

Advancing Responsible Leadership

Practical Wisdom for a More Human World

By

S. Aqeel Tirmizi

Advancing Responsible Leadership: Practical Wisdom for a More Human World

by S. Aqeel Tirmizi

2026

Ethics International Press, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2026 by S. Aqeel Tirmizi

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (Hardback): 978-1-80441-334-0

ISBN (eBook): 978-1-80441-335-7

Table of Contents

Prologue	ix
Acknowledgement.....	xvii
Chapter 1: Calls for Bold and Practical Leadership Wisdom	1
Chapter 2: An Integrative Framework for Responsible Leadership Practice.....	23
Chapter 3: Deep Dive into the Responsible Leadership Framework.....	47
Chapter 4: Responsible Leadership in Action.....	100
Chapter 5: Responsible Leadership for a World in Crises	120
Chapter 6: Developing Responsible Leadership	151
Chapter 7: Responsible Leadership and Persisting Challenges.....	177
Chapter 8: Reimagining Responsible Leadership	197
Notes	207

Prologue

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and in human responsibility – Vaclav Havel

Vaclav Havel was a poet, dissident, playwright, and statesman who served as Czech Republic's President from 1993 to 2003. A great advocate of human rights and a highly respected democratic leader, he was considered a conscience of humanity. Havel offered his above words in a speech to the US Congress in 1990. It is fitting to start this book with these words from a man who keenly understood the importance of responsibility as a thinker, writer, and leader. In the same speech, Havel went on observe, "Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will ever change for the better in the sphere of our being as humans, and the catastrophe towards which this world is headed – the ecological, social demographic, or general breakdown of civilization – will be unavoidable."¹ This urgent call by Havel towards responsible action in the face of major crises, is at the heart of what I have attempted to capture in this book. The notion of practical wisdom serves as an important vehicle to draw upon responsible leadership knowledge. As later explained in the book, the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom is primarily wisdom in action. Thus, *Advancing Responsible Leadership: Practical Wisdom for a More Human World*, is fundamentally concerned with drawing leadership wisdom to serve humanity's pressing and existential challenges in a responsible manner.

With the above background, I address five questions in this prologue to set the stage for this book: What do we mean by respon-

sibility? Why should we care about responsible leadership? Why do we need a new book on leadership? What are some underlying assumptions about how leadership is approached in this book? And who will benefit from this book?

What do we mean by responsibility?

Authors Kim Cameron and Arran Caza observed that the notion of responsibility in leadership is often defined narrowly and discussed its three different meanings.² In the first instance, the notion of responsibility is implied in leadership thinking and conceptualizations and it is often synonymous with accountability. For example, responsibility for the leadership mandates, decisions, and subsequent outcomes. The second instance focuses on leadership's freedom and choice to act. This meaning of responsibility suggests that individuals in leadership positions enjoy discretion in tasks, projects, and organizations. For Cameron and Caza, these two meanings of responsibility are linked because when individuals have the freedom to act, it is expected that they will be held accountable for their actions. The third meaning of responsibility implies the proclivity and ability to act appropriately. This notion of appropriateness is key as it links responsible actions to what is "right, correct, and beneficial." An expansive lens towards responsibility, which combines its different meanings, is therefore essential. However, it is the last meaning outlined above that is of particular importance due its ethical anchoring. This meaning of responsibility expands its scope and is central to responsible leadership thinking and practice.

Why care about responsible leadership?

In many ways, the story of leadership is the story responsibility. Implicitly or explicitly, we expect leaders to be responsible – especially when economic, social, and environments stakes are high. Yet, stories of irresponsibility abound. A contemporary well-known example comes from the 2008 global financial crises that originated in the US. Behind this crisis were a series of leadership decisions across the regulatory regime, banking system, and architects of complex financial products, which lacked responsibility. Concerns and scandals related to responsible leadership extend to the social sector as well. The American Red Cross, a globally known humanitarian organization, came under heavy criticism for failing to account for how it spent \$500 million that it raised for homebuilding in the aftermath of 2010 devastating earthquake in Haiti. On the political front, the March 2026 attacks by Israel and the U.S. on Iran killed over 3000 innocent civilians, destroyed extensive civilian infrastructure, and disrupted the global oil and gas supply leading to financial burdens for millions of people around the world including the U.S. These attacks happened while internationally mediated negotiations were underway. From a responsibility perspective, critics used a series of questions about the timing, motivation, and legality of this war.

