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ABSTRACT

This document presents a basic model of the relationship between leadership, situation, and outcomes. Following a discussion of questions on the nature, origin, and future significance of good school leadership, the conceptual, empirical, and practical tasks of a systematic approach to school leadership are explored. Multiple constituents, school structure, and the technology of instruction are described as three features of public schools that must be recognized in designing a research strategy. The influence of changing social problems, public problems, demographics, fiscal constraints, student populations, and expectations on school leadership is discussed. Next, conceptions of leadership are explored in terms of: (1) the significance of school contextual variables; (2) the relational nature of leadership; and (3) the difference between leadership and position. Last, our current understanding of educational leadership is summarized through a review of related literature, and needs related to promoting good school leadership are discussed. (113 references) (CLA)

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The National Center for Educational Leadership

# Re-Thinking School Leadership:

# An Agenda for Research and Reform

by

Lee G. Bolman, Susan Moore Johnson,

Jerome T. Murphy, and Carol H. Weiss

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Occasional Paper No. 1

NCEL

The National Center for Educational Leadership

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## NCEL OCCASIONAL PAPERS

1. *Re-Thinking School Leadership: An Agenda for Research and Reform* by Lee G. Bolman, Susan Moore Johnson, Jerome T. Murphy, and Carol H. Weiss; Harvard University (February 1990)

   This paper presents a basic model of the relationship between leadership, situation, and outcomes. Personal characteristics of leaders and the situation in which leaders find themselves both influence what leaders do, which in turn influences the kinds of outcomes that they produce. Embedded in the model are three questions: "What is good school leadership?" "How does good school leadership come about?" and "What will good school leadership mean in the future?" Systematic ways of approaching these questions are also presented.

2. *Preparing School Administrators for the Twenty-First Century: The Reform Agenda* by Joseph Murphy; Vanderbilt University (May 1990)

   In the second wave of school reform reports and studies of the 1980s, much attention has been directed to issues of school administration and leadership. Yet, to date, no comprehensive analysis of these calls for changes in school administration has been undertaken. The purpose of this paper is to provide such a review. The goals of the paper are threefold: (1) to explain the reasons for the calls for reform of school administration, (2) to review the major studies and reports on education reform from 1982 to 1988 and (3) to discuss educational administration reform issues that need further attention.

3. *What Makes a Difference? School Context, Principal Leadership, and Student Achievement* by Philip Hallinger, Leonard Bickman, and Ken Davis; Vanderbilt University (June 1990)

   This paper addresses the general question, what makes a difference in school learning? We report the results of a secondary analysis of data collected as part of the Tennessee School Improvement Incentives Project. We utilized the instructional leadership model developed by researchers at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development to guide our analyses. This conceptual model makes provision for analysis of principal leadership in relation to features of the school environment, school-level organization, and student outcomes. The paper focuses on the following research questions: (1) What antecedents appear to influence principal leadership behavior? (2) What impact does principal leadership have on the organization and its outcomes? (3) To what extent is the Far West Lab instructional leadership framework supported empirically by the data collected in this study?

4. *The Teaching Project at the Edward Devotion School: A Case Study of a Teacher-Initiated Restructuring Project* by Katherine C. Boles; Harvard University (September 1990)

   School districts around the country are in the process of initiating projects to restructure their schools. A small but growing number of these restructuring projects have been initiated by

teachers, but as yet little has been written documenting the experience of classroom practitioners involved in such efforts. The purpose of this study is to add teachers' voices to the literature on restructuring. This project restructured a portion of a school and altered the work of a group of third and fourth grade teachers.

5. *Educational Reform in the 1980s: Explaining Some Surprising Success* by Joseph Murphy; Vanderbilt University (September 1990)

In this paper issues of success and failure of reform initiatives are discussed from both sides of the aisle. The paper begins with a review of the financial, political, and organizational factors which normally support the position that reform measures are likely to result in few substantive improvements. Next the argument is made that educational reform recommendations have been surprisingly successful, and some speculations as to the reasons for this unexpected outcome are presented.

6. *New Settings and Changing Norms for Principal Development* by Philip Hallinger; Vanderbilt University and Robert Wimpelberg; University of New Orleans (at press)

Recently analysts have identified a variety of features that distinguish emerging administrative training programs from traditional ones. The rapid, but non-systematic growth in organizations providing administrative development services during the 1980's led to considerable natural variation in programmatic content as well as in organizational processes. In particular, significant variations emerged in the operation of state sponsored leadership academies and local principals' centers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze variations in current approaches to educational leadership development. The paper addresses three questions: (1) What is the range of variation among emerging staff development programs for school leaders on dimensions of program content and organizational process? (2) What can we learn from the naturally occurring variations in administrative development? (3) What are the most likely and promising directions for administrative development programs in the next decade?

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# Re-Thinking School Leadership:

# An Agenda for Research and Reform

by
Lee B. Bolman, Susan Moore Johnson,
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When parents or school board members say of a school, "There's no leadership there," what do they mean? How does it come about that in two otherwise similar schools, teachers in one cherish the presence of 'good leadership,' while teachers in the other lament its absence? When teachers or students say of a principal that, "She turned that school around," or, "He's a nice guy, but he can't lead," to what qualities or behaviors do they refer? Are those qualities the same for teachers, principals, and superintendents? Are they the same in small homogeneous elementary schools and large, multi-ethnic urban high schools?

