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Leadership ambiguity in universities and K–12 schools and the limits of contemporary leadership theory

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Abstract

This paper explores the differences in context, assumptions, and behavior of leaders both in modern American universities and in elementary and high schools. The paper's main section examines the utility of five leadership theories (situational, charismatic, transformational, path–goal, and leader–member exchange [LMX]) in explaining leader behavior in each educational sector. We show that while each theory has some merit, none adequately incorporates the larger internal and external "system" pressures on leaders whose institutions are undergoing changes. The paper concludes with a recommendation for a reformulation of the leadership dilemmas in education that sets the five theories in a broader, systemic conceptual framework. © 2002 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the differences in leadership context, leadership behavior, and the underlying theoretical rationales that explain leadership in modern American institutions of higher education and in elementary and high schools. While both types of institutions purport in common to be "educational," because of qualitative internal differences, variations in external conditions, and organizational cultural legacies, "leadership" may take on different forms and must be understood and explained uniquely for each sector. By contrasting the two settings and explaining the differences, we hope to enhance under-

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standing of the leadership requirements for both types of educational institution, and, by extension, organizations in general.

We employ five well-known theoretical approaches to leadership in this effort. Our objective in the hypothetical application of these theories is to test their cogency in explaining current behavior in the two sectors of interest. Each of the theories is presented in hypothetical form so that the dependent variable is "leader predisposition" and/or "leader behavior." What will be seen is that the theories, singly and in concert, fail to explain some portion of the actions of leaders in K–12 and higher education. One explanation is that the contextual systems of K–12 and higher education are both undergoing dynamic and tendentious change—but in opposite directions—and that the transitional stage itself requires leaders and followers whose characteristics and behaviors are appropriate to that and the next stage. In point of fact, higher education is being subjected to increasing scrutiny and external intervention (Cameron & Tschirhart, 1992; Gumport & Sporn, 1999) with the result being a new "managerial" culture—one in which economic efficiency and bottom line results dominate both policy and practice, often overriding most concerns for social goals, quality of teaching and research, and internal human relations. Using the "competing values" model of managerial roles (Denison & Spreitzer, 1991; Faerman, & Peters, 1991; Quinn, 1981; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), one can interpret the shift in colleges and universities as moving from "human relations," "open systems," and "loose coupling" models to "internal process" and "rational goal" models. Using Bolman and Deal's (1984) typology, universities are shifting from a "political" or collegial frame to a bureaucratic or "structural frame."

K–12 schools are shifting too, but in a quite different direction, becoming more open systems and giving teachers more discretionary management functions through formal and informal participation. This has occurred even though states have attempted to mandate more standardized curricula and assessments. Again, using Bolman and Deal (1984), K–12 schools are becoming more participatory and moving to a more "political" frame.

Significantly, it is not just the shift itself that is problematic. In such entrenched and institutionalized systems, the ambiguity and uncertainty of transition creates confusions and complications for most leaders, frequently leading to dysfunctional behavior. While in this paper we restrict ourselves to intraorganizational leadership dynamics, we are mindful of the impact of external systemic influences on the organization and its leadership and believe that these influences need careful attention (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). We address this issue at the close of the paper.

We will also make explicit here our assumption that a parsimoniously limited number of patterns of organization and leader behavior in university and K–12 education can be explained using theories and hypotheses that are reasonably predictive, and that Kotter's (1990) core issue, "what leaders really do" (or what they try to do) provides a question worth answering. In that sense, our approach is not postmodernist or poststructural. Selected leadership theories can provide predictions and explanations that may be apprehended through empirical research and analysis. In other words, the paper assumes that leadership events, people, language, and behavior can be understood from a coherent rational perspective that is commonly accessible and meaningful to observers.

The unit of analysis we have adopted to compare the two systems of education — K–12 and universities — is, in the first instance, the school building, headed by a school principal; and in the second, the academic department, formally led by a department chair. By position and tradition, in American educational organizations school principals and department chairs feel responsible for negotiating organizational transitions, and the professors and teachers they respectively lead expect them to do so. Both positions, especially the principalship, have titles with symbolic importance that provide status and recognition.

Professors and teachers have much in common. Both groups of course, teach, do work with a significant cognitive and intellectual content, and have substantial independence and autonomy, whether they work closely with students and associates or primarily on their own. Professors and teachers enjoy the protections of a tenure system that provides consequential job security and a buffer that allows them actively or passively to resist many requests or even demands from superiors. These factors are important characteristics of the "professional" and leadership context.

Both universities and schools provide frequent opportunity for face-to-face interaction between formal leaders and the professionals over whom they have titular authority. Moreover, both department chairs and principals occupy formal positions that require them at once to be responsive, Janus-like, up and down an organizational hierarchy. They experience the pinch of the classic "person in the middle," requiring simultaneous and often conflicting responses both upward and downward (Bennett, 1983; Howe, 1994). As Wilson (2001) suggests, their job is at times "thankless." Ambiguity and role conflict are built into the role and will likely increase in times of uncertainty and transition.

We do not want to underestimate the significant differences between chairs and principals or between academic departments and elementary and secondary schools. The leadership challenges in each are affected by distinctive modes of formal authority, the typical nature of everyday work, norms and assumptions about professionalism, and the natural and socialized dispositions of individuals who work in each type of institution. Each of these factors contributes to the cultures endemic in each sector. In addition, leader background and training set up strong ideological dispositions and preferences that importantly affect leader behavior.

For example, there is a key difference in leader career paths. In higher education, following years of study in the discipline and the receipt of a Ph.D., the department chair follows the route of achievement and recognition through research and publication, virtually never seeking training in administration. Few chairs pursue formal education and training in administration. Department heads have more access to university administration and additional budgetary responsibility. They gain some prestige, but gains in salary primarily come because they move from 9- to 10- or 11-month contracts. In sum, This employment history imprints in the chair a collegial lens with which to view conflict and conflict resolution (Cullinan, 2001). As we suggest below, however, provosts and deans are increasingly likely to select chairs with a more hierarchic and management-centered approach.

In K–12 schools, on the other hand, the route to the principalship begins with bachelor's degree, a license, and a teaching position. Further training follows through pursuit of a master's degree and/or an administrative license, sometimes culminating in a doctoral degree

in educational administration. The jump to a school principalship provides symbolic and tangible rewards: principals have much more prestige than teachers, and annual remuneration from 25% to 50% higher than teachers at the top of the salary scale. Although many principals claim that they are teachers at heart, only a very small proportion leave administration and actually return to full-time teaching. A managerial perspective is fairly quickly socialized into the K–12 leader. Again, as we detail below, those who select principals today may not prefer this majority ideology.

A difference in the gender balance also distinguishes the two sectors. Most elementary teachers, about half of secondary teachers, but only a third of principals are women (Digest, 2000). The prototypic leadership dyad is male principal–female teacher. Comparable statistics for doctoral granting universities reveal that no more than a third of tenure-track faculty are women and that the proportion of senior faculty (eligible for chair) is lower still (Chronicle, 2001). Minorities are also underrepresented in both educational sectors, raising unanswered questions about how "positionality" (i.e., gender, race, role within an organization, field of study) affects educational leadership and the meanings attached to it (Klenke, 1996). As Chliwniak (1997) notes, "until recently, scholarship on leadership continued to use the white male as the exemplar of leadership style and characteristics," and this affects the ways we reference women and minorities in leadership positions. This has particular significance in K–12 education, for example, because the school principal may be for many workers the first experience with formal, high status leadership. Finally, because the condition of education may differ across national borders, we confine our analysis to universities and schools in the United States.

With these preliminary orienting remarks, we now turn to the design of the paper. It is organized into four parts. Section 2 explores how shifting contexts in universities and in K–12 education present challenges that ultimately change leadership practice in each sector. Section 3 addresses a set of generic assumptions about what leadership is — i.e., assumptions that are likely to buttress theories and practice of leadership in both K–12 and colleges. In Section 4, we introduce five important prominent leadership theories that characterize today's literature: (1) situational leadership, (2) charismatic leadership, (3) transformational leadership, (4) path–goal theories of leadership, and (5) leader–member exchange theory. For each theory, we summarize the key variables and hypotheses and attempt to apply them to a leadership position — in higher education, to the department chairperson, and, in K–12 schools, to the school principal. We also attempt to integrate our observations into a more systemic and comprehensive approach to leadership in educational organizations that embraces and explains the leadership dilemmas of both sectors in ways that the five theories above do not. The concluding section draws together the material presented earlier and offers suggestions for new research.

