Beyond the Leadership Myth
Discover the Power of Collaborationship

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This book is dedicated to all the unknown followers, present and past, who despite lack of appreciation have changed the world for the better.

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Although writing is a solitary process, this book would not have been possible without the great support of many wonderful people.

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Thank you!

Foreword

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*"The insecurity of leaders is often related to the possibility that
their actions in the end may appear trivial."*

Abraham Zaleznik

Why do people lead and follow each other? What is the purpose?

When I first began my work on followership, I did not think too much about this question. I had no intention to challenge the traditional view of leaders and followers. Nor did I want to provoke anyone or create new theories. I was only interested in why people follow leaders.

Like most people, I believed that leaders were the important ones, while followers simply followed orders. Now, after several years of exploring the issue in more depth, my views have radically changed. I have found that when people try to understand why some groups or teams become more successful than others, or why some individuals gain more followers, they search for answers in the qualities of the leaders, not in those who follow. And *if* they look at those who follow, they tend to do so without taking off their leadership spectacles. By that I mean that they try to fit what they see into our traditional context of understanding leaders, which, as we will see, has its fair share of imperfections.

In this book, I view leaders and followers from a *follower's* perspective, which has been truly neglected. For me, this change of perspective has opened up a whole new way of understanding leaders, followers and how they collaborate. Contrary to what many believe, followers are truly essential to how we cooperate and achieve success in our endeavors - be it in a company, a political organization or any other type of group. Leaders are also important, but most important of all is *how* people lead and follow each other; that is - how they interact.

This book is divided into five parts:

- The first part looks at how people commonly view leaders and followers today.

- The second part takes a look at how Man lived and cooperated many thousands of years ago, exploring how leadership and followership worked at that time. Here collaborationship is introduced as a concept.
- In part three, *true followership* is defined and shown how it can strengthen collaborationship and lead to success of any group or team.
- Part four shows how one can improve his/her own followership skills.
- The final section, part five, discusses the challenges and advantages of followership in different settings and moves to a conclusion about how leaders and followers can work together more effectively.

I realize that the word "follower" may give you an image of a boring, unimaginative person who only does what he/she is being told. However, if you are willing to read on you may be intrigued to find that a true follower is none of the above. Instead, true followership is critical in human collaboration. In fact, understanding what actually drives people to truly follow, will give us a completely new perspective on cooperation. An effective form of collaboration, or collaborationship as I call it, has always been, and will remain to be, the backbone of human development. Collaborationship, therefore, is much more important than leadership as it is most often seen today. However, Collaborationship can only be understood if we are willing to explore the essence of both true followership and true leadership.

Part 1:
An Unchallenged Belief
Our View of Leaders and Those Who Follow

The Myth about Leaders and Followers

"We have been so mesmerized by the spotlight on leaders that we grow blind to the possibility that the keys to understanding organizational success lie somewhere in the shadows."

Robert E. Kelley

Take a look at the list below and choose five words or phrases that best describe your view of 'followers'. Then do the same for 'leaders'. You may use the same word for both leader and follower, just make sure that you choose the words that you think *best* describe the different roles.

Goal Oriented	*Dependent*	*Committed*
Active	*Innovative*	*Challenges others*
Yes-sayer	*Forceful*	*Independent*
Headstrong	*Dominated*	*Uninterested*
Passive	*Integrity*	*Dominator*
Influences others	*Irresponsible*	*Weak*
Proactive	*No-sayer*	*Uncommitted*
Insecure	*Easily influenced*	*Creative*
Responsible	*Powerful*	*Inactive*

Now compare the words you have chosen for 'follower' with the ones you have chosen for 'leader'. Is there a difference? Would you say that you view one or the other as more positive? If yes, can you explain why?

If you have chosen equally positive words for leader and follower then you are off to a good start. Most often the word 'follower' is associated with something negative. We tend to think of a follower as someone who is passive, uncommitted and weak. It is so negative, in fact, that I often come across people who suggest that I choose a different terminology, something "a little more positive and selling".

However, using a different vocabulary makes no sense. If we agree that there are people who lead, then surely there must be those who follows? **'Followership'** is simply a term we use to describe the way someone follows someone else. As far as I am concerned, *it is not the word that is wrong but our understanding of it.* People dislike the word follower because they do not understand what *true* followership is.

