historical and social moment and who we are within it? Have the ways in which we have traditionally thought about this phenomenon outlived their usefulness given the difficulties and complexities to which leadership must respond today? In disturbing our habitual patterns of thinking about leadership, this book aspires not only to provide new ways of thinking about it but also to foster renewed appreciation for this phenomenon and suggest a rationale as to why it might just justify the many thousands of words which have been written about it.

NOTES

1. Continental philosophy is a school of philosophy developed largely in Continental Europe during the twentieth century. It differs from 'analytic philosophy', which develops and applies the laws of rational logic by focusing on issues of meaning and the nature of lived experience. Analytic philosophy was largely developed in the United States and the United Kingdom.
2. For some, Continental philosophy and 'phenomenology' are synonymous. I am distinguishing the two terms and conceiving Continental philosophy as thinking which encompasses phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism and other philosophical ideas primarily developed by European thinkers.
3. For a comprehensive review of the range of different definitions of leadership, see Rost, J.C. (1993), *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Westport, CT: Praeger.
4. For instance, in his study of University Presidents, Birnbaum (2000) found that transformational leadership was a very inappropriate kind of leadership approach to use when leading academic communities see: *Management Fads in Higher Education: Where they Come From, What they Do, Why They Fail*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
5. Ontological questions are questions about the nature of a thing's 'being'. Ontological questions about leadership are those concerned with the kind of thing leadership is, that is, is it something we can easily see, is it constructed from the interaction of people's perceptions, is it located within a person? All of these questions will be addressed more fully in Chapter 2.

2.   Why are there so many different theories of leadership?

Phenomenology . . . examines the limitations of truth: the inescapable 'other sides' that keep things from ever being fully disclosed, the errors and vagueness that accompany evidence, and the sedimentation that makes it necessary for us always to remember again the things we already know.

Robert Sokolowski
Introduction to Phenomenology
(2000, p. 21)

Situational leadership, trait-based leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, servant leadership, collaborative leadership, shared leadership, charismatic leadership, authentic leadership – the list goes on and on. It grows longer as ever more leadership consultants, developers and scholars add their observations and ideas about leadership. Is it just the fact that leadership has become a twenty-first century fad that accounts for the proliferation of writing about it? Or might something else be going on?

This chapter addresses that question by considering whether or not the very plethora of ideas and theories about leadership conveys something critical about it. Rather than adding yet another definition or theory to the mix, I turn to the philosophical approach known as phenomenology to gain insight into the nature of leadership as a phenomenon.

Why ponder the nature of leadership? Firstly, the nature of a thing indicates the most appropriate means by which it might be studied. If the nature of a thing is such that when removed from the environment in which it naturally occurs it alters radically, you will not glean an accurate account of it by examining it within laboratory conditions. If you are only accustomed to seeing it operate within such an artificial arena, you may not even recognize it when it is functioning in its normal context. Indeed, if you ever spot it in that environment you may think it is something else. Similarly, if you believe that leadership only takes the form of heroic men metaphorically charging in on white horses to save the day, you may neglect the many acts which contribute to their ability to be there. You may fail to see the importance of the grooms who care for the horses, the messengers who bring attention to the crisis or the role played by those

cheering from the sidelines. You may miss the fact that without troops supporting them, any claims to leading on the part of these heroes would be rather hollow.

Additionally, knowing the nature of a thing provides clues about where we might find it and therefore, where we might most usefully look for it. It is no good conducting experimental research into 'skunk behaviour in the wild' in the United Kingdom where wild skunks do not live. Similarly, phenomenology indicates that the places where leadership is traditionally sought, for instance in the personal traits of 'leaders', may not be the most appropriate starting places for identifying and studying it. Understanding the nature of leadership as a phenomenon brings an appreciation of the landscape in which it occurs, encourages us to consider the air it breathes, the environment which feeds it, as well as its distinctive occurrence.

Phenomenology offers a number of concepts which can be helpful in illuminating aspects of leadership territory which are often ignored. These include the notion of 'The Lifeworld', initially introduced by the 'Father of Phenomenology', Edmund Husserl, the distinction between 'sides', 'aspects' and 'identity' and the distinction between 'wholes', 'pieces' and 'moments'. Before introducing these notions in more depth, however, I would like to familiarize you with the philosophical 'project' of phenomenology, in order that the ideas subsequently offered can be placed within their own philosophical and historical contexts.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO PHENOMENOLOGY

As a recognized philosophical approach, phenomenology has its genesis in the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Husserl proclaimed his 'new approach to philosophy' in the texts *Logical Investigations, Volumes One* and *Two* published in 1900 and 1901. Husserl was a mathematician by training and his earliest writings concerned the philosophy of mathematics. However, his disillusion with the route of positivist sciences, where he saw truths being based increasingly on abstractions of reality rather than the real world in which we operate, led him to explore other ways in which the truth of the world could be determined.

