

Leadership at the Conscious and Unconscious Levels: Case Studies from the British and Other Monarchies

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Abstract: Leadership functions at two major levels: the conscious, as strategy, decision and policy, and the unconscious, where a leader will work with collective mental states such as fear, insecurity, depression, elation, and euphoria, and the two levels are in interaction. This process can be observed in the operation of constitutional monarchy, a form of institutionalised leadership that operates at both levels, but is mostly symbolic and devoid of power. However, in times of national crisis, monarchy can provide a unique kind of leadership of great value by operating at the unconscious level. This helps to explain the persistence of monarchy in such countries as the United Kingdom and Denmark. Yet, there is also an element of chance in whether the individual monarch is suitable to the demands of the situation.

1. Levels of Leadership

The study of leadership at the conscious or strategic level is rightly placed at the center of many disciplines such as government, history, management, science, innovation and theology. To lead, from the old English *laeden*, is to direct by going forward, a quality much in demand and, not surprisingly, the subject of many theories. There is a rich offering of many valuable theories of leadership, and the majority of these are understandably concerned with conscious policy, strategy and decision. A smaller number is concerned with collective emotions such as identification, fear and even hysteria, and other manifestations of the unconscious. Leadership thus occurs at a minimum of two levels, the conscious and the unconscious, and requires an interaction between the two levels. Leadership at one level requires decisions and actions based on strategy, to achieve desired results. At the unconscious level, where dreams, emotions and subconscious states such as elation or depression occur, another type of leadership is required, though the two levels interact continuously.

The study can begin with the mass of people who will be transformed into followers, and here the concept of a *psychological crowd* has relevance. A *psychological crowd* has some characteristics in common with individuals but it also has some that are peculiar to itself and is fundamental to psychoanalytic study of the leader/follower

relationship. Predating Freud by more than two decades, the French theorist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) observed that unconscious phenomena preponderated in the functioning of the mind (Le Bon, 1896: 7). This is also shared collectively as innumerable common characteristics are passed from generation to generation to form what he called “the genius of the race” (Le Bon, 1896: 7), or *unretrieved collective memory*. The unconscious elements possessed by all members of a group, even those of widely differing intelligence or education, are feelings, passions and aversions, and form the common property of the psychological crowd. The power of this common basis of feeling results in the overruling of restraint so that the psychological crowd can be heroic or just as easily criminal in its behaviour (Le Bon, 1896: 14). Crowds are also highly suggestible so that ideas are passed by *contagion* among all the individual minds in contact. As an idea enters the brain, it transforms itself into an action which could be, for example, arson or self-sacrifice. While suggestibility can be a characteristic of an individual, it is more acute in a crowd, which will be “perpetually hovering on the borderland of the unconscious” (Le Bon, 1896: 22). Collective observation is highly erroneous, often being based on collective hallucination as a product of suggestions passed by contagion (Le Bon, 1896: 26). Legends are in a process of continuous transformation, but there is always an element of unpredictability in the direction of movement of a crowd. The behaviour of crowds is highly variable in relation to moral standards, being sometimes cowardly and sometimes lofty, even loftier than what an individual could achieve (Le Bon, 1896: 43-44).

Le Bon thus presents a theory of *following* based on collective mental functioning in which collective memories are linked with thoughts and emotions by the mechanism of contagion, which a leader can transform into group action of very great power.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) adopted Le Bon’s formulation of group mind functioning which he accepted as operating through mental processes just as it does in the mind of an individual (Freud, 1950: 157). Freud noted that a *racial unconscious* emerges, describing it as an *archaic heritage* of the human mind, which is unconscious, to which must be added a *repressed unconscious* (Freud, 1955: 75n), though it is important to note here that the major emphasis in Freud’s work was in the clinical analysis and treatment of the individual. When he speculated on the group mind, he saw it as impulsive, changeable and irritable, and led almost exclusively by the unconscious (Freud, 1955: 77). The group mind demands leadership from which it seeks strength and violence (Freud, 1955: 78). The attraction of the group for the individual is the fear of being alone, and here Freud notes that opposition to the herd is essentially separation from it. Thus Freud sees the herd instinct as something primary and indivisible (Freud, 1955: 118). The fear among small children of being alone is therefore the foundation of the herd instinct. However, it needs qualification in that the child will fear separation from its mother and be very mistrustful of members of the herd who are strangers (Freud, 1955: 119). Among children a herd instinct or a group or community feeling develops later, and this group will make, as its first demand, the demand for justice or equal treatment of all (Freud, 1955: 120). The “...demand for equality is the root of a social conscience and the sense of duty” (Freud, 1955: 121). The feeling of equality allows identification of one with another but also recognizes a single person as superior to all, that is, the leader. Each of the many groups that exist will have a group mind, so that each individual will have a share in numerous group minds, be they race, class, religion, nationality or any other (Freud, 1955: 129). Where memberships are in conflict, mental instability results,

leading ultimately to breakdown. Freud saw human libido as a powerful motivating force, not only in individual functioning as either sexual impulsion or hypnosis, but also in group functioning.