Of course, it is not surprising that our view on followers is so negative. In today's world, a leader is regarded as number one. Consequently, everyone else has to come in at second place. As one CEO I interviewed explained: "No one likes to be second best". This is very true. In our world where individuality is king, being second best means being invisible. Being invisible is the same as being a failure, and no one likes to be a failure (or invisible for that matter).

What is peculiar is that many people will admit that they follow leaders, but they do not like being labeled a follower. Robert E. Kelley, a pioneer in the field of followership studies, writes: "No one seems to mind being identified as a leader, and people don't mind identifying their leader. But even as people talk about their leaders, many are loath to be considered followers."[1] Praise your colleagues for their leadership skills and you will make their day, call them a great follower and they will think you just praised them for being an idiot.

I believe that this misunderstanding of the concept of 'follower' has also resulted in an incorrect understanding of the concept of 'leader'. Therefore, I will discuss *both* followers and leaders in this book, but I will do so from a follower perspective.

Since I began studying followership close to a decade ago, I have stumbled across a number of unresolved questions about the leadership paradigm. For example, it is often argued that good leaders understand that people are their greatest asset. Why then do companies generally spend so much more money on leadership development than on trying to understand and developing followership?

Let us now take a look at these and other inconsistencies and the muddled thinking behind them.

The Myth of the Omnipotent Leader

There was a time when scientists believed the Earth was the center of the Universe and that the sun orbited around our planet. Similarly, many knowledgeable people today believe leaders are the center of our social and business universe. Everyone else just orbits around them.

For thousands of years people have been fascinated by leaders. Since 'Tao Te Ching', a little book on leadership written by Lao Tzus[2] about five hundred years before Christ, countless philosophers, psychologists, experts and researchers have been captivated by the topic.

In our own time, Harvard Professor D. Quinn Mills is a good example. He says: "[f]ew things are more important to human activity than leadership. Effective leadership helps our nation through times of peril. It makes a business organization successful. It enables a not-for-profit organization to fulfill its mission. The effective leadership of parents enables children to grow strong and healthy and become productive adults … The absence of leadership is equally dramatic in its effects. Without leadership, organizations move too slowly, stagnate, and lose their way."[3]

Another professor and author, John Adair, agrees. He says: "the importance of good leadership today hardly needs to be stressed. For it is widely recognized that a democratic society cannot work effectively without it. Leaders are needed in all fields and at all levels to give direction, create teamwork and inspire people to give of their best."[4]

Warren Blank, a well-known leadership consultant put it like this: "[t]he need for leaders has always been important, and it has never been more urgent. The constant, accelerating, unpredictable change in today's competitive environment demands more and better leadership."[5]

Susanne Ekström is the CEO of Novare Accelerate[i], a consultancy company in Sweden, focusing on Leadership Development and Employer Branding. One of Novare Accelerate's main objectives is to promote, develop and create networks for 'future leaders' among young professionals. The aim is to help them develop their leadership skills. In an interview I made with Ekström, she said: "Leadership is the ability to do things. It is the entire machinery… It is about giving people a purpose to why they should do something and then help them do it and motivate them along the way." As to my question on how important leaders are for success, she

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[i] Novare Accelerate is owned by one of Sweden's most prestigious companies, Investor. Investor is the leading owner of many Nordic-based international companies.

answered, "I believe it is everything. If we do not have a purpose for doing what we are doing, then why should we do it? I believe that without it (leadership), there would be chaos!"

In general, people are convinced that leaders are the key to success, the answer to our problems and the future on which we depend. As I will attempt to show in the coming chapters, this widespread, unshakeable confidence in leadership is, as Robert Kelley put it, a **'leadership myth'**. This myth is so ingrained among both experts and non-experts that few ever question it. In fact, I have noticed that stating anything else is often regarded as absurd or even provocative.

The Holy Grail of Leadership

Growing up, I was told remarkable stories about great leaders (good or bad) who shaped our history. A few examples are:

<div align="center">

Julius Cesar
Jeanne d'Arc
Mahatma Gandhi
Winston Churchill
Shaka Zulu
Adolf Hitler
Martin Luther King
Alexander the Great

</div>

An interesting fact that emerges from considering these individuals collectively is that they had very little in common. Everything about them differed - their personality, style of communication, vision, ethnic and cultural background, gender, wealth, age, education, the age in which they lived and so forth. What, then, is the common denominator that made them great leaders?

