LEADING TO OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
How Leadership Behaviours Impact Organizational Safety and Well-Being
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How Leadership Behaviours Impact Organizational Safety and Well-Being

Edited by
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This book began with our collective recognition that leaders play a pervasive role in determining the health and safety of organizations. Our own individual research has shown the effect of leaders on employee safety (e.g., Mullen & Kelloway, 2009) and employee well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & McKee, 2007; Nielsen & Daniels, 2012), and has pointed to the role leaders play as mental health resources in organizations (e.g., Dimoff, Kelloway & Burnstein, 2016) and as key determinants in the success of organizational interventions (Nielsen, 2013; Nielsen & Randall, 2009). Indeed, enough data have now accumulated that we thought it worthwhile to invite the leading researchers in this area to review the work they have been doing related to leadership and occupational health and safety.

Doing so, of course, requires a common understanding of what constitutes organizational ‘leadership.’ Offering a single authoritative definition of leadership is a daunting task that goes well beyond our scope. Indeed, there are likely to be as many definitions of leadership as there are researchers interested in the topic (Kelloway & Barling, 2010). For the most part, however, these definitions fall within one of two broad categories. First, some researchers have focused on the notion of role occupancy – being concerned with who occupies the formal leadership roles (e.g., supervisors, managers) in organizations (Barling, Christie & Hoption, 2011). A second definition has focused on how individuals influence others. This is the question of leadership style (Barling et al., 2011) that, in its modern manifestation, focuses on the specific behaviours in which leaders engage. Kelloway and Barling (2010) combined these two definitions, suggesting that when we talk about organizational leadership we are talking about the effectiveness and behaviours of those who hold formal leadership roles in organizations. Broadly speaking, this is the approach adopted by the authors who have contributed to this book. Through these contributions, we have aimed to capture both the theoretical underpinnings of effective leadership styles and the implications for the specific leadership styles and behaviours that may influence occupational health and safety in the twenty-first-century workplace.
Theories of Effective Leadership

Early attempts to understand organizational leadership focused on studying the lives of influential people in order to identify the traits and qualities associated with leadership emergence and effectiveness (Carlyle, 1907). The focus on individual qualities or traits dominated the early twentieth century, but was subsequently supplanted by a focus on the behaviours enacted by successful leaders. In essence, the research question progressed from a focus on ‘who is a leader’ to ‘what do effective leaders do’ (Kelloway & Gilbert, in press). Although there have been many behavioural theories, relatively few continue to dominate most of the research literature. In our review, we focus on the specific theories that are referenced in the current volume in order to provide a common basis of understanding.

Transformational Leadership

Several reviewers have noted that Bass’s (1985) transformational leadership theory is the focus of more research than all other leadership theories combined (Barling et al., 2011; Judge & Bono, 2000). The theory makes a fundamental distinction between transactional and transformational leadership behaviours (Bass, 1985). Transactional behaviours constitute an exchange between the leader and the follower: the leaders’ behaviour is seen as a response to employee behaviours. Both negative and positive transactions are possible.

First, laissez-faire leadership occurs when the leader has no response to the behaviour of followers. In a sense this is the absence of transactions and such leaders do not take actions in the workplace and avoid getting involved in workplace decisions or activities. In the management by exception style, the leader responds to mistakes and failures to meet standards on the part of the employee. Two forms of management by exception are possible. In passive management by exception, managers act as laissez-faire leaders until a mistake is made and then they respond with criticism and punishment. In active management by exception, the leader actively looks for employee mistakes and then responds with criticism and punishment. Contingent reward behaviours are based on positive, rather than negative, transactions. Sometimes thought of as good management, leaders using this style set clear expectations for employee behaviour and respond with immediate and contingent feedback – either critiquing or praising performance depending on the nature of the employee behaviours. Judge and Piccolo’s (2004) meta-analysis found that laissez-faire and management by exception behaviours were associated with employee dissatisfaction. In contrast, when leaders displayed contingent reward behaviours, employee satisfaction and individual and organizational performance were enhanced.

