1 Introduction

Recently, leadership scholars and practitioners have expressed a desire to develop an integrated and unifying theory of leadership (Burns, 2004, 2006; Goethals & Sorenson, 2006; Harvey & Riggio 2011) for the sake of establishing leadership studies as a "distinct discipline." Unfortunately, as the late James MacGregor Burns (2004) lamented, while leadership studies "remains in its growing stages," it "has as yet no grand, unifying theory to provide common directions to thinkers and researchers" (p. 2). As early as 1978, Burns, for example, longed for the development of a school of leadership studies, and in 2003, he articulated his hope that leadership, as a field of study, will one day join the ranks of "traditional disciplines of history, philosophy, and the social sciences in scholarly recognition" (Burns, 2003, p. 2). Along with Burns, others like Perruci and McManus (2013) noted that "the time has come for leadership educators and scholars to carve out our own intellectual niche within higher education and begin to articulate our own 'leadership narrative' within our academic leadership programs" (p. 49).

In response to this expressed desire, there is also a noticeable resistance against efforts to develop an integrated theory of leadership, an uttered doubt on whether or not general theories are possible (Couto, as cited in Wren, 2006, p. 8), and that "the very idea of a general theory of leadership [is] Quixotic" (Ciulla, as cited in Wren, 2006, p. 3) – namely, that it is exceedingly idealistic, unrealistic, and perhaps even impractical. In a similar way, Couto asserted that "the effort to find a general theory of leadership smacks of a quixotic Enlightenment quest promoted by a Newtonian scientific view of a mechanical universe" (as cited in Wren, p. 8). At an affective level, Ciulla and Couto's reference to Don Quixote appears to suggest that to think of the very idea of developing a general theory of leadership is, as reflected in Quixote's *Man of La Mancha*, to dream the impossible dream. At an academic and disciplinary level, Riggio (2011) noted another kind of "resistance" and lack of agreement confronting efforts to develop an integrated theory of leadership. This lack of agreement "usually revolves around the notion that leadership is a topic of study and not a 'discipline,' or the scholar intends to hold firmly to his or her traditional discipline, as in 'I am a political scientist who happens to study leadership'" (Riggio, p. 9).

At best, this argument has moved scholars "who happen to study leadership" from multiple disciplines to choose sides by "disagreeing agreeably" (Burns, 2006, p. 234) or by "respectfully disagreeing" (Riggio, 2011, p. 9) with each other. At worst, these kinds of disagreement and staying firmly in one's own traditional discipline continue to leave the study of leadership as being

"fragmented" and "disorderly" and as a consequence vulnerable to continue being subjected to "snickering" when the word "leadership" is heard or used (Greenwald, 2010, p. A80). Burns (2003) was himself troubled that Leadership Studies, as a discipline, was and is being dismissed as a lightweight by other "established" academic disciplines.

1.1 Purpose

In this Element, I am not interested in developing a theory of leadership. I am, instead, intent on paying heed to that which grounds the interest to develop an integrated, unifying, or "grand theory of leadership" (Wren, 2006, p. 1) and the implications of such an interest for the study of leadership. I begin with the belief that *addressing the interest that grounds the interest* in developing an integrated or unifying theory of leadership will offer leadership scholars and practitioners an opportunity to see what connects their interest in this phenomenon called leadership as a collective – albeit from different disciplines. But, why focus on the interest that grounds the interest? It is here that I turn to Hans-Georg Gadamer, a prominent twentieth-century thinker and hermeneutic philosopher:

> Just as we, in our overstimulated process of progress of our technological civilization, are blind to stable, unchanging elements of our social life together, so it could be with the reawakening consciousness of a solidarity of a humanity that slowly begins to know itself as humanity, for this means knowing that it belongs together for better or for worse and that it has to solve the problem of its life on this planet. (Gadamer, 1981, p. 86)

Our "overstimulated" process of technological "progress,"[1] Gadamer could be heard as saying, (a) has increased our focus on change to an extent that we have become "blind to stable and unchanging elements of our social life together" and (b) has contributed to our being blind to what holds leadership scholars and practitioners together as a collective in our very interest in studying leadership. This experience of overstimulation, however, is not new. In the mid-nineteenth century, Marx (1848/1978) located this overstimulated focus on constant change as being the signature of the "bourgeoise" who themselves were driven to "constant revolutionizing of production" and "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions" (p. 476). He described the consequences of such an overstimulated and uninterrupted way of being in the world in this way.

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[1] Using the technology of Google as a search engine, for example, the search for "leadership and change" produced 744,000,000 results.

