Deconstructing The End of Leadership: Postmodernity, Epistemology, and Worldviews

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Abstract
The current article deconstructs Kellerman’s The End of Leadership via postmodernity, epistemology, and worldviews. Despite perceptively synthesizing and diagnosing a host of issues and assumptions that plague the leadership industry, Kellerman’s argument is flawed in two substantial, overlapping ways. First, the argument is decidedly grounded in modernity, despite the obvious evidences of a postmodern critique. Second, although the impact of technology and culture are likely correctly identified as significant, analysis explicating why these altered views about leaders facilitated a redistribution of power is unattended to. Therefore, the current work argues that The End of Leadership compellingly diagnoses the condition of the leadership industry via an incomplete lens. Therefore, three counterthemes are offered to compliment and nuance Kellerman’s argument: first, an understanding that technologies alter epistemologies; second, an analysis of the assumptions tethered to the epistemologies of modernity; and third, that individual and collective worldviews have changed as a consequence of the epistemological shift of postmodernity.

Keywords
The End of Leadership, Barbara Kellerman, epistemological shift of postmodernity, epistemology, postmodernity, modernity, leadership

Academics rarely agree and often struggle to find unanimity on issues within their own disciplines, and yet, scholars of organizational leadership and practitioners of leadership development generally agree that leadership studies and leader development are facing a crisis (Issa & Pick, 2010; Kellerman, 2012; Walsh, Meyer, & Schoonhoven, 2006). Popular perceptions of leaders and leadership, especially ethical expectations and the perceived trustworthiness of those in positions of leadership, have unmistakably shifted since the 1960s toward disillusionment (Kellerman, 2012). Before the 1960s, leaders were perceived far more positively than after the 1970s, and the whole strata of leadership and leadership studies, despite the sea of changes that have occurred since the 1960s and 1970s, have remained relatively unchanged (Kellerman, 2012). This disenchantment, coupled with the all too frequent news reports concerning unscrupulous leaders and their actions, appear to have set the stage for a turning point in the study, reflection, and development of leaders.

In The End of Leadership, Kellerman (2012) attempts to identify and analyze the status of the leadership industry, which Kellerman identifies as a “catchall term for the now countless leadership centers, institutes, programs, courses, seminars, workshops, experiences, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants, and coaches” (p. xiii). This is necessary because while the leadership industry has been thriving—growing and prospering beyond anyone’s early imaginings—leaders by and large are performing poorly, worse in many ways than before, miserably disappointing in any case to those among us who once believed the experts held the keys to the kingdom. (Kellerman, 2012, p. xv)

A majority of the problem, in Kellerman’s estimation, is mistaken assumptions. The End of Leadership is therefore an attempt to identify the problems, diagnose and uncover unhealthy assumptions, and prescribe a way forward.

The End of Leadership: A Perceptive Meta-Analysis

Kellerman’s (2012) work should be commended for wrestling with overarching concepts, a multitude of diverse global contexts, and the effort to locate the last 30 to 40 years of
leadership realities within the historical streams of influential theories. The finished product serves as a call to reevaluate and critically reappraise many of the assumptions that obfuscate the contemporary study of leadership and the development of effective leaders by reorienting and engaging the changes that have occurred. Kellerman astutely observes that cultural changes, shifts in power from leaders to followers, and technology have been the precipitating causes for the recent changes in leadership. These observations and the overarching concepts, varied contexts, and historicity of consequential leadership theories provide a meta-analysis that should prove useful for scholars and practitioners as they engage and encounter the realities so clearly described. And yet the causes identified and the lens utilized in this lucid narrative warrants further discussion.

Even though it appears Kellerman (2012) has fittingly synthesized and diagnosed the climate and effects influencing the leadership industry, it would seem that this analysis and the subsequent discussion are flawed in two substantial, overlapping ways. First, the lens utilized is decidedly grounded in the epistemological and ontological assumptions of modernity, despite the obvious evidences and glaring realities of postmodern influences. Second, although the impact of technology and culture are correctly identified as factors, the discussion fails to interact with and discuss the reasons these changes have influenced and continue to influence views about leaders and the redistribution of power. Essentially, Kellerman analyzes and isolates present day realities for leaders and their organizations correctly via an incomplete or, at the very least, an underdeveloped lens.

