

# **The Impact of Structure and Corporate Ideology on Leader – Follower Relations in the Bureaucratic Organization: A Reflection on Moral Mazes.**

## **Abstract**

In the wake of organizational scandals associated with corporate America servant as well as transformational leadership are seen as approaches capable of engendering a type of morality — on the part of leaders and followers — based on shared values, universal moral principles and an orientation towards a pro-social behavior serving the common good. However, recent critiques have highlighted the tendency in the relevant literature to overlook the systemic context within which leadership and followership are situated. Given this oversight this paper re-visits a classic piece of ethnography on corporate America: Robert Jackal’s Moral Mazes. Employing concepts from critical realism fused with insights from studies on management and bureaucracy we analyse the key themes from the book pertaining to the nature of the leader-follower dynamic in shareholder capitalism. The analysis highlights the role of bureaucracy and corporate ideology as key elements shaping leader-follower relationships, encouraging a type of morality associated with guarding self-interest whilst undermining relationality. The influence of the structural and cultural context in which leader-follower relations unfold draws attention to morality as relationally contingent as opposed to an ideal state. Keywords: Leadership, followership, morality, relationality, bureaucracy, corporate ideology, shareholder capitalism, ethnography.

## **Introduction**

Over the years corporate America has suffered many high-profile scandals that have called into question the leadership quality of their senior management teams. Examples range from the now “classic” case studies of corporate malfeasance such as Enron or Lehman Brothers to more recent incidents such as the Wells Fargo scandal and the Theranos controversy. Despite such examples “upbeat” leadership theories (Alvesson, 2020) such as transformational (Fu et al. 2010, Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2015), authentic (Gardner et al. 2011) and servant leadership (Parris and Peachy 2013, Eva et al. 2019) have maintained their appeal as an antidote to corporate ills. They put faith in a leader’s ability to transcend the vices of corporate life, engendering a type of morality — on the part of themselves and their followers — based on shared values, universal moral principles and an orientation towards a pro-social behavior serving the common good (Greenleaf 1977, Bass 1985, Graham 1995, Whetstone 2001). Nevertheless, recent critiques have highlighted the tendency of positive leadership theories to be framed by ideology — underpinned by the “heroic leader” imagery — thus defining leadership by its positive outcomes, offering appealing but possibly unrealistic solutions that distract attention from the problematic aspects of everyday working lives (Alvesson and Karreman 2016, Alvesson 2020).

In parallel with the leader centric approach of positive leadership theories, recent years have seen the emergence of a relational perspective — informed by constructionism — which views leadership as a process co-constructed through social interaction, thus highlighting the importance of examining leader-follower relationships and the context within which they unfold (Uhl Bien et al. 2014). At the same time, critical voices (Collinson 2014, 2020) have underlined the need for scholarship to shed more light on the interdependence and asymmetries

of leader-follower relationships — often stemming from formal authority structures — and the way they play out in contemporary workplaces. Given these developments we feel that a more careful assessment of the enduring aspects of the institutional context surrounding the leader and follower relationship in corporate America and the morality it may entail is timely.

This paper offers a counter position to the substantialist tendencies and context light approach of positive leadership scholarship by viewing the leader-follower dynamic as conditioned — but not determined — by corporate structure and ideology as features of shareholder capitalism. We do so by drawing on a classic case study of corporate America: Robert Jackall's *Moral Mazes* (1988, 2010). The book examines managerial elites' rules for success and how the large bureaucratic organisation shapes moral consciousness (p.2). Whilst the text was originally published over 30 years ago its account of corporate life is still compelling given the endurance of bureaucracy (even in a hybridised format) as an organisational form in large for profit corporations in conjunction with the recurrent issue of corporate misconduct. An updated version of the 1988 edition was released in 2010 offering additional reflections on the key themes of the book in light of the global financial crisis, illustrating their relevance to the contemporary corporate landscape.

A key aspect of this study which is often overlooked pertains to the importance of alliance building which serves to cement the authority of CEOs securing theirs and their followers' survival against the quest for profitability. Leadership is not always embodied in an elite and cannot be necessarily equated with formal authority structures yet in actuality the two very often can overlap (Alvesson and Blom, 2015). Thus, Jackall's ethnographic account allows us to examine in depth how the leader-follower relations entailed in these alliances are shaped by key features of bureaucracy (a durable structural form as mentioned earlier) and an institutional (cum organisational) ideology revolving around the idea of maximising shareholder value.

To further reflect on the study we employ concepts from critical realism (Collier, 1994) fused with insights from relevant studies on management and bureaucracy. Our analysis draws attention to the calculations of leaders and followers as they reflexively evaluate and confirm a shared “common good” — which speaks more to their own and deeply entwined survival in a volatile corporate context as opposed to a broader sense of shared good. In doing so, the paper makes three contributions. First, employing critical realism gives scope to explain leader-follower relations — including moral conduct — as shaped but not determined by corporate structure and ideology. In contrast to the substantialist approach of mainstream leadership theories which link morality to individual traits/qualities and ideal principles we see the latter as shaped by the reasoned choices of leaders and followers as they read their social setting. Second, the adoption of a critical realist account differentiates our approach from the relational leadership perspective informed by constructionism. Relational constructionism is important in its own right as it prioritises emergent dynamics unfolding independently of organizational hierarchies. However, the potential downside of treating structures as interaction patterns shaped by language (Fairhurst 2009, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien 2012) is that this type of study may find it hard to account for some of the non-discursive factors that shape who may be a leader and who may be a follower (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p.273), possibly overlooking the asymmetries involved in this relationship. Thus, as the emphasis is often on the immediate, dyadic, discursive context of leader-follower interaction (Uhl Bien 2006) this may at times slip into prescription, seeing organisations as “communities of people and conversations” whereby morally responsible leadership is dependent on creating the right conditions for dialogue (Cunliffe and Ericksen, 2011, p. 1431). In contrast, critical realism views structure and culture as activity dependent yet endowed with causal powers which are likely to impinge on actors as contextual constraints or opportunities (Donati and Archer, 2015). Thus whilst not determining the outcome of leader-follower relations the structural and cultural contexts in