In particular, he advocated a return to acknowledging philosophy as the 'Queen of the Sciences', rather than logical positivism[1] holding that position. In 1935 he gave a key lecture, 'Philosophy in the Crisis of European Humanity', in Vienna which argued that the tools of modern science are not equipped to address questions of meaning and significance central to human lives. For instance, positivist science might be able to establish certainty about the chemical components of bread but it could not lead

us to any conclusions about the ethics of wealth and what we might do about the fact that some human beings have more than their needs for bread, while others starve. He also reminded the scientists of the time that all of their laboratory-based formulations about the world, seen through abstract mathematical relationships and 'idealized' circumstances (for instance, in worlds of flat surfaces and in which lines can extend forever), had limited application to the three-dimensional world of human beings.

I do not think it is too far a jump to hear parallels between Husserl's critique of the limits of modern science to assist in the lived world of individuals and the applicability of theoretical management theories to the lived world of organizational leaders. How often do we hear practicing organizational members make similar pronouncements about the lack of relevance of much academic work to their concerns? In response, Husserl's solution was to 'return to the things themselves'. This meant that instead of studying things in abstracted and theoretical ways we need to engage with them in the actual circumstances in which they exist. In order to better understand a phenomenon such as leadership then, we must attend to it in the particular circumstances in which it arises rather than through abstracted theoretical frameworks. These particularized circumstances Husserl called 'The Lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*), a concept which has important implications for how leadership might best be studied.

Central to understanding the significance of 'The Lifeworld' is appreciating how phenomenology aspires to operate as a 'way of knowing'. A key goal for proponents of this branch of philosophy was to reassert the validity of epistemologies other than those revealed by logical positivism. Of course to some extent all philosophy concerns questions of knowing and how it is we can know. Phenomenology offers a distinctive way into this territory (especially in relation to scientific ways of knowing) in its recognition of the subjective world of the knower in creating what is known.

Phenomenologists argue that the way any perceived phenomenon is known is entirely interwoven with the viewpoint of the perceiver. This includes the perceiver's actual physical proximity and placement vis-à-vis what is being perceived, as well as on their psychological predispositions and previous experience of what is being perceived. Additionally, any purpose they have in mind will also colour their perception. All of these factors will contribute to how a phenomenon is 'known'.

An important concept within phenomenology which speaks to the interrelationship between 'knower' and 'known' is that of 'intentionality'. This is not intentionality as an act of will. Instead, phenomenologists use the concept to indicate that all perception is necessarily a perception *of* something. We cannot perceive without there being something for us *to* perceive. In this way our ability to perceive is as determined by the

availability of things to perceive as by our own capacity for perception. Additionally, those foci of our perceptions will always be perceptually co-determined by their own actuality and the expectations and positioning of those perceiving them.

That perception is coloured by how we are positioned vis-à-vis a phenomenon, our experiences of it and our purposes for it have important implications for leadership and how it is known. It suggests that you will know leadership differently if you are a passenger on a boat which is sinking and you are looking for assistance in getting into a lifeboat, from knowing it if you are a secretary in an office going about your day-to-day routines of responding to e-mails, making phone calls and answering customer queries. What you are wanting from leadership in those two different situations are different things and your recognition of it will be coloured by what you are expecting from it at a given point in time. This is an important idea which will be developed more fully through the chapter.

A final point to raise about phenomenology itself is that it is not a unified and consolidated school of thought. After Husserl, philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas developed Husserl's ideas in their own idiosyncratic ways. This happened to such an extent that Husserl was noted to have said in the later years of his life, 'I am the greatest enemy of the so-called phenomenological movement'[2] as he observed the ways in which this philosophical approach was unfolding. Even though there were vast differences between the ways in which subsequent thinkers developed this approach, they all retained a core interest in how the knowing generated from day-to-day engagement with the world could have its own validity and claim to 'truth', a claim grounded in the phenomenological notion of 'The Lifeworld'.

'The Lifeworld'

An underlying thrust of the phenomenological approach is the assertion that the lived world of human beings is where the 'truth' of how they should best operate could be found, rather than in abstracted scientific principles and precepts. Husserl saw 'The Lifeworld' as the 'universal framework for all of human endeavour' (in Briefwechsel IX, p. 79, quoted from Moran 2003), and as such encompasses scientific as well as philosophic endeavours. Within 'The Lifeworld', the way things are used and the meanings they hold for the humans who interact with them are vital aspects of their nature. For instance, the chemical constitution of the wood which makes up a chair or the physical forces which keep it from collapsing when you sit on it may, indeed, be very important ways

of knowing the chair. However such facts do not convey the entire truth about chairs and the significance they hold within human systems.

For instance, the physical forces which hold together a chair occupied by a Chief Executive Officer during a meeting are identical to those which hold the Queen of the United Kingdom's throne together. The chair in which the Queen sits as she opens Parliament each autumn has special significance to her subjects, even though it may be constructed of the same physical elements as a chair used by a secretary in an office block. The swivel chair I sit on as I type a document and the throne on which the Queen sits as she makes pronouncements have very different functions within the human systems in which they are situated. It would not be 'right', somehow, for a secretary to bring an elaborate throne into work to sit on, as we would indeed think it odd were the Queen to open Parliament from a common office chair. In our 'Lifeworld', chairs have significance which go beyond their material constitutions. Phenomenology reminds us that those meanings are important aspects of the truth of any entity's being in the world.