Whatever those qualities or behaviors, what difference do they make? How much difference does the quality of leadership in a school make to the academic achievement, or self-esteem, or sense of school pride of a second-grader in Cottonwood, Arizona, or a junior at John Marshall High in Cleveland? Will teachers in Washington, D. C., or Seattle, Washington, feel better, or teach better if the elusive essence of good leadership is present in their school? If we could

The authors thank our colleagues in the National Center for Educational Leadership for their contribution to the ideas contained in this paper. We owe particular debts to Terrence E. Deal, NCEL's co-director, to Leonard Bickman, Willis Furtwengler, Philip Hallinger, Willis Hawley, Catherine Marshall, and Joseph Murphy at Vanderbilt and to Dan Lortie at the University of Chicago.

answer questions like the ones above, and were closer to describing the subtleties of school leadership, how could we put that knowledge to use? What strategies for leadership development, school restructuring, or policy reforms would lead to a noticeable improvement in the quality of our schools?

To say or do almost anything sensible about leadership in American public schools, we need to be able to answer questions like those above. The reality is that, despite the hundreds of articles, books, courses and workshops on school "leadership" that abound in the United States, we know surprisingly little about how leadership really works in American public schools. Finding better answers defines the basic mission of NCEL, the National Center for Educational Leadership, a federally-funded research and development center built on a collaborative effort of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard, Peabody College at Vanderbilt, and the University of Chicago.

Our optimism about the prospects for improving schools through better leadership is tempered with healthy skepticism about leadership's alchemic powers. But we do believe that wise, creative leadership by an array of people in schools and districts has the potential for improving the educational enterprise -- if not by wholesale transformation, then by modest increments -- through better use of resources, more optimism about education, harder work, and a shared sense of commitment to teaching and learning.

Two related strands of activity are of fundamental importance to the effort: (1) research on basic questions about the nature and origins of effective leadership

in schools, and (2) strengthening existing efforts to develop and train school leaders. But if NCEL, or any educational research center, is to yield significant and lasting contributions to the real world of schools, it must develop a mode of inquiry that is problem-based, practice-driven, and improvement-oriented. Problem-based inquiry examines leadership not in a vacuum, but in relation to the real and specific problems in schools that must be confronted and resolved in order to produce better teaching and learning. Practice-driven research is committed to asking questions that practitioners believe are important, ones that they can participate in shaping and answering. Improvement-oriented puts as much emphasis on making schools better as it does on the equally important task of improving the theory base in education.

## Fundamental Questions About School Leadership

Figure 1 presents a basic model of the relationship between leadership, situation, and outcomes. Essentially, the model postulates that personal characteristics of leaders and the situation in which leaders find themselves both influence what leaders do, which in turn influences the kinds of outcomes that they produce. The model is incomplete,[1] but provides a useful starting point in defining fundamental questions about school leadership.

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[1]The model is incomplete because it does not specify which variables of leader, situation, behavior and outcomes are important. An even more important limitation is that it specifies a one-way, linear relationship among the variables. Reality is much more complex, as we will discuss below.

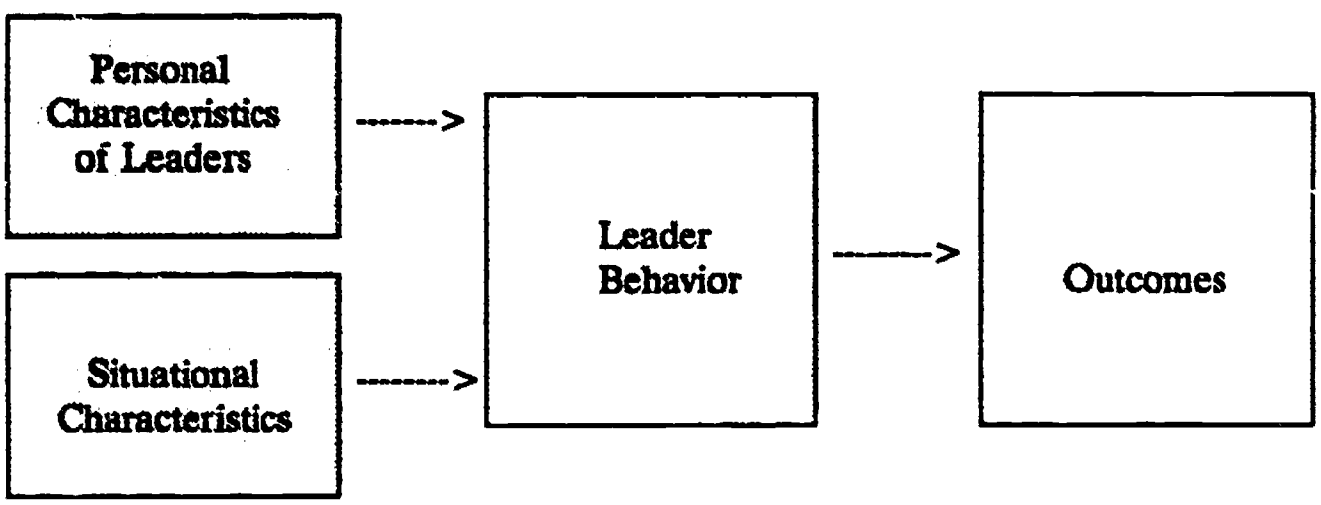


*figure 1*

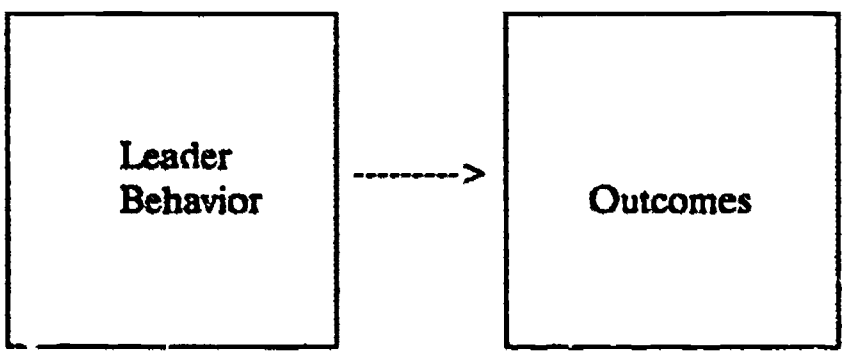


*figure 2*

***What is good school leadership?***

The part of the leadership model shown in Figure 2 depicts the basic proposition that leader behavior produces outcomes. Embedded in that relationship is the question: what kinds of leader behaviors produce what kinds of outcomes? We particularly need to know what leader behavior produces positive outcomes: what is *good* leadership?