This incomplete lens does not constitute a wrong analysis, far from it; rather, it reveals and highlights underdeveloped causal identifications. For example, technology itself did not cause power to shift from leaders to followers; rather, technology, in this instance, transformed and transforms individual and collective worldviews, which has altered and continues to alter conceptions of leadership and power. Likewise, the epistemological and ontological assumptions of modernity, which are the assumptions undergirding Western universities, function as the presuppositions that color and inform a majority of scholars and academic inquiries, including, but certainly not limited to, Kellerman’s (2012) critique and analysis. What is missing from Kellerman’s work is threefold: first, an understanding of the epistemological shift that was caused by a growing awareness of the other via technology; second, that individual and collective worldviews inform the perceptions of both leaders and followers and that such views have changed as a result of this epistemological shift; and third, an analysis that acknowledges, at the very least, its own tethering to the epistemologies of modernity. Therefore, the theory of postmodernity as an epistemological shift will be applied to Kellerman’s analysis, assumptions, and conclusions. To accomplish this, we first turn to the overarching narrative of Kellerman’s synthesis and argument and briefly discuss Kellerman’s explicit assumptions and the changes prescribed to right the leadership crisis. We then turn our attention to postmodernity as an epistemological shift and discuss in detail epistemological shifts and the effects on individual and collective worldviews. From this framework, implicit assumptions inherent to Kellerman’s work are discussed in light of postmodern epistemology and a critique is offered based upon the framework and suggestions set out as remedies for the study of leadership. But first, let us begin with an overview of The End of Leadership.

Overarching Narrative of Kellerman’s Argument

The End of Leadership tells “two tales,” the first is about leadership and change and the second is about the leadership industry itself (Kellerman, 2012, p. xx). Both tales are relatively well developed; however, for our purposes, we will concentrate primarily on the former. A fairly insightful introduction sets the stage for the book’s relevance to the study of leadership and assists the reader in conceptualizing the piece’s overall argument and organization. The introduction begins with an identification of many of the issues that plague leadership studies and the leadership industry, of which each are quickly refuted and discussed in detail as her argument progresses. Primarily, the issues are mistaken assumptions, such as conceptualizing leadership as static, that leadership can be taught and taught to anyone quickly and easily, that context is of secondary importance, and that leaders should be the central focus as they are more crucial than followers. These assumptions are refuted via the organization and development of Kellerman’s argument, which is grounded in her historiography of leadership as trajectory. This trajectory presupposes that “since the time of the Enlightenment, because of the Enlightenment, the weak increasingly challenged the strong” (p. xvii). And yet this assumption is held in tension with, and not clearly delineated from, the identification that the 1960s and 1970s accelerated such challenges and resulted in a far-reaching, global redistribution of power in which the power of leaders waned while the power of followers increased. Although we will discuss these assumptions later, at this juncture, it is essential to note that this forms the backbone of Kellerman’s argument. This historical trajectory identifies two additional assumptions unattended to by the leadership industry, namely, followers and cultural context.

Kellerman’s (2012) historicity concerning the development of leadership forms a foundation in which to build upon the cultural and technological changes that significantly affected leadership and perceptions concerning leadership. These changes, although not fully explicated or carefully discussed in light of the wider academic literature available outside of the study of organizational leadership, suggest that the leadership industry has been and is negligently complacent concerning these changes and, in particular, the ways in which culture and context have altered the balance of power between leaders and followers.
A trenchant critique justifying an assertion posited in the introduction that leaders, followers, and context should each be conceived of as equally important. This reorientation away from a leader-centric focus is a reoccurring theme throughout The End of Leadership and is further bolstered via discussions concerning the increased interconnectedness of people globally and a shift in the social contract between leaders and followers. Kellerman (2012) utilizes the lens of evolutionary leadership theory to demonstrate that the social contract between leaders and followers has changed from self-interest to merit. Again, according to Kellerman, this change occurred because the assumptions on which the contract is based have changed, first, because the old justifications for having power, authority, and influence are no longer so persuasive, and second, because people in the present think of themselves as more important, more entitled, than did people in the past. (p. 23)

The consequence of which rendered followers more likely to judge leaders upon two criteria: effectiveness and ethics. These criteria and this change in social contract were hastened by technology, which further solidifies her argument that the interconnectedness of a globally related world identifies another example of the leadership industry’s failure to adopt to this “new and changed social contract” (p. 149). Quite simply, Kellerman’s analysis is that the leadership industry has failed to account for, interact with, and engage these issues, which form the assumptions that “underpin the leadership industry” (p. 190).