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations ... are swept away, all new formed ones
> become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all
> that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses,
> his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind. (Marx, 1848/1978,
> p. 476)

It appears as if humans today, in their technological "progress," have become
intoxicated (real conditions of bourgeoisie life) with the activity of constant
revolutionizing and change. We have become so acutely aware of change,
which itself is a result of our own acts of "uninterrupted disturbance," that we
have become "blind to stable, unchanging elements of our social life together"
and to what holds our interest together as a collective that is interested in
studying leadership. To this end, the first purpose of this Element is to begin
unearthing, or reawakening our consciousness to, the stable and unchanging
elements (SUEs) of leadership studies in our white-water world of constant
change (Vaill, 1996). In response to Burns' (2006) "want" for an "intellectual
frame within which [he] at least could organize [his] own thinking" (p. 235), my
modest hope is that the uncovering of SUEs will offer us the possibility for an
intellectual frame to help us organize our thinking about leadership.

So, research question #1: To what SUEs must the study of leadership pay
attention? This research question makes a conscious choice to focus on unearth-
ing foundational elements that could potentially offer us an intellectual frame-
work for leadership studies.

1.2 Disciplinary Focus

From the perspective of the "emerging discipline" called leadership studies,
and staying with Hans-Georg Gadamer, I would suggest that the interest in
developing a unified theory of leadership is deeply grounded in scholars' and
researchers' general and particular interest in (a) collectively inquiring into *how
we belong* together in our shared space without destroying each other and (b)
reawakening our consciousness to the reality and possibility that it is up to us (as
scholars, citizens, and human beings) to address the problem (leadership pro-
blem?) of *how we choose to live together.* Gadamer (1981) could be heard as
saying that the *interest* in developing a "unifying theory to provide common
direction to thinkers and researchers" (Burns, 2003, p. 2) is itself grounded in
what he calls "solidarity of humanity" (p. 86). In this Element, I offer that it is
the *intentional interest* in reaching a shared agreement that grounds Burns'
interest in inviting his colleagues to develop a unified and integrated theory of
leadership.

To think otherwise would mean accepting that leadership scholars from
different academic disciplines have an "accidental" interest in their study of

leadership – that their interest is simply a matter of happenstance, as in "I am a political scientist who 'happens' to study leadership." If this is not the case, then here lies the first stable and unchanging element (SUE #1) for leadership studies. The interest in the study of leadership by scholars from different disciplines is intentional (not accidental), and it is their (our) intentional relationship to this shared purpose (what I call the Desire for Shared Agreement) that has the potential to unite the many voices (multiple definitions and approaches) for the study of leadership. The Desire for Shared Agreement, as it is understood in this Element, is that it is also a "governing standard," namely that it also governs our collective interest in leadership. We share in the interest of shared agreement and we are governed by such an interest.

1.3 Social Focus

From the perspective of our relationship with each other (social life together), could we not also say that those who engage in the study of leadership (no matter from what academic discipline) are also deeply interested in understanding how human beings choose to belong together (for better or for worse) in our planet and that the study of leadership is connected to the communicative challenge of *reaching agreement* on resolving the problem of living together in this shared space? This brings me to research question #2: What would we need to do to live together – without destroying each other?

In this Element, I will address both research questions by addressing two quests. First, I will focus on the quest by a select group of leadership scholars and practitioners who responded to Burns' call to develop a unified and integrative theory of leadership through the General Theory of Leadership (GTOL) project (Quest #1) (Goethals & Sorenson, 2006). Second, given that such an effort resulted in what Ciulla (2006) called "a terrific failure" (p. 221), in that this select group did not come to a conclusive production of a grand theory of leadership, I will focus on Burns' (2006) persistence in not abandoning his interest in developing a unified theory of leadership. In the face of that failure, Burns, for example, raised a challenge and a question for his colleagues by asking them to focus on the "amazing events" in Montgomery, Alabama, during the civil rights movement. "If those activists could integrate the complex process and elements of leadership in practice," Burns asked, "in reality, should we not be able to do so in theory?" (Burns, 2006, p. 239) (Quest #2).