Much thinking about leadership among both lay people and social scientists is confused, misleading, or simply out of touch with the peculiarities of schools as organizations. In particular, the common image of a leader is of a powerful, larger-than-life individual, usually a male administrator, who single-handedly creates a compelling vision of the future, convinces others of his keen insight, and motivates them to invest great energy and personal sacrifice in the pursuit of the mission (Bridges, 1977, 1978; Persell, Cookson, and Lyons, 1982; Wayson, 1979). This heroic image of leader as lion is misleading both descriptively and conceptually. In reality, there are many types of leaders whose styles and strategies derive from, as well as help shape, the environment in which they work. Moreover, the complex problems that school leaders face are often resistant to heroic solutions (Murphy, 1988). The task, then, is to discover what kinds of leadership, provided by whom and under what conditions, promote good schooling.

***How does good school leadership come about?***

To know what kind of leadership works does not necessarily mean that we know how to bring it about. As Figure 2 suggests, we would still need to know what characteristics of both leaders and the situations in which they find themselves produce good leadership. Suppose that we knew, as many currently believe, that two essential qualities of effective principals are that they have a vision and they emphasize instruction. Suppose that we also knew that such principals are relatively rare. We would still have the problem of figuring out how to get more principals with those virtues. We need to explore new approaches to identifying, encouraging, and preparing school leaders. We need to understand how those who are not in administrative positions, such as teachers, come to assume leadership roles in schools. We need to examine in-service and pre-service training models and develop new models and materials for training school leaders.

***What will good school leadership mean in the future?***

This is a time of change and challenge for all who work in schools. Many state legislatures and school districts have instituted attempts to restructure formal governance. Those initiatives have far-reaching implications for the occupants of traditional leadership positions (Fuhrman, 1984; Mitchell, 1984, Passow, 1984). In response to the reports of the Carnegie Forum (1986) and The Holmes Group (1986), teachers are likely to assume new roles and responsibilities for both instructional and administrative decisions. Plans to decentralize school districts will

require more leadership and decision-making at the school site (Guthrie, 1986). It seems certain that the role of the principal, the focus of research attention for almost a decade, will undergo considerable change in the decade ahead, and the same is likely to be true for superintendents as well. It is important to supplement our understanding of how leadership is currently exercised in schools with an analysis of where it is heading and an assessment of what kinds of leadership are most likely to result in improved teaching and learning.

## Conceptual, Empirical and Practical Tasks

A systematic approach to school leadership must address three related tasks: (a) a *conceptual* task focused on clarifying our *ideas* about leadership; (b) an *empirical* task of assembling better and richer data about the real challenges facing real school leaders; and (c) a *practical* task of putting theory and evidence to use in the improvement of schools.

### *The Conceptual Task*

Conceptually, we see a need to clarify and deepen the ongoing national conversation about the importance, character, and consequences of school leadership. In doing so, we need to draw on the advances that theorists have made in analyzing leadership in other sectors and will consider their applicability to education. Burns' discussion of transactional and transformational leadership

(1978), Gardner's discussions of leader-constituent interactions (1986b), Lipsky's analysis of street-level bureaucracy (1980), and Heifetz and Sinder's exposition of traps in conventional views of leadership (1988) exemplify some of the provocative and potentially powerful concepts emerging from research in the public sector.

There is also a large and extensive base of research on leadership in the private sector. We need to appraise whether Kanter's descriptions of innovative managers overcoming organizational inertia (1984) shed light on the work of effective school principals. We need to consider whether Maccoby's ideas about leadership as self-development (1981) are as relevant to schools as they are to unions or automobile plants. We need to explore notions of hidden organizational leadership (Barnes and Kriger, 1986). We need to assess whether Kotter's accounts of how senior managers cope with ambiguity and conflict (1982, 1985, 1988) illuminate the choices that principals and superintendents make in similar circumstances.

Clarifying the ways that leadership in education is distinct from and similar to leadership in other types of organizations is not a disengaged, academic exercise. As the conversation about school leadership in the United States becomes clearer and more focused, it will draw increasing national attention. In turn, those who work in schools will be encouraged to explore its meaning and seek to improve their practice with the new understandings and insights that emerge.

***The Empirical Task***

Empirically, we need to study school leadership where it happens -- in the classrooms, corridors, and offices of schools and school districts. We are convinced that there exists among those who work in schools a craft knowledge that is, as yet, little explicated. We believe firmly that we can best understand this wisdom of practice, as well as the opportunities and obstacles that school leaders face, through research that is problem-based, practice-driven, and improvement-oriented.

In developing such collaborative relationships with the schools, we can take advantage of Schön's (1987) insights on practice:

> We should start not by asking how to make better use of research-based knowledge but by asking what we can learn from a careful examination of artistry, that is, the competency by which practitioners actually handle indeterminate zones of practice -- however that competence may relate to technical rationality (p. 13)

Such research needs to employ a range of established social science methods, as well as careful investigation of artistry and wisdom of successful practice. We need to examine leadership in both routine and exceptional settings. We need to study leaders who hold positions of authority and those who do not. We need to mine the wisdom of practice of exemplary leaders and study innovations in school leadership as they develop.

