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Reflections on Discursive and Psychological Approaches to Leadership From Around the Globe

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Forum Introduction:

Reflections on Discursive and Psychological Approaches to Leadership From Around the Globe

As I write, the year has not yet ended, but by mid-November 2007, an Amazon.com advanced search of book titles and materials published on leadership yielded 15,601 hits, more than double the 7,519 titles appearing just 10 years earlier. Although I cannot comment on all 15,601 titles, I know that one of these—Gail Fairhurst's *Discursive Leadership: In Conversation With Leadership Psychology* (2007)—promises to make a meaningful difference in how leadership is understood and practiced. With this forum, we highlight the book's contribution by providing space for a group of management and communication scholars from a variety of locations to reflect on discursive and psychological approaches to leadership studies. These scholars offer their thoughts on the book in general and address how discursive leadership and leadership psychology inform each other and can be held in tension with each other, what aspects of leadership require study through a psychological versus discursive lens, and how the two approaches might inform studies of leadership across various scales of action.

For this forum, Fairhurst begins by introducing what she means by discursive leadership and by providing an overview of key differences in the use of discursive and psychological lenses for leadership studies. Next, Dennis Tourish, writing from Aberdeen, Scotland, as a leadership scholar, offers his interpretation of *Discursive Leadership* in light of the significant challenges that it presents to currently dominant approaches, such as transformational leadership. Writing from Oslo, Norway, as a linguist, Jan Svennevig acknowledges the contribution of *Discursive Leadership* to theory development and training in communication and management, arguing for an emphasis on the use of conversational analysis in research on leadership discourse. Bernard McKenna and David Rooney, management

and communication scholars in the School of Business at the University of Queensland, Australia, interpret *Discursive Leadership* in light of their work on wise leadership and the concept of ontological acuity. Finally, writing from Hong Kong, China, as an intercultural communication scholar, a department head, and an acting dean of a school of communication, Ling Chen offers her views on the importance of maintaining tensions between discursive and psychological approaches to the construction of knowledge about leadership.

To these voices, I invite you to add your own to what I hope is the beginning of a new and fruitful conversation among leadership scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines and a variety of locations. Although the number of popular books and materials published on leadership has steadily increased over the past decade, conversations about leadership have not appreciably changed. However, because of the publication of Fairhurst's new book (2007) and her creative reframing of leadership as discursive process, the conversation just became much more communication centered, interesting, and potentially useful to meeting the greatest leadership challenges of our time.

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Reference

Fairhurst, G. T. (2007). *Discursive leadership: In conversation with leadership psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.