The Changes Prescribed to Right the Leadership Crisis

Despite the failure of the leadership industry to recognize its own myopic self-justification, Kellerman (2012) provides several general correctives: developing a greater expertise as it pertains to contextual intelligence, developing a global focus with attention to global and local complexities, employing a far more critical analysis of leadership studies and leader development, and broadening education for both leaders and followers that incorporates interdisciplinary study. Certainly, these remedies would address the assumptions identified by Kellerman. A greater understanding and engagement with contextualization would greatly lessen the myopia of a field of study that fails to incorporate the numerous overlaps in the humanities and may serve to guard against self-serving study and application, including, but not limited to, cultural influences. Expanding one’s purview to a global focus in the midst of the obvious sociological and political changes that have occurred since the 1960s and 1970s should ensure, at the very least, a more effective engagement with the issues and complexities that global interconnectedness have spawned in the wake of an ever-closing global village. Developing a willingness and tools to critically analyze the leadership industry through contextualization and a broader focus should enable useful analysis that limits or, at the very least, challenges myopic tendencies. And, finally, providing interdisciplinary education that considers the complexities and interactions of both leaders and followers, as well as nuanced understandings of power and context, would likely address many of the observations that are identified as contributing to the leadership crisis. These remedies, although seemingly appropriate and well articulated, fail to adequately account for or identify the factors that precipitated the leadership crisis. Without identifying and discussing the reasons for these effects, remedies such as these remain untethered to the actual phenomena that instigated the crisis. Certainly, Kellerman (2012) identifies generalities, but her analysis and remedies fail to adequately wrestle with and incorporate a framework that explicates the cultural and technological changes that have spurned individuals toward a general distrust of their leaders and the reasons why power has shifted from leaders to followers. It is to this neglect that we now turn; to accomplish this, a momentary diversion is needed to provide a foundational understanding of postmodernity, epistemology, and worldviews to elucidate this study’s interpretation and critique of Kellerman’s analysis and remedies.

The End of Leadership Through a Postmodern Lens

Scholars from a variety of fields identify the 1960s and 1970s as a significant watershed in the cultural and historical development of the West. Cultural theorists from a plethora of disciplines attribute a variety of explanations for these changes, but most frequently, postmodernity is conceptualized as the consequence of the widespread disillusionment of the 1960s and 1970s (Ahonen, 2010; Balia & Kim, 2011; Bosch, 1991; Brown, 2000; Hiebert, 2008; Olsen & Ahlstrand, 2011; Sørensen, 2007). The effects of this disillusionment are all encompassing as postmodernity “is no marginal phenomenon, not something happening on the fringe[s] of society; rather, it is penetrating whole cultures, a paradigm shift consciously and subconsciously transforming commonly accepted habits, notions, and patterns of thoughts in its wake” (Balia & Kim, 2011, p. 67). The reason this paradigm shift consciously and subconsciously penetrates whole cultures is...
because postmodernity is best understood as an epistemological shift affecting individual and collective worldviews (French & Ehrman, 2016).

**Postmodernity as an Epistemological Shift**

Postmodernity is notoriously difficult to define. Postmodernity is often narrowly defined based exclusively upon postmodern philosophers and theorists such as Jacques Derrida (deconstruction), Michel Foucault (discourse analysis), Richard Rorty (neopragmatism), Thomas Kuhn (paradigm theory), and others who have attempted to “uncover the historical and cultural relatively of knowledge, the hidden agendas of power behind scientific discourses and tried to replace metaphysics and ontology with linguistics and constructivism” (Walldorf, 2010, p. 6). Certainly, postcolonial criticism and postmodern philosophies and theories have affected both the academy and the wider public; however, it is unlikely that these are the sole driving force of a paradigm shift that is consciously and subconsciously penetrating whole cultures. Rather, the widespread disenchantment in response to the failed promises of modernity more readily defines postmodernity as a reaction against the assumptions and presuppositions inherent to modernity (Balia & Kim, 2011; Bosch, 1991; Hiebert, 2008; Iyadurai, 2010). To understand postmodernity then, one must wrestle with this pervasive disillusionment concerning the assumptions and presuppositions of modernity, that is, epistemology.

