

# Critical Leadership Theory

Jennifer L. S. Chandler · Robert E. Kirsch

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Integrating Transdisciplinary Perspectives

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*The authors are deeply grateful to each other for their sustained collegial interdisciplinarity in action. The cliché about the sum being greater than the parts is true and achievable through engaging in the frustrating challenges created in collaborative work. This process was more than just an effort to create a text. We stretched ourselves and the concepts which created thin places and sometimes we tore some tenuous fibrils and had to expand and refashion our own conceptualizations and understandings.*

## PREFACE

This book is primarily for three distinct, but related audiences. For students who wish to study leadership as an intellectual field of inquiry; for peers who wish to engage in a critical analysis of an emergent field of study to see its interdisciplinary opportunities; and for people in organizations who are in positions designated as leadership, who wish to practice leadership, or understand how leadership is a not an unalloyed good but rather is a problematic concept that needs to be reckoned with.

While we think there is significant overlap in what each audience can get from this text, we also do not claim it is the final word on critical theory or its application in leadership studies. Therefore, there is significant room for any of our audience to find what they need, depart where they may, and find their own intellectual vistas for integrating critical theory into leadership, be that its practice, application, or theory.

Our aim was to begin a conversation to cherish the interdisciplinarity of leadership studies, strengthen its theoretical and methodological pluralism, and find ways of connecting leadership to questions of the good and social goals. The conceptual frame we used to ask these questions was movement and direction. To that end, we looked to other fields of study to see how they understood their undertakings relative to the ways in which societies moved and to what ends. We use these insights to build some non-exhaustive tenets for what critical leadership studies might look like. We welcome any expansion, elaboration, alternatives, or critiques in this conversation.

The beginning of our collaboration started with a critical question: is there a difference between what leadership *is* as opposed to what people who are designated leaders *do*? Feeling discomforted by existing critical leadership texts, we embarked on this collaborative exploratory journey trusting that the classic inquiry process would prove productive. It did.

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