; they are two sides of the same coin,
2. leadership for innovation has two faces: The corporate catalyst and the innovation incubator,
3. research on leadership for innovation can be significantly strengthened by looking at innovation management literature (and practice) and by applying diverse and rigorous methods and designs.

In the remainder of this address, I will introduce the topics of innovation and leadership and then provide a short overview of the field of leadership for innovation. I end with my recommendations for that field.

2. Innovation

Innovation matters. Innovations can make our lives easier (think of grocery delivery services or of the Quooker – my personal favorite) or even bearable (think of essential medicines). They can lift people up (literally – in airplanes, rockets or elevators), create a new form of civilization (think of what the dishwasher did for human lives or what the internet is doing in the current day and age), but innovations can also destroy (think of guns of mass destruction). For good or for bad, innovation matters and that makes managing innovation processes important. Innovation refers to generating and implementing ideas (West, 2002) or “The act of introducing a new device, method, or material for application to commercial or practical objectives” (Schilling, 2010). Novelty, implementation, and practicality are essential concepts for innovation. Innovation is about novel ideas although their novelty level (whether one conceives of such as continuous or categorical) may, in fact, vary for different audiences. Yet beyond conceptualization, innovation also refers to the actual production, implementation or introduction of the concept in order to achieve a certain aim. As such, innovation originates from the imagination, but is action-oriented and goal-directed.

Innovation is at the heart of doing business, and the question of how it should be managed has been addressed from multiple perspectives and with clear success. Answers to central questions of how to manage ideas in an organization, how to balance exploration and exploitation, how to be able to absorb information and new technology, as well as how to successfully implement projects, how to manage uncertainty both at the project level through stage-gates and at the organizational level through portfolio management are essential for innovators. Innovation management research has accumulated an impressive array of systems and tools to help people innovate.

Innovation management – the management of generating ideas and transforming them into (preferably successful) products, processes, and services – has always been an important topic in business. Yet in the last decades, changes in the business environments have significantly altered innovation practice and, consequently, the study of innovation management. Some of the most important changes that have affected innovation management in the past few years are related to the increased complexity of the business environment (i.e., more demanding customers, more complex supply chains, more competition) and the increased dynamics of the business environment (i.e., shorter lifespan of products and services and rapidly changing competition). Consequently, there is an increased and continuous need for innovation, be it radical or incremental (Shalley, 1995; West, 2002). Moreover, where traditionally the focus was on product innovation only, now service innovation, business model innovation, and process innovation are all critical aspects of a company’s innovation portfolio. Thus companies need to innovate continuously and focus innovation on diverse aspects of their organization in order to thrive.

These developments have led to different types of organizations that emphasize flat structures, creative climates, project organizations, and ambidextrous capabilities. Indeed, whereas decades ago innovation was the realm of an R&D unit and conducted by stable R&D teams, nowadays innovation involves a host of other internal stakeholders such as experts from the areas of marketing, operations, logistics, information systems and technologies, communication, and finance. Moreover, lean innovation, crowdsourcing and open innovation all show that opportunities for innovation are everywhere for the taking – both inside and outside of the company – and organizations need to salvage these opportunities in order to survive and thrive. This suggests that organizational members who are not formally involved in innovation may be a source of innovation, and that even relations outside of the company may help organizations to innovate. Our classrooms, especially in executive education, mirror this: we find all kinds of people in the classroom who are interested in managing innovation because their current role – ranging from R&D to marketing to HR to finance – requires a focus on innovation.

More diverse organizational members are becoming involved in innovation projects, and companies are fully aware that the next big innovation can sprout from anywhere and from anyone. These developments have had their impact on the field of innovation management. The field has shifted from a narrow focus on the operational and strategic aspects of innovation to a focus on the social side of innovation by, for instance, investigating social networks (Deichmann & van den Ende, 2013), team dynamics (Stam et al., 2013) and (social) motivations in crowdsourcing (Acar & van den Ende, 2016; Boons et al., 2015). In my opinion, this is a positive development. As a psychologist, I believe that it is difficult to underestimate the importance of the human factor, and especially human imagination, collaboration, and interaction for innovation management.