**Epistemology.** Epistemology, generally, is “an account of knowledge” (Moser, 2002, p. 3). Greco (1999) defines epistemology as the theory of knowledge, which is driven by two main questions: “What is knowledge and how can we know,” and “if we think we can know something, as nearly everyone does, then a third main question arises: how do we know what we know?” (p. 1). Epistemology is therefore a dynamic concept because human beings have understood knowledge—how it is identified, communicated, and justified—in different ways at different times in history. Three eras of epistemology are typically identified: premodern, modern, and postmodern (Corfield, 2010). However, using the term “eras” requires clarification. First, the following depictions are not without bias. The author of this work has been shaped by many of the explicit and implicit philosophic, historic, religious, and cultural assumptions of the West. Therefore, the following discussion should not be conceived of as comprehensive metanarrative of global history but rather as a narrative shaped by Western, Eurocentric influence(s). Second, eras of epistemology are not neatly divided epochs in which one era ends and the next begins; rather, significant overlaps occur (Corfield, 2010). The current work will therefore avoid establishing neatly divided epochs as there is little agreement concerning the symbolic moments that mark the transition between epistemological eras and assumes that premodern, modern, and postmodern epistemologies informed and inform individual and collective worldviews and that these influences are not uniform but affect individuals differently, in a variety of ways, and continue to do so today.

The premodern era is often characterized as the time before modernity in which the authority of rituals underpinned the ways in which knowledge was identified, communicated, and justified.

Most people in the human past knew who and what they were, not by precept or as a conclusion to an analytical discussion, but by constant, daily experience and reinforcement. Social stability and immobility combined (mostly) with relative geographical rootedness to place to produce stable and, above all, unreflective sense of selfhood. Indeed it was this which traditional religions both celebrated and reinforced. Religious ritual tells you... who you are and what it is that you are a part of, whilst investing the whole with significance by rooting it in the transcendent. (Pearse, 2005, p. 7)

The stability of one’s identity through religious ritual would be significantly challenged by the epistemological influences of modernity (Pearse, 2005).

The modern era is often identified as beginning with the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and European colonialism and is characterized by “the belief in the power of reason, progress, and the potential of the scientific method to solve hitherto intractable human dilemmas” (Balia & Kim, 2011, p. 65). Knowledge could therefore “be obtained only through reason, observation, and experiment,” and once known, it is applicable to all people as a metanarrative (Patterson, 1983, p. 28).

Typical for modernity is the grand narrative, a project designed to convince everyone of the truth of a particular vision or theory about historical development, as for example the cases of the Social Darwinist belief in the superiority of the white race [or] the nation state as the sole legitimate foundation for a political framework, Liberalism, Communism or Nazism as superior political ideologies, Deism or Atheism as the most rational worldview, or perhaps even the assumptions of some variations of Christian mission that the Christian faith is the most advanced creed and has produced the highest civilization so it needs to be spread throughout the whole world. (Balia & Kim, 2011, p. 65)

Modernity, therefore, challenged the local authority of traditional religions to “liberate the individual from the oppression of family, church, and local custom [so] he would be autonomous and free” (Colson & Pearcey, 1999, p. 104). So, “where religion was not rejected entirely, ritual and personal relationships were replaced by texts and ideas,” which were reinforced by the printed word (Pearse, 2005, p. 7).

Hiebert (2008) observes that “few transformations of worldview have been as decisive and influential as that which changed the religious worldview of traditional Europe into the rational and secular worldview of modern Europe” (p. 142). This transformation “from theocentrism to humanism is a Copernican revolution that radically changes the
way modern humans view the world” (p. 149). From this Copernican revolution emerged the doctrines of liberty and equality and the elevation of science as the sole arbiter of truth. Education, therefore, is also elevated and serves as the “most important legitimating agency of modernity” (p. 194), in which utopia was attainable simply by “illuminating ignorance, removing errors and increasing knowledge” (p. 203).

Scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want, and the arbitrariness of calamities. The development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition, release from the arbitrary use of power as well as the dark side of our natures. Only through such a project could the universal, immutable qualities of all of humanity be revealed. (Hiebert, 2008, p. 150)

In the beginning of the 1960s, there was an optimism that development would right the wrongs of the world and that science would prevail in making life better for all people. According to Nash (1975), “the widespread trust in scientific humanism” was “one of the striking features of the opening years of the decade” (p. 16). Yet despite this widespread trust, as the 1960s progressed, a crisis emerged.

The social, intellectual, religious crisis of the 1960s was specific to no one particular religious tradition, nor to any one part of the world. More widely still, it was not even a specifically religious crisis, it was rather one of total culture, affecting many secular institutions in a way comparable to its effect on the churches. It was a crisis of the relevance (or capability for sheer survival) of long-standing patterns of thought and institution of all sorts in a time of intense, and rather self-conscious, modernization. (Hastings, 1991, pp. 580-581)

This crisis of relevance of longstanding patterns of thought and institution of all sorts is a crisis of epistemology, which is demonstrated by developments within technology, travel, and communications, the growing recognition of global plurality and diversity, and the failure of science to solve humanity’s problems.