Transformational leadership is posited to result in performance above and beyond those attributable to transactions. Indeed, Bass (1985) entitled his book...
Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations, in recognition of the hypothesized effects of transformational leadership behaviours. In essence, these transformational behaviours comprise four behaviours (Bass & Riggio, 2006) that constitute the ‘four I’s’ of transformational leadership. Inspirational motivation occurs when leaders set high but achievable standards and encourage followers to achieve more than they thought they could. Leaders show idealized influence when they create a sense of shared mission and build trust and respect among their followers because they can be counted on to go beyond self-interest to do what is right. Leaders display individualized consideration when they get involved in coaching, mentoring and providing support to employees. Finally, when leaders challenge employees’ beliefs and encourage independent and creative thought they are engaging in intellectual stimulation.

There is a great deal of evidence supporting the effectiveness of transformational leadership behaviours. Transformational leadership is associated with increased individual, team, and organizational performance, as well as employee satisfaction and a variety of positive organizational outcomes (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Importantly, leaders can be taught transformational behaviours, and when they are, employees demonstrate improved attitudes and performance in a variety of contexts (Barling et al., 1996; Mullen & Kelloway, 2009).

Leader–Member Exchange (LMX)

LMX can be thought of as the second most researched theory of leadership. Barling et al. (2011) reported that 63 per cent of the studies they reviewed were based on either transformational leadership theory or LMX, with the former being more researched. Essentially, LMX theory is premised on the idea that leaders and followers influence each other and that it is the quality of the relationship between the two that is most important (Gerstner & Day, 1997). The theory is explicitly rooted in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) in that it focuses on the nature of the exchange between leaders and their followers. Meta-analyses (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997) largely support the hypothesized associations between high-quality relationships and employee attitudes and performance.

Authentic and Ethical Leadership

More recent theories of leadership that have garnered less research attention are theories about authentic (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005) and ethical leadership. Although researchers have articulated slightly different views of authenticity, most draw on Kernis (2003), who identified four elements of authenticity: self-awareness, unbiased processing, relational authenticity, and authentic behaviour/action. Ethical leadership shares a similar concern with authentic and transformational leadership, in that all consider the moral dimension of leader behaviour (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership is more than just an individual leader having personal integrity. Rather, ethical leadership considers the leader’s proactive attempts to encourage ethical, and discourage unethical, behaviour in organizations.
Theories of Negative Leadership

Although most of the extant research has focused on identifying the behaviours characteristic of effective leadership, more recently many researchers have focused on the dark side of leadership (see for example, Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis & Barling, 2005; Kelloway, Teed and Prosser, 2007), identifying behaviours that might be considered destructive (see Chapter 9) forms of leadership.

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision happens when individuals in a formal leadership role engage in aggressive or punishing behaviour towards their employees (Tepper, 2000, 2007). Yelling at or ridiculing subordinates, name-calling, or threatening employees with punishment or job loss are all examples of abusive supervision in the workplace. Not surprisingly, employees who experience such behaviours from their supervisors report lower levels of job and life satisfaction, lower levels of affective commitment, increased work–family conflict, and psychological distress (Tepper, 2000). Wong and Kelloway (2016) provided data on how negative interactions with supervisors might affect physical health. Their study documented increased blood pressure as a result of negative supervisory interactions and this increase in blood pressure was maintained into the after-work evening period.

Supervisory Injustice

More broadly, a great deal of research has focused on the consequences of being treated unfairly by supervisors. In the well-known Whitehall II studies, data have also emerged that suggests the importance of supervisory injustice as a predictor of psychiatric illness (Ferrie et al., 2006). Kivimaki and colleagues (Kivimaki, Elovainio, Vahtera & Ferrie, 2003; Kivimaki et al., 2005) have shown that both procedural (whether the organization follows fair policies) and relational (how my supervisor treats me) injustice were predictors of sickness-related absence and minor psychiatric illness. A variety of physical health outcomes, such as heavy drinking (Kouvonen et al., 2008), impaired cardiac regulation (Elovainio, Leino-Arjas, Vahtera & Kivimaki, 2006), and use of sick time (Kivimaki et al., 2003) are linked to supervisory injustice.