On the other hand, the story of leadership is also strewn with courageous, creative, and humanistic actions with many examples from around the world. Vaclav Haval, briefly introduced above, was recognized by Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award for contributions towards human rights. Wangari Mathai of Kenya, a professor and social movement leader, won a Nobel prize for her work protecting the environment. Malala Yousafzai, an advocate for girls' access to education, is the youngest Nobel

Prize winner. A common thread across their stories is the sense of responsibility they felt to improve human condition. I briefly share additional cross-sector examples of responsible leadership below.

Why another book on leadership?

An enormous amount of theory and practice-based knowledge about leadership now exists, and it enhances our understanding in important ways. At the same, this knowledge base is somewhat scattered, confusing, and complex. Turning this knowledge into wisdom then requires its careful integration and translation, to make it accessible to inform action. In other words, acknowledging that leadership wisdom exists also means that we acknowledge the need to integrate it and make it accessible. While some efforts have been underway to bring leadership insights and lessons together and translate them into practice, more concrete work is needed in that regard. This need, in turn, must translate into efforts that carefully research, integrate, and present vigorous leadership thinking drawing on classic and contemporary perspectives.

Much of the modern and contemporary writing on leadership, including responsible leadership, has been approached with the organizational and for-profit corporate sector orientations. This book approaches responsible leadership as an expansive phenomenon that has multi-sector and multi-level applications. The multi-sector lens means that responsible leadership is relevant not only to the private but also to the social and public sectors. This multi-sector lens is critical as many of our challenges cross sectoral boundaries and require responsible actions within and across these boundaries. Specifically, I argue for and demonstrate the relevance of responsible leadership in organizations in the private,

social, and public sectors. The multi-level application means that responsible leadership is not only relevant to organizations but is applicable at micro levels, such as community and grassroots settings as well as macro levels such social movements, political leadership at national level, and leadership of global institutions.

To demonstrate the multi-sector and multi-level role of responsible leadership, the book includes several brief examples from practice. In addition, I have included well-known case examples of responsible leadership in action at different levels and within different sectors. The cases include examination of Yvon Chouinard's leadership in Patagonia – a well know case study of bold responsible leadership from the private sector. Yvon made headlines in 2022 when he transferred the company ownership under a trust structure and declared that “Earth is now our only stakeholder.” Another case includes Jacinda Ardern's navigation of political terrain in New Zealand – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is well known for advocating and practicing compassion-driven leadership. The extraordinary humanitarian approach undertaken by Médecins Sans Frontières – a global social sector organization, is also examined in this book.

What are some underlying assumptions about leadership in this book?

The first assumption is that leadership is action in context and responsible leadership is responsible action in context. Leadership has some near universal ingredients but demands contextual sensitivity. For instance, providing a sense of direction and motivating others around that vision are near universal dimensions of leadership, but their manifestations need to be aligned with

the contextual needs and nuances (e.g., culture, organizational level and direction, employees' preparation and acumen, sectoral dynamics). On the other hand, certain contextual nuances and needs require leadership actions that look different. For instance, technical expertise is needed to be effective in leadership roles in a range of situations and professions. Examples may range from expertise in healthcare for nursing directors, aeronautical engineering for senior managers in the aerospace industry, monitoring and evaluation of impact for leaders in the nonprofit organizations. Finally, in some cases the work of leadership may involve challenging and changing the context which may be unjust, inefficient, or exclusionary. Airbnb and Uber rose to prominent success because they responded to market inefficiencies which made it difficult and expensive for property and vehicle owners to rent to clients at a scale. Their emergence led to massive changes in how consumers and providers connect, including the enactment of new regulations. The social sector also offers important examples of individuals who challenged and changed the status quo. Well-known and courageous efforts by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and subsequently many others, directly challenged the context which allowed discrimination and exclusion. As a result, while much work needs to happen on these fronts, important policy shifts have occurred.