Technology incited the social, intellectual, and religious crisis of the 1960s. Advances in technology, communication, and travel challenged epistemological frameworks in a variety of contexts. Brown (2000) identifies the wide-reaching impact that technological and communicative changes had in the 1960s:

International telecommunications, pioneered by the Telstar satellite in 1963, was by 1967 providing same-day coverage of the hippie “summer of love” in California. Between March and August of the following year, it provided coverage of the major political touchstones of the decade: the Prague Spring, the Cultural Revolution in China, the May revolution in Paris and other cities, and, from America, the Civil Rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and the Democratic Convention riots in Chicago. (p. 178)

Numerous radio stations and “the vinyl record . . . displaced the printed word as the key method by which young people formed their own discursive world” (Brown, 2000, p. 178). It was this “technology and the knowledge explosion [which] produced facilities for communication which are among the most influential factors in the contemporary world” that caused “vast developments in the organization, expression, and transmission of knowledge” (Stowe, 1968, p. 147). Changes in technology resulted in changes in the ways in which human beings organize, express, and transmit knowledge, which is, quite simply, a shift of epistemology. Just as the printing press reinforced the epistemological presuppositions of modernity, so did advances in technology, travel, and communications reinforce the epistemological presuppositions of postmodernity.

Postman (1987), in his book Amusing Ourselves to Death, identifies that technological developments change human discourse and therefore alter epistemology. Postman attempted “to show that definitions of truth are derived, at least in part, from the character of the media of communication through which information is conveyed . . . [and] how media are implicated in our epistemologies” (p. 17). Postman convincingly argues that “most of our modern ideas about the uses of the intellect were formed by the printed word, as were our ideas about education, knowledge, truth, and information” (p. 29). Surely, television, international telecommunications sustained by satellites, the global availability of transistor radios, and vinyl records corroborate Postman’s attempt to “show that in the twentieth century, our notions of truth and our ideas of intelligence have changed as a result of new media displacing the old” (p. 26).

Vast improvements in travel and communication further challenged the epistemological boundaries of modernity by facilitating opportunities for relationships and interactions over vast distances. Individuals who traveled by jet airplane or received information from radio and television were challenged by the sheer magnitude of global diversity. Up until the 1960s, many intellectuals in the West, who were undoubtedly heavily influenced by modernity, advocated science as a metanarrative. Nash (1975), in her discussion of the 1960s, identifies “science as the most dynamic cultural force in the world” (p. 19). But people became disenfranchised, for a variety of reasons, with the failures of the scientific worldview, that is, modern epistemology. Before the end of the 1970s, Derr (1977) observed,

The triumphalism of the scientific worldview has been badly shaken in our time by unexpected ecological backlash, by the destructive effects on traditional cultures, by awareness of the food and resource shortages and their consequences for development; and many people are newly aware that the sciences do not by themselves provide a coherent picture of the human future. (p. 123)

This new awareness that the sciences do not provide a coherent picture of the human future is also evident in Bosch’s
foundational presuppositions that inform individual and their cultures” (p. 14). Consequently, worldviews represent the and found deep but radically differing worldviews underlying “anthropologists empirically studied peoples around the world diverse people groups globally. Hiebert (2008) observes that The origin of the term stems from the anthropological study of because of the liberty with which it is used in mass media, Worldview is a particularly troublesome term worldviews. This is exacerbated by the recognition of and interaction with the complexities and nuances of the term by defining worldviews as “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world” (p. 19). Worldviews, therefore, provide the plausibility structures to the ultimate questions of life, validate cultural norms, help to integrate cultural change, and provide reassurance that the world is as one believes it to be (Hiebert, 2008). Although some disagreement surrounds which worldview presuppositions are the most fundamental, scholars generally identify epistemology as particularly significant (Hiebert, 2008; Sire, 2004). Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that shifts of epistemology substantially affect individual and collective worldviews and, consequently, culture.