2. Organizational problems of education

This review of leadership in education is particularly timely as we enter the new century. New pressures have altered the task environment for both K–12 schools and universities as

they enter an era of restructuring. Consequently, there are important implications for transformation in the leadership role of both school principals and university department heads, although our reading of these changes suggests that these role requirements are moving in different directions.

For example, in higher education, long-term financial constraints, especially in public research universities, have led to both rationalization and centralization, a phenomenon described in the research literature as early as the 1980s (Cameron, Kim, & Whetton, 1987). Less stable funding streams force central administrators to be more strategic in their thinking, increasing university development efforts and seeking out new "markets" for students and initiating programs in new areas, often geared to nontraditional students (although very recent trends have shown an excess of student enrollments causing still other "rationalizations" of strategy). Peremptory program cuts, sometimes of entire departments or even schools, as well as program introductions or expansions have become increasingly common, and few universities have escaped the need for incisive, immediate adaptive reactions. Central administrators generally make these decisions, often by passing traditional faculty governance mechanisms and procedures.

More important, in many universities the role of the department head has begun to change significantly. Traditionally, in American universities department heads were elected by their peers, usually serving one or two 3-year "terms," managing administrative details and serving as advocates for their faculty to central administration. The most talented built departments, recruited and mentored stars and potential stars, and facilitated research opportunities and funding. Today's department heads are more likely to be appointed by deans, serving at their pleasure, and more likely to be considered as "working for the dean" rather than for the faculty. Moreover, as universities face more demands for accountability (including student satisfaction and successful job placements) and for more student "credit hours", and as research dollars fall as a percentage of department and university income, the department head's job has begun to assume new management and perhaps leadership responsibilities.

K–12 education faces very different pressures threatening the educational mass production model and hierarchical structure that dominated the twentieth century American school. Educating non-English speaking children, managing ethnic and racial diversity, including learners with special needs in regular classrooms, and integrating educational and social services create hitherto unknown levels of school complexity. High stakes, statewide testing, school-by-school reporting, and efforts to assess teacher performance threaten to put individual schools, even individual educators, under increased scrutiny. These mandates combined with legislation to support opening up education to the "market" while public education faces declining funding put educators on notice. Parental and public participation in school governance, through site councils and school-based decision-making, affects relationships between administrators, teachers, and parents. These changes have challenged principals to be more attentive to outcomes, to encourage more interactive teaching, and to collaborate more extensively with their putative "subordinate" teachers. The shifts in leadership demands are reflected in recent educational leadership research in which such terms as "instructional leadership," "participative leadership," and "moral leadership"

dominate the literature principals read during and after their training (Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Moreover, the role of principals and performance expectations for them now emphasize the management of organizational change rather than maintenance of the status quo. While it is not clear where schools are going, it is mostly enlightened principals who will lead them there (Mawhinney & Smrekar, 1996; Murphy & Forsyth, 1999). Those who can detect and respond to the characteristics of the change stages in which they and their institutions are immersed will have significant advantages.

3. Perspectives on leadership

We begin with some commonly accepted notions about leadership. Most theories of leadership define it in various connected ways. For example, leadership is said to be a "social influence process," whereby one person (not necessarily the titular leader) is able over time to maintain greater control over others as the prerequisite tasks are carried out (Yukl, 1994, p. 3). Further, leadership is one of a number of subfunctions that are performed in all organizations, along with, for example, task accomplishment (production), communication, or quality control. Leadership usually involves the concerted modification by the leader of the goals, motivation, behavior and/or competencies of other members of the organization in facilitating the group achievement of preferred goals.

All theories of leadership struggle with the concept of "agency" — the degree of freedom that formal and informal leaders have to affect changes in their work environments (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996) and with the attribution of responsibility for organizational success to leaders themselves (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). As will be seen, some theorists ascribe major potential for influence to those in formal positions of responsibility, while others, taking a more deterministic perspective, tend to highlight the heavy constraints on leader influence when work environments and their own psyches limit options (Kerr & Jermier, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1993). While in this paper we will not address this energy source question directly, we wish to suggest at the outset the dramatically different organizational design conditions in K–12 and college and university departments that leverage leader behavior, particularly under differing conditions of change and uncertainty.

Leadership is not only leader agency manifested as behavior but also leader recognition of desired outcomes and the facilitation of individuals and groups in the achievement of those outcomes. Some theories suggest that leadership is the performance of those acts that help the group achieve preferred outcomes and the focusing of the attention of others (Cartwright & Zander, 1968); still others that it is the manipulation of meaning so that follower interpretation of leader action is consistent with the leader's intention. Yet another group argues that it is the fulfillment of group member psychological needs, in part via the capacity of the leader to act as an ego ideal for individual followers or to match the followers' prototype of the characteristics of an ideal leader (Cyert, 1990).

Leadership theories, as much literature continues to report (Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Keller, 1999; Lord & Maher, 1991), tend to focus on the leader as person (e.g., personality,

attitudes, values, behavior), follower characteristics, situational contingencies, or combinations of these. For example, it is alleged that "charisma" often induces followers to adopt and carry out the agenda of the leader as the leader and followers exchange valued goods and services that sustain the leader in his/her relationship to followers. As current theory continues to explore these theories, a "levels of analysis" exegesis of some (e.g., situational leadership) but not of others (e.g., Leader–member exchange [LMX]) has helped to provide a focus for investigations (Dansereau & Yammarino, 1998). Leadership also stems in part from latent beliefs and/or assumptions about the clientele to be served by the organization and, by association, about the nature of the products or services to be delivered to them.

As a subdiscipline or content area of leadership studies, educational administration is not a mature field. Publications about educational leadership, whether by academics or practitioners, characteristically use rhetorical, inspirational, and even moralistic language, reflecting beliefs that education is both benevolent and mission-driven. Educational leadership researchers have drawn selectively from the work of the broader leadership research community and have been especially drawn to such concepts as transformational and charismatic leadership. At the same time, they have produced little research, either theoretical or applied, on trait theory, path–goal theory, contingency theory, or normative theory. Instead, as Leithwood and Duke (1999) demonstrate in an extensive literature review of K–12 leadership, investigation is driven by issues central to educational practice, and significant research streams flow from such topics as "instructional leadership," "participative leadership," and "moral leadership" that are less central to the study of corporate leadership. Heck and Hallinger (1999, p. 145) only overstate slightly in asserting that only two images have dominated leadership studies in education: transformational and instructional leadership.

4. Five leadership theories

The five key leadership theories we propose to explore are the following:

1. Situational theories, particularly the contingency approach associated with a large number of researchers, including Vroom and Yetton, (1973), Hersey and Blanchard (1984), and Fiedler (1967), whose approach is somewhat different.
2. Charismatic theory, which some consider a subset of trait theory, exemplified most prominently in the work of Conger (1989).
3. Transformational leadership theory, which makes assumptions about empowerment, and is best represented by Bernard Bass (1998) and James McGregor Burns (1978). Also included in these theories are the broader conceptualizations of Manz and Sims (1991) and Selznick (1957).
4. Path–goal theory (House & Dessler, 1974).
5. Exchange theories, most salient in the LMX model work of Graen and his associates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998).

We do not suggest that this list is exhaustive, but do believe that it represents significant threads in leadership theory and research over the past 25 years. Leading figures of each of these schools are widely published, extensively cited, and serve as gatekeepers in the field of leadership scholarship (House & Aditya, 1977; Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2000; Yukl, 1998). What is important is that each of these approaches brings a distinct concept or insight to the study of leadership. We believe the five approaches, despite their apparent relevance for both K–12 and higher education, have not stimulated systematic research in educational leadership. In presenting the five approaches below, we link them to the emerging issues and contradictions that face educational leaders as their context becomes increasingly ambiguous.