The function which a physical entity such as a chair or a car or a banana plays within 'The Lifeworld' is an important aspect of knowing it as a phenomenon but when the 'thing' being considered is non-material, such as leadership, its place within 'The Lifeworld' is perhaps even more important. In fact, such 'things' can be seen only to exist within the socially constructed human communities in which they operate. Therefore, would it not make sense for them to be best studied as they are enacted in 'The Lifeworld'?

Social Construction and 'The Lifeworld'

The notion of 'The Lifeworld' reasserts the importance of meaning in human systems and ways of operating. Although meaning is not an objective, scientifically verifiable thing, phenomenology recognizes its central role in the day-to-day way in which humans live their lives and interact with one another. Shared meanings allow human beings to collaborate and live together in productive and potentially harmonious ways. However, shared meanings are not objectively 'given' entities, they are created by the human communities who engage with them. In this way, they are socially constructed; developed over time through culture, historical events and meaning-making systems of interpretation and dissemination across generations.

Social construction is particularly apparent in the way in which non-material concepts influence human ways of operating and being in the world. Concepts, such as liberty, freedom, wealth and leadership are

fundamentally socially constructed. These are not material entities that exist independently of the human beings for whom they have conceptual meaning. 'Freedom' does not exist in a material form, it does not have substance or shape (although it may be symbolized by material artefacts such as flags). Social construction is also a unique human process. It is hard to think, for example, that sparrows have a notion of 'economics' (although they may well experience the scarcity of food, they will not think of this scarcity in economic terms). These are human constructions which are culturally determined and normalized.

For instance, as a child growing up in a rural part of Northern Maine on the Eastern seaboard of the United States, I regularly took part in the annual potato harvest which involved most of my schoolmates and their families. I experienced the weeks I spent picking potatoes as a community-based activity which was part of the rhythm of living in that place. It was only when I went away to university and began reading sociological accounts of 'child labour' in Aroostook County that I ever conceptualized what I had been involved in as indicative of a poverty stricken part of the country as these articles characterized it. (I was shocked to think about it in that way!) The same activity was perceived very differently, depending on the viewpoint from which it was observed. To academic observers, my community engaged in oppressive child labour practices. To me and my friends the harvest certainly demanded hard work, but it also provided ample time to play in the fields as well as the opportunity to contribute to a vital and vibrant part of our region's livelihood. Reading the sociologists' accounts was probably the first time I began to realize that concepts such as 'child labour' or 'poverty' are not objectively determined 'facts'.

Such constructs can create a significant impact on those people operating within their reach. The power of concepts arises from the way in which they remain unquestioned and remain generally accepted. In phenomenological terms, 'The Lifeworld' – the day-to-day reality of how these concepts operate – is central to their very existence. People who travel from one culture to another will recognize the veracity of this idea. I was told the story of a Western business setting up operations in China. Part of the induction process was to explain the ethical codes of the business including introducing the notion of 'sins of omission' as well as 'sins of commission'. The Western-based translator anticipated that there might well be difficulties in translating the words 'omission' and 'commission'. However, he was very surprised when the question which came back to him was, 'Sorry, we do not understand what it is you mean by the word, "sin"?' The Chinese culture which is more communally-based, sees transgressions based in 'shame' – which is something that is created through others' judgements of you – rather than 'guilt' – a concept based more in

individualized notions of "sin". Such concepts have their very existence grounded in socially constructed views of reality.

Here I am joining the raft of other leadership theorists who consider leadership to be a socially constructed phenomenon.[3] As such, it is highly context dependent. However, what this actually means is somehow much weightier than what the term 'context dependent' seems to convey. Without 'The Lifeworlds' of human beings who would recognize, look for and respond to this phenomenon they agree to call 'leadership', there would be no leadership. Therefore, in order to understand leadership it is essential to understand 'The Lifeworlds' from which it springs. Studying it as 'something' which operates independently of those 'Lifeworlds' ignores the very 'stuff' from which it arises. It is like trying to comprehend 'love' abstracted from the people who feel and enact it. You may be able to capture a trace of it but it is virtually impossible to really appreciate its full impact and significance as a detached observer.

This understanding implies that approaches to understanding leadership from a logical positivist position will only ever be able to capture a trace of leadership in its experienced and socially significant form. However, because of its commitment to including 'meaning' in what constitutes an entitiy, I argue that phenomenology can get a bit closer to an apprehension of leadership which takes account of its socially embedded nature. It is able to do this through particular concepts which underpin a phenomenological way of knowing. The first of these is the distinction between 'sides', 'aspects' and 'identity'.

'Sides', 'Aspects' and 'Identity': Ways of Describing the Leadership 'Cube'

The importance of where a person is physically situated in terms of how they will perceive something is amplified through the phenomenological distinction between 'sides', 'aspects' and 'identity'. Robert Sokolowski elaborates on this distinction in his book an *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000). Along with many phenomenologists, Sokolowski refers to a 'cube' when illustrating these notions and I will start by doing the same. You will remember that in Chapter 1 I suggested that one of the capacities which would aid you on the journey through the book is a sense of play? This is the first opportunity to play with your thinking in that way. After experimenting with different ways of perceiving a cube, I will consider how these ideas might apply to leadership.