If you do not know the answer, you are not alone. In fact, another reason why our obsession with leadership is so fascinating is that *we do not know exactly what it is.*

Although most scholars agree that leadership is important, they seem unable to agree on much else. If you google 'what is leadership', you will find endless definitions, theories and opinions. It is pretty much like standing in front of thousands of cookbooks, all claiming to give us the best recipe for a

particular dish but using different ingredients and cooking instructions. How can we possibly know which recipe to follow?

I believe part of our problem lies in what I like to call the '**Holy Grail of Leadership**': *the idea that there is some form of universal leadership recipe that will make anyone a follower.*

The idea that there are certain techniques that leaders can use to make anyone follow is obviously an appealing thought. At least for those who want to lead others. It would definitely make their lives much easier. In reality, however, people have very different ideas of what constitutes good leadership.

> *WORTH NOTING*
>
> *Leadership as a concept is well known to the world, yet just like the Holy Grail, no one knows for sure what it is or where it can be found. So how do we know that leadership is critical for success?*

As we shall see in the coming chapters, the Holy Grail of Leadership does not exist. Who we are (age, gender, background, etc.) and what we strive for in life influence our view on leadership. As a result of our differences, people do not share a common opinion as to what makes a leader worth following. That is why even the greatest historically known leaders, such as Julius Cesar, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King had supporters who believed in them as well as critics or adversaries who opposed them.

The Holy Grail of leadership is just another myth. However, along with the leadership myth, it has made 'leadership' a very, very lucrative business.

Leadership — A Billion Dollar Industry

Over the years, companies and organizations have spent a great deal of money on what they call 'leadership development'. Exactly how much is not known. There are very few studies on the subject, but looking at the U.S.

alone, the figures range[ii] from somewhere between 13.6 billion dollars[6] to more than 170 billion dollars annually[7].

These are staggering amounts. If we also take into consideration all the companies and organizations around the world, then 'leadership' truly becomes a massive industry.

Of course, institutions, schools, hospitals, sports teams and other forms of social and business-like structures also invest in leadership development. And if we include all the revenues from book sales, magazine subscriptions, universities courses, membership fees, etc., then 'leadership' undoubtedly becomes a very large industry.

I have yet to find a study that fully evaluates the complexity and the effects of this industry. It would be very interesting to explore just how intertwined it has become with the rest of our society. Still, it is reasonable to assume that this industry employs a lot of people who have a personal interest in keeping the status quo.

The consumers on the other hand - i.e., the many people who spend money on leadership development - have (or *should* at least have) an interest in getting some kind of return on their investments (ROI).

A few years ago, I met the Head of Learning and Development at one of the largest banks in Scandinavia. He told me that his bank has six employees working full time with 'leadership development' in the Nordic offices. After his impressive presentation of optional and mandatory trainings for managers, I was curious to know how the bank measured the results of all this training.

Despite their great investments, the bank only evaluated perceived outcomes, such as how the participants 'felt' before and after a training, or how they 'judged' the quality of a training. The bank did not evaluate the actual *effects* on team performance. What other investment of such magnitude would a bank do without evaluating its economic ROI?

During the past sixteen years, I have worked in a number of different companies, organizations and schools. Yet, I have never once seen a leadership development training be evaluated - at least not financially.

This is not unusual. Studies show that only 10-20 percent of the organizations investing in leadership development will actually evaluate the effects of their investments.[8] So what makes the other 80-90 percent confident enough in their investment to consider an evaluation unnecessary?

[ii] Depending on who conducted the research and what was defined as 'leadership development'.

Perhaps we face something similar to that of Hans Christian Andersen's short tale "The Emperor's New Clothes". Everyone says leadership is important with such conviction, that eventually people feel that they would be fools to question it. Consequently, they too see a lot in leadership that is simply not there!

Nevertheless, the 10-20 percent that *do* demand an evaluation of their investments, are currently causing headaches for the leadership industry.

Calculating ROI is not easy. Leadership development usually only targets a few people (the expected leaders). The vast majority of businesses, however, want to measure their ROI in financial terms. Therefore, evidence must be found to support that the improved skills of these individuals, will lead to an improved financial result.

Many leadership development experts argue that it is more or less impossible to make a connection between training and economic outcome. For example, they argue (quite correctly) that it takes time for an individual to change or develop behaviors and attitudes. It also takes time to practice new skills and gather experience.[9] Therefore, 'developing' leaders is a long-term investment. But is that a reason not to measure it?

