

A thick, wavy line in shades of yellow and green that curves across the page, framing the title.

Paradoxes in Agentic and Communal Leadership

Summary

What we found: What is good leadership? There is no simple answer to this question when looking at the different pieces of advice available for leaders these days, especially when facing complexity and ongoing change. Based on our analysis of the leadership literature and leadership processes with a paradox lens, we suggest agency and communion as meta-categories of leadership traits, orientations and behaviors that need to be integrated into a “both-and” for leadership effectiveness.

Why it matters: In complex and everchanging environments, leaders need their followers to be aligned and to show initiative to ensure sustainable well-being and performance. Sounds paradoxical? It is. Good news is that leaders will achieve this in being paradoxical themselves, that is in showing both agency (e.g., providing direction) and communion (i.e., empowering people).

What next: Co-constructing paradoxes between leaders and followers is an important way how to ensure well-being and performance in organizations

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The increasing complexity and dynamic change in the working world require more complexity in our understanding of leadership. However, the leadership literature highlights isolated and sometimes seemingly contradictory leader traits, orientations, and behaviors. We build on the evolving literature on leadership and paradox to provide a framework for a better integration of the extant leadership literature. First, we suggest leader agency and communion as a meta-framework for organizing and understanding various leader traits, orientations, and behaviors in relation to leadership effectiveness. Second, we describe and systematically compare two classes of common “either/or” leadership approaches, namely one-best-way and situationally flexible leadership approaches, with a “both-and” approach to leadership. We consider follower alignment and initiative as the primary reactions to leader agency and communion, respectively. In addition, we refer to leader sensegiving and follower sensemaking processes to explain how a “both-and” approach to agency and communion in leadership can simultaneously engender follower alignment and initiative, and in turn, sustainable follower well-being and performance. Finally, we discuss the importance of co-constructing paradoxes between leaders and followers to advance our understanding of leadership and followership, and even between researchers in order to advance future research.

Keywords: Paradox, leadership, follower performance, agency and communion, alignment and initiative

Leadership in organizations – the process of “influencing and facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2012, p. 66) – is a phenomenon that has fascinated researchers for more than a century (Day & Antonakis, 2012). Scholars and practitioners alike have attempted to define a core of characteristics and behaviors associated with effective leadership, but in the ever-changing world of work, this core also seems to be shifting and changing. The increasing level of complexity seems to require more complexity in leadership as well (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018; Waldman & Bowen, 2016).

Unfortunately, predominant paradigms in leadership research are ill-equipped to represent this complexity. The leadership literature presents itself in a rather fragmented state, which is due to the long-standing focus on single or unidimensional aspects of leadership (e.g., single traits like humility, or styles like empowering leadership). This has led to a long list of positive leadership concepts, albeit a lack of a clear understanding of effective leadership (Ashford & Sitkin, 2019; DeRue et al., 2011; Dinh et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2019). Fortunately, the nascent paradox perspective on leadership offers an integrative approach to help capture the complexity of leadership.

In this chapter, we build on the notion that an important aspect of effective leadership in a complex and dynamic world is to constructively manage paradoxes. Following Schad et al. (2016, p. 6), we define paradox as “persistent contradictions between interdependent elements.” The core idea of paradox theory is that whenever one is facing a paradox, “both-and” approaches are more effective than “either/or” strategies (for an overview see Schad et al., 2016). A “both-and” approach acknowledges the seeming contradictions that are inherent in a paradox. But it also recognizes the interdependence between and persistence of the conflicting elements of a paradox. It is the ongoing reconciliation of this interdependence that is key to what has become known as paradoxical leadership (Zhang et al., 2015).

In this chapter, we first provide a short overview of the literature on paradox and leadership.¹ We then discuss agency and communion as meta-categories from which to draw paradoxes in leader traits, orientations, and behaviors (Kearney et al., 2019; Waldman & Bowen, 2016; Zheng et al., 2018). We chose agency and communion, because they have been described as “two fundamental dimensions of social judgment” (Abele et al., 2008; p. 1202) and leadership is an inherently social process. Agency refers to how leaders assert themselves, whereas communion is about how leaders attend to the needs of others (Waldman & Bowen, 2016). As we argue, some leaders feel torn between agentic and communal elements, and thus choose an “either/or” approach to address them. In contrast, other leaders will embrace the seemingly contradictory yet interdependent elements in a paradox (i.e., “both-and” approach), thereby leveraging the energy of the tensions between them (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018).