The second assumption is that leadership as a role may reside in an individual or a group and a series of factors may contribute to its success. The critical leadership perspectives have appropriately questioned the field's imprudent focus on person-centered and heroic approaches, which overemphasize the role of individuals in leadership and its effectiveness. While some individuals indeed play a prominent role in visioning and agenda-setting, it is often

a shared and collective effort that makes the work of leadership effective and successful. Another assumption driving this work is that leadership is not equal to authority, formal position, or title. Leadership is an influence process and may be exercised without a title or a formally designated role. This assumption further recognizes that leadership may occur in informal settings, ranging from community groups to social movements.

The question whether leadership can be learned and developed has long puzzled the field. Putting it differently, the question whether leaders are born or made has been debated extensively. In general, research evidence suggests that while genes may play a role in determining who occupies or moves up the leadership ladder, majority of the variance is attributed to environmental factors including training and development, experience, as well as practice opportunities. Therefore, another assumption in this book is that leadership abilities can be developed among individuals and collectives. With that premise, I have included a chapter on leadership development which brings together wide-ranging ideas about how to develop responsible leadership.

Who will benefit from this book?

My purpose for this book was to integrate evidence-based leadership thinking and insights and make them accessible to audiences with interest in leadership knowledge, practice, and its development. While the approach and framing are research driven, I have included a series of practice related examples to demonstrate concrete linkages of these insights to real world needs and problems across different sectors and levels. Specifically, I have attempted to relate this work to what I consider are existential

and critical issues that we currently face and will navigate in the years to come. These issues include navigating the climate crisis, grappling with consequences of generative artificial intelligence, as well as dealing with societal polarization and the associated threats to democracies around the world. It is my hope that audiences with both research and applied interests will benefit from this work intellectually and practically.

Acknowledgement

The genesis of this book is rooted in several years of reflection, research, and practice – my own and of others’ who I have directly or indirectly engaged with in my teaching, research, and consulting endeavors. Specifically, this work has greatly benefitted from the efforts and contributions of many scholars who have contributed to the study of responsible leadership. I acknowledge their wisdom and hope that this work is a useful addition to their efforts. Secondly, my thinking has also been informed by the leadership achievements, practice challenges, and wisdom of many leaders that I have worked with in consulting and leadership development contexts around the world. I thank them for their courage and insights. Additionally, my teaching work has created rich opportunities to learn with and from my students, who generously offered important perspectives in pursuing their learning journeys. I have appreciated their curiosity and questions.

There are some individuals and opportunities that contributed to this book in direct and important ways. I recognize Donna Ladkin for our collaborative work on the presentation titled, “Integrating and Accessing Leadership Wisdom Using the Aristotelian Concept of Phronesis.” The presentation was delivered at the 2020 International Leadership Association Global Conference – Leading at the Edge. As is evident from the title of that presentation, this work directly contributed to my motivation to deeply examine responsible leadership from an integrative perspective as a vehicle for practical wisdom.

My own efforts to increase accessibility of responsible leadership thinking with an integrative lens started almost a decade ago.

This work resulted in a framework titled, “An Integrative Framework for Responsible Leadership Practice.” This framework was published in the volume: *Enacting Values-based Change: Organization Development in Action*, which was edited by David Jamieson, Allan Church, John Vogelsang. This volume offered an important launching platform for this work, and I am thankful to its editors – especially John Vogelsang who worked closely with me and has since passed away. While conducting initial research on this topic and how it may inform leadership education and development efforts, my conversations with Jon Wergin and Laurien Alexandre played an important role in shaping my thinking regarding this line of inquiry.

As I continued my own research, especially with an interest in expanding the responsible leadership thinking beyond its predominantly for-profit organizational boundaries, my empirical work focused on Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. This work culminated into a research study titled, “Globally Responsible Leadership: The Courageous Case of Angela Merkel.” I mention this endeavor because it was pivotal in two ways. Firstly, studying and learning about Angela Merkel was not only a source of inspiration but also an important confirmation about the relevance of responsible leadership in the political realms as well as at the global stage. Secondly, this research and publication work played an important role in further refining my thinking about the nature, role, and place of responsible leadership in navigating our most pressing challenges today.

For Mishaal

The warmth of the light you left behind will surround me forever.