which the former are situated often lead to a narrow representation of morality as an outcome of the political alliances that are established. Finally, our third contribution consists in the way we read Jackall. *Moral Mazes* is a seminal text which has been cited widely by a range of studies (Laroche, 2005). For example, scholars examining the nature of managerial work (Hales 1998, Watson 1994), corporate governance or business ethics (Ocasio 1999; Swanson 1996; Ten Bos and Willmott 2001) and even gender and diversity related issues (Martin 2001) have referred to Jackall's work. In conjunction with bureaucracy or ethics, works that cite the book focus on managers' individual behaviour. For example, the study by Deslandes (2011) — appearing in this journal — uses *Moral Mazes* as a vignette in order to primarily examine the individual responsibility of authority figures and how it is robbed by bureaucracy. In relation to leadership and in the slightly more distant past Giampetro-Meyer et al. (1998) — also in this journal — briefly considered some of the themes from Jackall's work as an illustration of transactional leadership. Nevertheless, this reading is still informed by the individualist/leader centric account which overlooks the broader milieu in which the leader-follower dynamic is situated and would attribute some of the themes that Jackall outlines to the actions of a single leader. Given the nature of our enquiry our analysis differs in that alongside the book's other key themes we seek to bring out more explicitly its insights pertaining to leader-follower relationships in large corporations and how they are shaped by the institutional context of corporate America.

The paper proceeds as follows. A review which looks at both mainstream and critical perspectives on the leader-follower dynamic sets the stage for a presentation of key themes from *Moral Mazes*. This serves as a vignette which highlights corporate structure and ideology as important factors informing the leader-follower interaction and the type of moral conduct it entails. These themes are analyzed further by drawing on critical realism fused with additional

insights from classic and contemporary work on the impact of bureaucracy and the legitimization of corporate ideology.

### **Leader – follower relations and morality through the lens of mainstream leadership theories**

As mentioned earlier, leadership scholars have not lost their faith in leadership and its ability to address the perennial problem of corporate malfeasance. Therefore, a set of theories — representing “value - laden leadership” (Sendaya et al. 2008) — have been offered as examples of a morally superior approach to organising which also informs leader-follower relations. These include transformational, authentic and servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977, Burns 1978, Henderson and Hoy, 1983).

Transformational leadership has enjoyed immense popularity over the last few decades and its portrayal as a type of moral leadership can be traced back to the work of Burns (1978) who contended that transforming leaders can act as moral agents engendering an ethical behaviour on the part of both themselves and followers on the basis of universally agreed upon and mutually shared values and moral aspirations. It is worth noting that transformational leadership scholars (e.g. Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) have distinguished between authentic and pseudo transformational leadership whereby the former rests on solid moral foundations, seeks to unite people on the basis of common values and transform followers into leaders whilst the latter is associated with narcissism, the “dark side of charisma” and attempts to divide and conquer. An interest in authenticity lies at the core of authentic leadership which has also gained traction in recent years as a theory that pays tribute to morality. Authenticity is seen to rest on self-awareness and self-acceptance which by extension require a higher degree of moral character (Walumbwa et al. 2008). This link is justified on the basis of work on social

psychology which associates authenticity with a higher level of cognitive, emotional and moral development (Gardner et al. 2005).

It is, however, servant leadership that has been proffered as a morally superior approach due to its genuinely allocentric orientation (Sinnicks, 2018). In their recent review, Eva et al. (2019, p. 149) define servant leadership as “an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community”. Therefore, at the heart of the concept lies an altruistic motive and it is further contended that servant leadership can be differentiated from other approaches on the basis of its mind-set and mode in which it is practised. Both revolve around the notion of stewardship addressing their followers’ needs and hoping to “mould them” (indirectly) so that they too demonstrate a prosocial behaviour that would have a positive effect on organisations and society at large. On the basis of its key features - as outlined originally by Greenleaf (1977) and later refined by other scholars - other studies have suggested servant leadership is superior due to its ethical foundations. For example, Whetstone (2001) contends that in comparison to other approaches servant leadership is able to balance three different types of ethics: virtue ethics (emphasizing moral character), deontology (considering rules and principles) and teleology (considering objectives/acts and their consequences). As he puts it: “A servant leader has the character of a servant who seeks to lead others toward a meaningful telos, but only according to highly principled means...The antithesis of institutional bureaucracy, servant leadership is characterized by behavioral informalities, offering empathetic support for ethical behavior, and finding creative ways to do things better” (p.110).

Overall, all of the above theories have been offered as examples of morally sound leadership and view the leader-follower dynamic in similar ways. Far from adversarial or antagonistic,

leader – follower relations are portrayed as harmonious, underpinned by shared goals and values or in the case of servant leadership a predisposition towards altruistic, prosocial behaviour. Also, despite their observations on the leader-follower dynamic the essence of these theories remains leader centric in that ethical behaviour — among other positive outcomes — can be traced to the actions of a single leader — transforming, authentic or servant — who acts as a role model inspiring others to follow suit. Subsequently, in relation to corporate malfeasance the mainstream literature seems to implicitly perpetuate the “bad apple” paradigm (Zyglidopoulos and Flemming, 2008) — pointing the blame at individuals who deviated from the ideals outlined above — with the exception of Padilla et al.’s (2007) work on the “toxic triangle” which examines how leader and follower traits in combination with certain environmental factors (e.g. instability, perceived threat, high power distance) lead to destructive leadership in organisations.

As the key elements of mainstream theories pertain to individual traits it could be argued that by extension their assessment of morality is underpinned by a substantialist perspective which seems to consider ethical conduct innate to leadership styles as opposed to a process that may be conditioned by the wider institutional milieu in which business organisations operate. For example, the tendency of research on servant leadership to concentrate primarily on leader related traits (Eva et al. 2019) — such as prosocial motivation, service orientation or compassion — in combination with the aforementioned assumption that servant leaders can almost single-handedly remove the shackles of enduring systemic features such as bureaucracy provides a case in point. A similar example where ethical conduct is seen as an outcome of leadership style can be found in Graham (1995) who links transformational and servant leadership to post-conventional morality (founded on a certain sense of altruism as well as independence from social conventions).

In parallel with the mainstream literature, recent years have seen the emergence of a different strand of research that has aimed to eschew the leader centric approach whilst viewing the leader-follower relationship through a more critical lens. It is this type of literature our attention is turned to next.

### **Insights from Critical Leadership Studies**

This section aims to provide a summary of key insights from critical studies on leadership and followership which have critiqued the main assumptions of dominant leadership theories (including their take on morality and the nature of the leader-follower dynamic). Prior to doing so it would be worth noting that critical leadership studies (CLS) include a broad range of perspectives and strands of this literature share some common ground with a relational approach (Uhl Bien et al. 2014) which views leadership as a process and thus prioritises the examination of leader-follower interaction in context. The common ground lies in a desire to depart from the binary of either a leader or follower centric approach and the difference lies in the extent to which analytical emphasis may be placed on existing hierarchical structures and how they are implicated in the power asymmetries that often inform the leader-follower relationship. As this relational perspective is underpinned by social constructionism priority is afforded to verbal exchanges and interaction patterns (Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012), independently of organisational hierarchies. It would thus be fair to say that the relational approach and the body of work known as CLS complement one another.