We introduce paradoxical examples of agency and communion in leaders’ traits, orientations and behaviors for illustration. Further, we compare three typical leadership approaches to agency and communion, namely the unidimensional one-best-way approach, a situational switching approach, and the paradoxical approach. Since leadership is a process that is co-created between leaders and followers (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), we juxtapose leader agency and communion with follower alignment and initiative as the paradoxical building blocks of follower performance (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). We elaborate on the sensemaking – sensegiving process as the core of paradoxical leadership before we discuss how paradoxes are co-constructed, not only between leaders and followers in organizations, but importantly also between researchers to integrate the extant leadership research.

¹ Please note that the chapter by Fairhurst and Collinson on leadership dialectics in this book provides a complementary perspective on the topic.

Paradox and Leadership

Paradox research has a tradition of more than 30 years, with its roots going back to both Eastern and Western ancient philosophy (Schad et al., 2016). The paradox perspective has informed various fields of research over time, thus serving as a meta-theory that “deals with principles of tensions and their management across multiple contexts, theories, methodological approaches, and variables” (Schad et al., 2016, p. 9). One of those fields that has been informed by paradox theory is leadership. Scholars have studied paradox in leaders’ roles and interactions, with the idea that effective leaders demonstrate more behavioral complexity, as manifested in paradoxical behaviors, than ineffective leaders (Denison et al., 1995). Others have focused on leadership dealing with stability and adaptability in organizational change, suggesting that effective leaders shift between forceful and approval-oriented leadership (Denis et al., 2001). In the context of team innovation, Gebert et al. (2010) illustrated that the opposing action strategies of delegation and directiveness need to be combined to draw on the positive effects of each of these strategies, while neutralizing their respective potential downsides. The relevance of paradox management has been discussed for senior leaders who face strategic paradoxes (Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2012), middle managers dealing with change and complexity (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Sparr, 2018), as well as for leaders at all levels engaging in people-focused leadership (Zhang et al., 2015). Thus, learning to be paradox-savvy (Waldman & Bowen, 2016) is an important challenge for leaders at all levels in an organization (Waldman et al., 2019).

These studies provide important insights, based on conceptual (e.g., Gebert et al., 2010, Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2012; Sparr, 2018; Waldman & Bowen, 2016) and empirical work, both qualitative (e.g., Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) and quantitative (e.g., Zhang et al., 2015). However, there are still blind spots in our understanding of paradox and leadership. For example, scholars have only recently begun to study mediators and moderators in the relationship between paradoxical leadership and

outcomes such as creativity, innovative behavior, and performance in general. This research highlights the importance of leader vision and team and individual ambidexterity (Zhang et al., 2021), workload pressure and employee integrative complexity (Shao et al., 2019), and change readiness (Sparr et al., 2022) for paradoxical leadership effectiveness.

Another blind spot in the extant literature on paradox and leadership involves outcomes other than performance, creativity and innovation, such as follower well-being. Furthermore, the potential dark side of paradoxical leadership is not yet well understood. For example, Berti and Simpson (2021) argue that an implicit assumption in paradox theory is that actors have full agency in responding to paradoxes, which might not be true in asymmetric power relationships, such as leader-follower relationships.

While the field of paradox and leadership studies is expanding, a framework to integrate the different models and empirical findings is missing. Therefore, we continue this chapter with presenting agency and communion as meta-categories of leadership that allow us to comprehensively capture paradoxical tensions between seemingly contradictory, yet interdependent and persistent leader traits, orientations, and behaviors. We argue that these meta-categories can serve as a basic framework for theorizing on paradox and leadership with regard to multiple desirable outcomes.

Agency and Communion as Meta-Categories of Leadership

More than a century of research has examined leader traits, orientations, and behaviors in different contexts (e.g., Day & Antonakis, 2012). The heterogeneity of the resulting leadership literature is illustrated in the comprehensive review conducted by Dinh et al. (2014), who identified 66 different leadership theory domains. These authors, together with others (e.g., Ashford & Sitkin, 2019; DeRue et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2019), call for future research to “develop integrative perspectives that consider how disparate leadership theories relate or operate simultaneously to influence the

emergence of leadership phenomena” (Dinh et al., 2014, p. 55). Extant frameworks either focus on leader behavior to the exclusion of leader traits and orientations (Borgmann et al., 2016; Yukl, 2012), or on leader characteristics but not leader behavior (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Moreover, if studies focus on behaviors (or traits or orientations), they tend to investigate one particular variable and not others in the same category (Yukl, 2012). Or alternatively, they study two variables within the same category (e.g., behaviors), but frame them as distinct, without addressing potential benefits of their combination (e.g., Lorinkova et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2013).

