Leadership studies gravitate toward a leader-centric, behavioral approach. This thesis argues that shifting to a rhetorical perspective of leadership provides a more inclusive look at leadership as a process involving leader, follower, message, and context. When these components align a fuller understanding grounded in rhetorical action results. The four components were derived from McGee's notions about "the people," how audiences come to exist, and applied to Havel's text The Power of the Powerless. Havel's text reveals his implicit theory of rhetoric that enhances McGee's original theoretic contribution. The thesis concludes that leadership is an interaction imbedded in rhetoric, and argues that a rhetorical theory of leadership broadens the spectrum in which leadership is studied and practiced.

Subject
- co-creation of meaning
- leadership
- Michael McGee
- myth
- rhetoric
- Vaclav Havel

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Title
- Leadership as Rhetorical Action: The Power of the Powerless in Search of Its "People"
"The Power of the Powerless" was first written in 1978 as a discussion piece for a projected joint Polish Czechoslovak volume of essays on the subject of freedom and power. The posttotalitarian system touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on. This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called rhetorical action. The spiritual suffocation under communism is promoted by these simple, everyday acts of acquiescence.