Start by bringing into your mind's eye the image of a cube. Even better if you can find one, place a three-dimensional box in front of you as you read these next few paragraphs. At the most basic level of perception when you look at the cube you will be aware that it has six different sides. As

you turn the cube over in your hand, at any one moment in time, you can see some sides of the cube and not the others. For instance, when you can see the front face of a cube, you can not simultaneously see its back or its sides. Phenomenologists point out that at any one point in time, when you are seeing one side of the cube you 'co-intend' the other sides. That is you hold them in your imagination; you know them to be there completing the entirety of the cube even though you can not see all of the sides at once.

To give another similar example of the way in which sides work, when you see someone walking down the street usually you can perceive only one side of them at any given time: their front, their back or indeed their side. However, you will 'co-intend' the rest of their bodily form by filling in the details of the sides you can not see. This is not a guaranteed route to perfect perception as evidenced from the occasions on which you might have walked up behind someone thinking they are an acquaintance only to discover a complete stranger when they turn around.

Similarly there are many different 'sides' to the phenomenon of leadership. There is, of course, the person who is perceived as 'leader' – and in this way the 'leader' role could be seen as one 'side' of leadership. However, 'followers' provide another essential 'side' and the community or organizational context in which leadership happens constitute another 'side', as will the historical situation which has brought all these factors together at a given point in time. All of these dimensions can be seen as different 'sides' of leadership and its description would depend on the side which is being perceived.

Many more traditional theories of leadership only attend to the 'leader' side of the phenomenon. The rest – the followers, the organizational culture, the particular market circumstances, are often 'co-intended' – assumed to be there and to act in unquestioned ways. The phenomenological idea of 'sides' points out that all of those co-intended sides of leadership are vital to its occurrence, they are the always present other 'sides' of the leadership 'cube'. In order to gain a full appreciation of the phenomenon of leadership all of these sides must be taken into consideration.

The phenomenological notion of 'aspects' builds on that of 'sides'. 'Aspects' are the specific angles or orientations through which something is perceived. Returning to the example of the cube, as you turn the cube in your hand you may also notice that its sides take on different appearances. For instance if you look at the cube straight on it will appear to be square but if you tilt it downward slightly it will look more like a trapezoid. These different appearances disclose different 'aspects' of the cube. You are still viewing one and the same cube but its appearance alters according to the different aspect which is being disclosed at any point in time.

To give another example, if you walk around the outside of a building you will be aware of each of its different sides and you will perceive each of those sides from a particular vantage point. If you are standing at street level looking up at a skyscraper in Tokyo, the side of the building will appear as a great looming rhomboidal form whereas if you look at the side of the same skyscraper from an adjacent skyscraper, you will be more aware of its horizontal span. From an airplane flying over the building, the vertical walls may be completely invisible and you may only be aware of the building's roof and have to co-intend the walls stretching down to the street. Each way of perceiving the skyscraper has its own validity from the particular vantage point from which it arises. No one aspect is more truthful than another.

Similarly leadership can be viewed from a variety of aspects. If you are the Receptionist in the headquarters of a Blue-Chip international company, you will perceive the leadership of that company and your role within the leadership of the company differently from if you are the Finance Director for the company. Your perceptions will be informed by the daily interactions you have with customers and colleagues which will not be shared by the Finance Director. In your role as gatekeeper to senior organizational members, your insight into the firm's leadership will be coloured by close and possibly more informal proximity to them. You may understand, for instance, that the reason the CEO is abrupt on a certain day is because their spouse is seriously ill, rather than attributing their mood to just bad temper.

Furthermore, through its location the receptionist role is available to customer reactions and other aspects of the external world in ways that more internally focused roles cannot be. As a member of the senior management team, the Finance Director would interact daily with other director-level people and would probably be privy to information about the informing ideas behind strategic decisions. Through those interactions, he or she would form different perceptions of the firm's leadership than the Receptionist would. Interviewing the receptionist and then the Finance Director about the leadership of the firm would probably elicit very different accounts. Which version is 'correct'? This question will be addressed through reference to a final distinction in this trio of phenomenological ideas; that of identity.

Returning to the cube for one last time, we can see that all of the different sides and vantage points from which those sides can be perceived (aspects) are distinctive yet they all relate to one phenomenon, the cube. At the same time, the cube's identity is more than a collection of its sides and aspects. What it 'is' includes its internal mass which cannot be viewed from the perspective of an outside onlooker, its colour, weight and form

as well as the material from which it is constructed. More than the solely physical characteristics of the cube, phenomenology suggests its identity also takes account of its non-material aspects. The totality of its identity includes factors such as who made it, what purpose it serves and the meaning it holds for those who use it. A cube which acts as a die and in being thrown determines whether or not a gambler wins thousands of dollars has a very different identity from the cube which a two-year-old fits into a puzzle or a cube-shaped diamond exchanged between lovers. In such cases it is easy to see that the cube's identity is based on much more than solely its physical manifestation.

The notion of 'identity' offers its own frustrations however, particularly for positivist scientists who attempt to define and categorize phenomena. From a phenomenological perspective, an entity's identity always remains elusive. As much as we can perceive the sides which make it up, as much as we can be aware of the different aspects from which it can be viewed, as much as we can know about its internal workings, its history and its significance within human 'Lifeworlds', we can never know the totality of something which would constitute a definitive 'identity'. This is a key ontological assumption which underpins phenomenological investigations: that a 'thing's' identity will always be beyond the reach of human apprehension. In holding this position, phenomenology takes a radically different orientation to knowing from that assumed by logical positivism.