As mentioned earlier, a key characteristic of critical leadership studies pertains to an attempt to focus on both leaders and followers, acknowledging their agentic capabilities and examining how this relation may also be shaped by power asymmetries. This is perhaps exemplified in

the work of Collinson (2005, 2014, 2020) who makes a number of observations regarding leader-follower relationships. As asymmetrical power relations essentially refer to a two way process leaders are to a certain degree dependent on followers who are viewed as knowledgeable, pro-active agents with room for discretion. It is acknowledged, however, that leaders are often in the drivers' seat as power is afforded to them through hierarchical position amongst other means and therefore this interdependent, asymmetrical relationship is rather contested and plays out in different ways. By extension given the power asymmetries that underpin the leader-follower dynamic it is not surprising that followers often conform and thus what is required is a better understanding of "how, why and with what consequences men and women followers conform, comply, or remain committed to their leaders and organizations" (Collinson, 2020, p. 11). In conjunction with this line of enquiry - unlike the mainstream literature - critical studies provide a departure from highly voluntaristic accounts of followership.

Thus, due to power imbalance actors are often obliged to accept a follower's position and thus enact leaders' directives with which they do not wholeheartedly agree. Considering the wide range of forms in which "followership" is manifested, Collinson (2020) suggests that employment "can be treated as a particular kind of commodified followership: one that is more contingent and constrained, sometimes insecure and potentially disposable, and much less 'freely chosen' " (p. 11). In line with this argument Blom and Lundgren (2020) have recently suggested that in/voluntary followership is dependent on various degrees of compulsion, ignorance and obligation and on the basis of these parameters argue that what is often encountered in modern organisations is a form of moderately voluntary followership with freely chosen followership being a more common occurrence beyond formal hierarchies.

Apart from encouraging a closer look at the contested nature of the leader-follower relationship, critical leadership studies have also questioned the key assumptions of dominant leadership theories, including their take on morality. For example, as part of their critique of transformational and authentic leadership Alvesson and Karreman (2016) and Alvesson and Einola (2019) respectively note that although positive leadership theories may offer ideologically appealing solutions to organisational problems, this belies their thin theoretical foundations. Ideology in this case refers to the tendency of mainstream studies to view leadership through rose tinted glasses whilst painting an appealing image of it by linking it to positive outcomes. Therefore — as the distinction between authentic and pseudo transformational leadership may illustrate — leadership is framed as necessarily good and anything negative is framed as something else (Alvesson and Karreman, 2016). With regard to theoretical underpinnings, critiques have pointed to a lack of explanation regarding the key dimensions of some of these theories — e.g. transformational leadership (Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013) — a tendency for tautological reasoning where definitions mix together cause and effect, or attempts to stretch the original meaning of words — e.g. authentic — to include dimensions such as morality (Alvesson and Einola, 2019).

Finally, the stance of dominant leadership theories on morality revolves around an abstract notion of the common good which glosses over the presence of different views on morality, e.g. stemming from a tension between utilitarian and deontological perspectives (Alvesson and Einola, 2019). Although servant leadership — which places a heavier emphasis on moral behavior — is presented as an approach that can reconcile different perspectives on ethics whilst extending the notion of the common good to encompass all stakeholders, this view obscures conflicting interests and the complexities of attempting to please everybody. As Alvesson and Einola suggest (2019, p. 392): “Making efforts to serve “everybody” may call

for extreme altruism, possibly rare among people in business”. Similarly, authors such as Spector (2019, p.126) question the notion of a universally agreed upon definition of moral goodness to which all stakeholders consent, pointing again to competing interests whilst contending that societal and institutional changes are often intertwined with views on moral behaviour.

Overall, critical studies have pointed to the disconnection of the assumptions of mainstream leadership theories from organizational realities and have called for further attention to the conditions shaping the interdependent and asymmetrical leader-follower relations. To contribute to this debate we now turn to Jackall to shed light on the conditioning features of the corporate world on leadership-followership and its associated morality.

### **Moral Mazes: An Insight into Leader-Follower Relations**

Jackall’s work is significant for our current purposes because he was interested in examining the moral rules in-use that permeate managerial work in corporate America. As his focus is on the bureaucratic form and its impact on moral consciousness, it is noted with a few exceptions (e.g., the civil service) that American bureaucracy differed from Weber’s ideal type. Rather than stress impersonality, bureaucracy in corporate America emerged as a form of *patrimonial bureaucracy*: “in a patrimonial bureaucracy one survives and flourishes by currying favour with powerful officials up the line who stand close to the ruler. It is a system marked by patronage and by intrigues and conspiracies among various factions to gain the favour of the ruler. Of course, in America, kings and princes were unavailable as objects of personal attachment but the hierarchies of bureaucratic milieu allow the hankering for attachment to be focused on chief executive officers as well as on high elected and appointed officials” (p.11).

As part of his evaluation of the way bureaucracies shape the moral compass of leaders and followers Jackall focuses primarily on two features: the hierarchical structure and the compartmentalisation/fragmentation of tasks. Jackall's ethnographic account illustrates how some of the book's key findings/themes pertaining to the status of CEOs, the importance of alliance building and a culture of short-termism (which is also partially caused by market demands) can be linked back to these two elements. In what follows we will examine these themes in more detail.

Jackall is quick to acknowledge that the hierarchical authority structure encountered in bureaucracies informs the way managers make sense of their world. It fuels ambitions and its inequities are taken for granted as managers hope that down the line they will get access to the privileges bestowed to the select few that make it to the top. Given the status of CEOs in large corporations Jackall shows how the pyramidal bureaucratic structure and certain elements of it help to cement their authority and perpetuate relations based on patronage. Performance management and the widely used management-by-objectives process is a case in point as it generates a sense of obligation. This cascades down structures to create patrimonial authority, which is instrumental in shaping the experience of those who "owe fealty" to their superiors (p.21).