***The Task of Improving Practice***

With the best will in the world, it is hard to do research that responds to practitioners' concerns, grabs their attention, and translates readily into improved

practice. If it were easy, American schools would be filled with examples of highly successful innovations derived from applied research. Experience is bleaker than that. Involving practitioners in planning research is, in itself, no guarantee that they know what questions they need answered, nor that they will use answers that are discovered (Weiss and Bucuvalas, 1980, Weiss 1986, 1988).

What is needed is not simply an effort to build a structure and a strong voice for practitioners into leadership research, though that is important. We need to scrutinize the plan for every research study with a practitioner's skeptical eye. We need to give dissemination a central place in the planning of research. We need to commit ourselves to undertaking studies that are likely to have implications for pressing issues of practice, and to judge their success not primarily on their contribution to scholarly knowledge but on their contribution to the improvement of practice. We need to pay careful attention to the special characteristics of schools, and to the changing social context in which school leadership must operate.

## The Special Features of Schools

There are at least three features of public schools as organizations that must be recognized in designing a research strategy.

### *Multiple constituents*

First, as public institutions, schools must be responsive to diverse interests and expectations. Whereas private schools can define a narrow set of purposes and serve a relatively homogeneous clientele, public schools must be all things to all people. Typically, they are expected to adopt a comprehensive set of purposes and serve parents and students with many different predispositions and interests. As a result, public school staff are always coping with multiple and, sometimes, conflicting goals -- teaching citizenship, teaching basic skills, teaching content, teaching creative thinking. Because most public school students do not apply to their schools and most schools do not select their students, there is no explicit or implicit contract about what schools must do (Johnson, forthcoming). Therefore, they often try to do it all.

### *School structure*

Schools are decentralized, loosely coupled organizations (Weick, 1976). Buildings are decoupled within districts, and classrooms are loosely connected within buildings. School officials may try to prescribe practice, but teachers continue to

continue to choose how, and often what, to teach (Boyer, 1983; Fullan, 1982; Jackson, 1968; Lightfoot, 1983; Lortie, 1975). Even in districts that have made vigorous efforts to centralize authority and standardize practice, compliance and control are elusive. As a result, teachers and administrators find that their work is mutually dependent, and that success depends far more on commitment, encouragement, and cooperation than on rules, coercion or prescription.

*The technology of instruction*

The technology of instruction is ill-defined and often controversial (Lortie, 1975; Dunkin and Biddle, 1974; Sarason, 1982.) Teaching remains a profoundly personal activity, enormously dependent on the values and artistry of each teacher. Disputes persist about how best to carry out even the fundamental instructional task of teaching reading (Larrick, 1987). Should teachers emphasize phonics or whole words? Should they employ basal readers with a carefully-planned sequence of skills, or use only "real" books. Comparable debates about pedagogy continue among teachers and supervisors of mathematics, social studies, foreign languages, and vocational education. Where some researchers and practitioners believe that the codification of techniques for so-called effective teaching has established a uniform and preferred technology (Good, 1983), others regard such prescriptions as providing agreement on only superficial matters of technique (Garman and Hazi, 1988). Because teachers work with students rather than widgets, they must respond to individual needs and exercise discretion in doing their jobs (Centra and Potter,

1980). With discretion comes variety, and as Elmore and McLaughlin conclude: "Variability is not only inevitable in the specifics of classroom practice, it is a key ingredient of effective performance (1988, p. 39)." Anyone who presumes to be a school leader must acknowledge that variety.

## School Leadership In a Changing Environment

Intrinsic characteristics of schools make the job of the leader tough enough, but today's school leaders work in a particularly challenging and changing environment. Minorities and recent immigrants represent an increasing proportion of the population both in the society and the schools. Communities are becoming increasingly multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual. Minority students are already a majority in the public schools of California, and will soon be a majority in other states as well (Special Report, *Education Week*, May 14, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1985). These demographic changes have spawned new strength and vitality, along with an array of economic and social challenges that school leaders must confront daily.

As the nation faces these complex social problems, it also contends with economic competition abroad. The sun is setting on the era in which the United States enjoyed unquestioned economic and political pre-eminence. Business leaders, politicians, and economists, among others, argue that American schools are failing to give citizens the training and skills they need to compete in the global economy.

There is also a gnawing sense that loss of purpose and erosion of values are sapping the strength of American society. Workers, we are told, no longer believe in the work ethic. Standards of excellence have been compromised in manufacturing and service. Morality has become passé.

A series of blue-ribbon panels has argued that education offers the promise of a more stable and prosperous society (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Education Commission of the States, 1983; National Governors' Association, 1987; Office of Technology Assessment, 1988). Proponents of progress through education contend that schooling can eradicate illiteracy and produce skilled graduates, that it can teach tolerance and bridge racial, ethnic, and social differences, that it can reduce economic disparity, and that it can enable the country once again to compete successfully abroad. The enduring American penchant to turn to education to cure all ills places heavy burdens on those who work in schools.

School leaders simultaneously encounter seemingly intractable public problems and vast public expectations. Their capacity to address those problems is limited by a series of organizational, political, and economic constraints. Just as the society outside the schools has changed, so has the character of administrative work within them. Where once -- for better or worse -- authority was more centralized and decisions could be made by a small number of people in high places, power has become more fragmented and decision-making more

(Elmore and McLaughlin, 1988). Superintendents and principals rarely have final say over anything important, and their directives often carry little force.