Passive Leadership

Kelloway et al. (2005) suggested that one way in which leaders can be ineffective is through their own inaction. Drawing heavily on Bass’s (1985) conceptualization of laissez-faire and passive management by exception, Kelloway, Mullen & Francis (2006) showed that passive leadership was not merely the absence of transformational leadership. In their study, passive leadership was associated with lower safety attitudes among employees even after controlling for the positive effects of transformational leadership. Similarly, Skogstad,
Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland (2007) argued that passive leadership is not just the absence of good leadership, but actively exerts a destructive force in organizations.

**About This Book**

Mirroring the evolution of occupational health and safety as a field, we begin with a consideration of the role of the leader in promoting or developing safe workplaces. Thus, Sharon Clarke, Sara Guediri and Allan Lee focus on safety leadership in organizations, while Bowers, Fleming and Bishop focus more intently on the role of senior leaders and their influence on safety within the organization. Wong, Ozbilir and Mullen round out the focus on safety by considering how safety leadership can be developed in the organization.

We then move to a consideration of employee health and the contributions leaders make to employee wellbeing. Tafvelin draws on conservation of resource and self-determination theory to explain how transformational leadership is linked to employee wellbeing. Game broadens this focus by examining the contribution leaders make to creating respectful workplaces. Similarly, Kelloway, Penney and Dimoff suggest that the creation of a psychologically healthy workplace is linked to the behaviour of leaders in organizations. Sanz-Vergel and Rodriguez-Muñoz consider how leaders affect the experience of work and family balance among their employees, and Dimoff and Kelloway discuss the role of organizational leaders as sources of social support for employees. Skogstad, Morten Birkeland Nielsen and Einarsen consider the nature and effects of destructive leadership on employee wellbeing. Karina Nielsen discusses the role of leaders in making or breaking organizational interventions aimed at improving employee well-being. Paralleling our earlier structure, Donaldson-Feilder and Lewis round off our focus on health by considering how positive leadership can be developed in organizations.

In the last chapters of the book, we move beyond the traditional divides of health and safety to consider myriad ways in which leadership and wellbeing are intertwined. Many of these focus on newly developed concepts that the authors integrate into existing literature. Walsh and Arnold introduce the notion of mindfulness and mindful leadership as an antecedent to leadership behaviours that result in employee wellbeing. Broad and Luthans consider the burgeoning literature on psychological capital (PsyCap) to suggest how leaders might develop collective psychological capital to enhance well-being. Dubreuil and Forest adopt a strengths-based approach to leadership development.

The last chapter in the book, by Carleton and Barling, makes a fitting end note for the book by reversing the link between leadership and wellbeing. These authors focus on the psychological wellbeing of leaders and the consequences that might have for leadership and organizations. In doing so, they introduce a novel, and thus far overlooked, perspective.
Conclusion

The observation that ‘the way our leaders treat us has implications for our well-being’ would come as no surprise to any working individual. However, we suggest that the range of topics addressed in this volume make the case that these effects are more diverse, and more far-reaching, than many of us would have guessed. We hope that in assembling this collection we have advanced both research and practice and that the result of our collective endeavours will be better leadership and healthier, safer organizations.

References


Leadership has long been established as a critical element in relation to workplace safety. We will consider the role of leadership in safety, with a focus on recent theoretical and practical developments in the area. Our chapter is organized into three parts that cover: (1) established, existing research on the role of leadership for safety; (2) emerging strands of research that approach safety leadership from a self-regulation and social learning perspective; (3) implications for safety leadership interventions. The chapter reviews established research as well as new thinking about leadership and safety to help drive novel research directions in the area of safety leadership.

Safety Leadership: The Current State of Knowledge

In this initial section, we discuss the current state of knowledge regarding safety leadership, in particular traditional leadership theories, such as Bass’s (1985) full-range leadership theory (including transformational and transactional leadership) and the implications for workplace safety. We consider the importance of leadership in relation to the organization’s safety culture and as an antecedent to safety climate, before turning our attention to the underlying psychological mechanisms linking leadership to safety outcomes.