Another key theme emerging from Jackall's analysis pertains to the struggles for dominance and the importance of alliance building that become hallmarks of managerial work. For Jackall leadership becomes synonymous with the skill to enter and maintain networks and alliances in order to survive and flourish (p. 206). This is inextricably linked to the segmented work patterns of bureaucracy and associated tensions amongst competing groups/factions each one of which aims to secure their own survival and advancement. More importantly, however, alliance

building is necessitated by the sense of contingency and uncertainty which characterises managerial work. As Jackall (p.205) notes, success in the bureaucratic world depends on pleasing and submitting to one's bosses and the exigencies of an impersonal market. The upshot for corporate America is simple: the relentless quest for profits causes organisational upheavals marked by personnel changes, as new CEOs or heads of divisions aim to build new coalitions. In building alliances leaders create a relational world around them to embed their authority and secure their own position.

It is in this formulation we can understand leader-follower relationships and for a vivid case to highlight this we look to Jackall's example of Alchemy (a pseudonym):

“The new president of Alchemy — let's call him Smith — had risen from a marketing background in a small but important specialty chemicals division in the former company. Upon promotion to president, Smith reached back into his former division and systematically elevated many of his former colleagues, friends, clients and allies. Powerful managers in other divisions were forced to take big demotions in the new power structure; put on “special assignment” — the corporate euphemism for Siberia, sent to a distant corner office where one looks for a new job; fired; or given “early retirement” a graceful way of doing the same thing. What happened in Alchemy Inc. was typical of the pattern in the other companies of the conglomerate” (p. 27).

As Jackall notes, each round of re-organisation confirms the subordinates' belief that "personnel changes are arbitrary and depend more than anything else on one's *social relationships* with key individuals and with groups of managers" (p. 36 *italics added*). Alliance building emerges as the defining element of managerial work for senior figures and their subordinates as it offers them a mechanism to protect their self-interest in a context marked by adversity. Even though affiliation is not subject to formal criteria, cautiousness, or discretion, alignment with what is considered acceptable etiquette and a willingness to please the boss (especially consenting to their ideas being appropriated by others) are highly desirable qualities. The rules of behavioural conduct are learned through ongoing interaction with peers who are also part of the multitude of alliances seen as essential for organisational survival. As Jackall argues, the nature of these informal groupings is captured by the word "gang" (as opposed to words such as "managerial circles" which feature more benign connotations) that conveys the ongoing struggles for power and influence.

Market volatility in combination with task specialisation which diffuses responsibility give rise to a blame culture which necessitates a co-dependence amongst the members of a particular alliance. Followers are often supposed to act as "fall guys" — taking the blame — as an act of loyalty and at other times leaders of gangs may act as a "godfather" (p.94) protecting others if things go wrong. Dependence on senior figures and a desire to become part of the dominant coalition profoundly shapes managers' moral compass whereby "what is right in the corporation is what the guy above you wants from you" (p.4). Nevertheless, although alliances are based on a sense of fealty and loyalty the latter are rather fragile and transient as they are shaped by organisational upheavals. Furthermore — as will be seen later — the norm of mediocrity that prevails in large bureaucracies at times encourages a predatory stance as some individuals seek to benefit from organisational deficiencies by cutting private deals (p. 211).

Thus, apart from transient, allegiance to groups is genuine only to the extent that it offers protection from adversity and in actuality group solidarity appears to be a façade covering up self-serving motives.

### **Morality as a result of the twin effect of structure and corporate ideology**

Intertwined with organisational upheavals is an institutional culture of short-termism which is manifested in the demand for expedient results, undermining reflection about the future. Jackall attributes short-termism to both structural features as well as exogenous market forces combined with shifts in principles of corporate governance.

In relation to structure, it is noted how task specialisation in combination with the pace of managerial work which is “punctuated by quick huddles and endless meetings” mean that “issues do not come at managers in any integrated, coherent way but rather in a piecemeal fashion” (p.88). Thus, segmentation of tasks leads to a fragmentation of consciousness whereby actions are taken in an ad-hoc fashion ignoring the root cause of problems. Emphasis is placed on immediate issues of the moment that need to be tackled, postponing decisions on other, seemingly, less pressing matters. Despite some degree of awareness that “today’s minor issues can become tomorrow’s major crises” the pressure for immediate results overrides any careful consideration of long-term consequences.

In relation to exogenous forces and how they, too, contribute to short-termism Jackall highlights the twin impact of capital markets and managerial training. It is contended that capital markets “are dominated by big institutional investors whose “quick in-quick out”

philosophy wreaks havoc with corporate stocks” (p. 87). This encourages takeover activity and as any company can become a target managers have to keep an eye on the value of corporate stock. As Jackall puts it “the markets honor only short-term gains”. Consequently, the training of professional managers revolves around the techniques of “financial wizardry” whereby several of these tools (such as, for example the notion of “discounted cash flow rate of return”) are underpinned by the notion of short-term profit maximisation.

Jackall’s observations on the influential role of capital markets and institutional investors (in combination with key principles of managerial training) parallel those by Lazonick and O’ Sullivan (2000) who note that by the end of the 1980s (the time the first edition of the book was released) a significant shift had already taken place in the rules underpinning corporate governance: the transition from the concept of *retain and reinvest* to that of *downsize and distribute*, also known as *maximising shareholder value* (MSV). Underpinned by agency theory, the idea of shareholder maximization advanced in prominence in the 1970s. This trend in corporate America rendered problematic the idea of retaining earnings and reinvesting them in firm capabilities. For many:

“... there was a need for a takeover market that, functioning as a market for corporate control, could discipline managers whose companies performed poorly. The rate of return on corporate stock was their measure of superior performance and the maximization of shareholder value became their creed” (Lazonick and O’Sullivan, 2000 p. 16).

Overtime the MSV ideology led to downsizing corporations in an effort to increase return on equity, which was fuelled by the influential role of stock market analysts and management consultants in setting the standard against which the performance of a firm (and that of its leader) was then judged. As noted by Jackall (p.31), one CEO sent notes to his executives accompanied by articles written by a consultant in the Wall Street Journal paying tribute to the necessity of downsizing to streamline organisations.