The three epistemological eras defined above, premodern, modern, and postmodern, all demonstrate two substantial shifts within individual and collective worldviews. The shift from premodernity to modernity is widely regarded as “one of the great worldview shifts in history” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 17). Premodern worldviews are generally conceived of as being geographically oriented to the local village in which rituals and oral communication are justified by the religious leader via the authority of the god(s). Modernity challenged these assumptions via an epistemological shift, in large part, due to the printing press, the reorientation of individuals to the nation-state, the invention and use of caravel ships (ca. 1450), which were used by the Portuguese and Spanish to travel to the west coast of Africa and the Americas, and a reconceptualization of the social contract, based in no small part to the “sea change” brought about by the work of Thomas Hobbes in his reorientation “from those with power, to those without, particularly regarding their right, our right, to life” (Kellerman, 2012, p. 9). Modern worldviews are generally conceived of as being geographically oriented to the nation-state in which written and printed communication are justified by state officials, leaders, and/or scholars via the authority of “facts” as identified by science, the university, the nation-state, and/or an organization.

Postmodernity further challenged these assumptions via another epistemological shift brought about by vast changes in communication, including telephones, transistor radios, television, satellite communication, and the Internet; a reorientation of individuals away from individualism and the insularity of the nation-state to the interconnectedness of a global community; advances in travel, most notably the jet aircraft and the ever-increasing accessibility of air travel; and a further reconceptualization of authority, based in no small part to the failed promises of modernity (French & Ehrman, 2016). Postmodern worldviews should be generally conceived of as being geographically oriented to a myriad of diverse communities globally and locally, in which a plethora of electronic and nonelectronic mediums are available and in which the
individuals, and often their communities, justify knowledge through a variability of authorities (e.g., state officials, leaders, and scholars; but also relationships in community, social media, personal feelings, experience, and spiritual experience). The epistemology informing a postmodern worldview assumes that knowledge is subjective, that it may or may not apply to all people, and that knowledge and the nature of its communication and justification are a mechanism of power and are generally distrustful of authorities and the sources that modernity recognized as authoritative, that is, state officials, leaders of all types, and scholars. This epistemological shift from modernity to postmodernity is all encompassing and has influenced and informed individual and collective worldviews in varying degrees globally (French & Ehman, 2016). It is this shift that the technological and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed, and it is through conceptualizing postmodernity as an epistemological shift that Kellerman’s assumptions and remedies are found to be insightful but incomplete.

### Kellerman’s Assumptions, Critiques, and Postmodernity

Kellerman (2012), to her credit, correctly identifies aspects of these changes. First, technology is identified as monumentally important in the crisis of leadership via a brief discussion concerning the printing press, the disillusionment of the 1960s and 1970s, and the technologies emerging from this time period. Second, there is recognition that cultural changes and technology have affected cultures globally, which is closely related to a third identification that these effects are related and therefore demonstrate a multicultural historical and sociopolitical development. And finally, that education is the answer to the issues that face both the leadership industry and the study of organizational leadership.

### Assumption 1—Technology caused the disempowerment of leaders.

There is little doubt that changes in individual and collective worldviews reconceptualized the authority in which knowledge is justified. Before the 1960s and 1970s, the epistemological presuppositions of modernity elevated state officials, leaders, and scholars as the authorities of knowledge. Certainly, technology challenged and provided a framework for an epistemological shift. However, it was the multiplicity of changes, cultural shifts, increased global interactions and recognition of interconnectedness, and the general disillusionment with the promises of modernity that altered worldviews globally. The totality of these influences created significant skepticism concerning the communication and justification of knowledge via a new awareness of the power inherent to knowledge. This shift reconstituted epistemological justification from state officials, leaders, and scholars, again in large measure because of failed promises, to the individual. Therefore, failing to identify these influences, the epistemological shift that resulted, and the effect it has and is having on individual and collective worldviews worldwide wrongly associates movements and changes in various contexts globally as a linear trajectory within the purview of development and progress from the West.

### Assumption 2—Evolutionary development.

Kellerman (2012) unashamedly conceives of the changes globally through the theories of evolution, development, and progress both in the historical trajectory of leadership and in her estimation of global events as demonstrative of the leadership crisis. Such an assumption is particularly evident throughout Kellerman’s discussion in Chapter 6 concerning the impact of global change. Kellerman presupposes that “the trajectory of history moves generally in a single direction: toward democratization” (p. 147). This underlying assumption explains Kellerman’s uniform treatment of Russia and China in which both are described as having “scant knowledge of democratic theory and no experience with democratic practice” but, nevertheless, having “come very far very fast” (p. 128). Treatments such as these fail to see the cultural nuances and complexities that Kellerman herself later advocates as necessary for the study of leadership and the development of leaders. Furthermore, this discussion, as well as Kellerman’s general interaction with many of the cultural contexts identified in Chapter 6, fails to adequately address a plethora of presuppositions and intricacies that inform individual and collective worldviews and their unique historical and sociopolitical realities.