We propose that agency and communion are meta-categories that, in combination with paradox theory, are useful to foster an integration of the extant literature on leaders’ traits, orientations, and behaviors. From a paradox perspective, there is an inherent tension between agency and communion in leadership, as agency describes how leaders assert themselves, their goals, and self- or organizational interests in their interactions with followers. In contrast, communion refers to leaders attending to the needs and interests of followers (Waldman & Bowen, 2016). Waldman and Bowen (2016) discussed the agency and communion framework as a means of considering paradoxes associated with combinations of a strong sense of self versus humility, and of maintaining control versus letting go of control. Further, Kearney et al. (2019) framed visionary and empowering leadership as manifestations of agency and communion, respectively. These leader qualities have in common that they seem reasonable when considered in isolation, but contradictory when imagined simultaneously within the same leader at the same time.

To illustrate this notion, we provide three examples pertaining to leader traits, orientations, and behaviors, respectively. Each of these examples reveal how agency and communion can form the basis of leadership paradoxes. Figure 1 summarizes the framework of agency and communion as meta-categories in leadership.

Figure 1 about here

Trait Example: Narcissism and Humility

(Nonpathological) narcissists are self-centered, feel superior, and strive for personal power (Galvin et al., 2010, pp. 509-510). Narcissistic leaders are agentic because they clearly assert themselves, e.g., their own goals and interests, in their interactions with followers (Nehrlich et al., 2019). Narcissism is positively related to leader emergence. However, narcissism is also associated with leadership problems, and when viewed in isolation, its effectiveness as a leader quality is not sustainable over time (Braun, 2017).

Humility is seemingly the opposite: "(a) a willingness to view oneself accurately, (b) an appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and (c) teachability" (Owens & Hekman, 2016, p. 1088). Humble leaders are indeed perceived as communal (Zapata & Hayes-Jones, 2019). They foster communal processes, such as perspective taking (Wang et al., 2018) or team learning orientation (Owens et al., 2013), and thus facilitate positive outcomes (Owens et al., 2013). Nevertheless, leader humility may reduce one's identification with the leader role or desire to take charge (Waldman et al., 2012).

Narcissism and humility are examples of seemingly contradictory leader traits that have been studied mostly in isolation. However, they are also interdependent as humility keeps a narcissist grounded over time in terms of a sense of self in relation to others, while a tendency toward narcissism helps the humble person to maintain a sense of identification as a leader (Owens et al., 2015; Waldman et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2017).

Orientation Example: Determination and Ambivalence

Prototypical leaders are expected to be determined; that is, having a clear understanding of where the organization is going (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2013;

Podsakoff et al., 1996). Determined leaders provide stability and direction to followers and thus get things done (Podsakoff et al., 1996), which is clearly agentic. However, leaders who are overly determined may also risk losing followers along the way (e.g., Ames, 2009).

Conversely, ambivalence is defined as “simultaneously positive and negative orientations towards an object” (Ashforth et al., 2014, p. 1454). Ambivalence is triggered by complexity and invites collaborative contextual interpretation between leaders and followers (Guarana & Hernandez, 2014). Therefore, we consider ambivalence as communal. Positive outcomes include adaptation, proactivity, and creativity (Ashford & Sitkin, 2019; Rothman & Melwani, 2017). On the downside, ambivalent leaders might also cause stress (Herr et al., 2019) and dysfunctional outcomes due to uncertainty and inaction (Ashforth et al., 2014; Rothman et al., 2017).

Leader determination and ambivalence are examples of seemingly contradictory leader orientations that have been studied in separate literatures. While leaders are likely to experience a tension between determination and ambivalence, these orientations are also interdependent and persistent as leaders pursue goals. That is, in order to effectively show determination (i.e., confidence in structures and directions), leaders may also need to allow for ambivalence (i.e., willingness to see both the pros and cons of an issue, question their direction based on new information, and so forth), and vice versa.

Behavior Example: Directive and Empowering Leadership

Directive leadership can be defined as “leader behaviors that provide followers with specific guidance regarding goals, means of achieving goals, and performance standards” (Martin et al., 2013, p. 1374). Directive leaders allow for very limited, if any, follower input on decisions (Lorinkova et al., 2013). Empirical results corroborate the agentic nature of directive leadership, which is positively related to task, process, and

role clarity (Lorinkova et al., 2013), but not proactive follower behavior (Martin et al., 2013).