1.4 Organizing

This Element will be organized in five sections. Following Section 1, I will engage in storying the context for an integrated theory of leadership (Section 2),
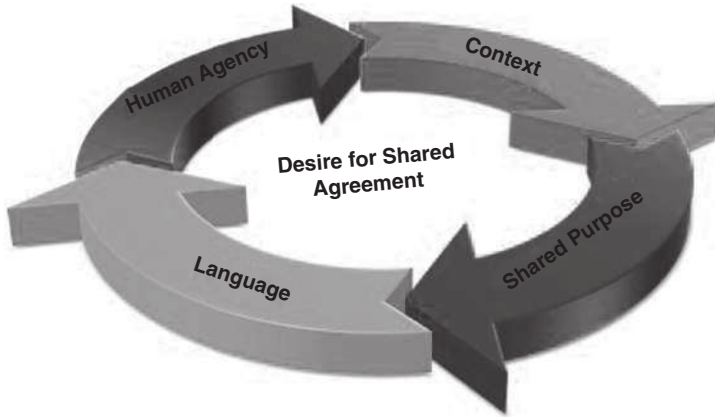
Figure 1 Toward an intellectual framework for leadership studies: four recurring themes

storying the current state of leadership studies (Section 3), and storying the storied choices of Rosa Parks (Section 4). I will collect twenty-seven SUEs from *within the context* of what is addressed in this Element under the rubric of four interconnected themes. Herein lies SUE #2 for leadership studies, namely that the study of leadership is always contextual (Wren & Faier, 2006). And therein lies the rub. By definition, contexts are particular. Moreover, particular contexts raise particular questions and they demand particular answers. What this means is that any "general" theory of leadership will always be "particular" because of context. However, since I am interested in the interest that grounds the interest in developing an integrated and unifying theory of leadership, I am drawn to exploring the relationship between the "general" and the "particular" as standing in a relationship with each other. This will be addressed later. Suffice to say, for now, that four recurring themes are connected and governed by the Desire for Shared Agreement. As visualized in Figure 1, these themes include context, shared purpose, language, and human agency.

While the SUEs will be addressed as they emerge throughout this Element, they will be collected in Section 5, "Bringing It All Together." Each of the sections and subsections that follow will end with a "Summary" of SUEs for leadership studies. Allow me to capture two SUEs that emerged from this Introduction:

- SUE #1: The interest in the study of leadership by scholars from different disciplines is intentional and it is their (our) intentional relationship to this shared purpose (Desire for Shared Agreement) that has the potential to govern and unite the many voices (multiple definitions and approaches) for the study of leadership.

- SUE #2: The study of leadership is contextual. Contexts are particular; each context raises particular questions and they demand particular answers. To that end, any "general" theory of leadership will always remain "particular."

1.5 Methodology and Method

I will respond to both research questions through the method and methodology of narrative inquiry. From a methodological perspective, I will first seek to "experience the experience" of scholars and practitioners *within the context* of their daunting charge of "writing an integrative theory of leadership" (Goethals & Sorenson, 2006, p. xiv). The language of "experience the experience" is a "reminder that ... narrative inquiry is aimed at understanding and *making meaning* of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80, italics original). In this regard, in Sections 2 and 3, I will first seek to understand and make meaning of the experience of scholars and practitioners who were invited by Burns in November 2001, to what was named the General Theory of Leadership (GTOL) project. This is the *first context* of my Element.

Second, while their "quest to arrive a general theory of leadership" was, as Ciulla (2006) noted, "a terrific failure" (Ciulla, 2006, p. 221), in that they "did not accomplish exactly what (they) set out to accomplish" (Goethals & Sorenson, 2006, p. xiv), while they did not come to a shared agreement, I want to make meaning of Burns' (2006) challenge, which he offered in his "Afterword" to *The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership* (Goethals & Sorenson, 2006). In the face of their "terrific failure," rather than giving up or putting that matter of developing an integrated theory of leadership to rest, Burns persisted by challenging leadership students, scholars, and practitioners to attend to the "amazing events" as they unfolded in Montgomery, Alabama (the Quest for Civil Rights). "If those activists could integrate the complex process and elements of leadership in practice," Burns asked, "in reality, should we not be able to do so in theory?" (Burns, 2006, p. 239). This is the *second context* that informs my Element.

In response to Burns' challenge and specific question, in Section 4, I will pick up on Burns' challenge and question by intentionally narrowing my focus on experiencing the experience of Rosa Parks' quest for freedom, justice, and social integration, as her story unfolded on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in early December 1955. I want to understand and "make meaning" not only of her experience but also of how her quest can contribute to stable and unchanging elements of leadership studies and to the work of developing an integrated theory of leadership.