For Haneen

The extraordinary generosity of your spirit touches so many lives near and far, including mine and I am eternally grateful for it.

For Ahmad and Hadi

The curiosity of your minds have taught me much and may the world benefit from its sagacity.

Chapter 1

Calls for Bold and Practical Leadership Wisdom

The world needs wise leaders, but wisdom is clearly in short supply these days if the state of the world is any evidence -
Sandra Waddock

Let us briefly consider why the calls for bold and practical leadership wisdom are timely and significant. While claims and warnings in relation to humanity's current challenges appear timeworn, cumulative evidence from around the globe clearly highlights their urgency and enormity. The United Nations Development Program produces an annual report called The Human Development Report. This report acts as a global barometer of challenges, threats, and developments that humanity faces worldwide. The title of its recent report "Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world" and its opening questions stated below, appropriately summarize the major challenges faced by the global community:¹

- Why does pursuing the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement feel like a half-hearted slog through quicksand?
- Why in many places does restoring peace, even pauses or ceasefires as hopeful preludes to peace, feel so elusive?
- Why are we immobilized on digital governance while artificial intelligence races ahead in a data goldrush?

- In short, why are we so stuck? And how do we get unstuck without resorting myopically to violence or isolationism?

Behind the questions outlined above, sits an array of wicked problems that need urgent and courageous responses. Related to the first question above, enormous amounts of resources, consultations, and negotiations led to the development of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. These global arrangements offer high level pathways and mechanisms to address crises and entrenched problems ranging from climate emergency, extreme poverty, access to health and education, to guaranteeing the rights of vulnerable groups. In other words, these goals offer promise of improving human condition and prosperity globally. There is much debate, analysis, and blaming going around for the lack of progress on the SDG 2030 agenda, but the reality is that we will globally fall short on many of these goals.

In relation to the second question regarding restoring peace, The International Crises Group published a report in early January 2024 highlighting ten major conflicts stretched across Asia, Africa, The Middle East, and Europe.² The report warned that “More leaders are pursuing their ends militarily. More believed they can get away with it.” The report goes on to note, “It seems unlikely that world leaders, given their divisions, will recognise how perilous things have become, collectively reaffirm their belief in not changing borders by force, and put more energy into forging deals in war-torn places that see belligerents brought to justice and civilians without blood on their hands take over.” Unfortunately, the trends that the report above noted about military use have continued and intensified over the last year with ongoing conflict in Ukraine and recent attacks by US and Israel against Iran.

Regarding digital governance, the last few years have seen an enormous boom in advances in artificial intelligence, especially generative artificial intelligence. The arrival of new digital technologies offers great potential for creativity and efficiency in how we work, organize, communicate, and live. At the same time, much is at stake in terms of the dangers and challenges that these technological advancements pose. The Center for AI Safety published a statement about grave AI risks which was signed by several prominent figures from around the world in the spring of 2023. The signatories included leaders of the tech companies creating and advancing artificial intelligence. The statement read, “Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war.”³ Despite these unanimous warnings from industry, academic, and public circles, efforts to safeguard against serious threats from AI remain weak and insufficient. An international team of fifteen researchers made the following observation in the journal *Science*, “AI safety research is lagging. Present governance initiatives lack the mechanisms and institutions to prevent misuse and recklessness and barely address autonomous systems.”⁴

In terms of the last question above regarding why we are so stuck, the current global and U.S. context highlights the challenge. Much has been written about the deepening societal divides recently. Political and ideological polarizations have risen significantly in different parts of the world, especially over the last a couple of decades. These divisions are emerging within what were considered great democracies, making them alarming and threatening to the foundational institutions and norms central to rules and rights-based societal governance. Based on several surveys, the Pew Research Center reported that Americans are extremely divided

on a range of issues, including climate change, racial justice, immigration, and international engagement. The centrist perspectives within the US political spectrum are diminishing. Summarizing Pew's research, authors Dimock and Wike noted, "What's unique about this moment – and particularly acute in America – is that these divisions have collapsed onto a singular axis where we find no toehold for common cause or collective national identity."⁵

The UN Secretary General summed up the current challenges in the following words,