Applying the logic of 'sides', 'aspects' and 'identity' to leadership, if you want to understand how leadership functions in a particular firm how might you go about it? Whose perspectives would you collect? Perhaps a better place to begin such an inquiry would be to articulate the purpose behind your wish to understand 'leadership'. Would you be doing so in order to try to alter the way leadership is enacted in the firm? Or would you be doing so in order to add to theoretical knowledge about how leadership is perceived within an organization of a certain structure? Recognizing that leadership consists of different 'sides' and that people will experience those sides from particular aspects alerts you to the importance of identifying which of those sides and aspects might be most useful in addressing the particular purposes you are pursuing. For instance, if you are interested in understanding the way in which leadership fosters a firm's perception in the marketplace, you may find the receptionist who deals with external calls and visitors all day of more help than the Finance Director.

From the concept of 'The Lifeworld', phenomenologists see 'purpose' as key in what can be known about things and how such knowing might most appropriately be pursued. If I am asking the question 'What is leadership?' because I am an academic scholar attempting to plot the historic

development of the concept, the way I will do so will be very different from the approach I would take were I an executive trying to understand how I might take up my leadership role in a manner that would halt the failing fortunes of my firm.[4] The purposes of the questions are very different; therefore it only makes sense that the choice of which sides or aspects you might focus on in order to answer them would also be different. Phenomenology highlights the existence of these distinctions and encourages us to be transparent about which we are focusing on and why at a given point in time.

'Sides', 'aspects' and 'identity' are not the entire story. The next group of phenomenological distinctions broadens our appreciation of the nature of a phenomenon such as leadership even further.

'Wholes', 'Pieces' and 'Moments'

When considering the nature of a particular phenomenon, another phenomenological categorization Sokolowski (2000) offers is that between a 'whole', a 'piece' and a 'moment'. 'Wholes' are clearly distinguishable, independent and separate things. A chair can be a 'whole', as can an art work, a bridge, a rug, a pencil or a trash compactor. Each of these things can be identified as a distinct entity and serves its own purpose, without reference to something else. 'Wholes' are comprised of 'pieces'. For instance, a rug is comprised of many coloured strands of wool. Each strand can still exist as a separate entity but in relation to the rug, it is a 'piece'. The chair's leg can exist on its own and in fact chair legs can be interchangeable but in relation to a particular chair, it is a 'piece' of the 'whole' chair.

The colour of the strand of wool in the rug or the weight of the leg of the chair are different kinds of things. A colour cannot exist independently of the strand of wool it infuses; the weight of the leg of the chair is inextricably determined by the chair leg. A quick thought experiment will show this to be the case. Try to think of the colour 'turquoise' without it occupying space. I hope that you will find it impossible to do so! Colours, weight, size are all things which cannot exist independently. Their 'being-ness' is dependent on the things of which they are part. Phenomenologists call such things 'moments'. It is important to emphasize that a phenomenological moment is not a time related concept. Instead it indicates that this sort of phenomena is wholly dependent on other phenomena for its expression in the world.

In these terms, what kind of phenomenon is leadership? Is it a 'whole', a 'piece' or a 'moment'? Many leadership theories are based in an assumption that leadership is a 'whole'. It is studied outside of reference to the particular context from which it arises; as though it can be abstracted

and still exist in an identifiable way. However, as has been suggested throughout this book already, I am arguing that leadership cannot exist apart from the particular individuals who are engaged and involved in any leadership dynamic. Leadership does not exist without people who are in some way identified as 'leaders' or people who are identified as people who they will lead. Neither can it exist outside of a particular community or organizational culture or history. For these reasons I argue that rather than being a 'whole', leadership can best be described as a 'moment' of social relations.

What does this imply about how we might come to understand leadership? Recognizing leadership as a 'moment' suggests that we can never arrive at the reality of leadership as separated from those particular contexts in which it arises.

Additionally, I am proposing that this conceptualization provides an explanation for the plethora of existing leadership theories and definitions. In fact there could be as many descriptions of leadership as there are situations in which it arises because it will always be subtly different depending on the 'pieces' and 'wholes' from which it emerges. Leadership that arises from a crisis situation, such as a forest fire in which there is a clear desired outcome and firefighters who have been trained to deal with such events, will look very different from entrepreneurial leadership in which someone generates an innovative idea and nurtures it to market. Leadership amidst professional groups, such as higher education teachers engaged in implementing a new curriculum, will be enacted differently from that in a call centre populated by large numbers of young workers who may not be very motivated and who do not see being call centre operators as their vocation in life.

Those who are part of the leadership event in each case may report they have experienced leadership happening but from an external perspective, its physical manifestations, the behaviours used and interrelationships enacted, may appear very different. Even if there are similarities between the behaviours perceived between contexts, there will be nuances and subtleties of expression which may be appropriate to one context but not to another. 'Leaderly' behaviours enacted by firefighters struggling to extinguish a blaze would look silly expressed in an academic environment and despite their noisiness would probably produce limited impact. I am suggesting that the distinction between 'wholes', 'pieces' and 'moments' helps to explain why this is the case. As a 'moment', leadership necessarily arises out of particular 'wholes' and its experience is interwoven with and dependent on those 'wholes'.