We would add two qualifications to our selection of these five theories. As the abundance of published research demonstrates, the boundaries among the five approaches overlap on some dimensions. For example, charismatic and transformational leadership are sometimes used interchangeably, and the path–goal concept is sometimes seen as a subset of situational leadership. Further, since leadership terminology is in the public as well as in the academic domain, colloquial meanings occasionally obfuscate the clarity required in scholarly writing.

As we explore each of these theories, we look at how leadership interacts with a fairly wide range of characteristic realities in K–12 and higher education. These include such factors as organizational design, worker maturity and levels of skill development, worker motivation, group norms and commitment to them, organizational culture, shifts in the levels or duration of conflict and the mechanisms for managing it, power intensity and aims, decision-making processes and structures e.g., sharing, organizational change and development (Barrow, 1977; Yukl, 1994).

Clearly, all organizations exist in larger systems that issue constraints, formally and informally, on the ways in which the members of organizations may operate. For example, external history, culture, bureaucratic patterns, and laws circumscribe the freedoms of the organizational participants. These external influences are sometimes difficult to discern and sometimes quite clear both to outside observers and to participants. As will be shown, external system constraints are quite different, even diametrically opposite, in the two settings considered in this paper. Furthermore, the range of perceptions of organizational participants is a function both of the cultures endemic to each field, to the natural and socialized dispositions of the organization's members, and to the resultant planned and intentional sensitivity of the organization to the cross-boundary conditions in which it conducts its business. That is, like workers in other settings, educators tend to see things as they desire.

Academic faculty in research universities have often operated under assumptions about academic autonomy and entitlement forged in the growth years of the 1960s and this is reflected in an organizational design in which chairs are managers of collegiality. Central administrators have had to face uncertainty for 20 years and in the past decade have come to realize that managing uncertainty may require chairs with a more activist and managerial orientation, relying less on traditional departmental and individual faculty entitlements.

In order to contain costs, generate revenues, and stimulate entrepreneurial activity, new forms of departmental structures and leadership may be required. Consequently, a new "managerialism" has found its way into the culture and structure of decision-making (Rhoades, 1998; Roberts & Donahue, 2000).

The transition in both settings, however, is awkward, conflict-ridden, and confusing, leading to severe dilemmas for leadership. As we compare and contrast leadership in these two sectors, we will bear in mind the different assumptions in the old and new paradigms in each and in the transitional states.

4.1. Situational leadership theory

"Situational leadership theory" (SLT) typically refers to the behavior of leaders as they attempt to adapt themselves to a variety of perceived conditions and challenges they face (Graeff, 1997). The approach generally assumes that some configurations or combinations of situation and leader behavior are more effective than others.

There are two major approaches to the study of these contingencies. The first presumes that the leader is able to modify his or her behavior based on an understanding of the situation. Key models using this perspective include Hersey and Blanchard (1984), Hoy and Miskel (1996), Vroom (1984), and Vroom and Jago (1988). A second, but quite different thread in situational leadership—Fiedler's (1967)—also addresses the contingencies in the environment of the leader but places severe limitations on the probability of modification by the leader of his or her behavior in the contemporaneous context. Each of these approaches has received much critical analysis and has undergone considerable and often substantive revision over the years. The changes involve primarily the redefinition of both the situational and leader variables to include more subtle nuances that account for more of the variance in leader effectiveness. Thus, the later work of Hersey and Blanchard (1984) modifies the conception of follower "maturity," while Vroom and Jago (1988), building on Vroom and Yetton (1973), amplify the nodes in the decision tree that normatively guide leader choices. None of these theories explicitly addresses the complexities of the exchange processes between and among leaders and followers, except to prescribe for the leader the allocation of varying degrees of subordinate participation in decision-making.

The Fiedler approach also employs an assessment of subordinate characteristics and structural conditions in the organization and combines them with a parallel assessment of leader disposition. Together, they yield a measure of "situational control" comprising the sum of three characteristics of the situation—leader–member relations, task structure, and position power—plus a leader personality temperament (as measured by the "least preferred coworker" scale). Different combinations of these variables create varying conditions of "situational favorableness" that call for different leader behaviors—either to modify the degree of favorableness or to leave the situation entirely.

4.1.1. SLT in universities

There are approximately 80,000 chairs and heads of department in US colleges and universities who serve an average of 3.5 years each (Green, 1988). In larger departments, particularly in research universities, chairs often do so reluctantly, returning with relief to faculty duties and peer, rather than hierarchical, relationships (Green, 1988). The faculty, their "subordinates," work under conditions of considerable job security after they achieve tenure, thus removing some of the asymmetrical power influences available in traditional bureaucratic

systems. Hence, department chairs usually rely on other strategies, primarily the reward power of allocating limited resources such as research assistants, office space, secretarial services, teaching loads, travel money, and a partial voice in annual salary increment decisions.

In light of the pressures towards greater managerialism and towards changes in faculty roles, what can we say about leadership using SLT? Taking first the propositions of Hersey and Blanchard (1984), it is possible that department chairs who are appointed by present upper-level administrators may come to have different, and perhaps more hierarchical, views about the maturity of their faculty than do chairs elected by their peers. To the extent they take that position, they may be more likely to believe that bureaucratic rather than collegial leadership will be effective and consequently take a more "telling" style of leadership. These chairs will also tend to see departmental faculty as less mature, i.e., less able to make sophisticated decisions.

Correspondingly, deans and provosts may increasingly seek chairs who can "carry out orders" and focus on carrying out policy initiatives from above. To the extent that chairs have more autocratic tendencies and perceive subordinates as immature, the shift from collegiality to managerialism is manageable for department chair leaders with need for more "control." As Conner (1998) notes:

> Arguably the most demanding reason change is so challenging has to do with why and how people seek control in their lives, and the ways they react to disorder. We are a control-oriented species.... (p. 28)

> Change is experienced as bewildering chaos when it is faced without the benefit of a sense of control. (p. 30)

Applying the Fiedler model of situational leadership of the academic department provides a different insight into recent organizational history in higher education. Fiedler's prescriptions for effective leadership require that the leader be able to properly assess both situation and self in order to better "engineer" the job—to "fit" him/herself to the situational contingencies. Department chairs according to this perspective, in other words, would need to be prepared to vary their position power, task structure, and leader–member relations—especially the last. In the light of the movement in higher education toward managerialism and the aforementioned ambiguity of the dynamics of the transition, it is likely that department chairs today are tempted to move toward a solidification of their position power, partially through attempting to engender more support from above, which they see as providing an opportunity to exercise more control, thereby reducing uncomfortable ambiguity. But as Fiedler, Chemers, and Mahar (1976) note,

> As the chairperson of a committee or the leader of a group performing creative or non-routine tasks, you will generally have lower position power. Relatively low position power is also found in such organizations as some university departments, advisory boards, or research teams where the members have a strong voice in management, as well as in professional organizations where the leader must depend on senior employees for advice and assistance.

One seductive option for chairs is to institute more rigorous task structures that circumscribe faculty roles more clearly and permit more accountability. Finally, in attempting

to improve leader–member relations, chairs might not be inclined to engender better rapport with their faculty members, since to do so would require compromises in the first two domains. The result would be a situation of "moderate" control for the chair. According to Fiedler, the most effective leader under this condition is a "high LPC" person (Vroom, 1984). The new managerialism, however, is likely to result in the placement of *low* LPC workers in the chair position. The reason is that most superordinates (in this case, deans, provosts, and presidents) believe that chairs who are more inclined to initiate structure and who are willing both to listen to and exercise their bureaucratic authority will be more effective chairs. The result is a "mismatch" of leader to situation — low LPC in moderate control settings — that in Fiedler's theory produces less effective departmental leadership.

In sum, both of these SLTs provide practical insights into the nature of academic leadership in universities. Both point to the probability of employment of chairs whose dispositions and ideologies are mismatched to the situations and constituents with which they deal. The theories also suggest the likelihood of reduced leader effectiveness under these conditions. The Hersey and Blanchard approach is somewhat circumscribed, however, in limiting the "situation" to subordinate maturity. The Fiedler model ignores this maturity variable and focuses on leader–group relationships, including position power, task structure, and leader–member relations. Both theories do not incorporate a number of key variables — e.g., organizational culture — that could importantly influence leader effectiveness.