"Our world is overwhelmed by crises. Divisions are widening, conflicts raging, hate is spreading and our planet is burning. But, through the dark clouds, I see rays of hope. Hope that we can bridge divides and rebuild trust. Hope that we can act together to save our planet. And hope that we can nurture a spirit of compromise and cooperation. All of this takes political courage and leadership. It takes solidarity. And it takes partnership."⁶

The urgent demands and leadership aspirations highlighted above, align with responsible leadership - the central theme of this book. Leading responsibly demands leadership action that is bold, urgent, and intelligent in confronting humanity's deeply entrenched challenges. It requires integrative wisdom that is ethically anchored and intellectually rigorous. While leadership study and practice have advanced considerably, the field still lacks thoughtful and practical integration to draw out its fragmented and latent wisdom. The purpose of this book is to offer a pathway to bring together leadership knowledge drawing on Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* or "practical wisdom." Relating and applying the notion of *phronesis* to the field of leadership studies offer an

important conduit to developing the practical wisdom that leaders need to navigate contemporary contextual complexities.

Calls for a more human-centered world have become prominent especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple global surveys with cross cultural samples from different continents make it clear that individuals are looking for a new social contract which honors human connections, care, and well-being. For instance, Bain and Company's survey of 20,000 respondents across ten countries representing sixty five percent of the global GDP, reveals a shift in employee priorities.⁷ The report emphasizes the evolving nature of work and the growing importance of human connection and purpose. To capture this global sentiment towards human quality treatment, the report was appropriately titled as "More Human, Not Less: The Future of Work."⁸

While compensation remains important, factors like purpose, flexibility, and work-life balance are increasingly driving satisfaction with work. The report identifies six distinct worker archetypes, each with unique needs and motivations. This diversity underscores the need for a more human-centric approach to work, where organizations must understand and cater to individual preferences. As digital technologies and automation reshape the job market, distinctly human skills like creativity, problem-solving, and empathy become even more valuable. The future of work, according to the report, lies in embracing the human element and creating workplaces and communities that foster meaningful connections, personal growth, and a sense of belonging.

The Need for Integrating Leadership Wisdom

A simple Google search for the term “leadership theory” led to over half a billion search results; additionally, the term “leadership development” generated over one and a half billion results during the research for this publication. These numbers clearly demonstrate the global interest in both leadership theory and leadership development. On the other hand, an international survey with 28,000 respondents from over 2,400 organizations revealed that about eighty percent of the surveyed organizations did not have the “ready-now” leaders in the pipeline to fill the anticipated leadership roles.⁹ One reason for this leadership-readiness gap is the lack of meaningful integration and application of leadership studies in applied leadership work. The following observation captures this challenge appropriately, “The existence of too many leadership theories obstructs progressive practice and research of leadership, hence there is need for leadership theory consolidation.”¹⁰ Recently, some efforts have been made towards integrating the leadership field,¹¹ but these works are limited and don’t have deliberate focus on generating leadership wisdom. As noted above, the responsible leadership approach presented in this book offers a pathway to integrate leadership wisdom using Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* or “practical wisdom.”

Leadership texts often acknowledge that the history of leadership is as old as the history of humankind. Re-visiting that history is an enormous task and goes beyond the scope and purposes of this book. However, a brief commentary outlining the macro evolution of the leadership studies landscape would be helpful in this opening chapter. Keith Grint, a leadership scholar, divided the historical leadership studies trajectory under the following periods and labels: The classical leadership studies, the Renaissance leadership

studies, and the modern leadership studies.¹² Writings such as *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu (400-320 BC), from the classical leadership era, have influenced leadership writing and practice over millennia. During the same period, important insights about leadership emerged from the works and debates of Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. For instance, Plato's *Republic* was a highly influential work to come out of this period. One of the most prominent books about leadership that emerged during the Renaissance is *The Prince* by Niccollo Machiavelli. This work was not originally meant to be prescriptive, but it was received that way and has influenced thinking about leadership into modern times. In his overview, Grint also offered an important caution when considering the classical and renaissance periods' leadership works. This caution emphasizes that a significant portion of leadership writing in these periods was written from the perspective of winners in the context of military engagement and conflicts.