These three sets of ideas: 'The Lifeworld'; the distinction between 'sides', 'aspects' and 'identity'; and the distinction between 'wholes',

'pieces' and 'moments' have important implications for understanding leadership as a phenomenon. Firstly, the notion of 'The Lifeworld' suggests that in order to understand leadership as a lived experience, it is important to study it within the particular worlds in which it operates. As a phenomenon which arises from constructed social realities, the meanings it has for those engaged with it, either as leaders, followers or academic theorists, impacts significantly on how it is experienced or viewed.

This is further underlined by the ideas of 'sides', 'aspects' and 'identity'. Phenomenology points out that every 'thing' does have different sides and that at any one point in time we can only view one of them with the others implied. Additionally, a side will always be viewed from a particular aspect. The 'follower' side of the leadership dynamic could be perceived from the position of the 'follower', the leader or a researcher standing outside of the relationship but who may have a vested interest in what the leader and follower are trying to achieve. From each perspective, a different aspect of leadership's identity is potentially revealed.

Finally, the distinction between 'wholes', 'pieces' and 'moments' offers philosophical justification for the intertwining of leadership and context proposed by a number of leadership theories. For example, Mary Parker Follett's work (1949 [1987]) highlights the dynamic nature of leadership as it responds to changes in context. Keith Grint (2001) writes about the 'constitutive' nature of leadership; and Martin Wood (2005) coins the phrase 'leaderful events' in an effort to capture the interplay of individual agency and context which is constructed as leadership. As a 'moment' of social relations, leadership is wholly dependent on the historical, social and psychological context from which it arises. Just as the colour turquoise cannot be separated from the space it fills, leadership can only be expressed through particular localized conditions and the individuals who take part in both creating it and making sense of it. One way of conceptualizing the interactive and context-dependent nature of leadership is through a model I think of as the 'leadership moment' represented in Figure 2.1 below.

Rather than attempting to add yet another definition to the plethora of those already in existence, the leadership moment identifies the 'pieces' of leadership which interact in order for leadership to be experienced. Leaders must relate to followers and together they interact within a particular context and work towards an explicit or implicit purpose. These pieces also interact dynamically, with the consequence that the way in which followers perceive the context will affect the way in which they interpret the leader's pronouncements, the follower's behaviours will affect the leader's and together leader's and followers' actions will demonstrate how a purpose is being understood and embodied.[5]
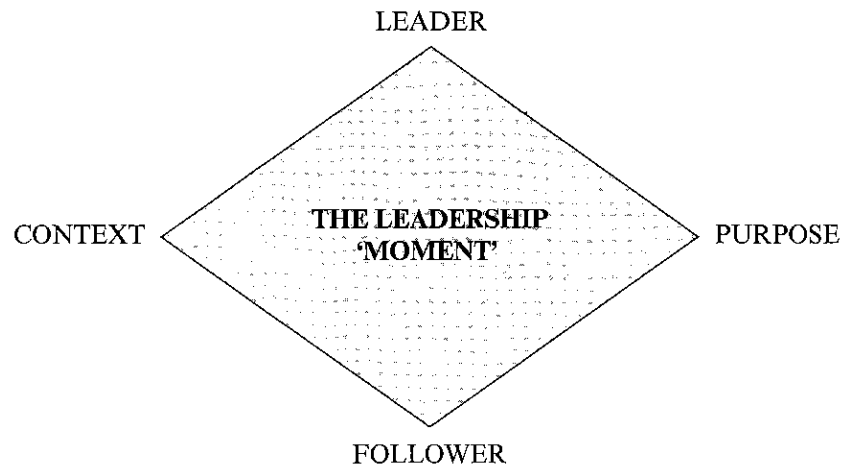
LEADER

CONTEXT

THE LEADERSHIP 'MOMENT'

PURPOSE

FOLLOWER

Figure 2.1 The leadership 'moment'

WHAT DOES THIS IMPLY ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF LEADERSHIP?

Does this all mean that leadership is anything and everything? Not quite. After all, the colour pink is still the colour pink, regardless of whether it appears in a geranium or in a plume of cotton candy. It is still distinctive from orange or blue or green. Likewise, although leadership may manifest itself differently within different contexts its energetic trajectory shares a common feature: collective mobilization towards an explicit or implicitly determined purpose. As the British leadership scholar Keith Grint argues, '. . . don't trace the leader, don't even trace the followers; trace the mobilization' (1997, p. 17).

How such mobilization is accomplished can appear very different depending on the circumstances. From the view of phenomenology, each expression of leadership – whether in the way it is embodied by firefighters trying to clear blazing buildings or by peace campaigners in dialogue with politicians – contributes to our understanding of its identity. Striving to provide a 'once and for all' definition for such a phenomenon is an impossible task. Understood as a moment of social relations, leadership's complete identity will necessarily always remain elusive.