Conversely, empowering leadership is a set of leader behaviors that involve sharing power, responsibility, and decision-making authority, as well as motivational and development support (Lee et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2013; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). As such, it can be considered a communal leadership style. Empowering leadership is associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as follower proactive behavior (Martin et al., 2013), team learning and performance (Lorinkova et al., 2013). However, empowering leadership seems to take time to engender positive effects on performance in teams (Lorinkova et al., 2013), and it can burden followers (Cheong et al., 2016).

Directive and empowering leadership behaviors have been studied extensively, but largely in isolation or in direct comparison (Lorinkova et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2013). However, they are also interdependent and persistent because for most jobs, it is impossible for leaders to pre-define every action of the followers. Thus, while providing direction, the leader may need to also empower followers to make their own decisions. At the same time, empowerment may be dependent on leader directiveness in order to maintain follower alignment with organizational goals.

Three Approaches to Paradoxes in Agency and Communion

In the previous section, we established agency and communion as meta-categories in leadership, which provide an organizing framework for key paradoxes in leadership traits, orientations, and behaviors. Based on the assumption that: (1) agency and communion are the basic building blocks of leadership, and (2) agency and communion often result in leadership paradoxes, we now compare three approaches to addressing paradoxes. We argue that when leaders face agentic and communal elements in their traits, orientations, and behaviors, their approach to dealing with paradoxical tensions depends on the way that they frame and interpret the paradox. If

they recognize and accept the tension between the seeming opposites but acknowledge their joint contribution to leadership effectiveness, they are likely to choose a “both-and” approach that combines the elements of the paradox. However, if leaders frame agency and communion as a dilemma, where competing choices come with fixed and inevitable advantages and disadvantages, they are more likely to choose an “either/or” approach (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Waldman & Bowen, 2016). In the following sections, we describe and evaluate the three main approaches to paradoxes based in agency and communion, namely one-best way (i.e., consistent choice of “either/or”), situationally flexible (i.e., flexible choice of “either/or”), and paradoxical (i.e., simultaneous choice of “both-and”) approaches.

One-Best Way Approach

In a one-best way approach, leaders clearly and consistently favor either agentic or communal leadership. The quest for identifying the one-best-way approach is a common tendency in the leadership literature (e.g., Ashford & Sitkin, 2019; Dinh et al., 2014). For example, in the early research on empowering leadership, these leader behaviors were viewed as superior to directive leadership. However, research shows that empowering leadership can be burdening for employees (Cheong et al., 2016; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015), which might indicate a lack of guidance and direction.

We suggest that agentic leadership primarily elicits follower alignment, because leaders who assert themselves require followers to defer to them (cf. DeRue & Ashford, 2010). This might work well in a given situation, but over time, the agentic-only leader risks rigidity in followers’ responses because followers will increasingly be discouraged from taking their own perspective and initiative. By contrast, communal leadership is likely to stimulate follower initiative because the leader encourages followers to contribute their own ideas and capabilities. This also might work well in a given situation, but without clear direction, there is the risk of confusion and chaos due to the lack of alignment. Paradox theory explains why tending to only one of the elements of a paradox results into such vicious cycles (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Consider the difficulties of Steve Jobs in his early years at Apple as example (Isaacson, 2011). Essentially, Jobs was highly determined in his vision for the Macintosh computer as the predominant product for the firm. Jobs' determination and directive leadership style were essential to realize the creation of the Macintosh, which at the time in 1984 was truly innovative. However, the narcissistic Jobs was not able to simultaneously demonstrate humility, ambivalence, and an empowering leadership style by pausing and taking into account the countervailing views of others on Apple's board of directors, especially the CEO at the time, John Sculley. In the end, the alignment that Jobs demanded from board members, coupled with his lack of communion – that is, his lack of willingness to question his own assumptions and consider other perspectives – led to rigidity and facilitated his ouster during his initial tenure at Apple.

Situationally Flexible Approach

The second option that leaders have when addressing agency and communion from an "either/or" perspective is to take a situationally flexible approach, in which they choose to display either agentic or communal traits, orientations, or behaviors, depending on what they decide is appropriate in a given situation. They switch back and forth between opposites, guided by their interpretations of situations and follower needs. This approach is well known in the literature; for example, in Hersey and Blanchard (1996)'s situational leadership theory.

The situationally flexible approach shares similar benefits and limitations as the one-best-way approach within a given situation, because it encourages either follower alignment or initiative, but not both at relatively the same time. However, this approach is more flexible in the sense that the choice of agency and communion can be adapted to situational conditions. For example, if a leader whose natural tendency is to be agentic recognizes that followers become rigid, that leader might choose to switch to communal leadership in some situations to stimulate follower initiative. Over time, the leader switches back and forth based on the followers' responses. Thus, a

major advantage to the situationally flexible approach is that the leader potentially adapts to follower responses over time.