Finally, Grint noted that the modern leadership era started with the writing of Thomas Carlyle, the rector of Edinburgh University in the late 19th century, who professed the "Great Man" approach, dominating the modern leadership era studies over the next few decades. In the following decades, the field of leadership studies has taken the trait, behavioral, contingency, relational, transformational, and charismatic approaches to advance the field's theory and practice. To align the field further with practical demands and complexities, works on adaptive, complexity, and leadership-as-practice streams have provided important additions. Other notable works have included spiritual, servant, and values-based leadership theories. An additional overview of the leadership studies is covered in the section below.

While this leadership knowledge has undoubtedly advanced our understanding of leadership theory and practice, the field lacks integrated wisdom to meet the applied and urgent needs that our times demand from leaders in multiple sectors. As argued above, relating and applying the notion of phronesis to the field of leadership studies offer an important conduit to developing the practical wisdom that leaders need to navigate contemporary contextual complexities. The phronesis lens offers an important foundation to synthesize the knowledge base anchored in the field of responsible leadership theory and practice. "According to Aristotle, phronesis is one of the "intellectual virtues" or "excellences of the mind" (*aretai dianoêtikai*). But phronesis is not only an intellectual virtue. It is an ethical virtue as well. Aristotle claims that we cannot be (intellectually) prudent (*phrónimoi*) without being (ethically) good. Hence, phronesis presupposes ethical virtue."¹³

This emphasis on the connection between intellectual excellence and ethical grounding offers a strong starting point for the application of phronesis in integrating and generating leadership wisdom. For instance, adaptive, systems, and complexity leadership theories carry important insights that inform the intellectual side of leadership theory and practice, but they are somewhat silent on the deeper ethical aspects of leadership challenges. On the other hand, ethical and values-based approaches put ethical considerations at the center but don't explicitly emphasize intellectual excellence and rigor or analysis to inform leadership actions. There are obviously a practice-based need and theory-based opportunities for integration across various leadership theories to inform practical wisdom.

The complexity of leadership practice is linked to the fact that many leadership moments have a newness about them which

means they do not lend themselves easily to solutions based on previous information or knowledge. These leadership moments require judgments that draw upon accumulated wisdom. Following earlier works, authors John Shotter and Haridimos Tsoukas noted, "Although in our everyday lives, we usually come across situations similar to ones we have encountered in the past, any time we are called to act in a particular situation we must do so while appreciating its uniqueness and... act for 'another first time.'"¹⁴ At the core of leadership practice is the ability to make responsible judgments during these "first times." These responsible leadership acts require ethical, relational, and analytical abilities to arrive at wise judgements.¹⁵ Phronetic judgement for Shotter and Tsoukes is about bringing past experience to the present context by using deliberative imagination, emotionally responsible attunement, and concrete particular considerations. The effort to apply the concept of phronesis to integrate and draw on leadership knowledge, is essentially concerned with acting on that knowledge wisely to improve practice.

In examining the notion of phronesis, it has also been observed, "In many of these discussions, phronesis plays a role in the great epistemological discussions of the 20th century by pointing to a kind of non-theoretical yet principled form of ethical knowing that provides a viable alternative to the scientific reduction of "real" knowledge to objective theory and technique."¹⁶ This notion of "principled form of ethical knowing" is of particular interest from the responsibility perspective, especially in the effort to integrate and relate the concept of practical wisdom stemming from decades of leadership research. Addressing the emergent social, environmental, and economic crises, requires leaders to rely on excellence of the mind and a principled form of ethical knowing, to

arrive at innovative, bold, and contextually appropriate solutions. In summary, my purpose in this book is to integrate knowledge of responsible leadership theory and practice in ways that facilitates leadership wisdom urgently needed for responsible practice across different societal domains.

The Leadership Studies Landscape

Before making a case for how responsible leadership provides a pathway to practical wisdom, it is important to contextualize the trajectory of leadership science by revisiting and highlighting some foundational elements and pivot points. As briefly noted above, the initial work on leadership focused on identifying states that led to effective leadership. In 1935 Ordway Tead outlined the following characteristics of leadership in his book *The Art of Leadership*: a sense of purpose and direction, enthusiasm, physical and nervous energy, technical mastery, decisiveness, intelligence, teaching skills, and faith.¹⁷ By around the 1950s, the trait theory did not provide an agreed-upon set of traits. While some interest in personality-oriented traits and leadership continued, the focus of leadership studies started shifting in the early 1950s.