Another psychoanalyst, Carl Jung (1875-1961), believed that the personal unconscious, as proposed by Freud and which Jung accepted, was underlain by a deeper level of the *collective unconscious*, or phylogenetic substratum. “Just as the human body is a museum, so to speak, of its phylogenic history, so too is the psyche” (Jung, 1959. 9.1: 287). The collective unconscious provides a second psychic stream, “... a system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals” (Jung, 1959. 9.1: 43). The unconscious has three levels: that which can be produced voluntarily, that which can be produced involuntarily, and that which can never be produced (Jung, 1959. 9.2: 110). The unconscious stores repressed material, it compensates or counterbalances the conscious, and it can create symbols. Jung saw the mechanisms of compensation and symbol-creation at work at the collective level in the decline of the Roman Empire and the French Revolution (Jung, 1959. 10.1: 3-28). The collective unconscious also shapes *Weltanschauung* (Jung, 1959. 8.32: 358-381). Though he does not use the specific term *collective neurosis*, Jung does refer to a state of *lunacy* among a people and went on to state, “There is no lunacy people under the domination of an archetype will not fall prey to” (Jung, 1959. 9.1: 46-7).

Jung believed that individuation brings about a harmonisation between conscious and unconscious in a process called *transcendent function* (Jung, 1959. 9.1: 289). However, the conscious and the unconscious can be in deep and violent conflict. When Jung states that when a social group deviates too far from its instinctual foundations so that it experiences the force of its unconscious forces (Jung, 1959. 9.1: 282), he implies that this conflict can also take place at the collective level. On the basis of this, one can posit a major function of the leader: resolving the conflict between conscious and unconscious, as in, for example, the conscious desire on the basis of reason to capitulate, and the unconscious desire to resist.

A modern theorist, Manfred Kets de Vries, has applied psychoanalytic concepts to the study of group behavior, and has given a new statement to the contagion mechanism. Kets de Vries extends the psychiatric concept of *folie à deux*, which can be called collective insanity or psychosis of association, to an interpretation as a phenomenon that can spread from two to many persons particularly within an organizational context (Kets de Vries, 1980: 90). Leaders can either be the cause of collective insanity, particularly in seeking external enemies, or in giving protection against it, by building trust and confidence (Kets de Vries, 1980: 109). The great value of Kets de Vries’ formulation is that it recognizes the very close relationship between the unconscious and the irrational.

In later work, Kets de Vries argued for the importance of the Freudian mechanism of *transference* in understanding the leader/follower relationship. Kets de Vries noted that followers endow their leaders with magical powers and omniscience in the same way that children do with their parents and certain other adults (Kets de Vries, 1990: 427).

However, the concept of a *collective mind*, as proposed by Le Bon, developed by Freud as *collective consciousness*, by Jung as the *collective unconsciousness*, and with

the risk of *collective insanity* as proposed by Kets de Vries, has been contested by those who argue for an emergent-norms theory that sees group unanimity as an illusion created by common action based on prevailing norms (Robertson, 1987: 358-359). The psychologist Reber also introduces an air of skepticism when he defines *group mind* as a “hypothesized, collective, transcendent spirit or consciousness, which was assumed by some to characterize a group or society” (Reber, 1995: 323).

Kets de Vries has been criticized as making an anthropomorphic assumption, that is, treating organizations as if they were human beings with a distinct personality (Gemmill, 1994: 351). The methodological difficulty of assessing any concept of *group mind* is obvious: its existence cannot be proven, but neither can its non-existence. But one can accept that, whether genuinely collective or simply agglomerative, collective mental states do exist, and it is with these that leaders will concern themselves in an infinite variety of ways.