Leadership is one of these social aspects and arguably the *primus inter pares* given leadership's role in managing not only innovation teams but also organizations as a whole. Moreover, whereas formal systems can be used to manage and control various elements of the innovation process, the existential uncertainty related to organizational innovation processes in modern companies makes it very difficult to design fully effective systems. Leadership, as an alternative means to control and manage (and/or empower!), is informal, decentralized, and flexible enough to deal with such uncertainty. As one practitioner in my class put it "The more I experience innovation, the more I see that it is all about leadership". Is leadership really such a powerful management system? Is leadership as influential as formal systems? Rene De Koster, Bert Balk, and I (2011) conducted a study in the area of occupational safety and found that leadership – as an alternative to formal rules and systems – can contribute significantly to organizational output. We compared the effects of formal hazard reducing systems and those of safety-oriented leadership in reducing accidents in a warehousing context. We found that leadership explained as much variance in safety performance as all formal hazard reducing systems did combined. This only goes to show that leadership matters as much as formal systems.

3. Leadership

Although scholars define leadership in different ways, leadership definitions converge on elements of group, influence, and goals. Leadership is the differentiated influence of one (or more) people (i.e. leader(s)) on a group of others (followers) to accomplish collective goals (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Yukl, 2000). My addition to such definitions would be that there is a shared mental model amongst groups that the leader(s) is(are), in fact, the leader(s). Note that such a shared mental model need not come from the leader holding a formal leadership position, although this could clearly be one source of leader status. This element of shared cognition that the leader is in fact a leader is important because it distinguishes leadership from social influence in general – the influence of leaders on followers is qualitatively different from that of peers on peers. As an observation, I found that the notion of collective goals is often quite unclear in leadership research and in fact I would argue that leaders have a key role to play in creating common goals (which in a sense could be interpreted as influence towards a common goal).

The field of leadership is one of the oldest areas of science with contributions on authority and leadership from such renowned scholars as Plato, Aristotle, and Locke. Ever since the Second World War, interest in leadership has exploded, laying the groundwork of what is now the thriving field of leadership. The evolution of the field has moved through various phases, characterized by the way in which leadership is viewed (Yukl, 2002). The first phase, named the Great Man phase, emphasized the difference between great leaders and mere mortals in terms of traits and characteristics. The second phase emphasized the behaviors of particularly productive leaders which was followed by a phase that focused on situation-behavior interactions. In the mid-1980s, a new phase named new leadership (Bryman, 1992) emerged, which focused on leadership styles (groups of behaviors). Transformational leadership, a style that aims to transform followers, has been the most popular style over the last three decades (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However, it has been strongly criticized in recent years (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014), and consequently some leadership scholars – myself included – use more focused leadership constructs in their research and are more mindful of the environment in which leadership takes place.

One element that has continuously been highlighted as the capstone of leadership is the conception and communication of an appealing vision of the future. Vision communication is defined as communicating images of the future of a collective with the aim of persuading others to accept those images (Stam et al., 2014). Early (practitioner-oriented) research described visioning as an essential difference between leadership and management. I don't really agree with this categorization, although I do agree with the notion that vision communication is essential for effective leadership. Later visioning became core to almost every leadership style developed including but not limited to transformational and charismatic leaders and servant leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2010). An important aspect of visioning is its framing. In prior research, my colleagues and I have focused on promotion and prevention framing of visions.

Promotion framing refers to framing a vision in terms of eagerness, development, and the joy of reaching the outcome using promotion words such as ideal, change, and progress etc. Prevention framing refers to framing a vision in terms of vigilance and threat, and the pain of not reaching the outcome using prevention words such as safety, responsibility, and duty etc. In a study with college students, we found that the use of such framing depends on the current state of mind of the students: Some students prefer promotion, others prevention, although it seemed possible to nudge such preferences to some extent (Stam et al., 2010b). In another study, we looked specifically at the use of promotion and prevention framing in times of (economic) crisis (Stam et al., 2018). In a series of studies, including a study on US presidents and their historic greatness, we found that both promotion and prevention framing can be effective in leveraging follower motivation, but in times of crisis, promotion framing outperformed prevention framing. Clearly, (framing) visions is important for leaders.