Jackall's ethnographic account thus illustrates how the interplay of bureaucratic features with a corporate (as well as institutional) ideology of short-termism produces a dominant mentality of mediocrity which is not conducive to a reflexive stance on decision making. The hierarchical distance inherent in large bureaucracies hinders passing on troublesome issues from one level to another whilst those at the top can only attain an abstract view of problems and due to the segmented nature of work they never witness the far-reaching consequences of their decisions. The labyrinthine nature of the bureaucratic structure and its many silos means that even on the rare occasions where well intended "rational" initiatives are taken from the higher ups to address an issue they become hostage to the private or organisational agendas of those below who are supposed to implement them. As notions of "quality" and performance criteria are shaped by power plays in a continuously turbulent environment attempts to "raise the stakes" and question the prevailing norm of mediocrity could lead to exclusion from dominant cliques that offer protection. Finally – and in contrast to the imagery of servant leaders who can successfully juggle organisational and societal welfare – it is contended that "most managers realise that there are no intrinsic connections between the good of a particular corporation, the good of an individual manager and the common weal" (p. 212). As Jackall suggests it is difficult to reach a working consensus around the meaning of Corporate Social Responsibility – which is subject to infinite interpretations – and although links between the organisational,

individual and common good may be forged at the level of policy and rhetoric, in actuality the three diverge as a result of market exigencies, personnel transitions and the “take the money and run” ethos associated with short-termism.

Overall, it is Jackall’s view that in the patrimonial bureaucracies of corporate America irrationality — masked as rationality associated with technique and procedures and entwined with the institutional logic of short-term results — overrides careful reflection on decisions. Large bureaucracies require a degree of self-rationalisation as ambitious persons need to align their mind-sets to the institutional logic of the organisations they serve: “when one encounters a troublesome problem that must be addressed, one strips away its emotional and stated moral aspects and asks what outcome would be most congruent with institutional logic and of advantage to oneself and to one’s social network” (131). It is this act of voluntary self-rationalisation which, according to Jackall, leads to a compartmentalisation of moralities informing behaviour in the various aspects of executives’ lives thus hindering translatability of values from one domain (e.g. one’s home) to another (the workplace) which could possibly allow for a more reflexive stance towards organisational practices.

Taken together, the dominant corporate structure helps to align leader-follower in subordinate relations that are mediated by a logic that acts as a significant barrier to the servant and transformational leadership aspirations of leadership scholars.

### **Leader-Follower Relations: Framed by Critical Realism**

This account of corporate America and in particular the constitution of patrimonial bureaucracy confirms our framing of leader-follower relations as a politically motivated process mediated

by corporate structure and ideology. In our effort to explore the consequences of Jackall's ethnographic account for leadership studies we draw on an explanatory framing borrowed from critical realism (Archer, 2003; Fleetwood, 2009; Elder-Vass 2005). Previously, scholars such as Kempster and Parry (2011) as well as Willis (2019) explored how insights stemming from this metatheory may inform empirical research on leadership. As our paper is not empirical in nature our interest lies in analysing Jackall's account through the lens of a critical realist perspective focusing on the deeper structures which may shape social phenomena; in this case leader-follower relations. Critical realism is a social theory, which is predicated on an analytical separation of structure and agency that avoids the "micro-contextual reductionism" (Reed, 1997) of many mainstream leadership studies. The separation of structure and agency allows us to make two advances in the study of followership-leadership accounts: first, we treat actors as separate from the structures that shape actions, which means both leaders and followers are capable of reflexivity although the exercise of such 'internal' capabilities is situated albeit in ways that recognise, and this is our second advance, the conditioning rather than deterministic qualities of the social world on follower-leader relations (Archer, 2003).

Adopting a stratified ontology allows us to reflect on those follower-leadership studies that propose the potential for equitable and transformational action. This is because critical realism acknowledges the possibility that individuals "have a capacity to flourish in the right contexts" (O'Mahoney, et al, 2018: 578) although as noted above such potentialities are constituted in the context of other subjects as well as natural and practical orders (Smith, 2010). The approach invoked from CR is an emergent account of causation whereby entities such as patrimonial bureaucracies have intrinsic properties that cannot be reduced to the parts and actors that constitute the entity or thing (Fleetwood, 2009). As indicated by Elder-Vass (2005: 3, *italics in original*): "an entity may be defined as *a persistent whole formed from a set of parts, the whole*

*being significantly structured by the relations between these parts*". To understand follower-leader dynamics is to appreciate the mechanism by which the relations between these parts combine to produce a *property*. For example, the fealty of subordinates to the CEO is a property of the actualisation of the political alliances crucial to the shared survival of each actor. This is a reflexive act on the part of both parties that invokes particular associations that reveal a form of oppression based on allegiance, reliability and subjugation (see O'Mahoney et al. 2018 for a discussion of CR accounts of oppression). The potential for other properties is not to be ignored but this also relies on emergence: entities have properties, and these properties instantiate power whereby the actualisation (by actors) of these powers are the causes of events and processes (Fleetwood, 2009: 365). This framing of patrimonial bureaucracy confirms that CEOs and subordinates operate in structured environments revealing particular corporate arrangements and ideological associations which produce particular outcomes that as described seem unlikely to lead to the pro-social orientation outlined by scholars of servant leadership – for example - given that personal survival is wrapped up in this shared destiny to protect corporate profits at any cost.

Writers who draw on CR such as Donati and Archer (2015) are quick to note that the structural and cultural contexts in which different levels of the social order operate nowadays tend to promote relational evils as opposed to goods. They contend that added social value — stemming from agential and social reflexivity — is more likely to be produced by third sector organisations — for example — than by markets or bureaucracies. Noting the production of relational goods or evils is context and activity dependent they argue that for-profit organisations seem rather unlikely settings for non-transactional associations, which is integral to servant or transformational leadership. This is due to the situated logic of competition which informs their operation, strengthened by bureaucratic measures (e.g. governance through performance indicators) at the service of instrumental rationality, thus undermining solidarity

and social integration. As they put it: “if any firm wishes to land on the side of the in-profit winners then there is little alternative to engaging in monetary cost benefit analysis and endorsing instrumental rationality in decision making” (p. 321).

### **The causal powers of bureaucracy and corporate culture**

The preceding overview of *Moral Mazes* shows the inter-dependence of leaders and followers as these relations are subject to structural and ideological conditioning. The former is linked to the impact of bureaucracy on the moral compass of managers and followers while the latter is evident in a type of corporate narrative — MSV — that allies with the instrumental rationality typifying bureaucracy as an organisational structure. Our brief discussion of critical realism provided an ontological underpinning of the constitution and functioning of corporate entities that draws attention to the social context of leadership while recognising leader-followers exercise agency in ways heavily moderated by the emergent properties of those relations. This creates what has elsewhere been termed the *logics of action* (Karpik, 1978), which is when individuals agree localised responses to broader institutional pressures and processes. In this case agency is associated with a “calculating instinct” (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001) informing relations in bureaucracies so that individuals tend to be “an individualist privately and a conformist publicly” (Dalton, 1959, p. 244). By extension, as Jackall (p.204) puts it ‘morality becomes indistinguishable from the quest for one’s own survival and advantage’.

