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On the Romance of Leadership – In Memory of James R. Meindl

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On the Romance of Leadership – In Memory of James R. Meindl

It was a tremendous shock to the leadership community when James R. Meindl suddenly passed away three years ago. Leadership research has lost one of its best scholars, and many of us have personally lost a wonderful colleague, mentor, teacher, and friend. This special issue is dedicated to one of Meindl's best known contributions to the field of leadership, the Romance of Leadership approach. First introduced in 1985 by Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich, the Romance of Leadership refers to the tendency people have attribute responsibility to leaders for company performance and other organizational phenomena, thereby disregarding other factors that might be of influence. Subsequent research by Meindl and his colleagues has demonstrated that people value performance results more highly when those results are attributed to leadership, and that a halo effect exists for leadership attributes. In other words, if an individual is perceived to be an effective leader, his or her personal shortcomings and/or poor organizational performance may be overlooked (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987).

The Romance of Leadership is a social constructivist approach (Meindl, 1993) that refers to how people explain the complex process of how organisational performance transpires. Just as when explaining other complex phenomena, people use cognitively less complex explanations rather than reflect on the phenomenon's real complexity. As a result, leaders and leadership issues often become the favoured explanations for various events in and around organizations. To put it even more simply: Attributing company performance to the influence of the leader is easier than to take into consideration the vast ensemble of possible predictors. In that sense, Romance of Leadership is a follower-centred approach as well (1998): It is not interested in explaining actual leader behaviour but rather in explaining *sense-making* in organisations.

Most research in Romance of Leadership so far has focused on the phenomenon itself (Meindl et al., 1985; Haslam et al., 2001). In addition, effects and/or outcomes of the

Romance of Leadership have been research in several countries so far. Examples are Awamleh's (2003) research in Jordan or Shamir's (1992) research in Israel. One of the aims of this special issue, therefore, was to bring together research on Romance of Leadership from different countries. We were very fortunate that so many scholars responded to our call so that this special issue comprises contributions from xx different countries. In addition, the recent state of the art of the research on Romance of Leadership is reflected in this special issue with three overview articles, two articles on leaders' Romance of Leadership and one article focusing on a so far neglected part of Romance of Leadership, namely the attribution of creativity to leaders.

Overview of the contributions in this special issue

Three of the contributions in this special issue focus on providing overviews. Awamleh examines the relationship between Romance of Leadership and transformational leadership in different countries using Hofstede's culture dimensions as an explanation. Similarly, Schyns, Felfe, and Blank conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between Romance of Leadership and the perception of transformational / charismatic leadership, thereby including data from different countries. Wolf, Jackson, and Chong while reporting results from one country use comparison data from other countries to assess the level of romancing leadership in Aotearoa.

A second group of papers extends the focus of Romance of Leadership to leaders. Schilling reports a qualitative study on leaders' conceptions of the consequences of good leadership, thereby shedding light on their romantic view of leadership. Gray, Densten, and Sarros refer to leaders' own view leadership and how they influence other to believe in Romance of Leadership.

Jaussi, de Luque, and Rosas extend our understanding of Romance of Leadership by applying it to followers' creativity perceptions. Creativity is thereby one part of the romantic view of leaders.

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