In my opinion, it is precisely the visioning part of leadership that ties leadership so naturally and so strongly to innovation. Visions are images of the future, and leaders communicate them to make them reality. Compare this to the innovation process, which comprises conceptualizing an idea and implementing it, and the similarities are striking. Visioning is an act of imagination just as innovation starts with imagining the (im)possible. Both vision communication and innovation emphasize actions to make such ideas reality (Stam et al., 2014) and focus on a purpose (commercial or otherwise). In essence, leadership and innovation are two sides of the same coin. Innovation cannot be achieved without visionary leaders, and visionary leaders do not exist without innovation of some sort. It's not surprising that people think of Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and Henry Ford when I ask what they associate with the word innovation, and that they think of the word leader(ship) when I ask them to think about the portraits of these three innovators. I am not alone in believing that leadership and innovation should be studied in combination. The notion has spurred the thriving (sub)field of leadership for innovation.

4. Leadership for innovation

The field of leadership for innovation, sometimes referred to as creative leadership, or leadership of creatives can be defined as “leading others towards the attainment of a creative outcome” (Mainemelis et al., 2015). Leading for innovation distinguishes itself from other types of leadership because it emphasizes change rather than preservation (Mumford et al., 2002) and focuses on a set of behaviors that is different from those of more traditional leadership styles, including the all-important aspect of creativity (Hunter et al., 2011). Moreover, leadership for innovation, more than any other type of leadership, is about managing uncertainty (Furr & Dyer, 2014). It encompasses a variety of work environments and tasks. Traditionally it was important in work settings in which managers led groups of creative experts in R&D environments and the creative industries. Nowadays, however, with the expansion of innovation into other aspects of the organization, the need for leadership for innovation can be found in many places: Leading production and manufacturing teams to use lean production methods that emphasize continuous process innovation, leading marketing teams that scan environments for new business opportunities, leading business units or even entire organizations that require continuous improvement and bold innovation to thrive etc. etc. Note that these environments may also require very different leadership: Leading an innovation project is very different from leading a stable permanent team that is sometimes involved in innovation. However, for companies to thrive, understanding leadership for innovation in all these environments is important. In a sense leadership for innovation is the leadership paradigm of the future. For instance, leadership for innovation has developed from being a “nice to have” to being a “must-have”: An IBM global study amongst 1500 CEOs showed that they valued creativity as the most important aspect of leadership. Yet even in this day and age, creativity and innovation restrict rather than facilitate one’s management career (Kark, 2011). Clearly there is a world to win in the area of leadership for innovation.

Two faces of leadership for innovation.

In order to further detail and summarize the area of leadership for innovation, I follow the categorization of Mainemelis et al. (2015) in their seminal review of research on leadership for innovation that distinguishes two related, yet distinct dimensions (called directing and fostering), underlying research in the field of leadership for innovation. I reinterpret these dimensions as prototypical leadership styles and call them corporate catalysts and innovation incubators – although I do not consider these styles validated and theoretically coherent constructs. Rather I see them as buckets of loosely coupled leader behaviors that together provide a good overview of what is known in the field of leadership for innovation. In the following, I briefly describe these two strands of research and subsequently reflect on the field.

Corporate Catalysts. Following Anthony (2012), I have renamed the first strand of research called “directing” by Mainemelis et al. (2015) to corporate catalyst, which is based on the idea of the leader as a source of innovation: the innovator or entrepreneur who needs others to accomplish his/her ideas for innovation. One could think of genius

technicians or visionary entrepreneurs (or intrapreneurs) such as Steve Jobs or – closer to home – ASML's Martin van der Brink, recipient of the Robert Noyce prize named after the famous semiconductor innovator who was so important in the development of Silicon Valley. In another realm, one could think of Johan Crujff, whose bold ideas were as palpable as his charisma. The essence of a corporate catalyst is persuading and motivating others to provide high quality supportive contributions for a common cause. In order to succeed in directing others top-down, leaders need **competencies** such as intelligence and creativity as well as intrinsic motivation (Gilson & Madjar, 2011) while displaying **behavior** such as vision communication (Stam et al., 2014). Moreover, transactional leadership may be more effective than transformational leadership in directing followers (Vaccaro et al., 2012).