The type of self-serving instinct which permeates short-lived leader-follower coalitions is seen to stem from the impact of bureaucracy on moral judgement and it is clear that Jackall paints a rather bleak picture in this regard. Nevertheless, this pessimistic account seems to resonate with aspects of Weber’s own work and with studies associated with the concept of moral distance (Bauman, 1991). The subjugation of reflection and moral judgement by instrumentally rational

action is somewhat acknowledged by Weber who suggests that in its ideal type bureaucracy much like the market is impersonal and thus ethically neutral (Hanlon, 2015). Bauman's (1991) concept of moral distance further highlights how the principles of impartiality/impersonality can induce unethical behaviour towards those who are not visible to decision makers. They represent both "the virtue and vice" of bureaucracy as they may enhance instrumental effectiveness, yet in conjunction with methods such as indoctrination or sanctions that are employed to reduce a person's sense of choice they help widen an individual's zone of indifference leading to morally questionable decisions (Russell and Gregory, 2011). Following on from these insights, other studies have examined how features associated with both the ideal type of bureaucracy as formal rationality as well as its dysfunctions may facilitate ethical/moral distance. For example Zyglidopoulos and Fleming (2008) highlight the role of temporal and structural distance in this process. Temporal distance is associated with the ethos of short-termism — vividly portrayed by Jackall — whereby decisions favouring the "here and now" and the benefits organisations can reap in the present obscure the long-term consequences of certain acts. Structural distance — on the other hand — results from specialisation which may facilitate engagement in dubious practices as organisational members carry out individual tasks in isolation not being fully aware of the moral ramifications of their actions. More recently, Huber and Munro (2014) drew on Franz Kafka's literary works to identify two additional facilitators of moral distance often associated with dysfunctions of bureaucracy (Gouldner 1954; Merton 1957): the corruption of formal rules by informal rules (associated with informal networks of patronage) and the disconnection of rules from the purpose they are supposed to serve and the higher principles on which they rest. As Huber and Munro (2014) illustrate that moral distance is not just the result of strictly bureaucratic features (such as e.g. task segmentation) they suggest that it can also be encountered in non-bureaucratic contexts such

as face to face relationships or in business ethics programmes that demonstrate a preoccupation with rules than a genuine interest in ethical concerns.

Jackall's account resonates with insights from the above studies as it highlights both the formal (hierarchy, task specialisation) and informal features (relations based on patronage) of bureaucracies and their impact on leadership-followership and its associated morality. The patrimonial bureaucracies of corporate America may deviate somewhat from Weber's ideal type, yet they still contain some of the ideal type's defining elements (in terms of structural features) and work at the service of formal rationality which derives from the demands of impersonal markets. It could be argued – as Jackall implicitly does – that relations based on patronage become essential precisely due to the adversity resulting from the struggle to please fickle markets (i.e. complying with instrumental rationality). The instrumental rationality inherent in impersonal and thus ethically neutral – as stated earlier – markets, manifested as an institutional logic of MSV and short-termism, penetrates organisations and allies with the bureaucratic structure to compound a feeling of uncertainty, contributing to a transactional leader-follower dynamic and a type of reflexivity aiming to protect self-interest whilst leading to the segregation of ethics as observed by Jackall and supported by others (Bauman 1991; Hanlon 2015).

Viewing the above from a critical realist perspective highlights the fact that structure and culture are activity dependent but are not mere patterns of interaction as they have causal powers and their effects may condition relations among actors (whilst also being re-elaborated by subsequent episodes of interaction) (Donati and Archer 2015, p.195). This differs from both the individualistic/leader centric account of mainstream leadership theories and from the tendency of relational constructionism to possibly collapse the social world into actors' discursive practices (Lewis, 2000). However, the activation of causal powers and the type of effects it may produce is contingent as it plays out against people's "needs, wants, desires and

compulsions which tend to make them strive to do or have certain things” (Sayer 2012, p.183). Thus, agency is not an epiphenomenon of structure as it is acknowledged that actors are endowed with the power of reflexivity assessing the degrees of freedom or constraint as they interact with structure/culture thus engaging in reproduction or transformation (Archer 2003).

Bureaucracy, as an enduring type of organisational structure features certain properties such as task specialisation and hierarchical authority relations which have the potential to induce a certain degree of moral distance among its members. This is, for example, related to the spatial dimension (Sayer 2012), as actors by virtue of their position within the division of labour can see but a fragment of the overall act and lack a clear understanding of its consequences. Furthermore, hierarchical authority relations as a property of bureaucracies facilitate CEOs who by virtue of their position tend to construct coalitions which would aim to further embed their authority. Here, the leader-follower relation is not entirely equated with that of manager-subordinate as not all subordinates in the organisational chart are able to find their way into dominant coalitions. According to Jackall this privilege is reserved for the select few who may also be located in a leader’s own social circle. In terms of Blom and Lundgren’s (2020) aforementioned framework an element of obligation may be present here on the part of followers – perhaps as a gesture of gratitude for being allowed into that circle – yet it is somehow balanced out by an element of voluntarism. The decision to enter these alliances is a pragmatic one and points to a particular type of reflexivity associated with the instinct of survival. Co-dependence between leaders and followers — as described by Jackall — is manifested as a transactional dynamic playing out against the competitive logic of private for profit bureaucracies and their effects (organisational upheavals and a blame culture). As questioning deep seated norms risks exclusion from coalitions seen as a prerequisite to survive adversity this is more likely to favour self-serving action and deter activities aiming at radical

change. Morality emerges at the point where agency and structure meet. In other words the properties of bureaucracies and the way actors read their context lead to protection of self-interest, moral distance and a segmentation of moralities where the private sphere may be seen as a more appropriate place to express one's genuine values.