As the field moved forward, its focus altered towards leader behaviors with an interest in synthesizing and examining what is it that leaders do that makes them effective. The leadership behavioral research was spread between 1950s and 1960s. Important work in this regard was done at The Ohio State University and The University of Michigan. This work led to the identification of two major dimensions of leader behaviors, namely task orientation and relations orientation. The other two labels for these dimensions were: initiating structure and consideration behaviors. This shift had a

profound impact on how the leadership thinking moved forward. The research was essentially saying that leadership ability was not based on some characteristics inherent to individuals. Rather, leadership ability was about how leaders acted and engaged, which are ways that could be examined and understood through observation and data collection. This insight, in turn, implied that the leadership tent was not exclusive to those who were born with certain traits but was open to individuals who embraced and practiced behavioral dimensions relevant to the work of leadership.

In parallel to advancements that focused on behavioral theories of leadership, the field's struggle to understand why certain approaches worked in some contexts but were not successful in others, led to the emergence of situational approaches to leadership. Authors Sihame Benmira and Moyosolu Agboola appropriately noted, "This implies that leaders must be able to assess the context in which they operate and then decide what style will 'fit' the situation best. Because the best style is dependent on the situation, this approach is known as the contingency theory of leadership."¹⁸ Following the recognition that the situation is an important determinant of leadership effectiveness, several situational or contingency theories were advanced during this era. One prominent example in this regard was the situational leadership theory advanced by Paul Hershey and Keneth Blanchard.¹⁹ One of the main assertions of this theory is that the extent of task and relational behaviors by leaders depends upon the maturity and readiness of individuals and groups they lead. Specifically, the theory posited that, as the group members mature in terms of their ability to handle responsibilities, leaders will become less task oriented and continue with relation or consideration focused behaviors. Upon their group's attainment of higher levels of matu-

ity, this situational leadership theory further argued that leaders may reduce both their task and relationship focused engagements and interventions.

Starting with the mid 1980s and early 1990s, the field of leadership studies took an important turn. This period is labelled as the new leadership era and included a focus on transformational and charismatic leadership, among other theories. In fact, research on transformational leadership has dominated the field of leadership over the past three decades. Central to these theories were concerns with values, ethics, motivation, and leading change. Following the popularity of transformational leadership, studies focused on ethical leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership, emerged and offered important contributions. Using somewhat different language and different degree of emphasis, some of the common ingredients across these approaches include attention to ethics, a mission driven orientation, a consideration of followers, and inclusion. Given the widespread use of the new era leadership thinking in leadership theory and practice, it is important to provide a brief introduction to these approaches. This overview will also set the stage for understanding responsible leadership in relation to these previous works and make the case for advancing the field of leadership theory and practice through further integration.

Transformational leadership theory was originally conceived by James MacGregor Burns.²⁰ As noted above, transformational leadership theory has emerged as one of the most influential leadership frameworks. The work on this leadership approach was taken forward by Bernard Bass and his colleagues. According to these authors, transformational leadership inspires and motivates followers through idealized influence, intellectual stimula-

tion, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation.²¹ A range of studies including meta-analyses have demonstrated its effectiveness in terms of employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance across diverse contexts.²² Initial studies on transformational leadership focused primarily on corporate settings. Researchers have since examined its effectiveness in a variety of contexts including healthcare, education, and public service organizations.²³

Servant leadership theory was originally conceptualized by Robert Greenleaf in 1970. It presents a paradoxical leadership approach where leaders prioritize serving others above their self-interests.²⁴ Servant leadership emphasizes empowering followers through humility, ethical behavior, authenticity, and concern with community, marking a significant departure from traditional leadership models. The theory posits that by focusing first on followers' growth, well-being, and development, individual, team, and organizational performance objectives naturally follow. Several major servant leadership reviews have validated the positive impact of servant leadership on organizational outcomes, including enhanced team performance, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors.²⁵