2. Theories of Monarchy

The word *monarch* comes from the Greek *monos*, alone, and *archein*, to rule, and a monarch is such a person who traditionally rules alone, by heredity, though occasionally by election. The theory of monarchy is quite simple: it is a divine right to rule as bestowed by God. An explanation for the origin of monarchs has been proposed in the concept of the charismatic leader, as developed by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). This type of leadership he defined as “...an extraordinary quality of a person...(t)he magical sorcerer, the prophet, the leader of hunting and booty expeditions, the warrior chieftain....(t)he legitimacy of their rule rests on the belief in and the devotion to the extraordinary, which is valued because it goes beyond the normal human qualities, and was originally valued as supernatural” (Gerth and Mills, 1958:295-296). Weber went on to analyse the way in which charismatic authority becomes routinized as rational-legal authority, in a much-acclaimed model, which, for present purposes, is an institutional theory of leadership. The ruler will need legitimation and this will be created through the power of hierarchy: “...(t)his holds expressly for the sovereign who represents a divine incarnation...,” a claim which will be acknowledged by “professional experts in divinity” (Gerth and Mills, 1958: 263). The concept of charismatic leadership has the great value of acknowledging a non-rational component in leader/follower relationships. It is this which explains the element of fanaticism in many such relationships, where rational behavior becomes deeply affected by emotion. Weber does not go quite so far as to postulate a collective unconscious, as did his contemporary Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), but Weber’s wife Marianne indicated a strong likelihood in Weber’s mind:

“[he had] no doubt that Freud’s ideas can become a source of highly significant interpretations of a whole series of cultural and historical, moral and religious phenomena” (Gerth and Mills, 1958: 21).

Over time and after many abuses of power leading to battles and revolutions, some philosophers, notably John Locke, saw that it was necessary “to think of methods of restraining any exorbitances” and of “balancing the power of government, by placing several parts of it in different hands” (Locke, 1993: 169). Absolute monarch in many countries gave way to constitutional monarchy, or the concept that a divinely appointed monarch could remain as head of state, signing into force laws passed by

parliament. As the English theorist Sir Walter Bagehot stated over a century ago, the monarch has “the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn” (Birch, 1987:47). In addition, the monarch constitutes a symbol of the identity and unity of a nation, as a personal symbol of continuity and stability (Birch, 1987:47). The fact that a monarch holds office for life, will have great wealth, is generally immune from prosecution though not from danger of assassination, and has religious authority, is a very strong though not perfect guarantee of personal integrity on following conscience in the exercise of symbolic leadership, particularly in times of national disaster.

Another approach to the explanation of the persistence of monarchy comes from the discipline of sociology. This approach is well illustrated by a comment made in relation to the English monarchy:

“When there is a select committee on the Queen the charm of royalty will be gone. Its mystery is its life. We must not let in daylight upon magic” (Bagehot, in Sampson, 1965: 22).

Monarchy in fact provides an excellent example of the sociology of knowledge, that is, the social construction of a set of ideas, which are cemented in tradition, religion and mysticism. In reality, however, there is no mystery about the establishment of these ideas.

The well-known writer and Member of the British Parliament, Nigel Nicolson, described how his father, Harold Nicolson, came to be commissioned by an old friend, Sir Alan Lascelles, to write the official biography of King George VI. The advice given by Lascelles to Nicolson clearly shows the mechanism at work:

“You must always remember, Harold, that you will not be writing an ordinary biography. You will be writing mythology, and the myth is one of gossamer fragility. Nothing discreditable about the monarchy, nothing uncouth, nothing comic, must enter your book” (Nicolson, 2003: 2).

Nicolson then goes on to state that his father carried out this task with great credit, and, as a result, was rewarded with the bestowing of a knighthood. This rare lifting of the covers reveals awareness on the part of the royal authorities of the extreme importance of the maintaining of a myth, and a willingness to use a reward system in its maintenance. This is not to say that there have not been many cases of embarrassing disclosure and many more of allegation, including, for example, one that London’s infamous Jack the Ripper was related to royalty (long discounted). Monarchies simply have to maintain themselves as best as they can during these times, however much they may draw upon the extensive fund of legitimacy in the fulfilment of their difficult role of providing a symbol of identity, unity, continuity and stability.

Even though most monarchies are now largely symbolic, the role of monarchy does sometimes include the necessity to take a position, and in so doing incur conflict with parliament and populace. One such case occurred in 1990 when Baudoin, King of the Belgians, was required to give assent to a duly passed bill liberalizing abortion, which he was unable to do on grounds of religious belief. The solution to this impasse was

for King Baudoin to effectively abdicate for one day so that the Council of Ministers could constitutionally give assent to the bill. After this was done, the combined Chambers of Parliament observed the end of the King's "impossibility of reigning," so that he could once again exercise his full constitutional role. This incident clearly demonstrates the importance of religious belief to monarchical leadership (as noted at an earlier time by Weber) and the complexity of negotiating a transition between the strategic and the symbol levels of leadership (The Belgian Monarchy, 2005: 2).