As I organize my thinking about leadership studies within these two contexts, I reassert the second SUE that needs to inform leadership studies. SUE

#2, as I noted earlier, not only affirms that the study of leadership cannot be abstracted from context, but it also affirms that particular contexts raise particular questions requiring particular answers. This very formulation of context throws the initiative of developing a "general" theory of leadership, namely "one that could be useful," as one anonymous reviewer noted, "at least in some way, at all times and in all places," into question. Insofar as particular questions require particular answers in particular contexts, then the most general statement that we can make about the interest in developing a general theory of leadership is that any theory of leadership is itself conditioned by particular contexts.

Within the context of the quest for a unified and integrative theory of leadership (GTOL project) and the quest for social justice (Rosa Parks, civil rights movement), we find ourselves in the middle of two approaches to the Desire for Shared Agreement. Burns (2003) defined these approaches as being "descriptive" and "prescriptive" or normative. The latter embraces "a moral, even a passionate, dimension" (p. 2). Accordingly, I suggest that we are already in the middle of a third stable and unchanging element for leadership studies, namely that leadership scholars and practitioners need to pay attention to *both* the descriptive *and* the prescriptive/normative elements in their quest for a unified and integrative theory of leadership (SUE #3).

1.6 Stories, Stories, Everywhere

From the perspective of method, I will respond to both contexts as "stories," and as such these eventful stories will become my unit of analysis. What, however, is the significance of orienting to events as stories? First, as Habermas (1984), a critical theorist, formulated in his *Theory of Communicative Action*,

> When we tell stories, we cannot avoid also saying indirectly how the subjects involved in them are faring and what fate the collectivity they belong is experiencing. Nevertheless, we can make harm to personal identity or threats to social integration visible only indirectly in narratives. (Habermas, 1984, p. 137)

Orienting to *both* quests/contexts as stories (quest for a general and integrated theory of leadership and quest for social justice), then, becomes my way of making visible and making sense (making meaning) of how actors involved in both stories are faring, what fate they (the collectivity to which they belong) are experiencing and, in the process, unearth the SUEs of leadership studies that we need to pay attention.

Second, critical to my choice of this method, is Bateson's (1979) thinking about what it means to think like a human being. Listen, for instance, to

Bateson's favorite story about a man who consulted his computer about the nature of the human mind.

> He asked it (no doubt in his best Fortran), "Do you compute that you will ever think like a human being?" The machine then set to work to analyze its own computational habits. Finally, the machine printed its answer on a piece of paper, as such machines do. The man ran to get the answer and found, neatly type, the words: *THAT REMINDS ME OF A STORY.* [Italics, parenthesis, and upper case, original] (Bateson, 1979, p. 13)

The machine (computer) offered *a* human truth that to think like a human being is to think in terms of stories. The limit of the machine (at least in Bateson's example) is that it is restricted to the technical production of six words: *that reminds me of a story.* Unlike machines, human beings can be reminded of more than one story (a story); they can also tell a story or stories, and they can tell stories about stories that have been told. They can also be reminded of stories in ways that remind them of other stories. It is this "truth" that allows narrative researchers to affirm that we live storied lives, that our world is a storied world, and that our stories inform, touches, and shapes our identities (Gardner, 1995; Gergen, 1994; Mair, 1988, Sarbin, 1986; Silko, 1977; Senehi 2009), and they "aren't just entertainment" (Silko, 1977, n.p.). For Gardner (1995), narratives that help people think about and feel who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed "constitute the single most powerful weapon in the leader's literary arsenal" [Italics original] (p. 43).

Burner (2002) captured a third significance for choosing stories as a unit of analysis. He noted: "if you look at how people actually live their lives, they do a lot of things that prevent their seeing the narrative structures that characterize their lives. Mostly, they don't look, don't pause to look" (p. 8). To this end, my narrative inquiry will become my way of pausing, looking, and surfacing *both* the narrative structures that structure the experience of scholars and practitioners in their quest for a general theory of leadership *and* Rosa Parks' quest for freedom, justice, and social integration. Here, I would suggest, is the fourth "stable and unchanging element" (SUE #4) for this emerging discipline called leadership studies. The study of leadership calls on us to pay attention to the narrative structure (assumptions, beliefs, and epistemology) of our language because the structure of our language structures the experience of our conversation and action. It is in this way that language reveals both the product (how our conversation is structured) and the process (the structuring of our conversation).