Within organizations, leadership at the most senior levels has direct effects on organizational safety: senior management decisions (for example regarding resource allocation, investment in training, maintenance and updating of equipment) will determine how safety risks are managed at an operational level. Such decisions are fundamentally shaped by (and consequently shape) the organization’s safety culture. The failure of leaders to adequately factor safety considerations into their business decisions has been repeatedly highlighted by investigations into major disasters, where the adverse effects of poor safety leadership can be measured in terms of their considerable human, societal and environmental costs. Reason (1993, 1997) argued that the majority of
organizational accidents have their origins within the managerial sphere; but the deleterious effects of poor safety leadership permeate throughout the organization, affecting attitudes and behaviours at every level. For example, in 2010 a major accident at BP’s Macondo offshore drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico resulted in the deaths of 11 oil workers, and, subsequently, in an extensive oil spill with devastating and wide-ranging environmental effects. The National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling (2011) report into the accident concluded that: ‘most of the mistakes and oversights at Macondo can be traced back to a single overarching failure – a failure of management. Better management by BP, Halliburton, and Transocean would almost certainly have prevented the blowout by improving the ability of individuals involved to identify the risks they faced, and to properly evaluate, communicate, and address them’ (p. 90). This conclusion is not unusual, and highlights the critical role that leaders play in setting the context within which individuals evaluate and manage risks on a day-to-day basis. Similar conclusions have been drawn from the analysis of earlier incidents in the oil and gas industry, such as the Texas City oil refinery explosion in 2005 (Hopkins, 2008), and the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988 (Cullen, 1990), and across various other industrial sectors.

As suggested by the above quote, failures of management affect the cognitions, perceptions and behaviours of individuals working at an operational level. Leaders may directly influence the level of hazards within working environments, but they may also affect risk evaluations and safety attitudes through employees’ perceptions of the safety climate (i.e., perceptions of the priority that safety is given in relation to other organizational goals, such as productivity; Zohar, 1980, 2010). Leaders’ actions and attitudes towards safety, which reflect the strength of their commitment to safety, are recognized as a key aspect of safety climate (Flin, Mearns, O’Connor & Bryden, 2000). Substantial research has investigated the role of safety climate and established that safety climate acts as an antecedent of a range of safety outcomes (such as injuries and accidents) and safety-related behaviours (such as safety compliance and safety participation). This body of work comprises both meta-analyses (e.g., Beus, Payne, Bergman & Arthur, 2010; Christian, Bradley, Wallace & Burke, 2009; Clarke, 2006, 2010; Nahrgang, Morgeson & Hofmann, 2011) and longitudinal studies (e.g., Johnson, 2007; Neal & Griffin, 2006; Zohar, 2000).

Safety leadership acts as an antecedent of safety climate, which in turn mediates the effects on safety outcomes (Clarke, 2013; Mullen & Kelloway, 2009; Zohar, 2002a), as well as having direct effects on behaviour (Clarke, 2010). Zohar (2002a) argued that the value-based and individualized interactions characteristic of transformational leadership underpin the positive impact of this leadership style on safety outcomes. Indeed, there is a well-established link between leaders who demonstrate genuine care for the well-being and safety of their workforce, and higher levels of workplace safety (Cohen, 1977; Dunbar, 1975; Hofmann, Jacobs & Landy, 1995; Mullen, 2005; Parker, Axtell & Turner, 2001). In a longitudinal study, Parker et al. (2001) demonstrated that having supportive, coaching-oriented supervisors led to safer working over an 18-month period. Furthermore, supportive leadership
had a significant positive association with safety compliance, and also with employee engagement and satisfaction, as shown by the meta-analysis conducted by Nahrgang and colleagues (2011). Such relationships would suggest that supportive leaders encourage employees to follow safety rules and regulations, but also that they create a positive working environment, which enhances work-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction. Supportive leaders are more willing to listen to safety concerns and discuss safety issues with their team (Hofmann & Morgeson, 1999; Mullen, 2005). Such safety interactions not only will encourage further safety participation from employees, but should also raise managerial awareness of safety issues, leading to reduced hazards in the workplace. Evidence gathered from interventions involving enhanced interactions between supervisors and employees around safety supports a positive impact on employees’ behaviour and safety outcomes (Kines, Andersen, Spangenberg, Mikkelsen, Dyreborg & Zohar, 2010; Zohar, 2002b; Zohar & Polachek, 2014).