The role of vision communication is especially critical for directing. Corporate catalysts direct the efforts of their followers by creating great visions of brilliant futures in which their innovations shape the world. However, although the name corporate catalyst seems to suggest radical innovation or revolution, corporate catalysts should not fall into the trap of focusing solely on change and innovation in their visioning. As a case in point, Merlijn Venus, Daan Van Knippenberg and I (2018) studied the role of vision communication in generating acceptance of organizational innovations in a series of studies, both experimental and in the field. We looked at acceptance of change from a social identity perspective and worked from the premise that people resist change because they feel it may threaten their organization's identity. This is in contrast with prior research that assumed that people are fundamentally against change that does not directly benefit them. We found that especially visions that not only emphasize the conceptualized changes, but also highlight the elements that remain stable, especially the core elements of identity, were conducive in getting followers to accept organizational innovation. Interestingly these effects were especially pronounced when employees were faced with high job uncertainty. Given the uncertainty that surrounds innovation, it would seem important for innovation leaders to communicate a vision of continuity.

Innovation Incubators. I have renamed the second strand of research, called "fostering employee innovation" or "facilitating" by Mainemelis et al. (2015) to innovation incubator. The main idea behind this strand of research is that employees are the main source of creativity and innovation, and it is the leader's role to foster this creativity and innovation to benefit the organization. One could think of management in the creative industry or managing R&D teams. Walt Disney is a great example of an innovation incubator given his acclaimed focus on gathering ideas for his movies from all his personnel (from art directors to cleaning personnel) by providing rewards for each joke they added to a movie. In the Netherlands one could think of Joop van den Ende, who is especially good at stimulating others' creative contributions or Robert Dijkgraaf who has dedicated a significant portion of his career to creating the optimal environment to foster employee creativity at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton University. Fostering implies facilitating idea generation and idea development (evaluation and integration), but also actually implementing ideas into innovation projects and eventual launching products or services (or new business models). Research in this strand has looked at leader characteristics and found, for instance, that **competencies** such as technical expertise, organizational expertise, and creative thinking skills (Mumford et al.,

2002), creative process management skills (Reiter-Palmon & Ilies, 2004) emotional intelligence (Zhou & George, 2003), and organizational identification (Deichmann & Stam, 2015) are important for leaders to successfully foster innovation. Others have described **behaviors** that foster innovation such as providing support (Amabile et al., 2004), empowering employees (Nederveen-Pieterse et al., 2010), and providing feedback (Zhou, 2008). Finally, several **leadership styles** have been associated with improved creativity and innovation such as leader-member-exchange (Tierney, 2015) and transformational leadership (Nederveen-Pieterse et al., 2010), the latter including visioning as a central part. Innovation incubators courageously support, communicate visions of inclusion and empower people to stimulate them to fulfill their innovative potential.

One element that I would like to emphasize here is the importance of leader attitudes and cognitions. In a study at a big German public organization, Dirk Deichmann and I (2015) investigated the role of leadership in supporting employees to contribute ideas for innovation. Specifically, we examined why some line managers were better than others at stimulating their employees to submit ideas for organizational improvement, mainly process innovations, to the official organizational idea management system. Although the roles of some factors derived from prior studies could be re-established (such as transformational and transactional leadership), the most critical variables were leader and follower commitment to the ideation system and the organizational identification of the leader. Apparently, the attitudes of leaders about innovation and the organization are key predictors of their ability to foster innovation.