Kellerman (2012) fails to incorporate, interact with, or discuss a variety of influences that likely influenced, if not caused, the various movements and events occurring in a variety of global contexts. Exemplifying this, Kellerman suggests that the events of Europe in 1989 and of the Middle East in 2011 constitute a pattern, a pattern demonstrating “a link between past and present and between what happens in one place and what happens in another” (p. 149). Certainly, there is an interconnectedness to such events. But were the causes and complexities of the upheavals in Europe similar enough to the widespread protests in the Middle East to justify the idea of a historical trajectory in which development is encompassed by the “arc of history?” (p. 149). Certainly not. Rather, the events in the Middle East are complex and unique as compared with the events occurring in many other contexts. Certainly, religious presuppositions, such as the Islamic belief of Dar-al-Islam, should be discussed as well as the effects of decolonization (Shenk, 2003).

Nash (1975) clearly encapsulates the global effects of decolonization, “in 1946 well over a third of the world’s population was living in colonies ruled by western powers; but between then and the end of the 1960s almost all of these people attained political independence” (p. 236). These changes had far-reaching consequences that substantially influenced and influence the realities for leaders and
follows as well as contextually nuanced understandings of power and authority.

Patterns of authority were being upset alike in the intellectual realm, in the familial-communal and in the political. Achievement of national if not of economic independence by some six hundred million people in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean brought to an end the old imperial-colonial era. (p. 16)

Decolonization is but one example of the complexities and nuances required when discussing leadership and followership, sociopolitical realities, and power globally. Furthermore, awareness of such realities should cast significant doubt on the explicit or implicit claims that the world continues to develop in a linear trajectory.

Assumption 3—These global changes constitute modernizing. Modernity assumes a linear trajectory of development, progress, and evolution. For example, despite recognizing that Russia has not and most likely will not develop along the same lines as the West, Kellerman (2012) suggests that “Russia’s leaders are caught between modernity on the one hand—including rising expectations and growing demands—and chaos and repression on the other” (p. 130). Such a dichotomous assumption fails to account for the vast reactions against the assumptions of modernity and the emic perspectives by scholars in non-Western contexts who identify the presence of premodern and postmodern assumptions and the absence of modernity (Li, 2010). Simply, the assumptions inherent to modernity fail to adequately interact with the numerous complexities and histories that a diverse, global account necessitates. Postmodernity, however, refuses to conceive of either past or present realities as stemming from one center; rather, postmodernity is polycentric, recognizing a multiplicity of origins and the variability of directions in both local and global contexts (Olsen & Ahlstrand, 2011, p. 225).

Assumption 4—Education is the answer. Wrestling with the innumerable nuances and complexities of a globally interconnected world necessitates a multidisciplinary incorporation of emic and etic perspectives from scholars from a variety of contexts and specialties. As noted earlier, the university is the primary legitimizing agency of modernity, and it, like the leadership industry, is experiencing, or at the very least being challenged by, the epistemological shift from modernity to postmodernity. The assumptions of modernity have led to an “epistemological diminution that reduces knowledge to scientific knowledge, in this way forgetting that at the core of knowledge we do not find the ‘experiment’ but the totality of human experience” (Kim & Anderson, 2011, p. 233). Such assumptions have increasingly been challenged as the additions of qualitative and mixed-method research methodologies demonstrate. Furthermore, as our previous quotations suggest, the sciences, social sciences, and humanities all have been challenged by this epistemological shift. This change of epistemology has challenged the fragmentary nature of the academy and its long-held emphasis of specialization while neglecting, either intentionally or unintentionally, collaboration with other disciplines. As a result, calls for interdisciplinary collaboration have increased globally throughout the academy. Educators, not unlike those within the leadership industry, must examine, confront, and critically appraise their own assumptions and biases, as they seek to engage the growing complexities of an interconnected world.