Discussion concerning the most effective leadership style for promoting workplace safety has centred on the positive influence of transformational leadership on employees’ safety perceptions, attitudes and behaviour (Barling, Loughlin & Kelloway, 2002; Conchie & Donald, 2009; Inness, Turner, Barling & Stride, 2010; Kelloway, Mullen & Francis, 2006; Zohar & Luria, 2004), and its association with fewer accidents and injuries (Yule, 2002; Zohar, 2002b). One mechanism through which transformational leaders influence their employees is based on the types of relationship that form between leaders and their subordinates over time. Transformational leaders are better able to build with their employees high leader–member exchange (LMX) relationships, which are based on trust, loyalty and integrity (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer & Ferris, 2012). Leader behaviours in these high-quality relationships are reciprocated by employees through safe working and safety citizenship behaviours (Hofmann, Morgeson & Gerras, 2003; Kath, Marks & Ranney, 2010). Because of the trust-based relationship with supervisors, high LMX has been associated with employees feeling comfortable speaking up and raising safety concerns in the workplace (Kath et al., 2010). However, while Hofmann et al. (2003) showed a strong positive association between high LMX and safety citizenship role definitions, suggesting that employees reciprocated high LMX through performing such behaviours, they also found that this relationship was moderated by safety climate. Thus, this relationship was strong in work groups with a positive safety climate, but much weaker in those exhibiting poorer safety climates. As high LMX relationships only lead to increased engagement in safety citizenship behaviours when safety climate is positive, this would suggest that safety-related behaviour is only viewed as a legitimate means of reciprocating a high LMX relationship with the leader when safety is perceived as having high priority. Similarly, Clark, Zickar and Jex (2014) showed that narrowly defined role definitions (i.e., those characterized by the belief that organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) are dependent on the quality of social exchange) moderated the positive relationship between safety climate and nurses’ safety citizenship behaviours.
Transformational leaders, through a better understanding of safety issues and improved communications (Conchie, Taylor & Donald, 2012), may directly influence decisions about the management of safety hazards. In addition, there will be indirect influence through their capacity to build consensus amongst employees about the priority given to safety (Luria, 2008; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). At a group level, Zohar and Tenne-Gazit (2008) found that transformational leaders encouraged team members to develop shared perceptions of safety through the promotion of shared values, the setting of collective goals, and teamwork. The study, which focused on group interactions within military platoons, using social network analysis, demonstrated that communication density (extent of platoon members’ interactions) mediated the effect of transformational platoon leaders on the subsequent development of group safety climate. In contrast, it has been argued that passive leaders, who demonstrate no interest in safety and avoid safety problems, disrupt the formation of shared views regarding the importance of safety (Luria, 2008). Supporting research has shown that passive leadership results in significant negative effects on safety, including increased incidence of occupational injuries and adverse safety events (Kelloway et al., 2006; Mullen, Kelloway & Teed, 2011) and reduced safety-related behaviours, especially safety participation (Jiang & Probst, 2016; Smith, Eldridge & DeJoy, 2016). Furthermore, even transformational leaders who sometimes engage in passive safety leader behaviours risk damaging workplace safety: this inconsistent leadership style has been associated with negative safety outcomes. Mullen et al. (2011) found that, for those leaders who demonstrated both transformational and passive styles, the use of passive behaviours (e.g., avoiding safety issues) attenuated the positive effects of transformational behaviours (e.g., motivating employees to act safely). The importance of transformational leadership for activating those employees who are motivated to actively participate in safety was emphasized by Jiang and Probst (2016). They found that the relationship between safety motivation and safety participation was moderated by transformational leadership, so that the relationship only existed under high transformational conditions. The authors also found that passive leadership had a significant negative effect on safety participation: employees with passive leaders were less likely to actively engage in safety activities.