That said, this approach is still limited because it is, in essence, a rather bumpy sequence of successive one-best-way approaches, in which the leader may attempt to engage in the “one right leadership” for the respective situation. In some situations, followers’ alignment is promoted through agentic leadership, but follower initiative is discouraged. In other situations, followers’ initiative is elicited through communal leadership, but follower alignment is impeded. Thus, there is no situation in which the benefits of follower alignment and initiative are brought together, and this lost potential in each situation is likely to cumulate to less-than-optimal outcomes over time.

Moreover, diagnosing what is called for in a particular situation is a difficult task. For example, it has been suggested that followers with low experience should be led in a directive manner, while those with more experience should be empowered (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). But other work would suggest the exact opposite (Ahearne et al., 2005). Indeed, this inconclusiveness could be a key reason for why it has been difficult to find supporting evidence for the effectiveness of situational leadership approaches (Johansen, 1990; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009).

Finally, such ways of approaching leadership can lead to attributions of leader inauthenticity due to perceived inconsistency, which can undermine leader effectiveness (Gardner et al., 2011). Leaders who frame agency and communion as a dilemma are likely to have relatively stable preferences for certain elements over their respective opposites (Zaccaro, 2007; Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018). For example, a natural narcissist is likely to experience difficulties when attempting to be genuinely and exclusively humble under some conditions.

The “Both-and” Approach

Besides the described “either/or” approaches, leaders may choose a “both-and” approach to the contradictory, yet interdependent, elements of agency and communion in their traits, orientations, and behaviors (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Zhang et al., 2015). We argue that ultimately, the “both-and” approach can reveal the full benefits of agentic and communal leader qualities over time. Combining agency with communion leverages the virtues of both follower alignment and initiative, while neutralizing potential disadvantages of one-sided agency or communion (for a similar argumentation, see Gebert et al., 2010). It allows leaders to fully utilize a broader repertoire of traits, orientations, and behaviors. It does not favor one side, nor make compromises. Further, there is no such thing as an optimal level of certain traits, orientations and behaviors. Rather, leaders who pursue this approach will realize the positive sides of both elements, which neutralizes the downsides of the respective opposite element. As such, the “both-and” approach is a “consistently inconsistent” strategy (Smith et al., 2016). It is consistent because the leader shows both agency and communion in a general sense over time. However, it is also inconsistent because the momentary manifestations of leading with both agency and communion can vary over time.

For example, leaders who combine directive and empowering leadership simultaneously take control, while sharing control with their followers (Waldman & Bowen, 2016; Zhang et al., 2015). They do not understand control as a zero-sum game in which sharing control means less control (Smith et al., 2016). Rather, they make suggestions for a certain direction and invite followers to discuss and decide together (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Such leaders encourage and fully support the development of their followers, and they do so in a directed manner that enables followers to have more structure as they pursue their empowerment in ways that serve the goals of both the employee and the company. In short, the “paradoxical” leader consistently, yet flexibly, employs both directive and empowering leadership – *relatively*

simultaneously and over time. The term “relative” is important here, since at any one moment in time, the leader may be emphasizing a particular pole (e.g., directiveness) of a leadership paradox. However, for various endeavors (e.g., making a decision on a task) and over time, the leader is careful to integrate both poles (e.g., both directiveness and empowerment) of the agency-communion paradox.

Sensemaking – Sensegiving Processes at the Core of Paradoxical Leadership

Combining agency and communion is a complex task for leaders, as is combining alignment and initiative for followers. We argue that due to this complexity, leaders and followers need to co-create a reality in which they can thrive with the seemingly contradictory, yet interdependent, demands. To better understand this ongoing process, we draw on recent research on the paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) and the notion that leader sensegiving about paradox is at the core of paradoxical leadership (Sparr, 2018; Waldman & Bowen, 2016). In the following, we summarize the model illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 about here

Leader Paradox Mindset and Sensemaking of Agency and Communion

The concept of the paradox mindset describes the propensity of individuals to accept paradoxes, see the value in paradoxical tensions, and feel comfortable (even energized) in dealing with them (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). We argue that the acceptance of agency and communion as opposing yet complementary elements in their traits, orientations, and behaviors helps leaders to explore the opportunities of a “both-and” approach. Instead of trying to avoid the tensions that are inherent in agency and communion, they will attempt to realize the advantages of combining the

opposite elements in their traits, orientations, and behaviors (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

The process of working through paradox (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) involves sensemaking, namely a “process through which individuals work to understand novel, unexpected, or confusing events” (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 58). We suggest that leaders’ paradox mindset helps them to stay positive and to continue the above described “both-and” sensemaking process about how to leverage the potential of both agency and communion in an ever-changing, complex world. This will help them to find creative approaches (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) and to acquire behavioral complexity in their leadership (Zheng et al., 2018).