4.1.2. SLT in K–12 schools

School leadership researchers, when employing the situational leadership approach, focus on the distinctions between initiating structure and consideration or task and socioemotional leadership. Two important orienting hypotheses characterize the literature on leadership styles: the belief that principals who exhibit both high initiating structure and high consideration are more effective (Blase & Blase, 1997; Hoy & Brown, 1988) and the belief that a principal's leadership style can be changed and/or adjusted to specific tasks or problems in the course of the working day. There is little consensus on the correlates of leadership style or on parameters for finding a "fit" between leadership behaviors and specific situations. The literature focuses more on leadership style and everyday leadership behavior than on decisions or decision-making.

Studies investigating teacher perceptions have rarely been in the tradition of Fiedler, Vroom, or Hersey and Blanchard. The few studies using Least Preferred Coworker (Kennedy, 1987; Theodory, 1981; Whorton, 1983) were inconclusive, showing no leader influence on school effectiveness. A larger number of studies have attempted to develop or refine measures of leadership style (Begley, 1995; Sirotnik & Durden, 1996) and/or assess consequences of different styles. For example, "facilitative leadership" is positively associated with teacher empowerment (Blase, 1993) and with teacher sense of efficacy (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995). Hoy and Brown (1988) found that styles combining initiating structure and consideration enlarged teacher zones of acceptance of principal decisions.

School reform, with its emphasis on systemic change, both recognizes and creates complexity and diversity. Site-based management, individualized programs, community interconnections, portfolio-based assessment, inclusion of children who do not speak English,

have disabilities, or come from severely disadvantaged circumstances combine with a new emphasis on accountability through standardized testing and a teaching force in transition as baby boomers begin to retire.

The circumstances faced by each principal are unique and require leadership skills that combine initiating structure and consideration. Effective principals will attune themselves to such indicators as attendance and discipline data and whatever ongoing academic performance indicators are available during, as well as at the end of, the school year and assess whether instructional improvement efforts are actually taking place. At the same time, they will be expected to react to individual problems from all directions, many of which create legitimate exceptions to policy and established practice and stretch their ability to respond to the personal needs of staff and students. They must be able to understand and to cope with staff "immaturity," the inability or unwillingness of teachers to accept and adapt to the new demands of school restructuring. Leadership requires an understanding of both their staff and the situations they collectively face.

How do we understand "contingency" when the situation changes daily, even if in ways that have recognizable patterns or cycles? This type of problem-solving is not identical with decision-making as it is conceptualized by Vroom and Yetton (1973), for instance, because it is more likely to affect individuals rather than the organization and often is private rather than public. Moreover, multiple pressures (which have increased with more complexity and less administrative support) push principals into multiple leadership styles. This in turn creates the problem of attempting to be all things to all stakeholders. The conventional wisdom, only modestly supported by actual research, is that participative leadership is a politically attuned response to the general contingencies facing schools (Hoy & Brown, 1988; Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990) because it allows for both sharing of administrative burdens and cooptation. At the same time, it makes coordination extremely difficult because decisions and initiatives may move in different and incompatible directions (Conley & Goldman, 1994).

For school principals to apply contingency theory effectively, they must not only have a good understanding of teacher skill and talent, but also an understanding of how these might be affected by the structural changes we are seeing in K–12 education. While it is possible to do this, the ebb and flow of people and circumstance in most schools threatens to make administrators so adaptive that they operate in a problem solving, rather than a leadership, mode.

4.2. Charismatic approaches to leadership

Max Weber's (1947 [1924]) classic depiction of charisma provides an intellectual backdrop for understanding charismatic behavior (cf. Jermier, 1993), and serves as a basis for recent research into its characteristics. Conger (1999) focuses on leader traits, personal characteristics, and behavior; follower attachment to the leader, and the process by which the former influences the latter, a logical, empirical extension of Weber's logic using a somewhat different language. Conger and Kanungo (1987) characterize charisma as elaborating and conveying an unconventional, yet clear vision; personal risk and unconventionality; accurate perception of situations, especially where followers are disenchanted; and communication of self-confidence.

Charismatic and transformational approaches to leadership overlap. Like Conger (1999), Pawar and Eastman (1997) and Yukl (1999), we distinguish between them. The defining elements of charismatic leadership are special personal characteristics leaders possess as these interact with the perceptions and needs of followers at a given moment in time. Weber called this the "gift of grace," and Klein and House (1998) suggest specific personal characteristics and behaviors that distinguish leaders who have the potential to "ignite a fire of charisma" within their subordinates:

> Prosocial assertiveness, self-confidence, need for social influence, moral conviction, and concern for the moral exercise of power [and] articulation of distal ideological goals, communication of high expectations, and confidence in followers, emphasis on symbolic and expressive aspects of the task, articulation of a visionary mission that is discrepant from the status quo, references to the collective and collective identity (rather than to follower self-interest), and assumptions of personal risks and sacrifices (pp. 4–5).

They point out that these characteristics and behaviors are "necessary but not sufficient" to be recognized as charismatic by subordinates. The followers themselves must have certain characteristics that render them susceptible to charismatic leadership.

The educational leadership literature shares this evocative terminology, perhaps because the high proportion of case studies puts a highlight on individuals, their personal characteristics, and their behavior. We also note that it inevitably puts far more attention on successful than unsuccessful leaders, and makes little effort to locate either activities or outcomes on the type of continua made possible by research utilizing more quantitative assessments. Although the literature does hint at ways individuals might enhance their charisma, specific steps are seldom spelled out with the same detail we find in Conger and Kanungo's (1998) research on corporate leadership.

4.2.1. Charismatic leadership in universities

In higher education, especially at the department level, charismatic leadership is rare, and not necessarily effective even when present. Professors are generally not "open" to leaders with charisma. Faculty members are typically skeptical, often proud of their independence, usually highly protective of their individualism and autonomy, and at times contrary as matters of both preference and principle. Historically, the organizational structure of academia has reinforced these follower traits. Inside a department, faculty constitute a loosely coupled confederation of independent scholar/professionals whose interdependence is most frequently "pooled," rather than "sequential" or "reciprocal" (Thompson, 1967). Their work in teaching and individual research does not usually require them to interact with one another in order for the work to be completed. In team-centered research, different teams remain independent of one another. Much research is externally funded, thus reducing collaboration and intimacy of relationships between faculty and chair. The proliferation of subspecialties and interdisciplinary possibilities reduces common identity. In addition, faculty have high perceived self-efficacy, causing them to believe more in the wisdom of their own agendas. Most faculty, *qua* professionals, in short, do not "need" a great deal of external stimulation to provide leadership or motivation.

Present circumstances in universities also support such a conclusion. In stable times or in times of predictable growth, there is neither need nor opportunity for department chairs to galvanize faculty around common issues and common objectives. Even in periods of crisis, decline, or uncertainty, the structure seems stable. Faculty (and departments) are more likely to compete for scarce resources than perceive and work toward a shared common destiny. Charismatic leadership might help a department frame decisions or collective new directions, but this has not been documented in higher education research. Furthermore, it is difficult to envision how charismatic leadership at the departmental level would help departments manage the centralizing tendencies we see in universities. In sum, in our view charisma in a departmental leader will not translate into strong leadership. We are aware of those circumstances, relatively rare, where a charismatic department head "builds" or rebuilds a department, often by capturing such external resources as new research grants or endowments.

In sum, charismatic leadership is not likely to help explain leadership effectiveness in universities.

4.2.2. Charismatic leadership in K–12 schools

K–12 schools are a more hospitable environment for charismatic leadership. K–12 teaching is not only an intellectual occupation; successful teachers possess the social skills to make personal connections with students. Teacher individualism is professionally grounded, but teachers are probably more "other-directed" than college professors, and do not share the same sense of entitlement. K–12 teachers see students, every day, all day, 40 weeks a year, including those who are in school because they have to be, not because they want to be. They see failure almost as often as success. Maintaining motivation and energy to teach is a real challenge, and even effective, organized teachers experience burn-out.