Sometimes present-day monarchs become involved in politics, with generally unfortunate results. Nepal is the world's only Hindu monarchy and has struggled to institute democracy, a task made more difficult by the presence of Maoist rebels. After decades of rule by absolute monarchy, in 1990 King Birendra bowed to pressure from his subjects and proclaimed a new constitution, which returned the kingdom to democracy, with the king remaining as the head of state. In 2001, the royal family was massacred, allegedly by King Birendra's son Crown Prince Dipendra under the influence of drugs. Victims included the king and queen, their two younger children, and three of the king's siblings. The crown prince also apparently shot himself, but lived long enough to be proclaimed king. After Dipendra's later death, the crown passed to his brother, Gyanendra, who suspended Nepal's democratically elected government in October 2002. After massive protests, King Gyanendra reinstated the Prime Minister in June 2004, but in 2005 the king once again dismissed the government and assumed complete control of Nepal (Royalty.nu: 2005: 1).

Thus although monarchy can be seen as an artificial creation with a long and often bloody history, it can, in the right circumstances, have immense value in providing institutionalised leadership, as can clearly be seen through the days of the life and death struggle of World War II. At this time, countries were under threat of Nazi invasion and were experiencing extreme collective fear, passed by contagion, to the level of severe neurosis. While political leaders dealt with the threat at the strategic (conscious) level, some, but not all, monarchs were responding at the level of the collective unconscious, as well as the conscious level of strategy, though with varying measures of success.

3. Leadership by Monarchy: Edward VIII of England

In 1936 King George V died and his eldest son David was in line to become Britain's King Edward VIII. However, before he was crowned, Edward VIII was forced to abdicate from the Throne because of the matter of his impending marriage to an American lady, Mrs. Wallis Simpson. This marriage was considered by the Prime Minister and other influential persons to be unacceptable, officially on grounds of her legal status as a divorced woman, but unofficially on grounds of her perceived character, behavior, and nationality.

After abdication, the former uncrowned King Edward VIII accepted the title of the Duke of Windsor, and his wife the title of the Duchess of Windsor, though she was denied the additional title of Her Royal Highness, a denial that became the cause of a lifelong resentment by the Windsors. For some time, the Windsors had been believed to be sympathetic to the Fascist regimes of Europe and this feeling was given some weight when in October 1937 they visited Germany, ostensibly to study labor conditions. However, while there, they met Himmler, Hess, Goering and Goebbels

and were received at the Berchtesgarden by Hitler who turned the meeting into a propaganda coup (Cannon and Griffiths, 1988: 608-609). Whether the Windsors were motivated by a desire to be future collaborators or simply displaying naïveté is a matter of conjecture. Yet, in either case, they were clearly out of alignment with the thinking and the mood of apprehension of the British people at that time.

To the future Prime Minister Winston Churchill (who had been a supporter of Edward as he feared abdication would weaken the institution of monarchy) and other influential people, it was clear Britain should resist the coming Nazi onslaught, and that America's help would be needed and should be actively sought. The fact that Anglo-American relations had entered a new low because of the abdication crisis was quite alarmingly apparent to perceptive observers.

4. Leadership by Monarchy: George VI of England

When Edward's brother Albert acceded to the Throne in 1936 (taking the name of George VI), he was seen as possibly even more unsuited to the role of kingship than his brother, though for completely different reasons. Albert had been afflicted with poor physical health, pathological shyness, depression and a very bad stammer, and within elite circles, was portrayed as even slightly intellectually handicapped.

King George VI was thus a most unlikely candidate for the role of symbolic leader of a country at war, but he accepted this role with a deep sense of commitment. Rather than fleeing his kingdom under threat, George VI and his family remained in residence at Buckingham Palace and the King undertook pistol-shooting instruction in the Palace grounds and intended to die there fighting (Taylor, 1965: 600). Well aware of the need to repair and rebuild relations with the United States, George VI visited President Roosevelt at the White House in 1939. There, in secret discussions, both men analyzed the magnitude of the likely consequences of Axis victory in Europe and laid the foundations for future Anglo-American cooperation.