Although passive leadership has negative effects on workplace safety, active forms of transactional leadership (which involve proactive monitoring of employees’ behaviour, taking corrective actions and anticipating problems) facilitate the development of a work environment in which opportunities for error recovery are increased and learning from mistakes is encouraged. This type of active leadership style enables leaders to learn how to anticipate potential adverse events, better preparing them to intervene and prevent safety incidents (Griffin & Hu, 2013; Rodriguez & Griffin, 2009). In addition to improving leaders’ own capabilities, the proactive monitoring associated with active transactional leadership has been associated with employee safety behaviour, especially safety compliance (Clarke, 2013; Griffin & Hu, 2013). Thus, the emphasis on monitoring and correcting employees’ behaviour increases awareness of the importance of safety regulations, and encourages rule-following. Research has shown that there are differential effects of leader behaviours in relation to employee safety behaviours.
For example, Griffin and Hu (2013) found that safety-inspiring leader behaviours were significantly associated with safety participation: motivating behaviour encouraged active involvement in safety activities, safety citizenship behaviours and speaking up about safety. On the other hand, safety-monitoring leader behaviours were aligned with safety compliance: close supervision encouraged adherence to safety rules and regulations. Similarly, Clarke (2013) supported a model of safety leadership in which transformational leadership was directly related to safety participation, and active transactional leadership was directly related to safety compliance. Such studies suggest that safety leaders might use a combination of transformational and active transactional behaviours to influence workplace safety effectively. Indeed, Clarke and Ward (2006) found that influence tactics associated with both leadership styles were effective in promoting employee safety participation.

Theoretical Perspectives Linking Leadership to Safety Performance

As highlighted in the previous section, a sizeable body of research demonstrates the link between leadership and various aspects of safety performance. While establishing this link is important, it is imperative to elucidate the underlying processes that explain how leaders, and different leadership styles, influence followers’ safety performance. The theoretical frameworks described below demonstrate the reasons why certain leadership styles predict safety performance and can help establish the boundary conditions that may accentuate or attenuate such effects. Specifically, this section will review emerging approaches to studying leadership and safety. To provide a theoretical framework, we will integrate these emerging approaches within the wider conceptual perspectives of social learning, social exchange and self-regulation. Such theoretical perspectives have been prominent in recent research investigating the leadership–safety link.

Safety Leadership from a Social Learning and Social Exchange Perspective

The impact of leaders on employee safety attitudes and behaviour has been explained through the principles of social exchange and social learning. Social exchange theory posits that if a party acts favourably towards another party, this gives rise to a sense of obligation to reciprocate the beneficial behaviour (Blau, 1964). In an early study, Hofmann and Morgeson (1999) referred to social exchange theory as a theoretical foundation for a better understanding of the effect of leaders on workplace safety. If a leader provides resources for safety and invests in safety training for employees, this will create a sense of obligation amongst followers to reciprocate through engagement in positive safety behaviour (Hofmann & Morgeson, 1999; Hofmann et al., 2003). Social learning theory has been utilized as a second conceptual foundation for investigating the role of leaders in employee safety behaviour. Social learning theory proposes that learning occurs in a social context through the observation of and interactions with others (Bandura, 1977). Applying a social learning perspective to safety
leadership, it is suggested that as leaders interact with their employees, they transmit messages about what is expected with regard to safety (Dragoni, 2005; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Consistent with a social learning perspective, numerous studies have shown that leaders influence their followers’ safety behaviours through safety climate, as discussed previously. For example, meta-analytic evidence shows that safety climate mediates the relationship between transformational-transactional leadership styles and individuals’ safety behaviour (Clarke, 2013). Thus, employees learn the value of safety, as well as what behaviours are accepted and rewarded, through observing and interacting with their leader. The following section will use the principles of social exchange and social learning to review research on the effects of different leadership approaches on employee safety behaviour and attitudes.