Charismatic leadership is an antidote to discouragement and disengagement, and it seems to have surfaced in many of the least privileged schools, inspiring and energizing teachers and students alike. In the 1980s, Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) and Lightfoot (1983) published widely read volumes of case studies that described how charismatic leaders reestablished educational values in difficult schools. The implied leadership model uses charisma as its frame of reference: strong personalities inspire staff (and sometimes students), resulting in improved school climate, conflict resolution, and better outcomes.

These authors, and others like them, assume that teaching is hard work and that neither direct bureaucratic authority nor tangible inducements improve teacher or student performance. Moral authority and role-modeling, however, may generate the desired results. One way of putting this is that charismatic leaders "loan" teachers the leader's ego, helping the latter to actualize themselves and take uncharacteristic risks. The idea of moral or ethical leadership emerged as an important theme in the educational leadership literature of the 1990s. Thomas Sergiovanni (1992), Robert Starratt (1993), Lynn Beck (1994), and Christopher Hodgkinson (1991) all discuss moral reasoning and how a humanistic, person-centered articulation and embodiment of moral values provides the type of role model that inspires teachers and students. Case studies suggest that this orientation plays into the classical Weberian theme of follower attachment coming from the leader's perceived "state of grace."

Other writers have suggested that the increasing number of women administrators reinforces the role model effect, both because women may bring special qualities to leadership roles and because women teachers are now the majority gender, even in many high schools, making identification with principals more likely (Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1999). However, as we noted above, educational researchers have not systematically explored either gender or ethnic/racial influences on the projection of charismatic leadership.

As schools become more complex and more participative, what effects will charismatic leaders, those with the capacity to inspire and motivate their teachers, have? To the extent that leaders generate a moral community that includes a commitment to volunteerism and collaboration, charismatic principals may serve as catalysts of sustainable changes. But the nature of charismatic leadership in schools is principal-centered, which contradicts the movement towards group decision-making, except perhaps where principals use their legitimacy to delegate and share power (Goldman, Dunlap, & Conley, 1993). Moreover, time is always the adversary of charisma: high-energy environments run down, and principals resign, retire, or are transferred. In schools charismatic leadership may create moral community; it may not catalyze systemic change.

4.3. Transformational leadership

James McGregor Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership, suggesting that certain leaders can elevate their followers' frames of reference, ideological underpinnings, and attitudes toward self, peers, the organization, and society in ways that go well beyond extracting performance commitment. The transformational leader appeals to a higher-order universal set of human needs that can be activated by virtue of the natural proclivities of human nature to become self-actualized and self-organized. As Yukl (1994) notes,

> Transforming leadership can be viewed both as a microlevel influence process between individuals and as a macrolevel process of mobilizing power to change social systems and reform institutions. At the macrolevel of analysis, transformational leadership involves shaping, expressing, and mediating conflict among groups of people in addition to motivating individuals (p. 351).

Bass (1998, pp. 5–6) asserts that transformational leadership has four key components reflecting four types of behavior: (1) charismatic leadership or idealized influence; (2) inspirational motivation; (3) intellectual stimulation, which encourages problem-reframing and creativity; and (4) individual consideration. Transformational leaders may not exhibit all these behaviors simultaneously (or ever), and the behaviors need not be intentional or instrumental. The transformational leader engages in a symbolic exchange with each subordinate and with groups of subordinates. The processes usually (but not always) involve the subordinate's cognitive capacities, including imagination, as well as values, emotions, and attitudes. Leaders make choices about how to take advantage of their own and their subordinates' abilities. Situational factors may also be important. As Bass (1985, p. 154) suggests, changing environments, especially where institutions do not meet member expectations, encourage the emergence of transformational leadership.

Bass notes that transformational leadership must overcome resistance to change, and it is most likely to do this in organic organizations, where aims, structures, and procedures are ambiguous, but the levels of trust are high (Bass, 1985, p. 158). Mechanistic organizations lend themselves to transactional leadership, partly because transactional leaders are both recruited to them and find them compatible with their leadership styles. Transformational leadership requires a climate of trust. Subordinates must come to believe that the leader has their interests at heart. They must feel that the leader's vision about the potential, promise, and fulfillment of institutional mission is worthy of the individual's attention and commitment.

The term transformational leadership is evocative and compelling, implying that leaders "transform" either organizations and/or individuals. Change is an underlying subtext of most theory and research about transformational leadership. Conger (1999, p. 148) suggests the approach emerged as corporations faced global competition requiring them to radically reinvent themselves (an organizational phenomenon) while "simultaneously building employee moral and commitment—a seemingly contradictory endeavor" requiring change in people. Public schools and universities face similar pressures, but more inertia.

4.3.1. Transformational leadership in universities

Bass (1985, pp. 159–160) argues that transformational leadership is not likely to be found in the American university, especially public universities, primarily because they are rule bound. The institution of tenure and the relatively low levels of interinstitutional mobility in higher education encourage high levels of longevity in academic departments. Further, in universities the bifurcation of teaching and research objectives results in a bimodal culture. In teaching, the typical work pattern is one of inertia—where longstanding rules and routines dictate behavior and are substitutes for leadership; in research, individual agendas are addressed to specialized disciplinary problems that mostly defy collaborative orientations (Anderson & Louis, 1991). Both the heavy routines of teaching and the decentralized authority for research render a chair's potential transformational leadership efforts difficult to execute at best.

Because transformational leadership depends on peer support for significant organizational change, the diversity of faculty interests and orientations in the typical department usually presents problems for leaders. Despite putative common academic subject matter and disciplinary backgrounds, faculty diverge in both intellectual preferences and personal goals. Since as Bass (1985) notes, the "arousal" process in transformational leadership requires the use of appealing "symbols, images, and vision of a better state of affairs" (p. 66), it would take an extraordinarily broadly educated and informed chairperson to communicate effectively to each faculty member.

At best, he or she can convince followers that adherence to ambitious goals and high standards is, indeed, in their own and the department's best interests. Unfortunately, the press for publication often vitiates those values. Further, in the current, frequently uncertain, captious, and mistrustful climate, faculty members may not believe that rewards for dedication to transformed goals will be forthcoming. The changing priorities of higher education also reduce the potential for transformational leadership.

The apparent transition of higher education from a collegial to a managerial orientation is likely to render the possibilities for transformational leadership even less likely (though see Cameron & Ulrich, 1986). Just as most business organizations with concrete goals and bottom line mentalities engender a "calculative" exchange norm (Etzioni, 1961), so also are universities now moving in that direction, as chair–faculty relationships are increasingly based on *quid pro quo* rather than collegial expectations. Faculty may be unwilling to take risks or even to be "good citizens" unless there is a clear-cut reward in prospect (Organ, 1988). In sum, when transactional opportunities and immediate success probabilities outweigh positive transformational outcomes, department chairs will be less inclined to take the transformational route.

"Pockets" of transformational leadership may, exist however, in a few universities. Departmental subcultures generally reflect the prevailing values of the larger university culture in which they are immersed, but there are occasional deviant groups (Bess, 2001). Some departments have long-lasting cultures that have survived changes in institutional culture and climate. In these cases, the integrity of the culture permits the identification of common goals and objectives and makes it possible for a transformational leader to induce creativity, productivity, and/or internal organizational change, even in unfavorable university-wide climates. It is possible also that, where departmental cultures are anomic and faculty morale low, a new leader, probably brought in from outside, helps the department transform itself.

In sum, because of the stability of the insular, idiosyncratic, and professional patterns of teaching and research in universities, the utility of transformational leadership theory in university departments may be limited.

4.3.2. Transformational leadership in K–12 schools

What is transformational leadership in K–12 education? Educators and publics who believe today's educational crisis demands not better educational delivery, but different approaches to education, look for visible leadership to change teaching and learning practices. There is a new emphasis on working both harder and smarter. The leadership "problem," then, is as much about overcoming resistance to change as about motivating performance. Because educational traditions are so deeply institutionalized and entrenched in habit and perception, transformational principals must reframe problems and provide the support structures and the formal and informal rewards that help teachers cut themselves loose from their routines and comfort zones.