Critique 1—Unexamined biases and assumptions. Kellerman’s (2012) work is thoroughly grounded in the assumptions and presuppositions of modernity. Clearly, the historical development and trajectory of leadership and political thought is based upon and grounded in the evolutionary and developmental assumptions of modernity, namely that human progress should alleviate unethical practices and ineffective leaders. Modernity is notoriously ineffective at setting or righting moral and ethical agendas. Hiebert (2008) discusses this at length and suggests that one of the reasons for the current crisis or disillusionment “is that modernity said little about ethics and the purposes for which knowledge, scientific or other, should and would be used” (p. 215). Furthermore, the assumption that leaders and experts warrant authority is legitimized upon the epistemological assumptions of modernity and may help explain Kellerman’s tendency to seemingly lament the shift in power from leaders to followers. And finally, Kellerman’s interaction with and explanation concerning multiple contexts globally is inherently biased. To suggest that the democratizing trajectory of human history or that contexts as unique as Russia are confronted with modernity on one hand and chaos on the other is nothing less than a reductionistic logic informed by the epistemological presuppositions and homogenizing metanarrative of modernity.

Critique 2—Incorporating interdisciplinary sources. Kellerman’s work is filled with topics and areas of study that other academic disciplines have and continue to study extensively. In fact, as may be observed from our discussion, the overarching topic of disillusionment toward leaders can be examined through a variety of disciplines. Incorporating academic works from disciplines such as philosophy, religious studies, sociology, and history in the areas of culture, cultural shifts, globalization, power, postcolonial studies, postmodernity, and worldviews would have provided a more robust and reflective picture of the many diverse sociopolitical and cultural realities attempted by Kellerman. Much of the current work is therefore suspect from the first chapter to the conclusion as it lacks the nuance and expertise in establishing the historical, cultural, and global arguments that provide the framework for Kellerman’s overarching argument. Nevertheless, despite these
criticisms, The End of Leadership succeeds in its goal—the call to overhaul the leadership industry and leadership studies.

Conclusion

Kellerman (2012) should be commended for the extensive scope The End of Leadership attempts to encapsulate into a call for the leadership industry to change with the changing times. It seems quite evident that this work is intended for an audience beyond the academy, and yet, the presentation for the causes of the changes needed falls short of adequately describing the realities facing leaders, followers, and organizations. The work’s most admirable quality, the width and breadth in the attempt to interact with 2,000 years of leadership thought and global contexts to explain the last 30 to 40 years, is overshadowed by a lack of specificity and question-able explanations concerning the global complexities and the ways in which culture and technology influence leaders, followers, and organizations. Finally, the unexamined assumptions and homogenizing application of theory neither accounts for nor explains the polycentric and varied directionality the last 30 to 40 years warrant. Such a critique, strangely enough, actually serves to validate a vast majority of Kellerman’s observations and call.

Indeed, a shift has occurred, and this paradigm shift is pervasive, all encompassing and is affecting a myriad of cultures in a multiplicity of ways. Furthermore, technology and cultural shifts have played a role in the transfer of power from leaders to followers, but this occurred in conjunction with disillusionment and global awareness, which deeply affected and affects individual and collective worldviews via epistemology. Individuals may or may not think of themselves as more important: What is clear is that the individual, by himself or herself or within the bounds of the community identified by the individual, serves as the epistemological authority. This identifies and reinforces Kellerman’s clear appraisal that recognition of and interaction with local, regional, national, and international complexities are necessary for the leadership industry to wrestle with and account for. Education must include a multidisciplinary approach in which leaders and followers learn from and incorporate insights and knowledge outside of the leadership industry thought and global contexts to explain the last 30 to 40 years, is overshadowed by a lack of specificity and question-able explanations concerning the global complexities and the ways in which culture and technology influence leaders, followers, and organizations. Finally, the unexamined assumptions and homogenizing application of theory neither accounts for nor explains the polycentric and varied directionality the last 30 to 40 years warrant. Such a critique, strangely enough, actually serves to validate a vast majority of Kellerman’s observations and call.

Although The End of Leadership, in many respects, correctly identifies the path forward for the leadership industry, Kellerman essentially fails to apply these observations to her own work, in large part neglecting interdisciplinary collaboration and critical analysis of her own biases and assumptions. Furthermore, the issues, assumptions, and remedies supplied to right the leadership industry are essentially an identification of the effects of the epistemological shift of postmodernity. An understanding of this epistemological shift, the growing awareness of the other via technology, and disillusionment combined with the recognition that individual and collective worldviews inform and reinforce conceptions of power and identity accentuate the necessity to understand and wrestle with the complexities of 21st-century realities. These realities demonstrate that the leadership industry must change with the changing times, and to do so, it must examine its own biases and assumptions; must learn and educate followers, leaders, and organizations to critically analyze the complexities of cultures and contexts globally and locally; and must understand individual and collective worldviews to engage the multifariousness of the epistemological shift of postmodernity.

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