> *"I've worked here for many, many years and I've seen CEOs come and go. Some have invested more in leadership development than others, but I've never once seen any real positive consequence of all these trainings."*
>
> A senior employee at the Swedish Film Institute

Another difficulty with evaluating ROI is that many trainings focus on the personal development of the participants. How does one evaluate personal development objectively? Besides, what is leadership development? Surprisingly few studies on the benefits of leadership development will actually *define* what it is.[iii]

I am not arguing that current leadership development programs are useless. Many of them are probably beneficial. However, on the whole, the results you would expect from the world's leadership investments are not clear to see. Managers continue to complain about unfocused and ineffective

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[iii] For example, is leadership development defined by who the targeted group is (whom it is for) or if it is defined by the contents (what the trainings or coaching etc., aims at achieving)?

personnel; politicians still worry about low voter turnout or people's general lack of interest in political issues; teachers continue to struggle with uninspired students, and so forth.

During 2011 and 2012, the internationally renowned public opinion research company, Gallup, conducted a survey of more than 230,000 employees in 142 countries. According to this survey a shocking 87 percent of workers around the world are disengaged or actively disengaged in their work.[10] That means a vast majority of the workers worldwide are emotionally disconnected from their workplaces and far less likely to be productive.

According to Gallup, the average number of engaged employees in the world have increased 2 percent (from 11 percent to 13 percent) since their first survey in 2009/2010.[11] However, it is worth noting that in the 2009/2010 survey, "only" 47,000 employees participated from 120 countries. That means the 2011/2012 survey was conducted on an additional 22 countries and more than four times as many employees.

In America and Germany, Gallup has conducted similar surveys for more than ten years. Here we can observe the more long-term trends in employee engagement.

In America, the number of workers not engaged or actively disengaged in their work has been more or less stable at 70 - 74 percent since 2000.[12] In Germany, the number of actively disengaged employees actually *increased* from 15 percent to 21 percent between 2001 and 2008![13]

So what is going on here?

Engaged employees in a few selected countries. (From the 2011/2012 survey)			
Country	Engaged	Country	Engaged
Australia	*24%*	*Japan*	*7%*
Belgium	*12%*	*Mexico*	*12%*
Canada	*16%*	*Norway*	*16%*
China	*6%*	*Nigeria*	*12%*
Denmark	*21%*	*Panama*	*37%*
Estonia	*16%*	*Russia*	*19%*
Finland	*11%*	*South Africa*	*9%*
Germany	*15%*	*Spain*	*18%*

Hungary	*11%*	*Sweden*	*16%*
Island	*16%*	*Thailand*	*14%*
India	*9%*	*Turkey*	*7%*
Ireland	*16%*	*United Kingdom*	*17%*
Israel	*5%*	*United States*	*30%*

If leadership (as it is understood today) is the key to success, then surely the enormous investments made all over the world should have resulted in a massive increase in active engagement during the past ten years?

The fact that it does not, raises several questions. Is something wrong with the trainings? Are the participants simply unable to absorb the information given? Is leadership determined in our genes so that only a handful of people can become good leaders?

Another possibility is that *leadership is not as important as we believe it to be and/or that we have misunderstood what true leadership is.*

Unfortunately, the idea of challenging the leadership industry seems unlikely in today's world. As a matter of fact, instead of rethinking the effectiveness of their massive investment in leadership, companies and organizations worldwide are expected to *increase* their investment in leadership development the coming years[14]. It seems that people and businesses around the world believe that if current leadership trainings do not give them the results they look for, then the reason is that they have not invested *enough* time or money on it.

Albert Einstein is known to have defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Leadership has been the focus of our attention for a very long time. It is time we move on.

> *"Leaders often say that their organization's greatest asset is its people — but in reality, this is only true when those employees are fully engaged in their jobs."*

From Gallup's report "State of the Global Workplace 2013"

The Myth of the Insignificant Sheep

The leadership guru, William Cohen, uses an experiment made on insects to highlight the importance of leaders. As you read his text below, reflect on how the followers have been presented.