Corporate catalysts and innovation incubators. Thus, there are two sides of leadership for innovation: directing others to implement one's own innovation and facilitating the innovation of others; directing and fostering, corporate catalysts and innovation incubators. Both roads lead to innovation, but the former does so by rallying followers behind one's ideas, whereas the latter does so by focusing efforts on followers and their contributions. Importantly, the research that suggests these two diverse dimensions has not empirically established them, but rather uses them to interpret prior research. Although this prior research can be interpreted neatly using these dimensions, and this provides strong support for their use, this does not mean they are well-established scientifically. Interestingly, I have found that there seems to be other support for the notion of directing and facilitating leadership. For instance, in practitioner-oriented journals that use experience as a source and face validity as a publication criterion, authors have also discussed the role of leaders in innovation. Anthony (2012), for instance, discusses the key role of leaders for innovation in (large) companies. He calls these successful innovation leaders "corporate catalysts" and describes them as "those mission-driven leaders who corral corporate resources that are outside their traditional span of control to address sprawling challenges" (p. 48). Corporate catalysts are visionary individuals that defy rules, upset the status quo, and create enthusiasm among people, all people not just their people, for their dreams. A clear case of directing. At the same journal, Govindarajan and Trimble (2010) plead for a different approach. They emphasize that innovation leaders should stimulate cooperation, creating common ground and commitments, and developing synergies: "the innovation leader should take a cooperative and positive approach". This is much more in line with facilitation.

A more scholarly work that investigated a similar duality is an article by Dirk van Dierendonck, me, and several of our students (2014). This article compares two significant leadership styles, transformational leadership and servant leadership, that are prominent in the field of leadership and both have significant overlap (they both focus on changing followers' attitudes and on using visions) but also key differences. The most important difference ties neatly into the directing/facilitating categorization: Whereas transformational leadership emphasizes leader charisma and creating strong ties between followers, leaders, and organizations through inspiration, servant leadership emphasizes followers' needs and creating ties between followers, leaders, and organizations through need satisfaction of followers. Transformational leaders are charismatic role models that exemplify all that is good for followers, whereas servant leaders embody courageous supporters that are there to help and guide followers. In a series of studies, we show that although the two styles overlap to some extent, they are clearly different but lead to similar outcomes (engagement, commitment) through different pathways. Transformational leadership led to perceptions of leadership effectiveness and subsequently to engagement/commitment. Servant leadership, however, led to feelings of satisfied needs and subsequently to engagement/commitment.

Apparently the notion of two faces of innovation – the corporate catalyst and the innovation incubator – has some level of supporting evidence from various independent sources. I want to mention two important additional points regarding the different faces of innovation though. First, these different faces of innovation are not opposites that cannot go together (actually, I would put forward that in management there are hardly any opposites despite such claims by some paradox scholars). For instance, Maimelides and colleagues (2015) describe a form of leading innovation that balances leaders' and followers' contributions. They call this **integrating heterogeneous innovative inputs**. This third stream of research is a hybrid situation of the latter two and happens when both a leader's creative input and follower's creative input is vital for a final product, discernible in a final product, and both leaders and followers have the power to assert their wills in the final product. This situation requires leaders to stimulate creativity and manage the innovation process, to persuade employees and motivate them, but most importantly to develop and integrate diverse ideas. To accomplish this, leaders need competencies in negotiation and conflict skills (Mainemelis & Epitropaki, 2013), display behavior which is focused on collaboration (Kramer & Crespy, 2011), and have a charismatic leadership style (Mainemelis, 2010).

Second, in my mind these two (three) strands of research do not represent independent types of leadership (cf. Mainemelis et al., 2015), but rather constitute overlapping activities whose relative need is determined by environmental aspects such as innovation type, organization type, and phase of innovation. For instance, in the idea generation and development phase in which employees and leaders generate, evaluate, integrate, and develop ideas and find initial support for them in the organization, facilitating and integrating are key. Yet, in the implementation phase in which teams are formed that need to understand the complex nature of the task, to share the purpose of the team, and to be leveraged as well as controlled and monitored, directing may become increasingly important. Interestingly, there may even be cultural differences regarding directing and fostering. Menon and colleagues (2010) found that in Western,

more individualistic cultures when people draw leaders and followers they draw trailblazers: the leaders are in front of the group facing forward, blazing the trail, focused on the future and the goals they envisioned – corporate catalysts. Yet in Eastern, more collectivistic cultures, people draw leaders trailing behind the group, focused on their followers – innovation incubators.