So far our analysis has zoomed in on structural conditioning and although the transactional dynamic of leader-follower relations is the result of the combining effect of structure and ideology here we wish to briefly consider cultural conditioning as well drawing on Archer's concepts of the Cultural System (CS) — domain of ideas — and Socio Cultural Interaction (SC). Whilst a detailed assessment of the forces colliding to give rise to the dominance of MSV is beyond the scope of this essay, the preceding synopsis of "Moral Mazes" in conjunction with insights from Lazonick and O' Sullivan's work probably point to the influential role of allocative (corporate businesses, finance, consultancies) and expert elites (e.g. academia) (Reed 2012, p. 211) in embedding the notion of "maximising shareholder value" at the level of CS as the key principle underpinning corporate governance in the Anglo-American context. Archer (1996) points to contradictions in the main propositions holding together a central value system in conjunction with the existence of antagonistic interests as possible determinants of cultural change. In the case of MSV, however, once its main tenets are institutionalised — as a result of ideational unification and complementarity between the domain of ideas (e.g. agency theory) and the domain of organisational practice (e.g. accounting practices favouring a short-term perspective) — it can be assumed these ideas inform social interaction at the organisational level (through means such as socialisation, peer observation/pressure etc) pointing to a case of morphostasis as they are reproduced by actors despite the continuous change of guard in dominant coalitions. Overall, the competitive logic of capitalist corporations evident in an enduring structural form associated with instrumental rationality and further bolstered by a

dominant cultural discourse is more likely to shape a leader-follower dynamic which may be characterised by a lack of relationality and a type of reflexivity associated with autonomous action aimed at safeguarding one's interest as opposed to diagnosing and possibly correcting organisational issues. In her assessment of broader societal transformation Archer has used the SAC (structure-agency-culture) triptych to support a thesis of morphogenesis (change) attributed to social differentiation and ideational diversity. In relation to the organisational level of analysis, Jackall's ethnography paints a picture of stasis rather than change (in terms of the dominant mentality of patrimonial bureaucracies) yet in actuality it could be contended that as the impact of structure/culture is not deterministic the ability of actors to diverge from the short-termist, self-serving perspective depicted in *Moral Mazes* is a possibility and a matter of empirical enquiry. As it is not possible to generalise on the basis of a single ethnography we wish to consider a few issues that go beyond Jackall's narrative.

## **Discussion**

The preceding sections have drawn on a range of resources to elaborate on Jackal's key themes and further analyse how the leader-follower relationship and its associated morality (revolving around guarding self-interest) may be shaped by particular features of the bureaucratic structure as well as the mandate for maximising shareholder value. As the purpose of this article has been to problematize the nature of leader-follower relations in corporate America by drawing on Jackall's ethnography our analysis has to be somewhat restricted to the main issues discussed in "*Moral Mazes*" and cannot be generalised or expanded to touch upon themes that go beyond the scope of the book. However, here, we would like to briefly consider three points,

namely the transition to post or neo-bureaucratic structures, the calls for an approach representing the interests of various stakeholders and finally the idea of “perception of politics” (Ferris et al. 1989) which implies that not all organisational members may be inclined to participate in the political machinations inherent in forming the alliances Jackal vividly describes.

Firstly, in response to competitive pressures as well as criticisms levelled at bureaucracies — regarding their inefficiency in coping with change or the “democratic deficit” resulting from their “command and control” approach — it is suggested that organisations have moved to what may be considered “post-bureaucratic” forms of operation characterised by flatter, network-based structures and a greater degree of decentralisation aiming to enhance individual autonomy and discretion (Heckscher, 1995). Whilst research has confirmed these tendencies it is contended that the move to post-bureaucratic modes of operation on a global scale is uneven and non-linear reflecting the durable effects of “national, regional and sectoral regulation” (Johnson et al. 2009, p.37). Moreover, a common theme in the relevant literature pertains to the endurance of bureaucratic features and forms of control (in both the private and public sectors) that actually complement the supposed move to decentralisation and delegation of authority. Thus, instead of “post-bureaucracy” as a term denoting a genuine move away from the bureaucratic modus operandi commentators prefer to speak of the “neo-bureaucratic state” (in the public sector) (Farrel and Morris, 2003) or of “re-bureaucratisation” (Hodgson, 2004) and “soft bureaucracies” (Courpasson, 2000) to more accurately describe this process of hybridisation. The rationale for fusing “bureaucratic” and “post-bureaucratic” features as the above studies show lies in the necessity of securing both “discretion” and “control” and thus whilst task responsibilities may be decentralised, power is centralised and concentrated in the hands of senior management. Courpasson (2000) contends that in soft bureaucracies — fusing decentralisation and autonomy with centralised and authoritarian forms of governance —

domination is achieved — among other strategies — through soft coercion relying on external threats — e.g. references to markets, globalisation etc — and the “utilitarian worries” of individuals who opt to obey central authority as the most effective strategy of survival. There is a parallel to be drawn here with the self-serving inclinations of the leader-follower relations observed by Jackall which are also rooted in the uncertainty stemming from fickle markets.

With regard to the prevalence of the short-termist perspective stemming from the MSV ideology, it should be acknowledged that stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and the associated concepts of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) or “corporate citizenship” (Matten and Crane, 2005) have offered some degree of counterbalance to the idea that a corporation’s main responsibility lies in delivering value to its shareholders (Friedman, 1970). It can certainly be argued that CSR related initiatives could possibly restrain somewhat the myopic focus on short-term profit maximisation as described by Jackall. Nevertheless, critical studies in this area have pointed to limitations, noting that CSR related notions are “cut from the same cloth” as MSV, (i.e. informed by economic rationality), thus suggesting a more active involvement by government in regulating corporate conduct. For example — and in relation to the US — Banerjee (2008) points to the divergence of corporate and public interests as a result of regulatory developments that removed the states’ authority to monitor corporate behaviour, noting that at the same time CSR is assessed by economic criteria focusing on its correlation with financial performance. This “instrumental” take on CSR has contributed to the idea that in order to strengthen the performance links corporations should restrict their focus only on those stakeholders who can influence the competitive position of the firm. It is also noted that corporate citizenship discourses may promote self-governance — beyond governmental scrutiny — leading to codes of conduct that are not legally enforceable. A similar concern is echoed by Shamir (2008, p.14) who contends that the emphasis on moral self-governance (developing solutions within the corporation and rejecting external intervention) is informed

by market rationality leading to the prevalence of teleological ethics that “subordinate socio-moral sensibilities to the calculus of possible outcomes”. Subsequently, Banerjee (2008, p.74) suggests a more active involvement by government in regulating corporate behaviour, e.g. “a universal charter that corporations are accountable to than voluntary codes of conduct”.