The transformational leadership literature, however, does not separate the leadership that sustains a "good" school from that which leads to significant change in ways that make teaching, learning, and school organization truly different. Reviewing Bass' four elements of transformational leadership, only "intellectual stimulation" that encourages "problem reframing" is uniquely associated with change, and even problem reframing may not represent fundamental change in either personal assumptions or organizational change. The overall public dissatisfaction with K–12 education creates a climate where the only "good" leadership is leadership for change.

What do we know about what transformational leaders in schools actually do? Empowerment and visioning are key elements. Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) place strong emphasis on

the transformational principal as information processor and decision-maker, but they link those behaviors to activities that nurture personal change in teachers. This includes fostering the development of vision, facilitating collaborative decision-making, symbolizing professional practice, providing individualized support, supplying intellectual stimulation, and holding high performance expectations (Murphy & Louis, 1994).

But, as this research makes clear, substantial educational change requires organizational transformation as well as individual transformation. New state laws, most school district policies, and emerging practice have decentralized many decisions and resulted in "site-based management" rather than top-down control. Consequently, teachers are increasingly involved at all stages of the management, decision-making, and political process, placing a premium on committed, energetic teachers willing to work with adults as well as children. Transformational leaders not only must provide direction and inspiration, they must manage "process" as well (Meier, 1995). More important, they must sustain the momentum of organizational change over a period of years. The K–12 literature (e.g., Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Lightfoot, 1983) documents the existence of extraordinary transformational principals, but these are only a small proportion of school leaders.

4.4. Path–goal theory

Path–goal theory has its origins in the work of Robert House and his colleagues (House, 1971, 1996; House & Dessler, 1974; House & Mitchell, 1974). The theory is both transactional, in the sense that the leader is responsible for "initiating" structures and expectations for subordinates, and transformational insofar as the leader attends to developing group norms that elevate the goals of the group members. As Smircich and Morgan (1982) note, "leadership is realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeed in attempting to frame and define the reality of others" (p. 259). Path–goal theory assigns that framing and definitional responsibility to the leader.

Conceptually, the theory relies primarily on an expectancy theory of motivation (Bandura, 1997; Chemers, 1997; Schriescheim & Kerr, 1977; Vroom, 1964). That is, its tools for action are specific assumptions engendered in or ascribed to employees: belief in the probability of success of action (expectancy), belief in the probability that rewards will follow from success (instrumentality), and the relevance and/or value of the rewards to the actor (valence). Note that this approach in turn relies on theories of social cognition and in part on socially conditioned "affect."

Path–goal theorists argue that the effective leader will be able to make more psychologically salient for subordinates the rewards for organizationally desirable performance. The rewards must include both hygienes and motivators (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Leaders will be successful when subordinates come to understand that their rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic, depend on effective performance as perceived by the leader and to believe that the leader has the power to deliver the rewards—by opening and clarifying the "paths" to the desired "goals." Since different subordinates respond to different stimuli, the effective leader chooses his/her tools wisely. In particular, path–goal theory suggests that leaders manipulate a number of subordinate trait variables: tolerance for

authoritarianism, locus of control, perceived self-competence, need for achievement, and need for affiliation. The leader must also be attentive to environmental and situational characteristics such as routineness of the work, the formal authority system in the organization, and group norms.

By judging both subordinate and situational characteristics, the leader can choose among four contingent leader behaviors: supportive, participative (or consultative), instrumental (structuring/clarifying/specifying), and achievement-oriented (setting goals and high standards). Most research using path–goal theory has concentrated on supportive and instrumental behaviors with various moderators of the theory explored.

In the theory, when subordinates are in positions of relatively low role ambiguity, leaders who exhibit more supportive/considerate behavior will be more effective. Further, when situations for subordinates are high in complexity and role ambiguity, instrumental behaviors will be more effective. Importantly, leader behavior must be congruent with subordinate preferences for that behavior style. There is only moderate empirical support for the potency of the hypothesized moderator variables in removing the obstacles to path–goal clarity and ultimately to effectiveness and satisfaction (Wofford & Liska, 1993).

4.4.1. Path–goal theory in universities

A university faculty member's primary tasks — teaching and research — require individualized effort and creating rather than following structured agenda. This suggests that department chair behavior would be most effective when it is instrumental, that is when the chair can illuminate the faculty's path from effort to achievement. However, as noted above, the extreme specializations in most departments (especially those that are large) results in greater subject matter knowledge residing in the faculty member rather than the chair (contrary to Weberian principles of hierarchy).

Indeed, most teaching and research practice follows the predilections of the faculty member, not the organizational needs of the academic department itself. Where there is an established need for curricular change and/or for staffing new courses (or less desirable courses, such as introductory large lectures), faculty with low formal and informal status are assigned these burdens. Such assignments, moreover, do not for the most part bring desired faculty rewards. Teaching lower level undergraduate courses does not normally lead to tenure or promotion. Hence, chairs who seek to "clarify the path" leading to desired faculty goals will be hard-pressed to convince faculty that hard work on low status assignments will be worthwhile. In terms of expectancy theory, these faculty will not believe that they can teach the courses well, will not see that rewards reliably follow from effective performance, and will not value the rewards that are available.

While the chair's reward ammunition includes allocation of research assistants, travel funds, and a vote on salaries and tenure and promotion, other persons have significant roles in the decision chain, including peers and deans. On the other hand, the chair does have primary discretionary power over office amenities, including secretarial service, office space, and equipment. These conditions, however, are largely hygienic rather than motivating. Hence, path–goal theory will be more likely to have an impact on faculty satisfaction than on motivation.

Chairs have somewhat more power to be supportive, especially with junior faculty. Since many departments are collections of loosely connected, highly competitive faculty, it is sometimes difficult for faculty to find support among their colleagues. Indeed, the absence of caring, sensitive mentors for younger faculty members deprives them not only of supportive leadership for their work, but also of models for their developing relationships with students and ultimately with new faculty. The chair, therefore, can have considerable impact on junior faculty levels of expectancy — in their belief in their ability to perform the work. On the other hand, the motivation of more mature faculty is more likely to have been determined by past patterns of success or failure and by external, cosmopolitan influences.

Finally, it is useful to consider the capabilities of the chair in executing path–goal theory even if the motivational contingencies are present in faculty. House and Shamir (1993) suggest that effective path–goal leaders must be able to articulate a transcendent ideological goal that connects with subordinates' own essential values. There is some question as to whether most chairs, who are primarily "temporary" leaders without training, have the skill and vision to attend to this leadership requirement.

In sum, as with charismatic and transformational leadership theories, path–goal has limited value in identifying effective leader behavior for the department chair. However, path–goal theory does pinpoint the source of the limitation in the chair's ability and power to influence faculty motivation.

4.4.2. Path–goal theory in K–12 schools

K–12 researchers have generally avoided path–goal theory. Kroll and Pringle (1986) attempted to address one of the major tenets of the theory — that initiating structure in ambiguous circumstances improves employee satisfaction. In a study of 261 Texas mid-level administrators, they found that relationship was not moderated by individuals' personal growth needs. While not written from the path–goal perspective, recent research by Blase and Blase (Blase, 1993; Blase & Blase, 1997, 1999) addresses its major issues. The Blases' research over the past decade, mostly large sample interview studies, focuses attention on teacher responses to their principals' behaviors. In emphasis it resembles the work of House and others, but indicates that principals positively regarded by their staff tend to empower their staffs.

Path–goal theory has special problems in explaining K–12 leadership behavior. Leaders have little control over any of the critical variables that would allow them to frame expectations in ways that would motivate teachers. Education has few clear pathways, and no guarantees that specific teacher behaviors will improve the learning of every student. Moreover, principals often operate in contradictory ways, asking for example their most talented and motivated teachers to do more — take an extra student or chair a committee — than her or his less talented colleagues.