Leader Sensegiving and Follower Sensemaking about Alignment and Initiative

Followers of a paradoxical “both-and” leader will experience both agency and communion in ongoing interactions with their leader and will experience those interactions as the paradoxical request for both alignment and initiative in their own responses. Like their leader, followers basically have two options when trying to make sense of these paradoxes. First, they can frame those tensions as a dilemma, classifying the leader’s demands as either agentic or communal; that is, asking for either alignment or initiative. However, in this “either/or” framing, “both-and” signals are inconsistent and will leave the follower potentially confused, frustrated, or even behaviorally paralyzed.

The second option that followers have is to understand their leaders’ agency and communion, as well as the resulting demands for alignment and initiative, as contradictory but mutually enabling elements, which require a combination (see also Smith & Lewis, 2011; Zheng, Kark, et al., 2018). The “both-and” sensemaking will result in combined actions, because sensemaking serves as the basis for action (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Weick et al., 2005). We claim that the followers’ active “both-and” sensemaking of the implications and expectations for their own behavior will facilitate

the relationship between “both-and” leadership and “both-and” followership. Empirical support for the facilitating role of follower “both-and” sensemaking about paradoxical demands comes from research on follower paradox mindset, which has been shown to moderate the relationship between paradoxical tensions and follower in-role performance (i.e., alignment), as well as innovative behavior (i.e., initiative; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018).

Sensemaking is a social process that does not take place in isolation (Weick et al., 2005). Leaders are in a privileged position to influence their followers’ sensemaking through their own sensegiving regarding paradox, which is the process in which leaders convey their interpretation of paradoxes to followers and persuade them to adopt this interpretation (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Sparr, 2018). Leaders’ sensegiving pertaining to their own agency and communion ensues because the leader anticipates a gap in follower sensemaking (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). As such, leader sensegiving is one of the most important leadership tasks in complex and ambiguous situations (Foldy et al., 2008; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kraft et al., 2016). In other words, sensegiving is at the core of “both-and” leadership.

For example, a leader might explain to followers why he/she is empowering (i.e., to develop followers by providing them with freedoms and challenging them to be proactive), while at the same time directive (i.e., to ensure that whatever ideas and solutions followers develop are in line with the leader’s expectations and specified objectives). Explaining the leader’s actions should help followers understand that paradoxical leadership is not erratic, but that combining opposites follows a clear logic. It is intended to promote both follower initiative and alignment. We draw on earlier theorizing on the importance of leader sensegiving about paradox (Sparr, 2018; Waldman & Bowen, 2016) to propose that leader “both-and” sensegiving facilitates follower “both-and” sensemaking.

Implications for Sustainable Well-being and Performance

As argued above, one-best-way approaches to the agency-communion meta-paradox can create vicious cycles. That is, these approaches can engender downward spirals of increasing follower rigidity or confusion, which are the respective downsides of a consistent choice of either leader agency or communion. While both the one-best-way and situationally flexible approaches might work well within a given situation or in the short term, they are likely to engender inferior results over time – not only in terms of performance, but also with regard to well-being, as we have seen in the downsides of our examples (e.g., Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Cheong et al., 2016; 2019). In contrast, the simultaneous “both-and” approach to leader agency-communion creates virtuous cycles; that is, upward spirals of leader agency and communion mutually complementing each other to stimulate both follower alignment and initiative, thus enabling sustainable outcomes over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Ultimately, an important goal of effective leadership is to ensure both short- and long-term performance (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009), or more generally, sustainable performance (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Long-term performance is dependent on short-term performance, because without the latter, neither the individual nor the team or the organization will realize a sustainable future. Similarly, long-term performance enables better short-term performance over time due to an accumulation of experience and resources. We propose that short- and long-term/sustainable performance at the individual, team, and organization levels is the cumulative, paradoxical outcome of simultaneous “both-and” leadership in dyadic leader-follower relationships, team-leadership, and strategic leadership (see also Waldman & Bowen, 2016).