Organization charts tell only part of the story of educational governance. Employee unions circumscribe administrative discretion. Parent groups are more prominent and more focused. Groups formed along lines of ideology, class, ethnicity, race, or the interests of particular student groups exert organized influence on school policy-making and practice. Business leaders use financial support as a lever to voice their concerns about curriculum and standards. Policy-makers in courts, legislatures and public agencies prescribe curriculum, testing, and the assignment of students and staff.

Those who work in this increasingly complex setting often cope with severe fiscal constraints. Restrictive funding formulas, defeated bond levies, and statewide tax referenda have forced many school administrators to try to do more with less (Rosen, 1984, Oakes, 1987). Turbulence compounds the problems of stringency. Many schools cope simultaneously with declining enrollments at the secondary level and burgeoning growth at the primary level.[2] Student turnover as high as 40% in a year disables many urban schools. In big cities, more than half the students drop out before finishing school (Designs for Change, 1985; Williams, 1987). Meanwhile, teachers earn less than engineers and sanitation workers (Feistritzer,

[2]It is also important to recognize that problems of fiscal stringency are unequally distributed across the nation. Some sun-belt districts are busily hiring staff, building schools and initiating new programs, while some districts in other regions are nearly insolvent.

1983), school buildings deteriorate, and tight budgets force teachers to work with outdated texts and inadequate materials.

Principals are often held accountable for the performance of these changing student groups, but they are often hard-pressed to cope with the serious personal problems that their students confront daily -- poverty, drugs, pregnancy, physical abuse, and mental illness. Home and church are not the supports they once were. (Coleman, 1987; Edelman, 1987). Even in elite communities, principals encounter the stress of student suicide, the threat of drugs and alcohol, and the family strains that students experience. Amidst this welter of problems, we expect principals to balance broad social purposes and lofty human goals against the public's bottom-line demands for quantitative test results.

Ironically, while student populations have shifted and become increasingly diverse, faculties have contracted and become more stable and homogeneous. Fiscal constraints and seniority-based layoffs have produced school staffs that are less varied in age, race, ethnicity, and academic specialty (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Graham, 1987). Some of these teachers, most of them white, have difficulty meeting the educational and social needs of non-white student populations (Graham, 1987). Meanwhile, excellent teachers who have persisted despite trying circumstances often report that they are demoralized by the public's lack of respect for their work (Johnson, forthcoming). They are depressed by their workplaces and overwhelmed by large teaching loads and unrelenting schedules that compromise their best efforts (Boyer, 1988). They are discouraged by school budgets and

testing programs that force difficult choices about which programs to offer and which children to serve (Corbett and Wilson, forthcoming). Those districts that now seek to hire new teachers have trouble attracting able and enthusiastic recruits, particularly those from racial and ethnic minorities (Graham, 1987).

Principals find themselves caught in a net of conflicting expectations about their role. Many who have concerned themselves primarily with managerial matters now find that they are expected to be instructional leaders. Researchers in the "Effective Schools" movement urge principals to set instructional goals, raise student performance standards, devise school improvement plans, observe and evaluate teachers' performance, and monitor test scores (Little, 1984), yet many principals feel far too busy fighting off alligators to spend much time draining the swamp. Principals struggle to demonstrate pedagogical wisdom in subjects or grade levels that they have never taught. Many are uncomfortable with new pressures to institute and sustain reform. Some have responded with narrow, centralized, and authoritarian approaches to leadership. Others, who hope to build collaboration and "shared leadership" in their schools, have few guidelines to help them proceed.

School administrators must also contend with the continually shifting winds of educational reform in America. A series of prescriptive reforms in the early 1980's achieved only modest success in the service of a narrow set of objectives -- primarily higher test scores -- but did succeed in placing new constraints on principals' work. Elmore and Mclaughlin contend that one consequence has been to "elevate the authority of rules above the authority of competence, practice,

judgment, and expertise" (1988, p. 62). By legislation and mandates, the discretion available to educators has been reduced.

As one set of reforms failed to live up to expectations, policy-makers have proposed new ones: decentralize school governance and grant teachers the right to exercise formal leadership. States and local districts have already restructured some schools in the service of those objectives (Sickler, 1988; Casner-Lotto,1988; Johnson, 1989); others are sure to follow.

In responding to these new expectations for decentralized governance, principals must reconcile the call for strong leadership that emerged from the Effective Schools Movement with the current push for participative management. Many are reluctant to relinquish authority and unsure about how to empower others. They are left struggling to adapt conventional, top-down approaches in the face of increasingly bottom-up expectations for change.

## The Role of Leadership

Given the society's unsettling problems and the trying, changing environment of public education, it is no surprise that so many look to better leadership as the key to resolving problems (Adler, 1982; Clinton, 1987; Education Commission of the States, 1983; National Commission on Excellence, 1983; National Governors' Association, 1986, 1987; U.S. Department of Education, 1987; Clinton, 1987). New leadership skills, it is felt, will enable school administrators to confront and settle

an array of elusive, ambiguous, and controversial issues. Leaders will promote responsibility, cooperation, and initiative in a decentralized organization. They will skillfully negotiate the political demands of their work. They will express purpose and personally embody core values. They will emphasize the importance of teaching and learning while simultaneously setting high standards and supporting others in doing good work. The complete leader will be instructional expert and polished politician, sensitive coach and inspired visionary, a leader for all seasons and all constituencies.