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, support for a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee safety behaviours has been reported by several studies (e.g., Barling et al., 2002; Conchie & Donald, 2009; Inness et al., 2010; Kelloway et al., 2006; Zohar & Luria, 2004). Within transformational leadership, the dimension of idealized influence directly recognizes the importance of role modelling as part of effective leadership (Bass, 1985). Idealized influence is the extent to which a leader displays exemplary conduct and is regarded by their followers as a role model. Within the dimension, a behavioural and an attributional component can be distinguished (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The behavioural element is the extent to which the leader exhibits behaviours that result in their being viewed as a role model, and the attributional element is the extent to which followers attribute ‘idealized’ characteristics to the leader (e.g., being worthy of trust and respect). Barling et al. (2002) conceptualize that safety leaders who are high in idealized influence impart safety as a core value through their personal commitment and behaviour. Hoffmeister, Gibbons, Johnson, Cigularov, Chen and Rosecrance (2014) tested the relationship of individual facets of transformational leadership with each of safety climate, safety compliance and safety participation in a sample of construction workers. Using relative weights analysis, the authors revealed a pattern whereby idealized influence (attributes) and idealized influence (behaviours) explained greater amounts of variance in the safety outcomes than the other dimensions of transformational leadership. More precisely, idealized influence (attributes) was the most important predictor of safety climate and idealized influence (behaviours) was the most important predictor of safety participation. The finding suggests that transformational leaders predominately influence employees’ attitudes towards safety and safety performance through a role-modelling process, while other leader actions associated with transformational leadership might carry less weight in the effect on safety outcomes. Hoffmeister et al. (2014) discuss the possibility that idealized influence is a prerequisite for other leadership tactics to be effective. For example, challenging existing assumptions about safety (Intellectual Stimulation) or getting employees to buy into a vision (Inspirational Motivation) is difficult to accomplish unless the leader is viewed as a role model. Consequently, a primary focus for safety leaders should be on establishing themselves as a role figure that employees endeavour to emulate. An important part of being considered as a role model involves building trusting and authentic relations with
followers. Authentic leaders foster a social identification process through awareness of their own strength and limitations, acting in ways that are consistent with their own true self and placing moral conduct at the core of their actions (Eid, Mearns, Larsson, Laberg & Johnsen, 2012; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa, 2005). Thus, it can be expected that, for effective role modelling, leaders need to deploy transformational practices as part of authentic relations where concern for well-being and safety are inherent to leader–follower exchanges. Within the wider leadership literature, it has been recognized that leaders can engage in pseudo-transformational leadership, where transformational behaviour is decoupled from ethical principles and aimed at maximizing self-interest (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Christie, Barling & Turner, 2011). In the safety leadership literature, studies so far have demonstrated a positive association between authentic leadership and safety climate (Borgersen, Hystad, Larsson & Eid, 2014; Nielsen, Eid, Mearns & Larsson, 2013), but more research is needed on how transformational leadership style and authentic leadership interact with each other in their influence on safety outcomes.