An additional complication was the position of the United States Ambassador to Britain, Mr. Joseph Kennedy, who was of Irish descent, and affected by Britain's policies and actions in Ireland. Kennedy was openly defeatist, and also strongly anti-Roosevelt, and opposed to all aid to Britain. This background and these opinions subsequently led him to strongly advise the King to surrender. On receiving this advice, King George VI wrote in a letter to Mr. Kennedy,

“We stand on the threshold of we know what not. Misery & suffering of War we know. But what of the future? The British mind is made up. I shall leave it at that” (Stevenson, 1976: 67).

In this statement one can see a clear affirmation of the concept of the group mind, and an assertion of collective willpower in resisting the onset of the mental state of depression based on fear of defeat.

In addition to his transatlantic bridge-building, George VI also saw the need to unify Britain's population, which was traditionally divided by social class. In this he may well have been responding to a perception of the role of internal divisions of class and

ideology as certainly contributing to the collapse of morale in France (Maurois, 1941: 53).

In the 1920's, the future George VI (then Albert) had been president of the Industrial Welfare Society and had sought to improve the conditions of workers through canteens, medical centers and other benefits, to the extent that the comment had been made that no one in a comparable position had done so much to "establish and maintain harmonious relationships between employers and workmen" (diggerhistory, 2005:1). George VI's reign could therefore be interpreted as legitimate leadership realized through the conscious level, where he played a strategic role internationally and domestically, and at the level of the collectively held beliefs where he was seen a symbol of resistance, stubbornness and continuity. In so doing, he had to make a personal transformation, from a severely inhibited and depressed individual who, with the help of speech therapist Lionel Logue, went on to become a powerfully compelling leader who worked in perfect tandem with another even more powerfully compelling leader, Churchill (who was himself also fighting personal depression), to resolve an immense problem.

5. Leadership by Monarchy: King Christian X of Denmark

King Christian X (1870-1947) was the reigning constitutional monarch of Denmark at the time of the Nazi German invasion, capitulation and occupation from April 9, 1940 to May 5, 1945. For the lack of resistance and acceptable "racial" (that is, Aryan) qualities, the Danes were permitted a measure of self-government until August 29, 1942, when the Danish government resigned and Nazi Germany assumed full control. During this time, King Christian had maintained his presence in his capital and had been seen as a figure of symbolic resistance. After full German control, the position of Denmark's 6,500 Jews became one of extreme peril (Hilberg, 1961: 359-363). During this time leading up to the persecution, King Christian had made clear his support for his subjects of Jewish background. For example, when in June 1942, Germany began demanding the wearing of a "Jewish badge," he was reported to have said that he would be the first Danish citizen to wear the badge (Reitlinger, 1961: 371), though in fact he never had to wear it, as compliance with this regulation was never enforced in Denmark.

In September 1943, several days before the deportations were scheduled to begin, Danish authorities, with the certain knowledge and approval of the King, were able to assist in the removal by many small boats of over 6,000 Danish Jews to neutral Sweden, in a process that continued until October 1943, in what has been described as "one of the strangest rescue operations in history." (Hilberg, 1961: 362).

In the case of Denmark, the distinction between the two levels of leadership, the strategic and the unconscious, and their coalescing in the person of the monarch, King Christian X, is very clear. In the absence of evidence as to the specific state of the Danish collective mental state, it can only be speculated that Christian X's actions were profoundly effective in the general effort to save people. What can be said is that his actions provided *symbolic* leadership, that was also backed up with the *substantive* leadership of his strategic interventions with his Danish political leaders and Dr. Werner Best, the Nazi plenipotentiary of Denmark.

Referring to King Christian X of Denmark and some others from among Nazi occupied Europe's monarchs, it has been remarked that they contributed by providing "...an important psychological boost to the Allied war effort by their courageous example of resistance to Nazi Germany..." (Steinberg, 2005: 1).

6. Conclusion

Leadership functions at two major levels: the conscious, as strategy, decision making and policy, and the unconscious, where a leader will work with collective mental states such as fear, insecurity and depression and also at times elation and euphoria. This will involve a managed interaction between the two levels.

Centuries ago, inspired charismatic leadership became institutionalised as monarchy, where a right to rule was considered as being conferred divinely. In modern times, most monarchies have become constitutional, that is, largely symbolic and devoid of power, but in times of national crisis, monarchy can still provide a unique kind of leadership of great value by operating in symbolic ways that influence the unconscious level as well as the strategic level. This helps to explain the persistence of monarchy in such countries as the United Kingdom and Denmark. Yet there is also an element of chance in whether the individual monarch is suitable to the demands of the situation.

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