Although these are noble expectations, they are unrealistic. Leaders, however talented, are not super-human. School administrators may be determined, diligent, and even charismatic, but few come prepared to meet such unbounded expectations. Moveover, as their jobs are currently structured, little time is available for it. As John Gardner suggests, leadership will not emerge simply from our fervent hopes for it:

> For many--perhaps for most--Americans, leadership is a word that has risen above normal workaday usage as a conveyer of meaning and has become a kind of incantation. We feel that if we repeat it often enough with sufficient ardor, we shall ease our sense of having lost our way, our sense of things unaccomplished, of duties unfulfilled. (Gardner, 1986a, p. 1)

Leadership must be more than an ardent incantation if it is to be a force in school improvement, and a more searching inquiry into the *concept* of leadership is urgently needed. We are hopeful about the promise of leadership and inspired by the challenge of examining it in all its complexity and variety. Yet, we begin

with the sober realization that expectations for leadership are grandiose, that the concept itself is elusive, and that the practice of leadership is enormously difficult. In his recent analysis of leadership, John Kotter describes the difficult challenge for both leadership and leadership research:

> Beyond the yellow brick road of naïveté and the muggers' lane of cynicism, there is a narrow path, poorly lighted, hard to find, and even harder to stay on once found. People who have the skill and the perseverance to take that path serve us in countless ways. We need more of these people. Many more. (Kotter, 1985, p. xi)

The work of school leadership research is to map the path, widen it, improve the lighting, and encourage more people to follow it. Then we need to examine critically where it takes them and how far they get.

The intensity of the call for leadership is not matched by any degree of consensus about what good educational leadership is or about how to promote it. Our expectations for school leaders have outrun our understanding of how effective leadership works. It is easier to describe ideal schools than to explain what leaders should do to create and sustain them. It is simpler to list the qualities that some search for in a leader -- vision, principles, creativity, perseverance, energy, supportiveness -- than to explain how to instill those qualities in ordinary human beings.

## Conceptions of Leadership

Over time, students of leadership have sought to define leadership and to differentiate it from related ideas of authority, power, influence, and control (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1986; Gibb, 1969; Stogdill, 1974; Bass, 1981). They have parsed the concept and pursued its theoretical nuances. Some define leadership in general and all-inclusive terms. For example, Hersey (1984) defines leadership as "any attempt to influence the behavior of another individual or group (p. 16)." Eisenhower defined it as "the ability to decide what is to be done and then get others to want to do it (cited in Bass, 1985, p. 17)." Definitions are but signposts to practice. None is sufficiently detailed to tell school leaders how to act or to inform institutions about how to train them.

We do not expect that any single conception of leadership will command universal assent, but we do need a working definition of what we mean when we talk of leadership. We begin, then, with this basic conception of the function of leadership in schools:

> Leadership is a process of mobilizing people and resources to confront and resolve difficult problems, and to move schools toward the fulfillment of their instructional, social, and civic goals.

That definition is a helpful start, but begs the question of what sort of process we mean. We offer three propositions to expand the definition and to differentiate our concept of leadership from many other uses of the term. We

believe that leadership is always situational and relational, and that it is important to distinguish leadership from the related issues of power and position.

***The Demands for Leadership Vary by Context***

Traditional notions of the solitary and heroic leader have led us to focus too much on the actors and too little on the stage on which they play their parts. Many discussions of leadership overemphasize the influence of individual "leaders", and underemphasize the significance of contextual variables. Against the assumption that "leaders make things happen," it is important to counterpose the proposition that "things make leaders happen." That proposition is reflected in the following component of our basic leadership model:

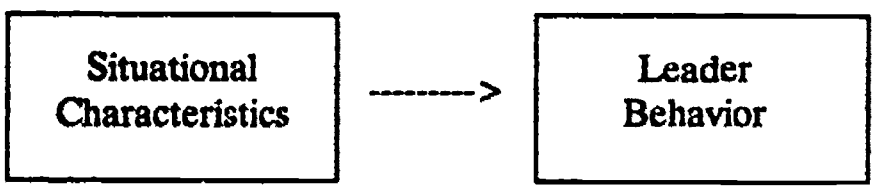


*figure 3*

The context of schooling influences both what is necessary and what is possible for school leaders. The requirements for leadership differ among public and private schools, large and small districts, wealthy and poor communities, as well as bargaining and non-bargaining states. Although basic principles of effective

educational leadership are much needed, no single formula for leadership is possible or advisable.

***Leadership is relational***

The heroic image of leadership conveys the notion that leadership is largely a one-way process: leaders lead and followers follow. We believe instead that leadership is fundamentally a relationship between leaders and others with whom they work (constituents, superiors, subordinates, and colleagues). This adds an additional element of complexity to the basic leadership model:

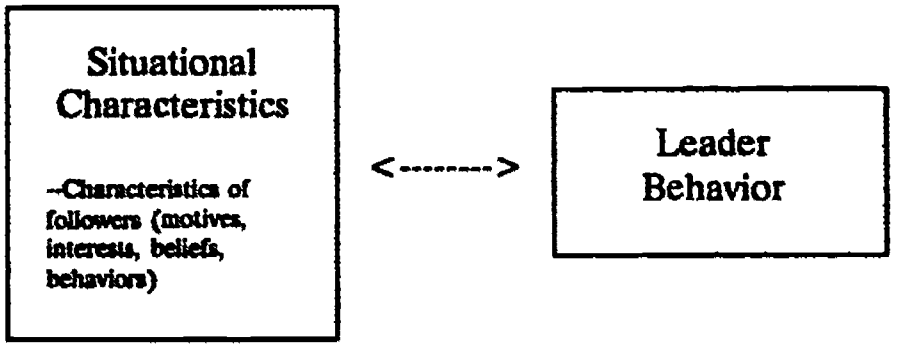


*figure 4*

Leaders are not independent actors, nor is the relationship between leaders and those whom they lead a static one. That relationship is interactional and moves in many directions within the organization. We distinguish carefully here between leader and leadership: leadership is not simply what the leader does, but what occurs in the relationship between leader and others. This seems to be particularly

important with reference to schools, where the relationships among teachers and administrators are fundamentally interdependent, and administrators' power and discretion are often sharply circumscribed. The actions of leaders generate responses from others that, in turn, affect leaders' capacity for further influence (Murphy, 1988). In fact, administrators are leaders only to the extent that others grant them cooperation and characterize them as leaders.