In sum, I see two broad types in research in leadership for innovation that relate to corporate catalysts and innovation incubators. Although this research seems rather separated, I believe these constructs are tightly interwoven and that both can be crucial for innovation – one size does not fit all. Where should this research go next?

5. A vision for leadership for innovation

The field of leadership for innovation has a rich tradition and encompasses a range of studies that use a variety of methods to investigate a variety of situations (see Mainemelis et al., 2015 for an overview). Yet, I also see opportunities for improvements. Specifically given my background as an experimental psychologist with a methods focus and my experiences in the innovation management area, I believe both these aspects can provide a strong added value for the field of leadership for innovation. Thus I detail two broad areas here: Using insights from the innovation management literature and applying theoretical and methodological variety and rigour.

Using insights from the innovation management literature

The field of leadership for innovation emphasizes the influence of leadership in the innovation process, but it often seems that scholars in this field have more expertise in leadership (and sometimes creativity) than in innovation management. Indeed, much of the research seems to view innovation as an outcome construct closely related to creativity, but different from it because it incorporates the implementation of ideas. Although not necessarily wrong, this perspective on innovation is quite narrow and does not do justice to a research field that includes many intricate processes related to politics, operations, portfolio management, and strategy etc. As an individual who has spent significant time in an environment of innovation management, I believe there is a world to win by taking more knowledge from the core domains of innovation management and using it when theorizing about or designing for leadership for innovation. Let me mention some elements:

Focusing on implementation. Many of the studies on leadership for innovation focus on creativity. Even when scholars discuss elements such as innovative behaviors, they often emphasize idea generation over anything else. This is in stark contrast to the field of innovation management that emphasizes idea implementation. I believe that leadership for innovation would greatly benefit from a stronger focus on innovation implementation. With my colleagues, I have argued for implementation research in the last years. Most prominently, in the area of vision communication there is a lack of research focus on making the vision reality in an organizational context (Stam et al., 2014). Specifically, whereas most research seems to emphasize attributions of leadership or general performance as outcomes of vision communication of leaders, we have consistently appealed for a focus on implementing visions as an outcome of vision research. We have called this vision pursuit (Stam et al., 2014; Van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Given the prominence of visioning for leadership for innovation, developing studies on vision pursuit would go a long way in getting valuable insights in innovation implementation.

Temporal dynamics. Most innovation processes, formally or informally, move through various stages that are characterized by idea general, idea development, idea refinement, prototyping, manufacturing, and launch etc. Although prior studies have mentioned mindfulness of temporal aspects as important for leadership for innovation,

the dynamics of stages goes much further: Various stages may require very different forms of leadership (see for instance, West, 2002). This may require leaders to transform their own leadership to fit situations requiring high levels of requisite complexity (see Hannah et al., 2011) or ambidextrous leadership (Alexander & Van Knippenberg, 2014). Sometimes it may even require a switch of leaders (see Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007). I believe this temporal dynamic, the switch from creativity to implementation and everything in between, to be a critical issue in leadership for innovation.

Idea assessment. Most, if not all, work on leadership for innovation emphasizes innovation behaviors in terms of generating ideas, creating support for ideas, and implementing ideas, etc. Yet in innovation management a crucial part of the work is to select ideas for innovation. Such issues are elementary to stage gate models (Cooper et al., 2002) or portfolio management. Although it is clear that decision-making is a crucial element of innovation leadership, research on leadership for innovation has not paid much attention to selecting and assessing innovation. I believe, given the importance and complexity of idea evaluation (see Zhou et al., 2019), this is a big mistake – especially as currently evaluation is either done very systematically and numerically (causing more incremental than radical innovation – Cooper et al., 2002) or is done completely unsystematically, causing randomness.