This might best be illustrated by reference to another phenomenon which could be understood as a moment of social relations, the concept of 'justice'. Within human communities there is an appreciation for a phenomenon which balances ideas of rights and responsibilities (these too

are social constructions!). What is considered to be 'just' differs radically from culture to culture. In some cultures it is considered just to subject perpetrators of extreme crimes such as murder to capital punishment. In other societies capital punishment itself is seen as morally unjust. The way justice is enacted manifests itself very differently even though both societies are enacting their way of balancing rights and responsibilities. Similar to leadership a common intentionality can be identified between acts aimed at achieving justice. However, the many and sometimes contradictory ways that it appears means that determining its total identity remains beyond our grasp.

You may at this point be thinking, 'What good is that? Is phenomenology's claim to knowing a phenomenon so limited that it is virtually useless?' On the contrary, I propose that through the specific way it encourages us to engage with leadership, it can assist us in clarifying what it is we are seeking in the first place. In pursuing leadership's identity, what problem is it we are hoping to solve? Are we actually more interested to know how to make sense of a confusing context and communicate that sense to others who are equally confused? Or instead are we interested to know more about why a model of leadership seems to have such good results in a particular context? Are we interested in leadership's identity because we are studying it as an abstract feature of organizational life or are we seeking an answer to the question because we are teaching first-year undergraduate business studies students the material they need to fulfil the requirements of their programme? Alternatively, have we recently been appointed 'line manager' and want to know how to best lead the members of our team? Depending on the purpose behind the question we might focus on a particular aspect of the leadership moment.

I hope this brief excursion into phenomenological ideas has demonstrated the importance of the questions we ask in bringing insight to a phenomenon like leadership. What particular aspect of this phenomenon are we trying to gain insight into? Given that, what are the most helpful sides of leadership's identity to investigate? What aspects of the 'whole' from which it arises, should we be paying attention to? Perhaps more importantly it highlights the importance of researchers recognizing the way in which their own perspective colours and shapes their experience of leadership. A phenomenological approach demands greater transparency on researcher's parts about their own positioning vis-à-vis the phenomenon and how that influences their interpretations and theoretical insights.

Finally, because phenomenology is concerned with the way things operate in 'The Lifeworld' regarding leadership from this perspective always retains a pragmatic orientation. We may not be able to establish leadership's abstract 'identity' but we can say something about how it

functions in a particular prescribed circumstance. Having introduced these ideas, let us use them to reconsider why there are so many different theories of leadership.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DIFFERENT THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP (AND WHY DO WE NEED MORE)?

From a phenomenological perspective, there are at least three answers to this question.

Firstly, if we consider the role of leadership in 'The Lifeworld' from the perspective of those who recognize it, it becomes clear that the very apprehension of leadership is a socially determined phenomenon. Influenced by the dominant culture in which they operate certain behaviours will be read as leadership and others will not be.

The story of Chris, a Royal Air Force officer, illustrates this point. Chris explained to me how he realized his conception of leadership had changed as a result of undertaking a Masters in Leadership Studies. In his job Chris was responsible for high-intensity training activities for young cadets. His role largely consisted of preventing them from doing anything dangerous as well as assessing their teamwork and leadership behaviours. One day his commanding officer (CO) visited his unit to observe how a cohort of cadets was progressing. After a morning watching the young recruits in action, the CO said to Chris, 'This is frustrating; I haven't witnessed a single act of leadership all morning'.

Chris was somewhat surprised by this pronouncement, especially in light of the reading and thinking about leadership he had been doing as a result of undertaking the Masters programme. He said he found himself slightly startled by his own response to the CO, when he said, 'I'm sorry Sir, I beg to differ; I've been seeing acts of leadership all morning'. Apparently what then ensued was a lively conversation between the two men in which Chris expressed the view that leadership did not necessarily have to be enacted through high profile 'commands' from the front. For the kinds of tasks being undertaken by the recruits, leadership could move between people depending on who was best equipped, either through expertise or experience, to take the lead at any given moment.

The CO had been operating from assumptions about leadership informed by the Air Force culture. This view had largely remained unquestioned especially among more long-serving members. From this viewpoint, leadership is a phenomenon which is held by one person, 'the man' (in the Royal Air Force it is still more often than not 'the man') who is 'in front', often shouting orders. Chris' view of leadership allowed for a

much more distributed understanding of the phenomenon, something that can move around among those engaged in a task. Was Chris 'right' and his CO 'wrong'?

The notion of 'The Lifeworld' alerts us to the possibility that this may not be such a helpful question. Asking 'What is trying to be achieved in these circumstances and what would leadership look like which best fulfilled that purpose?' might provide a more fruitful response. The latter question helps to identify the most appropriate leadership response for a given context. Through addressing that question, a more appropriate definition for the leadership requirement of that context might be identified. What and how goals were accomplished was what Chris focused on as he assessed the leadership activity within his team of cadets. Identifying the 'leader' and assessing his or her performance was the CO's pre-occupation.