> *A professor at a large midwestern university was an entomologist. That is, he studied insects and their behavior. He became curious about a strange insect called a processionary caterpillar. What makes this species of caterpillar so unusual is the way it travels. A "team" of these caterpillars moves as a physically connected unit. They actually "hook up," one behind the other, and move in a long, undulating, connected line. The leader in the front has the vision and knows where they are going. The others simply hang on and have a close-up view of the rear end of another processionary caterpillar. The leader-caterpillar makes the decisions when to stop, eat, drink, or rest. This professor wondered what would happen if there were no leader and hence no vision. So he removed the leader from the procession. The next caterpillar in line then took over as leader. He repeated his action of removing the lead caterpillar several times, and the same thing happened. The professor stopped and thought about what he had observed. Then he designed a little experiment. The professor took a family of these caterpillars that were connected and hooked the leader up to the caterpillar who was last in line, so that there was really no leader, just a single, unbroken circle of caterpillars. Then, with the aid of assistants, he placed the circle of caterpillars on the rim of a flowerpot whose circumference exactly equaled the length of the circle. He put water and mulberry leaves at the bottom of the flowerpot. Mulberry leaves are the processionary caterpillars' favorite food. He gave the signal, and his assistants allowed the circle of caterpillars to begin to progress around the rim of the flowerpot. Everyone started his stopwatch and watched and waited. … The professor and his assistants never pressed their buttons to stop their chronographs. Why? Because the caterpillars kept going round and round until they fell unconscious from fatigue and lack of sustenance, even though food and water were always only a few inches away.[15]*

Cohen concludes that processionary caterpillars become completely paralyzed without a leader. Of course, whether there are leaders or not among insects is debatable, but more importantly, by comparing insects with humans, Cohen not only suggests that the myth of the omnipotent leader is true — he goes as far as suggesting it is a biological fact. Without leaders, not only insects but animals and humans will die. That is quite an assumption.

Our willingness to glorify the leader has gone so far that we have come to view followers as unimportant, like sheep that can easily be herded anywhere. If that were the case, then why are followers needed at all?

When I ask people this question, I get answers like:

"Followers are needed to carry out the wishes of their leader" or
"To do what the leader wants them to do".

With this view on followers, what difference is there then between a follower and a servant? The idea of blindly serving others is usually not something people want to do. As we will see in coming chapters, getting "bossed around" is not natural for us. Most of us will do everything we can to avoid it which is why many leadership gurus believe and argue that good leadership is the ability to motivate the "unmotivated", inspire the "uninspired" and get people to follow orders despite their reluctance.

Leadership guru Glenn Boseman is a good example. He believes that inspiring people is the most visible part of leadership, which means "selling the vision through telling stories, confronting reality, asking the right questions, reassuring, and providing hope for a bright future".[16] According to Quinn Mills, leadership "is the ability to get other people to do something significant that they might not otherwise do".[17] Perhaps President Harry S. Truman has best expressed this point of view when he said that a great leader "is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don't want to do and like it."[18] No wonder we do not like being called followers!

The correlation between our views on leaders and followers seems to function much like a seesaw — if you raise one side ("it is leaders that make the difference"), then the other must come down ("followers do not make a difference").

This is a dangerous assumption. By focusing on leaders as the center around which everyone and everything revolves, we are regarding everyone else as peripheral, more or less insignificant. In part three, I will show why this assumption is completely false!

We can therefore conclude that due to the leadership myth, another myth has developed over time: the **followership myth**. This myth argues that followers are servants who must be motivated, inspired and guided in order to move in the "right" direction.

The followership myth is clearly not very exciting. It simply reinforces the idea of the omnipotent leader, while doing little to inspire people to

collaborate with each other in an efficient way. Just think of how it affects our democratic governing. Democracy means "rule of the people". Now, how can we, the people and the expected followers, rule a country if we are at the same time told that we should subordinate ourselves and serve our leaders?

No wonder political institutions and political parties have increasing problems gaining or even keeping their credibility among large sections of the population!

Leadership and Science

The Holy Grail of Leadership will have us believe that there is *one* way of leading others. Another common misconception is that it has been scientifically proven that leaders are more important than followers.

Scientist and author Rupert Sheldrake points out, that science in general "is being held back by centuries-old assumptions that have hardened into dogmas."[19] When it comes to leadership, nothing could be truer. When studying leadership we are entering a world *full* of assumptions. Vital questions about the most fundamental building blocks are simply not asked because we falsely presume science has already answered those questions long ago.

In 1982 Arthur Jago, a professor of management at the University of Houston, wrote that despite years of empirical studies researchers have not been able to agree on what differentiates a leader from a non-leader, or an effective leader from an ineffective one.[20] More than thirty years later, his argument remains just as relevant.

> *"Changing currently popular, engrained paradigms — those that have become "conventional wisdom", … is very difficult especially if the theory also fits standard cultural views of the world. Scientists, like most people, are generally conservative in their ability to adopt new paradigms.* "[21]
>
> Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman

Considering that leadership is a billion dollar industry which so many companies, organizations and societies invest in, is it not peculiar or even absurd that we do not know what a leader is? In practice, this means that

when people strive towards becoming 'better leaders', they do not actually *know* what it is they should be striving for.

