LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Second Edition

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Organizational Theory for the Practitioner

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To the wonderful women who are the center of my life—Gail, Cathy, and Amy.

— R. M.

This work is only possible because of the wonderful support and energy that my partner, Ruben, and my daughter, Sudeshna, offer to me day in and day out. I dedicate this work to you.

— L. G.

About the Authors

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Preface

I (Russ) occasionally ask the question on exams, "What is leadership?" This is an intimidating question for my students because they know it isn't intended to be trivial or simple. Defining leadership is a complex and elusive task that requires good scholarship to tease out what it is. Leadership is a process rather than an event, and one must decipher what that process, that dynamic, is. Furthermore, leaders themselves are people who engage in the leadership process. Thus, one must also get away from the notion that leaders are people in official roles and that mere authority is leadership.

But, still, everyone thinks they know what leadership is, and everyone is most often wrong. Here are six common claims about how people describe leadership:

1. Leadership is what people in charge do. Wrong. This definition is about control (being "in charge"); in reality, leadership is about influence, and there can be a big difference between "control" and "influence." Perhaps what is more problematic about this definition is the claim that leadership is a position. Positional roles are only one platform from which leadership can/may be expressed; research has demonstrated, for example, the power of informal leaders, who are often situated in subcultures within organizations. Just having the positional role doesn't make someone a leader any more than a guitar makes someone a guitarist.

2. Leadership is the person who tells you what you can and can't do, who decides how much time/money allocation you receive for your projects, or who evaluates you. Wrong again. That's just the person who tells you what to do, decides your allocation, and evaluates you. Your four-year-old does that, and you wouldn't call him or her a leader! If this is leadership, then maybe teenagers should be running our schools and businesses—they have a knack for this skill. No, this is bossing, it's managing, it's control freaking, but it is not what leadership is.

3. Leaders are deciders (thank you, George W. Bush). No again. This is almost the same as the second wrong definition. Anyone can decide. True, a few people have a personality that convinces others that they decide pretty well, and maybe this is an element of leadership, but still, deciding is not the essence of leadership.

4. Peter Drucker claims that leadership is doing the right thing and management is doing things right. That's cute and would be nice in marble, but leadership just isn't captured by aphorisms

5. The leader is the person who talks the most. Members of groups often ascribe leadership to just such people. Verbose people do tend to take over, but being vocal doesn't make one a leader. (That is not to say that communication isn't important to leadership, however.)

6. Finally, the leader is the one who is tall, good looking, and dressed immaculately. Wrong again. We have known finely dressed people who couldn't lead their way out of a paper bag. Dressing well makes a good impression; it may even make people think you are a leader, but it doesn't make you a leader. It's the guitar thing again (see the first definition, above).

So what is leadership really? Let's start with key characteristics: Alan Bryman argues that leadership is about influence, it's about change, and it's about groups. Leaders operate on groups whose members are usually (but not always) cast as subordinates. They influence the group to implement some sort of change—change in their behavior or in their actions. Here are some common definitions of leadership; you will see these characteristics in each:

• Leadership is Teddy Roosevelt blazing a path up San Juan Hill for others to follow. This definition has ancient roots and is still quite common. It's called *heroic leadership* and it argues that leaders have special skills for creating solutions to challenges and personalities that inspire people to implement those solutions. This definition of leadership is entity based: Leadership is a characteristic that individuals possess and can express. Entity assumptions were the basis of much of 20th-century scholarship on leadership.

• Leadership is influencing people to achieve organizational goals. This is another entity definition, and it covers a lot of territory. Influence can be achieved through threat, reward, good one-on-one relationships, knowing what motivates people, or knowing what organizational buttons to push.

• Leaders are people who can change followers' sense of propriety or meaning to align with the goals of the leader. They influence people not just to do what the leader wants, but to want what the leader wants, to believe in the leader's vision, and to make the vision their own. This is called *transformational leadership*.