The example of the CO visiting Chris' unit demonstrates how 'aspects' also interact with definitions of leadership. In this context, the CO, Chris and the cadets involved in the task all had different viewpoints about the 'leadership' operating amongst them. Chris' aspect on leadership was coloured by his further study and his willingness to accept that leadership can operate collectively. The COs viewpoint was influenced by his own personal history and training as well as the situations in which he had encountered the need for a more individualistic approach. The actual cadets involved would have apprehended yet another aspect on the leadership process. It would be interesting to inquire about their experience of leadership as they engaged in tasks. Did they perceive particular individuals' inputs as 'leaderly'? How aware were they of the way in which the leader role moved amongst them? What insights could they offer about how they achieved tasks and the role leadership played in that success?

The notion of aspects demonstrates that leadership will be viewed from different perspectives and that each perspective can potentially provide a new insight into its identity. Depending on where one is situated vis-à-vis any leadership activity, a very different view of it will emerge. Although no one viewpoint can appreciate the totality of leadership, each contributes a distinct facet of leadership's identity.

Finally, this brings us to the categorization of leadership as a 'moment', rather than a 'whole' or a 'piece'. If leadership were a 'whole', a phenomenon which can operate independently of its context or social construction,[6] then perhaps achieving a more definitive rendering of it would be possible. As a 'moment' however, like the colour pink which cannot exist without extension, leadership can not exist without those who would enact it, the context from which it arises, as well as the socially constructed appreciation of it as a particular kind of interaction between human

beings. The colour pink has an identity but the form of that identity differs depending on the chemical combinations which create the pigment, the textures and surfaces of the materials of which it is a part, the way the light shines on it at a particular time of day as well as my capacity to see 'pink' because of the range of colour my optic nerve can detect.

Similarly, leadership arises out of different and specific social constructions. Sometimes it can look forceful and outspoken and other times it is appreciated for its steady ability to hold a psychological space in which dialogue between people who hold vastly different views can safely occur. At times it can be concentrated within the charismatic power of an individual and their mesmerizing ability to capture the imaginations of followers. Suddenly, however, those charismatic individuals can find themselves toppled by the collective movement of those they have led who in turn replace the leader role with somebody else.

From a phenomenological perspective, each of the many leadership theories currently in existence could be seen to be addressing a particular side of the phenomenon from a particular aspect. For instance, transformational leadership concentrates on the 'leader' side and speaks from an interest in organizational change. More relational theories, such as distributed or collaborative leadership, attempt to capture much more of the 'follower' side, often from the viewpoint of de-centralized organizational structures. Servant leadership again attends to the leader but seeks to reveal an aspect of leadership which positions itself in support of followers rather than 'from the front'.

Each theory provides another 'piece of the leadership puzzle'. By considering leadership through the lens of phenomenology, we can appreciate that there will be as many different descriptions of leadership as there are situations in which it arises. In contemporary times, for instance, we see the need to understand how leadership works within virtual communities – a situation early leadership theorists could never have anticipated! We see the need for new theories which can inform how leadership might be constructed within globally distributed organizations, within communities and companies trying to reduce their negative impact on the environment, within organizations which span private and public domains. These are all new contexts in which leadership arises and, in providing ways of responding to each, leadership reveals new sides of its identity.

The phenomenological analysis presented here raises something of a conundrum for those seeking to understand leadership better. How can a phenomenon constituted by so many different and disparate factors be studied? Is it possible to say anything useful about such a thing? Furthermore, if leadership's identity is continually unfolding, how might it be approached at one given moment in time? The next chapter approaches

these quandaries by addressing the related question, 'Why is it so difficult to study leadership?'

NOTES

1. Logical positivism is a way of investigating reality which assumes notions of objectivity, reductionism and the ability to verify knowledge through the testing of hypotheses. Largely associated with 'the scientific method', it largely grew from Enlightenment rationality and has been widely used in the study of the physical world.
2. Quoted in Moran, D. (2000), *An Introduction to Phenomenology*, London: Routledge, p. 2.
3. For a key text on social constructionism itself, see: Berger, P. and T. Luckman (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Garden City, NJ: Doubleday. For leadership scholars writing about leadership as a social construction, see Meindl, J.R. (1995), 'The Romance of leadership as a follower-centric theory: a social constructionist approach', *Leadership Quarterly*, **6** (3), 329–41, Grint, K. (2005a), 'Problems, problems, problems: the social construction of leadership, *Human Relations*, **58** (11) 1467–94, and Sjostrand, S.E., J. Sandberg and M. Tyrstrup (eds) (2001), *Invisible Management: The Social Construction of Leadership*, London: Thompson Leary.
4. The mismatch between these different purposes for understanding leadership is revealed when executives come to business schools wanting to know about how they might 'do' leadership differently, and instead they are given historical accounts of different ideas about leadership by the academics who teach them.
5. These particular interactions will be considered in more depth in subsequent chapters of the book: for instance, Chapter 5 which looks at the way meaning-making occurs between leaders and followers will consider the link between leaders-followers and purpose in more depth; and Chapter 8 about how leaders might take up their role wisely, focuses on the interaction between the leader and how he or she makes sense of their particular context.
6. It is of course questionable as to whether or not anything can indeed act as a 'whole' which is completely independent of its context or social construction. For the purposes of the argument here, 'wholes' might be those things which are relatively more independent of their contexts – so for instance the physical being of a teapot would still exist as a 'thing' whether the teapot in question were a standard clay pot or an exquisite art object, the latter descriptions being determined by social construction.