The difficulty principals have in evaluating teacher performance creates another constraint. While clinical observation allows principals to make a general estimate of teacher effectiveness, how to improve instruction is not well understood. Teacher evaluation is not an exact science and is particularly difficult for secondary administrators who must observe teachers having subject knowledge and expertise the administrator lacks. Principals generally pay

most attention to their truly ineffective teachers, in order to the provide documentation that may be required for discipline or dismissal. Even then, colleagues frequently revolt when one of their number, no matter how marginally competent, is subjected to an aggressive effort to terminate his or her contract. While some skilled principals can help teachers improve instructional practice, time constraints and the tendency of teachers to keep doing what they think works make it difficult for principals to establish credible cause–effect relationships.

Moreover, because educational policy and politics frequently move the goalposts in K–12 education, neither leaders nor followers have much confidence in the goals or in the paths that lead to them (Conley & Goldman, 2000). Consequently, many teachers believe, with some justification, that their principals have no control over, and little ability to predict, the basic contingencies of school organization or performance. The instability of educational policy and funding also works against leadership strategies that rely on expectancies. State legislatures, state departments of education, and school district central offices create mandates that change every few years. Rules for textbooks, policies for special education, and curriculum guidelines are rarely stable, and veteran teachers learn to resist (usually passively) the latest policies (or "fads") until their sponsors lose enthusiasm or leave office. Even in states where the "reforms" of the 1990s appear to have become at least semi-institutionalized, it has taken years for teachers to accept, or at least adjust to, mandates.

Nevertheless, the movement towards high stakes testing may encourage school administrators to adopt leadership styles utilizing the path–goal approach. Testing has become increasingly sophisticated, and transparent reporting of scores by school and even by classroom puts a new and unaccustomed spotlight on teacher performance. In several states there is or soon will be legislation that links teacher pay and even teacher retention to test scores. If these initiatives become settled policy, consequences will be far-reaching for principals and teachers. And if principals, some of them at least, can develop and display the skills that help teachers improve their students' test scores, then some of the processes implicit in path–goal theory may come into play. It is more likely, however, that the process of test score enhancement will require teacher collaboration and that the principal's role, while vital, will probably be indirect. In sum, the major problems for path–goal theories in K–12 education are the uncertain nature of cause–effect relationships in explaining student learning and the principals' lack of control over important externalities.

4.5. LMX theory

LMX theory had its origins in "vertical dyad linkage," and subsequently was elaborated through the explication of specific dyadic leader–subordinate relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). The theory now focuses on the dynamics of leader relationships with multiple subordinates and on intragroup subordinate relationships. Brass (1984) addresses the differences between leader–subordinate relationships and activities when subordinates are part of an "in group" (where influence is reciprocal, especially with "dominant coalitions") compared with situations when leaders interact with "out group" members (where influence tends to be asymmetrical). A further elaboration of the theory, particularly relevant to the subject of this review, involves research findings that

show that a leader's ability to form productive relationships with "in group" members is contingent on the leader's relationship with his or her superordinate (Drummond, 1998) — an extension of Likert's "linking-pin" thesis.

The central theme of the now substantial body of literature on LMX borrows heavily from social exchange theory (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997) and focuses on the different "relationships" that develop between leader and each subordinate and groups of subordinates and on relationships among subordinates themselves (recognizing and elaborating the attention paid to leader–member relations in Fiedler's theory). LMX is particularly interesting in education because it provides a window into individualized relationships in educational organizations by which subordinates are differentiated not by job title, but by talent, attitude, and personality. The approach also recognizes the importance of informal organizational groupings among subordinates.

With the recent shift in authority structure and decision-making patterns in universities and in K–12 schools, however, leader–member "relationships" become ambiguous and problematic, and not easily characterized as universalistic or particularistic. LMX thus has a direct connection with emerging theories of "enacted narratives" (Kozlowski et al., 1996) whereby both leaders and followers are engaged in an interactive process of attempting to negotiate agreements about how to interpret the meaning of appropriate organizational actions. As institutions move from monocratic or participative structures and cultures (and vice versa), there is much ambiguity in these negotiations (Cohen & March, 1974). Leaders must be attentive to the nature of the transition and its implications for team-building.

4.5.1. LMX theory in universities

In higher education, the history of academic freedom and individualized research agenda and course assignments encourages department chairs to develop particularistic, professionally intimate relationships with each faculty member, but especially with high performers — the "in group" in LMX theory. Save when an outside chair is hired, these relationships carry over from when the chair was a fellow professor. Thus, the "enacted narratives" in which chairs and faculty engage are aimed at a mutuality of understanding about what will benefit both chair and faculty member (Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000). Citing Bourdieu, Drummond (1998, p. 103) suggests that:

> To the extent that a game takes place it is enacted with vigor and could therefore be thought of as a site of struggle or battle as players seek maximum power or dominance within a field. In this sense the aim is to rule the field to become the person who has legitimacy in order to confer or deny legitimacy to others. The person with the greatest amount of power is the one who can acquire and use various forms of capital to maximum advantage, including their own. Competition for promotion within an organization (field) is an excellent example of a struggle within a field for personal advantage.

To some degree, department chairs as leaders utilize exchange theory in attempting to build their departments as "teams." Indeed, the recruitment, employment, and promotion processes in higher education, in which peers are intimately involved, support the identification of new members whose values enable trusting and collaborative "relationships" to

develop. As such, these modes of organizational behavior reflect the gradual enlargement of LMX theory to include intragroup relationships and away from simply vertical dyad interactions and affiliations.

Much current literature in higher education addresses the team building process, usually with limited use of theory (but see Bensimon & Newmann, 1993; Frost, 1998; Koslowski et al., 1996). Developing relationships among subordinates that are based on trust and interdependence is a mark of LMX theory. However, as the higher education climate becomes more unpredictable and internal battles for internal resources become more competitive or even hostile, zero-sum transactions may increase. Moreover, chairs, appointed for limited terms, may be more concerned with management than organizational development issues.

The applicability of LMX theory to the university setting is also limited by an important hidden assumption of the theory, namely that primary agency resides in the leader. Hence, the initiation of leader–member interactions and relationships would seem to rest with the leader. The egalitarian and collegial norms of higher education, on the other hand, bespeak parity between chairs and professors. As higher education moves towards a more hierarchical authority structure, this balance could be thrown off. Consequently, opportunities to practice LMX would decrease. Not only will chairs have more leverage; faculty may *expect* them to initiate structure, the result being an application of LMX theory that focuses on a smaller, privileged "in-group" and larger "out-group" interactions with the chair. These latter will become more bureaucratized in the interests of efficiency, thus vitiating the efficacy of LMX theory.

4.5.2. LMX theory in K–12 schools

LMX has not found its way into the K–12 educational leadership research. The ideology of this literature, expressed most strongly in writings about charismatic and transformational research, stresses an egalitarian approach to leadership that does not differentiate among subordinates. The work of teachers is relatively standardized and quality of performance is difficult to assess accurately and fairly. Moreover, the rewards at the principal's disposal are limited (no control over salary; little right to discipline) but not entirely insignificant.

Even with these qualifications in mind, it would appear that LMX provides a theoretical explanation for an important empirical reality of schools: principals have individual relationships with teachers. Many such relationships are personal in nature, based on common teaching experience, long-time acquaintance or friendship, common educational philosophy, personal respect, or affinity. Others, and these are of special interest to us, are specific to the management of the school: perceived teaching quality (both good and bad) and willingness and/or ability to collaborate in school-wide efforts and initiatives. The emerging phenomenon of teacher leadership wherein teachers take on central roles in the restructuring efforts associated with school reform provides a general example. While this process is often attributed to transformational or charismatic leadership style, LMX provides an alternative interpretation.

Qualitative and anecdotal studies (Blase & Blase, 1999; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Goldman, Dunlap, & Conley, 1993; Hart, 1994; Kleine-Kracht, 1993; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992) indicate that principals (and vice-principals) use relationships with specific teachers, as well as their perceptions of individual teachers' talents, potential, engagement,

and effort, to make decisions about distributing those resources (often having to do with quality of work life) they do have at their disposal: teaching and room assignments and professional development opportunities. Teaching assignments are a significant reward for some high school teachers. More important, principals make critical decisions about who will be selected for leadership responsibilities as team leaders, instructional coordinators, and department heads. These positions almost always require an activist orientation and are often entryways into school administration. While many aspiring administrators self-select, sponsorship still plays a significant role.