If leadership is to produce movement in positive directions, then it must promote cooperation among participants in a school or school district. Participants must be willing to assume new responsibility and even to sacrifice personal goals in the interests of broader institutional aims. As Chester Barnard wrote in 1938: "Cooperation, not leadership, is the creative process, but leadership is the indispensable fulminator of its forces." That indispensable fulminator ignites the basic components of cooperation -- a shared sense of purpose and mission, a commitment and enthusiasm for a common task, and a willingness to submerge differences and parochial interests in the service of a higher purpose.

***Leadership is not the same thing as position***

It is common to equate leadership with high position and to regard "school leadership" and "school administration" as synonymous. Although we look to administrators for leadership, it is both elitist and unrealistic to look only to them (Barth, 1988). The assumption that leadership is solely the job of administrators relegates everyone else to the pale and passive role of "follower." At the same

time, it encourages administrators to try to do everything, and to take on more responsibility than they can ever adequately discharge.

One can have formal authority without being a leader. Conversely, one can be a leader without holding a position of formal authority. Heifetz and Sinder (1987) argue that position may inhibit leadership, because those in positions of authority tend to see their central tasks as maintaining equilibrium and providing security, rather than prodding the organization to maintain vitality through change. In any case, leadership is not a zero-sum commodity. We need to recognize that there are opportunities for leadership at many levels -- at the central office, on the school board, at the school site, in the departments, at the grade levels, in the classrooms. The occasions that call for leadership are widely diverse: administrative cabinet meetings, collective bargaining sessions, faculty meetings, and informal discussions. An effective leader is not the only leader; he or she can promote leadership at the many discretionary points in the organization where people can act to further, or stymie, the school's improvement. There are opportunities for leadership by participants in a variety of roles, and good schools are likely those that encourage leadership from many quarters.

## What We Know About School Leadership

Although leadership has been the focus of systematic inquiry in private corporations and segments of the public sector, empirical research about educational leadership has been relatively sparse. In 1982, Bridges concluded: "There is no compelling evidence to suggest that a major theoretical issue or practical problem relating to school administrators has been resolved by those laboring in the intellectual vineyards since 1967." Immegart offered a similarly glum assessment of the research on educational leadership:

> Of over 1000 manuscripts submitted [to the *Educational Administration Quarterly* during the six years that Immegart was editor], only a small percentage were empirical efforts directed toward leadership and leader behavior. Such efforts were typically of poor quality and were repetitive, not ground-breaking in nature. (Immegart, 1988, p. 267)

From about 1946 to 1974, in what has come to be known as the Theory Movement, researchers pursued "theory-based" inquiry designed to promote basic research and theory construction in educational administration (Griffiths, 1988). Enchanted by the prestige of social science and the doctrines of logical positivism, researchers studied administrative practice deductively, testing hypotheses drawn from the disciplines of psychology, economics, sociology, and political science. In his analysis of the Theory Movement, Culbertson (1988) observed that the core tenets of this approach precluded normative findings, regarded administration as generic rather than situation-specific, and held that the social sciences were the core

of both theory development and training. Although Griffiths (1988) concluded that "the theory movement moved educational administration from the status of a practical art toward, if not altogether to, the status of an academic discipline," critics argued that the approach yielded fragmented outcomes disconnected from the real world of practice (Greenfield, 1984). Immegart concludes that researchers have been unwisely constrained by the principles of scientific inquiry:

> Normal processes of inquiry have unduly delimited and restricted what has been investigated. Through operational definitions, the selection of variables for study, the delimitation and control of those variables, and the determination of the focus of inquiry, the very same studies that have continued to demonstrate the complexity and situational nature of leadership and the need to look at a greater number of variables have tended to remain relatively restricted or selective themselves, and thereby have not very greatly expanded what has been considered (1988, p. 269).

Immegart also observes that research has relied excessively on retrospective and reputational data rather than "actual unfolding situations," and concludes that "if the goal is to get at behavior or to gain knowledge about what leaders do and how they do it, then more studies of actual situations are needed (p. 268)."

Much of the research on educational administration relies on a static list of administrative behaviors rather than on dynamic and integrated notions of what leadership is. That is, certain activities of administrators are judged to be "leadership behaviors" and these actions, in turn, are assumed to promote improvement in school climate and instruction. However, there is evidence that leadership behaviors that produce good results in one setting may be neutral or

negative in others (Murphy, Weil, and McGreal, 1986). There are several reasons for this. First, factors in the school or district environment may counteract the negative aspects of some behaviors or compromise the positive effects of others (Firestone and Wilson, 1985). Second, activities may convey different meanings when they are interpreted in isolation than when they are viewed amidst an array of behaviors (Marshall and Weinstein, 1984). Third, differences in place and people influence how constituents interpret the meaning of leaders' actions. The "fit" (Duke, 1986) or the "congruence" (Lotto, 1983) between the actions of leaders and the perceptions of others must be considered. Finally, the timing of leadership activities may alter both how they are perceived and the effects they have (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972; Duke, 1986; Pitner and Ogawa, 1981). As Marshall and Weinstein (1984) remind us, it is the totality of the organization that determines how individual participants act and how specific events will be interpreted.