Authentic leadership theory has gained substantial attention in leadership research as a response to corporate scandals and societal demands for genuine, transparent leadership.²⁶ The theory emphasizes four key components: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective. Using balanced processing, leaders attempt to objectively analyze a variety of relevant information and consider multiple perspectives before making decisions. They embrace relational transparency to present their genuine self to others by openly sharing informa-

tion, feelings, and invite others to do the same. Unlike some other leadership approaches focusing primarily on leader behaviors, authentic leadership theory emphasizes the importance of leaders' self-awareness, values congruence, and self-expression. Existing research shows that authentic leadership positively influences follower well-being, trust, work engagement, and performance through increased psychological capital and leader-follower relationship quality.²⁷

Complexity leadership theory offered an important pivot point and addition to existing approaches by conceptualizing leadership as an emergent and interactive phenomenon within complex adaptive systems.²⁸ Complex adaptive systems are networks of interrelated, inter-reliant entities that interact dynamically and adapt how they act in response to contextual changes and internal demands. Going beyond the established leader-focused perspectives, this theory acknowledges leadership as a complex interplay of administrative, adaptive, and enabling functions that emerge across multiple organizational levels. The framework highlights the need for organizations to nurture adaptability, learning, and innovation in complex environments characterized by rapid change and uncertainty. This leadership approach suggests that leadership effectiveness depends less on individual actions and more on facilitating the conditions for adaptive outcomes to emerge through dynamic interactions.²⁹

As noted above, there have been plenty of debates in the scholarly and practice circles about the implications of digital technologies for leadership, organizations, and the society at large, over the last several years. With the arrival of generative artificial intelligence in early 2022, these debates became more urgent and complex. Generative AI and other digital technologies indeed show great potential

for usefulness in a variety of sectors, including healthcare innovation, education access, poverty reduction, and rights protections. At the same time, there are significant concerns about their adverse impacts on individual privacy, warfare, societal cohesion, work and organizations. A responsible digital future is possible, but it will depend upon the leadership actions in the near and medium-term future. These digital challenges call for studying and practicing responsible leadership to help navigate their enormous societal implications. And emerging research in this regard has argued for, "...development of hybrid leadership models that combine AI's analytical strengths with indispensable human qualities such as empathy, ethical judgment, and emotional intelligence."³⁰

In outlining the trajectory of leadership studies, it is important to note the role of voices that encouraged critical perspectives on the nature and role of leadership research and practice. Critical perspectives on leadership challenge the mainstream theories by questioning fundamental assumptions about leadership as a positive, neutral phenomenon.³¹ These perspectives examine how leadership discourse and practices can perpetuate power imbalances, reinforce social inequalities, and serve as mechanisms of control. Scholars adopting critical views argue that conventional leadership theories often ignore the dark side of leadership, romanticize leader-follower relationships, and overlook how leadership concepts are socially constructed to maintain existing power structures. They emphasize examining leadership through lenses of power, gender, race, and class to understand their role in reproducing organizational and societal inequalities.³² These critical leadership perspectives have informed the field of leadership studies in important ways. For instance, as noted in the complexity leadership introduction above, the field expanded its focus from heroic

actions of individuals and started attending to other human and contextual factors that determine the effectiveness of leadership. Similarly, critical leadership perspective also pushed the field to pay closer attention to issues of ethics, identity, and inclusion with a particular attention to power dynamics. Following a broad overview of the leadership landscape sketched above, it is appropriate to review some selected definitions of leadership to get a sense of its conceptualization, ingredients, and meaning.

Defining Leadership

Like many social phenomena, it is not easy to articulate or subscribe to a single definition of leadership. At the same time, it is important to have an overall sense of the basic meanings we attach to the idea of leadership and ways to operationalize the concept for both research and applied purposes. This review of leadership definitions is meant to serve three purposes. Firstly, it serves as an introduction to readers with different levels of familiarity with the field of leadership. Secondly, in line with the aims of this book, it shows the diverse perspectives of the meaning of leadership and offers an initial approach to integrate the key ideas. Finally, this review adds to the stage setting to understand the need, nature, and role of responsible leadership in relation to the existing ways of defining leadership. Without necessarily following a linear order, the review below weaves together definitions of leadership from philosophical, scientific, and critical perspectives.

An often-cited definition of leadership comes from Peter Northouse. He defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”³³ Three elements stand out in this definition: emphasis on leadership as