Future Directions and Conclusions

Co-construction of Paradoxes between Leaders, Followers, and Researchers

In our discussion of the sensemaking-sensegiving process at the core of “both-and” leadership and followership, we described this process as a co-construction of leader agency and communion and follower alignment and initiative. Both leaders and followers need the ability and motivation to adopt the paradoxical perspective, and this process is easier for individuals with a paradox mindset. With our reasoning in this chapter, we hope to encourage the leadership research community to also adopt a paradox mindset when framing their own research. With the notion of agency and communion as a meta-framework for leader traits, orientations and behaviors, we offer leaders and scholars alike a concrete way of framing “both-and” leadership.

Thus, researchers and practitioners can contribute to collective paradoxical frames (Miron-Spektor & Paletz, 2020), resulting in the valuing of both agency and communion in leadership processes. In the long term, this might even have consequences for implicit leadership and followership theories at the larger, societal level. That is, societies might move from predominantly agentic expectations of leaders to a more balanced view of agency and communion. This issue has been highlighted in discussions about gender and leadership (Zheng, Kark, et al., 2018; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018).

At the same time, we caution organizational researchers and practitioners to be cognizant of their own potential biases regarding one particular pole of a paradox, or how exactly a pole might be operationalized in practice. Three examples come to mind. First, we have already mentioned the paradox of narcissism and humility, fully recognizing that the former concept is often met with skepticism, or even disdain, by researchers and practitioners alike. Yet both theory and research point to the notion that narcissism and humility can potentially work in harmony to produce better leadership (e.g., Owens et al., 2015).

Second, Waldman and Javidan (2020) considered how the paradox of nationalism and globalism pertains to effective leadership. Among the two poles of this paradox, nationalism is obviously the more controversial in modern times. Nevertheless, Waldman and Javidan (2020) described how both nationalism and globalism can work in harmony for strategic/global leaders. In a way, this example underlines the ethical aspect in “both-and” leadership, because nationalism and globalism are only harmful if pursued in isolation, assuming one of them to be superior to the other. However, the “both-and” approach enables the benefits of both nationalism (e.g., good local citizenship) and globalism (e.g., embracing other cultures) at the same time, while neutralizing their downsides (e.g., xenophobia, loss of national opportunities).

Third, also in line with current events, we recognize diversity and inclusion as important issues for organizations and their leaders. Diversity can be viewed in paradoxical terms by juxtaposing it with its opposite – homogeneity or unity (i.e., a belonging paradox according to Smith & Lewis, 2011; see also Zhang et al., 2015). While diversity and homogeneity/unity are seeming opposites, they are nevertheless interdependent in order to ensure effectiveness. For organizations, the paradoxical challenge is how to pursue diversity, while simultaneously maintaining and even strengthening unity. This is achieved by inclusion, the process of enabling people of different identities to be themselves, while also contributing to the collective sense of purpose or mission (Ferdman, 2017). Indeed, although diversity benefits organizations, a cohesive and strong or unified organizational culture is likely to also be necessary to achieve organizational effectiveness (cf. Nishii, 2013). In paradoxical leadership terms, the question becomes how organizational leaders can pursue diversity, while simultaneously pursuing unity (e.g., in terms of cultural values and beliefs).

The Paradox Perspective as a Means to Advance Leadership Research

The notion of agency and communion as organizing meta-categories in leadership can guide researchers to classify and integrate patterns of leadership traits, orientations, behaviors, and other concepts that have been the targets of research for

years. To date, we have largely seen a focus on individual traits, orientations, or behavioral components of leadership. However, our paradoxical approach, which is centered around agency and communion, proposes that focusing on a unitary concept (e.g., humility, ambivalence, empowerment) misses the value of considering its respective conceptual opposite (e.g., narcissism, determination, directiveness). Further, we challenge some current thinking that dismisses the potential value of a trait like narcissism, or a behavioral tendency like directiveness. When examined in isolation, such traits or behaviors might seem problematic and less desirable than their seeming opposites, but in paradoxical combinations, they can make important contributions to leader effectiveness.

With our three examples of narcissism and humility, determination and ambivalence, and directive and empowering leadership, we have illustrated how a consideration of both the agentic and the communal elements of paradoxes contributes to our understanding of effective leadership. Nevertheless, we recognize that other paradoxical combinations exist, which could be incorporated into theoretical extensions of our meta-category of agency and communion paradoxes. They include, for example, the combination of distance and closeness (Zhang et al., 2015), collaboration and competition (Lavine, 2014), and vertical and shared leadership (Pearce et al., 2019).