The importance of role modelling for good safety leaders can be related to the concept of behavioural integrity. Zohar (2003, 2010) shows that the extent to which safety values are espoused is not necessarily aligned with the extent to which safety values are enacted during work operations. Safety can be proclaimed as a high priority through organizational policies, but in the face of budget or production pressures safety procedures might be compromised. The true priority of safety emanates from the degree of congruence between the espoused and enacted values of safety (Zohar, 2010). Behavioural integrity is the (mis)alignment between leaders’ words and deeds, or the extent to which leaders ‘walk the talk’ (Simons, 2002, 2008). Research has demonstrated the importance of leader behavioural integrity in establishing and reinforcing the value of safety (Halbesleben, Leroy, Dierynck et al., 2013; Leroy, Dierynck, Anseel et al., 2012). The findings from these studies suggest that behavioural integrity influences employees’ safety behaviour through two mechanisms. By putting words into practice, leaders clearly signal that adherence to safety protocols is desirable and constitutes behaviour that will be rewarded (this constitutes a social learning mechanism). In a second, complementary mechanism, behavioural integrity creates a predictable environment through consistent prioritization of safety, which consequently lets followers feel safe to speak up about safety concerns and report errors. This dual mechanism is important, as achieving excellent levels of safety performance involves following safety procedures to prevent errors as well as learning from failure through investigation of errors (Rodriguez & Griffin, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Leroy et al. (2012) studied leader behavioural integrity as a predictor of reported treatment errors in a sample of hospital nurses. If head nurses displayed high levels of behavioural integrity with regard to safety issues, their teams rated the priority of safety as higher, which in turn was associated with fewer treatment errors. At the same time, head nurses’ behavioural integrity was linked to higher psychological safety within the team, which in turn was related to more reporting of treatment errors. Thus, if leaders’ actions live up to their words, they influence follower safety behaviour through role modelling, and the consistency in their support for safety delineates safety as a genuine
concern, with the result that followers feel confident to report errors or breaches of safety protocol (Halbesleben et al., 2013; Leroy et al., 2012). Other studies (Blumer, 1969; Weick, 1995) have highlighted the relevance of social sensemaking in high-risk environments, where employees are typically confronted with multiple demands, such as ensuring safety while keeping a project on schedule and reducing cost (Zohar, 2010). Therefore, the priority of safety is not absolute, but relative to other demands and targets (Shannon & Norman, 2009; Zohar, 2008, 2010; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Moreover, dangerous work contexts or crisis situations might place increased cognitive demands on the individuals who operate within them (Dóci & Hofmans, 2015). Hence, it can be argued that a core function of safety leadership is to aid employees to make sense of the complexity and ambiguity that characterize their work environment (Baran & Scott, 2010; Mumford, Friedrich, Caughron & Byrne, 2007). Dahl and Olsen (2013) showed in a sample of offshore petroleum workers that if leaders were involved in daily work operations employees had greater levels of role clarity, which in turn improved safety compliance. The relevance of sensemaking for effective safety leadership is that good safety leaders need to engage in practices that can reduce ambiguity and demarcate accepted and expected behaviours from those that are not. This sensemaking approach would suggest that transactional leadership practices, which create structure and clarity, will be of importance to safety leadership (despite the focus of extant research on transformational leadership). As noted earlier, transformational leadership behaviours predict safety participation, while transactional leadership behaviours are associated with safety compliance (Clarke, 2013; Griffin & Hu, 2013). Probst (2015) found that supervisors’ encouragement of safe working practices (e.g., through reward and praise) was related to a reduction in underreporting of accidents, and that this relationship was moderated by the organizational-level safety climate. If the organization’s safety climate does not provide a clear frame of reference for safe working (because of a lack of systematic safety procedures and policies, for example), followers are dependent on the guidance of their leader through strict enforcement of safe working behaviours. This is in line with earlier research that has identified safety climate as a moderator of the leadership–safety outcome relationship (Hofmann et al., 2003).

Social exchange theory has also been drawn upon to explain the role of trust in safety leadership. Research evidence from several studies lends support to the idea that followers’ trust in their leader assists that leader to exert influence on employee safety behaviour (Conchie, 2013; Conchie & Donald, 2009; Conchie, Taylor & Donald, 2012). In contrast to economic exchanges, where stakes can be clearly offset against each other, the equivalence of contributions in social interactions cannot be managed to the same level of precision (Blau, 1964). Therefore, if followers are to respond to their leaders’ actions, they need to hold a certain level of trust that their behaviour will be valued and rewarded in some form (Conchie, Woodcock & Taylor, 2015). With regard to the effect of leadership on safety outcomes, empirical support exists for trust as mediator (e.g., Conchie et al., 2012) as well as moderator (e.g., Conchie, 2013; Conchie & Donald, 2009). As a moderator, trust in one’s leader can be viewed as a factor that reinforces followers’ willingness to look to their leader