There are clearly more issues to tackle (for an overview see Hughes et al., 2018), but I believe the above ones are critical in moving the field forward, and as a chair of leadership for innovation I will aim to contribute to this research. For instance, I am currently working on the first empirical investigations of vision pursuit with colleagues (Stam, Van Knippenberg, & van Balen, under review). I am also conducting research that aims to reconcile abstract visioning with actual task goals and implementation (Gochmann, Stam & Shemla, in preparation for submission) and studies that aim to uncover the dynamics of idea evaluations (Berreta, Frederiksen, Deichmann, & Stam, in preparation for submission; Bavato, Boons, Hoever, & Stam, in preparation for submission).

Applying theoretical and methodological variety and rigour

The last decades of research in leadership has seen a surge of research on leadership styles – broad and fuzzy sets of leader behaviors that are thought to lead to certain outcomes. The idea of this research is to define a set of behaviors and consequently investigate the outcomes of this set of behaviors, the processes through which these outcomes are accomplished and the boundary conditions of these effects. This has led to a myriad of leadership styles (70+ and growing) that seem to overlap substantially. Recently the styles paradigm has received severe criticism (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Three aspects of this criticism are especially relevant for research on leadership for innovation and offer opportunities for improvement (see Hughes et al., 2018).

First, styles are broad sets of behaviors. Often it is unclear why certain behaviors form a coherent and theoretically valid set. Equally important, by aggregating a variety of leadership behaviors, the actual effects of each of these behaviors are masked and the actual aggregation effect is unclear. By investigating more clearly defined leadership behaviors individually and in interaction with other behaviors, we can achieve a better

understanding of the effects of each behavior and of the effects of their interactions. This has clear implications for leadership in innovation research. Most of this research is now oriented on the effects of transformational leadership on creativity and innovation, but it is much more interesting to investigate the effects of subfacets of this leadership style (and other leadership styles) for innovation and creativity. An example of this is the effects of visioning on project accomplishment (see Stam et al., 2014).

Second, leadership styles are defined by a set of stable leader behaviors. This set, however, is often created based on the assumption that these behaviors lead to a specific outcome. Research consequently investigates the relationship between the style and these specific outcomes. This is problematic for two reasons. First, it obscures other potentially important leadership behaviors that may impact the specific outcome and thus hinders a more comprehensive understanding of leadership. Second, it ignores the fact that leadership is a holistic phenomenon and that a leader is usually expected to reach a variety of goals and accomplish a variety of tasks (e.g., Tuncdogan, Acar & Stam, 2017). By only investigating some outcomes but not others, we may overlook the effects of some leader behaviors on outcomes that, although not theoretically linked, may still be of practical relevance. For instance, although the mainstream leadership literature suggests that promotion focus (a focus on gains) is more effective for leaders than a prevention focus (a focus on losses), Stam and De Koster (under review) show that this may not be true if leaders want to achieve operational excellence (which is highly relevant for many leaders). This critique is relevant for leadership for innovation as well. Most research on leadership for innovation has looked only at outcomes such as innovation, creativity, idea generation etc. while ignoring more mundane tasks such as in-role performance or operational excellence. Yet for many leaders, even those leaders primarily tasked with changing the status quo, elements of preservation are very relevant as well. Indeed, Venus, Stam, and Van Knippenberg (2018) show that leaders need to emphasize continuity rather than change in order to sell change. Research in leadership for innovation should therefore consider a much broader outcome perspective.

Third, measurement of leadership styles is usually of mediocre quality at best. Not only do many of these measurements overlap significantly up to the point of measuring the same thing (even though these styles are theorized to be quite different such as transformational and transactional leadership) but also many measurement tools measure independent and dependent variables in the same scale. For instance, as Van Knippenberg and myself (2014) demonstrate, measures of vision communication often include questions such as “my leader communicates an inspiring vision of the future”. This is highly problematic, as “inspiring” is what should be conceptualized as an outcome of visioning and by measuring both in the same question, it is obvious that one should find that visioning (measured as inspiring) would be seen as stimulating or charismatic (often the dependent variable in these studies). This becomes worse when one considers that most research investigates leadership attributions and perceptions of followers (such as inspiration) rather than follower behaviors as outcomes.