To add to the confusion, several researchers have observed a number of flaws in the general leadership research. Among other things, they name "poor methodology, conceptual problems, definitional ambiguities, inappropriate focus, lack of coherence" [22], and so forth.

Remember the example of the processionary caterpillar that Cohen used to imply that the leadership myth exists among all species, even insects. Let us look at another example of an insect – the African termite, used by consultants David Baum and Jim Hassinger to make a point about leaders and their leadership. They write:

> *"Have you ever seen pictures of those gigantic ten-foot termite mounds in Africa? They are truly marvels of engineering and cooperation. These mounds are huge, magnificent structures, built by creatures so small that a similar human structure would dwarf anything currently on the planet. What's amazing to note, however, is that this entire fantastic effort is done without a leader. Termites have no hierarchy like ants to direct or manage. Every termite is an equal, performing a task for the common good. They create this monumental structure by following three simple rules that are never violated: Rule 1. Every termite keeps moving till it finds a piece of wood. Rule 2. When it finds a piece of wood, it picks it up and keeps moving. Rule 3. When it finds another piece of wood, it drops the one it has, leaving a small pile, and goes back to rule one. By this process, termites end up creating one of the greatest engineering marvels on the planet.[23]*

You might assume that the above example was used to argue that leaders are redundant. On the contrary; Baum and Hassinger's point is that good leaders create an environment where followers are not too dependent on leaders and their leadership.[24] In other words, this example is in complete contrast to Cohen's. Still, *both* examples are used to highlight a claimed attribute of leadership. Unfortunately, people are likely to accept them both.

There are many reasons why we ended up here. One is that "[m]ost of the practitioner books are written by retired managers who want to pass their leadership secrets and wisdom on to subsequent generations."[25] The managers themselves are also likely to be biased in their analysis of their own role and importance. It is like asking a musician to objectively review his/her own most recent album.

Secondly, as Sheldrake reminds us: "[s]cientists are subject to all the usual constraints of human social life, including peer-group pressure and the need to conform to the norms of the group." [26] While leadership, of course, is an accepted discipline to study, followership is still more controversial.

Thirdly, when it comes to funded studies on leadership: "[g]overnments and corporations do not usually pay scientists to do research because they want innocent knowledge… Most funding is a response to Bacon's[iv] persuasive slogan 'knowledge is power'." [27] And who are truly gaining from leadership studies? The same people who want the power to begin with (the authorities) and those who make a living selling the knowledge (leadership gurus, trainers and consultants etc.).

But what do scholars actually say about the importance of leaders? Surprisingly little. *Very few studies have actually been made on the importance of leadership.* [28] I dare say that most people in the leadership industry are well aware of this fact, but for some reason it does not seem to concern them. As leadership guru Andrew J. DuBrin writes: "The belief that leaders actually influence organizational performance and morale is so plausible that there is not an abundance of research and opinion that deals with this issue. (Nor do we have loads of studies demonstrating that sleeping reduces fatigue)." [29]

Considering that the entire leadership industry is founded on the very idea that leaders are the key to success, this nonchalant attitude towards the absence of evidence is striking.

In 1977, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Professor in Organizational Management at Stanford University, pointed out that our view on the great importance of leaders is just an assumption. [30] People have developed highly romanticized and heroic views on leadership, believing that leaders have more influence and power than they actually do. [31]

I believe that Manfred Kets de Vries, a professor of leadership development, expressed it well when he stated: "[a]s far as leadership studies go, it seems that more and more has been studied about less and less, to end up ironically with a group of researchers studying everything about nothing." [32]

There are so many assumptions and inadequate research about leaders and their importance, that it becomes nearly impossible to separate myth from reality. It seems the only thing the massive leadership industry can agree on is the claim that leaders are the key to success. However, *why*

[iv] Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626)

leaders are so important is more often than not a matter of speculation or interpretation.

For example, it is generally *assumed* that if a company is successful, then the answer to its success can be traced to its management. It is also assumed that company leaders are managers, not subordinates.

The danger with these and other common assumptions is that they limit our understanding of true leadership and true followership. In fact, as I will show in the coming chapters, this one-sided focus on leadership has hindered the development of strong followership in our society. It has also, paradoxically, hindered our understanding of true leadership.

Part 2:
Hunters, Farmers and Managers
The origin of leadership and followership