LMX theory provides an unfulfilled framework for understanding K–12 leadership. At the same time, potentially useful knowledge could be generated through better understanding of the principal–teacher exchange and the discernable patterns of these exchanges. For example, to what extent do principals perceive distinctions between individual teachers? Do these distinctions result in different relationships and different transactions? If so, are they instrumental or unconscious, personality-based or task-based? And how do teachers perceive this manifestation of leadership?

In sum, it is likely that LMX theory will become increasingly valuable in understanding the impact of decentralization and the shift to greater teacher participation and shared leadership in K–12 education. The complexity of these dynamically evolving leader–subordinate relationships lends itself particularly well to LMX-based scrutiny.

5. Conclusions

As we have maintained, the two systems, K–12 and higher education, appear to be moving in diametrically different directions with unknown vectors and destinations. One, higher education, is tending toward an autocratic axis, the other, K–12, to a more egalitarian stance. The reasons are complex. With the advent of mass higher education state systems, managers and leaders have not had the experience to learn how to hold units accountable without establishing controlling mechanisms that dampen motivation, creativity, and effectiveness (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). On the other hand, a century of practice with mass elementary and secondary education has (finally) resulted in at least a partial awareness by leaders of the deleterious consequences of centralized control. Because these changes are occurring incrementally and in different ways across different institutions within each sector, leaders in both are uncertain about how to "manage" or "control" their situations so as to best exercise the "influence" that leadership is said to manifest.

For example, the literature indicates that varying degrees of external stability and certainty result in different kinds of leadership behavior. In turbulent environments, conditions induce considerable uncertainty and ambiguity for the leaders in both settings. Specifically, we suggest that educational leaders experience three types of perceived uncertainty about the environment: unknown or unpredictable trends in external influencers, unpredictable impacts of the trends on the organization, and unknown or ambiguous action/reaction options (Kezar, 2000; Klenke, 1996). Leadership in these transition stages is similar to, but different from the demands for leadership during longer-lived stages in the organizational life cycle or when

there are "mixed" authority systems (Boyd, 1998; Hunt, Baliga, Dachler, & Schriesheim, 1988; Lunsford, 1968; Walton, 1995).

Furthermore, leadership ideology and behavior in all organizations tend to lag behind the empirically observable shifts in environment and culture. Tradition and past experience have not prepared leaders to anticipate significant change, and incremental change often fails to send interpretable signals. During transitions, leaders perceive reduced opportunities for either the security of mimesis generally available through institutional isomorphism (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) or through adaptive/innovative change. Leaders are thus caught in a "zone of ambiguity" (see Fig. 1). They are uncertain about the stage of transition, and they are unclear about what behaviors are appropriate either for the transition state or the next state.

Ambiguities in each of the education sectors also differ from one another because of the directions that control and influence patterns flow. Since K–12 is moving away from bureaucracy and toward a more open, school-based, and community-based system, leadership is shifting from known, circumscribed organizational parameters with fairly predictable power and influence roles and toward a more uncertain, dynamic political mode.

This shift manifests a transition from specific to diffuse role orientations and from professed affective neutrality to a greater degree of affectivity. K–12 educational leaders whose perceptions of the transition lag will therefore be applying quondam or inappropriate organizational or managerial leadership behaviors in circumstances that may now call for more political leadership. Since political leadership is almost always ambiguous, especially when participants are just beginning to learn a new set of rules, K–12 leaders will find themselves frustrated in their attempts at bridging the old and new appropriate (read "effective") leadership roles.

Conversely, in the college and university setting, leaders accustomed to the political power plays and maneuverings of a democratic ethos, which may be either collegial or politicized, will be slow (or unwilling) to recognize the subtle pressures of the emerging system toward hierarchic leadership roles. The consequence is the gradual yielding of leadership responsibility from the faculty to a managerial class whose mandate is external and whose orientation is bureaucratic. Over time, this shift engenders change (often imperceptible) in culture, and with it an alteration in certain interpersonal orientations. This affects leader–member relations

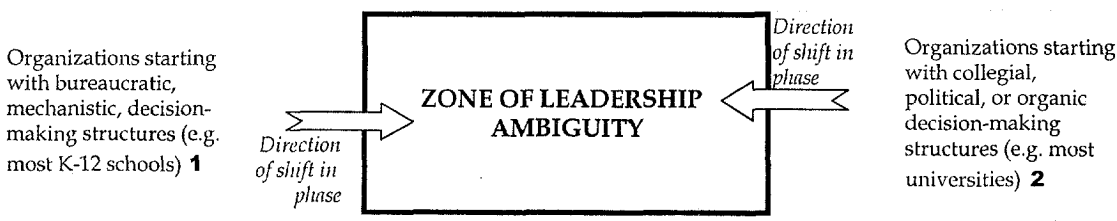

Fig. 1. Effects on leaders of changes in educational organization structure, function, and culture. (1) The cultures of these types of organizations will more likely place high value on "pattern variables" matching the organizational prerequisites of "Adaptation" and "Goal Attainment" (Parsons and Smelser, 1965). (2) The cultures of these types of organizations will more likely place high value on "pattern variables" matching the organizational prerequisites of "Integration" and "Latency" (Parsons and Smelser, 1965).

and, when the shift is perceived ambiguously, leaders tend to give mixed and inconsistent signals and messages. Both leaders and followers may be slow to understand and acknowledge this transition.

We propose, consequently, that under such conditions of change and ambiguity a leadership perspective that would appear to be most appropriate is "leadership as meaning-making." As Lundberg (cited in Sashkin, 1988) notes:

> If sense-making, generally speaking, is the process of arranging our understanding of experience so we can know what has happened and what is happening so that we can predict what will happen. . .then sense-making is probably at the core of leadership. People construct their experience together so they can anticipate, interpret, communicate, agree, and cooperate about what is happening. Leadership may be the process, therefore, of how social sense-making, social meaning construction, and social change occurs (p. 40).

It would appear more fruitful, therefore, to look for effective leadership in universities and K–12 schools by identifying leaders who are able to understand the social, political, and moral changes that are intimately implicated in the dynamic changes processes that their institutions are undergoing (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988). Their ability to do this, moreover, emerges through an interaction with subordinates such that evolving formal and informal rules of acceptable behavior in the organization tap into the subordinates' own sense-making systems. This "fit" is likely to occur, according to Weierter (1997), when a subculture or class of people, because of perceived oppression, question the accepted mainstream reality. Metaphorically, the question they ask of themselves and each other is: What is our place in the world?

The faculty, in other words, are concerned with personal, social, and career survival and with achievement that addresses deep-seated, human psychological needs for meaning and growth (Day, 1998), thus inviting a leader who has some of the characteristics of charismatic or transformational leadership. In our view, great leaders are able to interpret external and internal pressures for change in ways that give comfort to workers and encourage them to dedicate energy and commitment to the accomplishment of the goals of their organizations. As Smircich and Morgan (1986) argue, effective leadership results when the leader's definition and framing of a situation for others serves as a basis for their actions. Absent such leadership, individuals may be both unclear about the meanings of their own lives and uncertain about the directions their lives should take in the particular work circumstances they find themselves.

Our belief is that the ambiguity that characterizes all change is particularly powerful in these two educational sectors, which today are moving in directions that violate historical and cultural traditions in diffuse ways and with unknown speed and directionality. Leaders who can penetrate this ambiguity and facilitate the clarification of meaning for and by their teaching and research staffs will surely be seen to be most successful. Much more research is needed on the subject of sense-making and meaning-making in times of uncertainty. As Weick (1995) notes, leaders typically vacillate between espoused theories and practice, especially when they "are jarred back into controlled processing when the automatic processing associated with theories-in-use is interrupted" (p. 124). He notes further that

"manipulation," a "leap before you look" strategy, "generates clearer outcomes in a puzzling world" (p. 168). Perhaps courage and boldness in both domains, K–12 and higher education, will bring coherence and effectiveness into leadership behaviors. This paper opens up favorite leadership theories currently in vogue to scrutiny and offers a new direction for exploration.

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