The third area we briefly wish to consider pertains to the degree in which political behaviour permeates the leader and follower dynamic — as described by Jackall. Relevant research has confirmed the prevalence of politics in the upper and middle levels within managerial ranks (Ferris et al. 1994) attributing this partly to the greater degree of ambiguity and uncertainty encountered in the upper echelons of organisational hierarchies (March, 1984). These insights resonate with Jackall’s findings on the essence of managerial work which pertains to the management of symbols/meaning, alliance forming and self-protection as one ascends the organisational hierarchy. The ambiguity associated with volatile markets and the proliferation of a blame culture necessitate — as mentioned earlier — seeking allies leading to a dynamic of co-dependence between leaders and followers. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that involvement in the political game would depend — among other factors — on the way individuals perceive politics in an organisation. Perceptions of organisational politics pertain to “an individual’s subjective evaluation about the extent to which the work environment is characterized by co-workers and supervisors who demonstrate such self-serving behaviour” (Ferris et al. 2000, p. 90). Ferris et al. (1989) contend that a negative perception of organisational politics can lead to three possible responses – especially by those on the ground: to withdraw from the organisation, to stay but opt not to be involved in the political game (immersing themselves in their work) or to stay and get involved in politics.

## **Conclusions**

This paper revisits key themes from Robert Jackall's "Moral Mazes" in order to examine the nature of the leader-follower relationship in corporate America alongside the factors which may constrain relationality and morality on the part of leaders and followers. In light of recent critiques pointing at the shaky theoretical foundations and ideologically loaded propositions of positive leadership theories (such as transformational, authentic or servant leadership) which highlight the superior moral character, pro-social orientation and transformative potential of individual leaders as a response to corporate misconduct we feel that an emphasis on some of the enduring elements of the institutional context surrounding leaders and followers is essential in redressing the balance towards a non-reductionist and contextually sensitive take on the leader-follower dynamic. Drawing on insights from critical realism and studies on bureaucracy our analysis has viewed leader-follower relations and associated morality as a process conditioned — but not determined — by structure (bureaucracy) and culture (MSV ideology) as relatively durable features of shareholder capitalism. This has allowed us to make a number of contributions.

Firstly, in contrast with the substantialist tendencies of positive leadership theories which see morality (entailing an altruistic element) as innate to particular leadership approaches we see it as relationally contingent at the juncture where institutional contexts and action collide. The properties of bureaucracy as organisational structure (task specialisation, silos, hierarchical authority relations) and MSV as a type of corporate culture (in this case ideational unification and alignment with organisational practice) underpinned by the situated logic of competition interact with actors' reflexive capacity to produce such effects as ethical distance or cynicism and a leader-follower dynamic which takes the form of short-lived alliances imbued with a calculating logic aiming to safeguard self-interest. In this case lack of relationality and a highly transactional leader-follower dynamic are not the result of individual leadership failure but the

outcome of an instrumental logic inherent in patrimonial bureaucracy and the corporate ideology of MSV.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, highlighting the impact that structure and ideology may have on leader-follower relations limiting the scope for moral judgment or radically transformative action differentiates our approach from the relational leadership perspective informed by constructionism where the emphasis on the discursive context of leader-follower interactions (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006) may at times also lead to a framing of leadership as “good doing” (Alvesson 2020) where positive outcomes emerge as a result of dialogue and the construction of a community based on shared values (Ospina and Sorenson, 2006). Our approach is also different and thus complementary to some of the rare critiques stemming from the mainstream such as the aforementioned concept of the toxic triangle (Padilla et al. 2007, p. 180) which focuses on destructive leadership as an outcome of factors pertaining to destructive leaders (ideology of hate, narcissism), susceptible followers (low maturity, unmet needs) and conducive environments (instability, lack of checks and balances, perceived threat). Our critical realist reading of Jackall’s work primarily emphasizes – as mentioned earlier – some of the enduring facets of corporate America which even leaders and followers with otherwise benevolent intentions may find constraining. Padilla et al. on the other hand (2007) focus on a particular type of leader and by extension on contextual and individual factors which may vary, drawing their case illustration from the field of politics (Fidel Castro’s Cuba).

Thirdly, through our reading of Jackall’s work we have highlighted its insights pertaining to a relational account of leadership. Drawing on a critical realist perspective in combination with additional insights from studies on corporate governance and the nature of bureaucracy has allowed us to flesh out his ethnographic account by also bringing out more explicitly the twin effect of structure *and* corporate ideology (MSV) whilst viewing leader-follower relations and

the morality they entail through the lens of the interplay of structure and agency (here associated with self-serving inclinations). Additionally, by further analysing Jackall's empirical evidence the paper offers some insight into questions posed by the critical strand of the literature (Collinson, 2020) around the asymmetrical yet interdependent relations between leaders and followers and why the latter may choose to conform. Here, we have seen how co-dependence of leaders and followers is often the result of ambiguity inherent in corporate America and maintaining a position of deference to those seen as leaders (by virtue of their position and associated privileges) emerges as the only option to protect one's self from adversity. Nevertheless, these ties are rather thin and allegiance to a leader and a dominant coalition is transient and masks self-serving motives.

All said, a limitation of our work pertains to the fact it is not possible to generalise our insights on the basis of a single ethnographic study. Here, it would be worth mentioning that Watson (1994) — for example — on the basis of his own ethnography of corporate culture contends that the managers he researched did not display the self-rationalisation and compartmentalisation of moralities observed by Jackall, yet he does not develop a full-fledged analysis of moral struggles (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001). As structure and culture condition but do not determine the course of leader-follower relations this leaves open the possibility for nonconformist action outside the confines of instrumental rationality. Jackall's account suggests it is more likely that structure and corporate ideology in large for profit corporations may serve to accentuate the egocentric rather than allocentric orientation of one's self. For commentators such as Knights and O'Leary (2006, p.133) "ethical leadership cannot exist without some attempt to overcome the preoccupation with self that is the legacy of the Enlightenment thinking on autonomy". Thus, given the limitations posed by bureaucracy and MSV, further research would prove helpful in illustrating the conditions under which such openly "other-oriented" perspectives as servant leadership may prove more feasible, for

example, in a non - profit setting. Such work, however, should also take into account challenges such as ethical distance which is not limited to commercial corporations or a strictly bureaucratic context (Huber and Munro, 2014).

In closing, it should be noted that the popularity of positive leadership theories has persisted despite the various criticisms levelled at them. This can be explained by virtue of the comfort the hero imagery provides in times of uncertainty and helplessness (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992), its lasting appeal to lay audiences and the ease with which it can be converted into a lucrative consultancy enterprise (Alvesson and Einola, 2019). Nevertheless, as a relational perspective is also gaining currency the paper's intention has been to contribute to a body of critical work which aims to produce an understanding of leader and follower relations grounded in the challenges of corporate life which are often overlooked by the mainstream literature.

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