In future research, we encourage experimental designs that manipulate traits, orientations, and behaviors associated with agency and communion, and in a series of different scenarios, examines and compares one-sided, situationally switching, and paradoxical leadership. This needs to be supplemented by qualitative and field research that helps us to better understand *how* leaders and followers actually address the type of paradoxes considered in this chapter. Furthermore, to study dynamics in the “both-and” leadership and followership process, methods including real-time observation for micro-scale dynamics and social network analysis for meso-scale dynamics could be considered (cf. Dooley & Lichtenstein, 2008). This will help us to

better understand reciprocal effects in sensegiving and sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005), in particular between leader sensegiving and follower paradox mindset, and vice versa (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), as well as between leadership and followership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Note that our assumptions may not be restricted to formal leadership. Indeed, the same assumptions may hold when leadership is shared, and leaders and followers flip their roles on a frequent basis.

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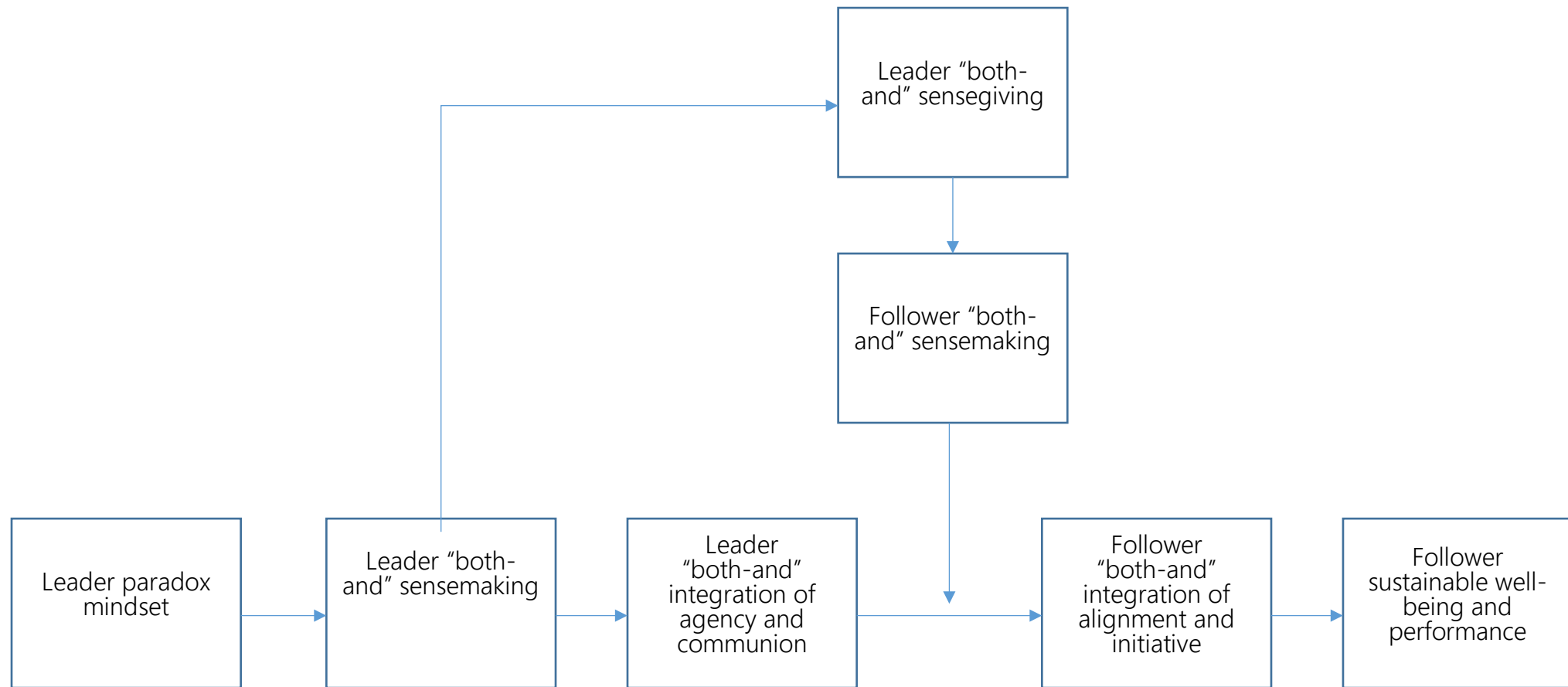
Figure 1.

The Meta-Paradox of Agency and Communion in Leadership with Examples of Leader Traits, Orientations, and Behaviors

	Traits		Orientations		Behavior
Agentic Leadership	e.g., Narcissism		e.g., Determinatio		e.g., Directive
Communal Leadership	e.g., Humility		e.g., Ambivalence		e.g., Empowering

Figure 2

Model of "Both-and" Leadership and Followership



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