Moreover, the leadership and innovation field in general, and the leadership for innovation field specifically, mainly make use of survey or archival studies. Although these have their merits, the methods are rather limited. For instance, survey studies

cannot establish the one thing that every researcher craves for: causality. Moreover, they usually lack actual observational behavioral data, even if their face validity may be high. Experimental designs can add both. For instance, in two experiments we focused on how leader visions can influence acceptance of visions by manipulating vision communication to focus more or less on followers (Stam et al., 2010a). Our findings show that more follower focus makes it more likely that followers develop possible selves – images of themselves in the future – based on the vision. These experiments deliver strong **causal** evidence for this particular idea. Of course, experiments have their own issue, face validity and generalizability being two of them. Therefore, I would recommend combining experiments with other designs such as surveys or archival data.

Thus, problematic aspects of leadership research in general already provide several very important handholds to improve research in leadership for innovation. These include a focus on clearly defined leader behaviors (individually and in concert), the inclusion of multiple outcomes in research designs (including outcomes that are not related to innovation), the use of better measures, and the use of experimental designs especially in concert with survey or archival research). In my capacity as a chair of leadership for innovation, I aim to enhance the quality of leadership for innovation research in general, and specifically regarding the above mentioned issues. Although I have also focused on leadership styles on occasion (Deichmann & Stam, 2014; De Koster, Stam & Balk, 2011), I tend to theorize about focused constructs such as visioning (Stam et al, 2010b, 2014). Moreover, new work with Rene De Koster (under review) investigates the role of leaders for a multitude of outcomes such as sales, service, and operational outcomes, something I have argued for with Aybars Tuncdogan and Oguz Ali Acar (2017). Moreover, much of my work is experimental (e.g., Stam et al., 2010) and I am increasingly combining such experiments with survey research (e.g., Venus et al., 2018) and/or archival studies (e.g., Stam et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion

Helping leaders manage innovation is important and this importance will not diminish any time soon. Acknowledging that there is not one single way to lead innovation, but that two rather different approaches to leading innovation (the corporate catalyst and the innovation incubator approaches) is important. Individual leaders can take comfort in the fact that not being the next Steve Jobs does not mean that one cannot be a successful innovation leader. Companies need to understand that charismatic/transformational leadership is not the end all of innovation, and that people may develop into different leaders who can all contribute to innovation in their own way. But this is not enough.

The way forward is to dive into the theory and (especially) practice of innovation management and get inspired to work on problems that are really relevant and useful, and help leaders **manage** innovation; to bridge the worlds of innovation management and leadership. And then to take this inspiration and conduct rigorous research to investigate it. This is difficult for a field that is inward looking and guruistic. This requires innovation. And it requires people, not just one person but many people, to lead that innovation, to clean up the mess and rebuild it into something greater. It is time to practice what we preach and to lead innovation in our field.

To quote a famous predecessor "that suits me just fine".

7. Word of thanks

Although I am all too aware of the fact that a word of thanks is riskier than it may seem at first given that it is simply impossible to give due credit to all who deserve it, I would like to thank a number of people with the immediate caveat that I am grateful to many more for their support over the years.

I would like to thank Ed Sleebos, Daan Van Knippenberg, Barbara Wisse, and Bob Lord for your role in educating and socializing me in academia – a daunting task I understand now looking back and all the more daunting given that I did not understand that then. I hope you are satisfied with the results.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the department and especially those in my section of innovation management for a great working environment over the last 10 years, which has contributed greatly to my spirits. I am very grateful to Jan van de Ende, who taught me innovation management as well as executive education and for all the lessons as well as the freedom to pursue the career I wanted in the way I wanted. Jan is a great example of good leadership for innovation – a true innovation incubator!

Finally I want to thank my family and friends, and of course my kids, but particularly Hanneke for making the most important part of my life – that outside of work – such a beautiful experience. In the end of it, becoming a professor is much easier than staying happy while doing it, so this is for you more than for anyone.

Ik heb gezegd.

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