Fourth, while stories are told, it cannot be denied that listeners edit what they hear. What this suggests is that narrative researchers recognize that they are also involved in the dual intersubjective role of "experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81;

Rainbow & Sullivan, 1979). Narrative researchers acknowledge that they are both receivers and listeners. As receivers, they receive the stories that are told. As listeners, they edit what they receive, and as a consequence they participate in re-storying the stories that are received. So, while stories establish a relationship between teller and audience, narrative inquiry and analysis establishes a *three-way relationship* among (i) narrator (researcher), (ii) story-tellers [within the context of this Element, there are two storytellers, namely (a) those who are interested in developing an integrated theory of leadership, and (b) Rosa Parks], and (iii) audience (scholars who are interested in developing an integrated theory of leadership, those who came to arrest Rosa Parks in her story, and now me, the researcher, who by virtue of reading and interpreting their stories, is also a part of the audience). All three are in the story at the same time. In fact, social constructionists from the discipline of sociology (Berger, Berger, and Kellner, 1974) and others in psychology (Bruner, 1986; Mair, 1988), anthropology (Rosaldo, 1993), peace and conflict studies (Senehi, 2009), and in the emerging discipline of leadership studies (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006), would argue that all three are always participating and co-participating in the telling, re-telling, constructing, de-constructing, and re-constructing of their stories and their realities.

Finally, in the same way that the story metaphor "emphasizes that we create order . . . in particular contexts" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2), I would offer that the leadership metaphor also affirms that we can only construct an analytical order (an intellectual frame) by organizing our thinking about leadership within particular contexts. A critical "order" of business then, or one stable and unchanging element of leadership studies (as we saw earlier, SUE #2, and at the risk of repetition), is that *any* talk about leadership must remain *contextual*.

From the perspective of a narrative approach, the storied state of leadership studies, and the storied choices of Rosa Parks, within the context of the "amazing events that unfolded in Montgomery," offers us the opportunity to *turn away* from a limited understanding of social life as viewed from the realist assumptions of the natural sciences and make an *interpretive turn* toward narrative as the organizing principle for human action (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 1998; Rosaldo, 1993; Ricoeur, 1981; Senehi, 2009). This organizing principle of human action allows, as Sarbin (1986) noted, "for the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening" (p. 9). And for a social phenomenologist like Schütz (1973), it is impossible to understand human conduct by ignoring its intentions, and it is impossible to understand human intentions by ignoring the settings in which they make sense. For Czarniawska (1998) such setting may be sets of practices, institutions, or some other contexts that have been organized as narratives.

1.7 Summary

Allow me to recapitulate two other SUEs that have emerged from my reflections
thus far.

- SUE #3: Leadership scholars and practitioners need to pay attention to both
  the descriptive and the prescriptive/normative elements in their quest for
  a unified and integrative theory of leadership.
- SUE #4: The study of leadership is about paying attention to the narrative
  structure (assumptions, beliefs, and epistemology) of our language because
  the structure of our language structures the experience of our conversation
  and action.

2 Storying the Context for an Integrated Theory of Leadership

Burns' passion "to bring concepts together in some kind of general – or at least
integrated – theory" (Burns, 2004, p. xxxii), and his call for a purposeful and
systematic study of leadership, culminated in the publication of a four volume
Encyclopedia of Leadership. "The creation of an encyclopedia," was for Burns
and his colleagues George Goethals and Georgia Sorenson, "a true sign of the
coming of age of a new and significant field of study" (Burns, 2004, p. xxxi). It
was his way of making leadership studies "an intellectually responsible disci-
pline," and legitimizing a "field that some skeptics still dismiss as lightweight
and ill-defined" (Burns, as cited in Wren, 2006, p. 2).

In 2001, Burns' passion for developing an integrated theory of leadership was
further compounded, when his General Theory of Leadership (GTOL) project
ended in what Ciulla (2006) called a "terrific failure." "If," as Joanne Ciulla,
a participant and philosopher in the GTOL project noted, "the only purpose of
our quest was to arrive at a general theory of leadership, then it was a terrific
failure" (Ciulla, 2006, p. 221). If the purpose of the quest was not "only" to arrive
at a general theory of leadership, then, for what other purpose(s) did they come
together? Ciulla (2006) makes a clever proposition. She proposed that "you do
not need to have a theory [grand or otherwise] to be legitimate" (p. 232), and
coyly implied that perhaps *that* was not Burns' *real* intention. "Maybe," she
playfully proposed, "the idea of finding a theory was just a ruse to get people
talking" (p. 232). What she could be heard as saying (my interpretation) is that
while we may not need a "theory" to be legitimate, we do need to talk, we do
need to theorize, and it is through talking, theorizing about leadership, and
theorizing about our own interest in leadership, that we begin to establish
legitimacy and meaningfulness of the very subject that we choose to talk about.