Most studies of administrative leadership have ignored both the environmental and organizational context of work in schools (Firestone and Wilson, 1985; Greenfield, 1982; Pink, 1984; Sirotnik, 1985). Those researchers who have examined environmental influences on administrative leadership have primarily used socioeconomic status to represent context (Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby, 1986; Estler, 1985; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Miller and Sayre, 1986; Miller and Yelton, 1987). Although the scope of this research is limited, it does suggest that the context of leaders' work has considerable consequence for what they do. For example, in their study of effective elementary schools of varying social composition,

Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 1987) found that effective principals in low-SES communities tended to exhibit a highly directive leadership style, while their counterparts in high-SES communities tended to orchestrate more from the background. Such findings suggest that, if we are to understand leadership in schools, we must study what leaders do in a variety of settings.

Research has also tended to underestimate the kind and number of leadership activities that school administrators typically perform. By focusing on behaviors that are directly observable and closely linked to prescribed curriculum and instruction, researchers tend to miss or undervalue the leadership component of such managerial tasks as assigning students to class (Monk, 1984) or budgeting funds (Wayson, 1975), as well as the symbolic and cultural activities of leadership (Firestone and Wilson, 1985; Pitner and Ogawa, 1981; Sergiovanni, 1982, 1984; Wimpelberg, 1986).

Most who review research about school leadership judge it to be too abstract and detached from practice, or too narrow and disengaged from person and context, and, therefore, of little use to those in schools. The most notable exception in the last decade has been the effective schools research (Edmonds and Fredriksen, 1978; Brookover et al., 1987; Lezotte et al., 1980), which has had direct effects on practice. By locating and studying administrative practices in successful schools, researchers have concluded:

> [Principals] are perceived to be strong programmatic leaders who know the learning problems in their classrooms and allocate resources effectively. Effective principals create the conditions listed above by providing coherence to their schools' instructional

> programs, conceptualizing instructional goals, setting high academic standards, staying informed of policies and teachers' problems, making frequent classroom visits, creating incentives for learning, and maintaining student discipline (Bossert et al., 1982).

But there are many unanswered questions about the effective schools research. Successful schools have been identified solely on the basis of test scores. Subsequent research linking leadership to student performance has used achievement in reading and mathematics almost exclusively as the dependent variable (Chubb, 1988; Murnane, 1981; Persell, Cookson and Lyons, 1982; Rowan, Bossert, and Dwyer,1983). However, researchers have begun to question how well test scores indicate learning (Murnane, 1986, Madaus, 1987). Corbett and Wilson's study of local responses to "high stakes" mandated tests suggests that:

> Performance on the test becomes an end in itself rather than merely an indicator of student attainment of broader learning outcomes. The consequence is that educators in the district begin to question whether their efforts to improve specific test scores are consistent with their interest in promoting student learning. (forthcoming, 1989).

It is clear that teachers can, if they choose, "teach to the tests" and improve test scores. There is also evidence that administrators can closely monitor teaching and increase the time that teachers allot to tested material. However, to the extent that schools have multiple goals, those that are not tested are generally overlooked in assessing the effects of administrative leadership (Murphy, Hallinger, and Mesa, 1985; Porter, 1983; Rowan, Bossert and Dwyer, 1983). Even in those cases where researchers have considered multiple goals, they have usually treated them one at

a time, without considering interaction among outcomes (Purkey and Smith, 1983a; Bossert, Dwyer, and Rowan, 1982). This limited use of outcome measures severely limits our confidence in conclusions about the effects of school leadership. Moreover, the correlational nature of most of the effective schools research has not permitted us to examine how much the principal's behavior is cause rather than effect. Even if it is possible to identify those administrative behaviors that are associated with test scores in the short run, we do not yet understand how that comes about, and how we can create the conditions for more comprehensive, long-term learning.

## Promoting Good School Leadership

Relatively little is known about the preparation, socialization, and professional development of school administrators (Greenfield, 1982; Willower, 1987). Moreover, little attention has been given to non-administrators who exercise leadership in schools. For example, which teachers in which contexts become leaders? What kind of leadership do they provide and what impact does it have?

Administrative training programs have been criticized from all quarters (The University Council for Educational Administration, 1987; Champagne, Morgan, Rawlings and Swany, 1984; Gerritz, Koppich, and Guthrie, 1984; Gousha, Jones, and LoPresti, 1986; Johnson and Snyder, 1985). Having analyzed the literature on the training of school principals, Murphy and Hallinger (1987) concluded that "the

content of most training programs in educational leadership and administration has remarkably little to do with either education or leadership." Finn (1986) argued: "It is common knowledge that the usual means by which principals are selected, trained and certified are grossly ill-suited to the production of savvy, risk-taking, entrepreneurial educational leaders." Administrative training has been denounced as well for its isolation and impenetrability. Cooper and Boyd (1987) observed that America has developed "one best model" of preparing educational administrators, a model that is "state controlled, closed to non-teachers, mandatory for all those entering the profession, university-based, credit driven, and certification bound."(p.3)

The demands for leadership mount, yet there is limited guidance from theory, research, or training about what constitutes good leadership, how it might be cultivated, and what we might expect of it in the future. Those are the tasks facing school leadership research.

To move forward, we need better theory, coupled with research that is rooted in problems of practice. We need to augment faith in the scientific method with faith in the wisdom of practice. We need to expand concern with leaders to include an equal interest in those whom they try to lead. We need to balance our interest in the heroic side of leadership with an equally careful examination of its unheroic aspects. We need to abandon the assumption that leadership is the sole province of those who are formally assigned to administrative roles and identify the potential sources of leadership throughout schools. And, in collaboration with those who work in schools, we need to move beyond the comfortable stance of describing

what is and assume the responsibility of describing what might be and charting how we can get there.

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