• Leadership is good "sensemaking" and "sensegiving." Sense*making* is an alternative to decision making. It involves making patterns out of what's going on around you and creating effective responses to those patterns. Sense*giving* is the ability to convey those patterns and responses to others. Sensemaking is more of a collectivist approach to leadership than an entity approach. Collectivist leadership is about interactions with other people and with environmental events, and sensemaking is just that.

• Leadership is a collective phenomenon in which people informally do things to make a system highly dynamic, because dynamic, interactive groups are good at solving complex problems. These leaders are not formally assigned to such

roles; they may perform such leadership sporadically, and there may be many such leaders in the system. This is leadership "within" rather than leadership "of," and it is called *adaptive leadership*. People in positional roles in such systems tend to be enablers: They manage, or enable, conditions that foster dynamism, and help the system avoid spiraling into bad decisions (sometimes). This theory is called *complexity leadership*.

We have made a concerted effort in this book to write in a reader-friendly style. Moreover, we constantly talk about real-world situations—"practice" is always in our sight. Theory is just a scholarly exercise if all it does is describe; to be useful, it must also inform action, and we seek to do just that. We include numerous practical exercises (we call them Roundtables) that foster debate, simulations that illustrate key points, research topics to explore, group activities, and reflective exercises. We discuss how all these theories play out primarily in P–12 and higher education, but they could also be applied to business environments, nonprofits, governmental organizations, hospitals, and other organizations.

Our coverage is structured so that theories are topically grouped. The first seven chapters discuss entity leadership theories. To be honest, both of us are collectivists (or constructionists). Even so, we see significant value in entity approaches to leadership, and we use elements of such approaches ourselves when we lead. It's also important for readers to know about the entity approaches to leadership because much of the accountability movement in P–12 education, and the ELCC accreditation movement in higher education, takes entity leadership as gospel. If you are familiar with instructional leadership, you know what we mean: Instructional leadership is about strong, skilled principals single-handedly leading their schools to higher test scores—the "San Juan Hill" of P–12 education.

Next we include a chapter on conflict. Conflict is an important topic in its own right because it is a constant part of social life; no one can avoid conflict in their career. A discussion of conflict provides a transition from entity to collectivist theories—from conflict assumptions about the motives of individuals to conflict assumptions about the behaviors of crowds.

The next three chapters explore collectivist assumptions. We talk about sensegiving and then about complexity leadership and wind up by discussing culture leadership.

In the final three chapters we address organizational theories, or theories of how organizations work. We include these perspectives because organizations are important contexts within, and sometimes against, which leadership functions. Thoroughly understanding leadership requires knowledge of power and control, ethics, organizational fads, and environmental pressures. So we cover critical theory (power and what it does to people), institutional theory (how organizational fads shape what we do), and population ecology (how environmental pressures and Darwinian/Spencerian survival of the fittest shape organizational behavior and leadership).

Our presentation is intended to make readers feel like they are having a conversation with us. Thus, our writing style is somewhat informal—more like having a discussion than giving a lecture. We want to "talk" with readers about ideas in a way that goes beyond their merely "absorbing" information—in a way that encourages readers to "engage" in ideas. We believe our readers are not glasses for teachers to pour ideas

into; they are complex humans who need to contribute to the development of ideas by processing them and discussing them. It's Marshall McLuhan's cool media versus hot media. Hot media is so intense that all you can do is to absorb it, while cool media engages you interactively.

At times the concepts may seem intense, and to temper this we try to help readers interact with the material and with us. If we can accomplish this, readers will learn. And, we hope that what they learn will positively affect their leadership style.

Introduction
An Overview of Leadership Theories

One of the hotter debates today among leadership scholars is about whether leadership is a characteristic that independent individuals practice or whether it is a product of individuals working together as collectives. Is leadership a trait or skill that gifted individuals possess, or is leadership something that can be understood only in the context of group dynamics (even though an individual may have the title and receive the credit)? On the one hand, if we accept that leadership is the practice of independent individuals, then leadership is framed as heroic individuals who blaze paths for followers or as individuals who direct people's behaviors with clear information, charismatic appeal, or in the worst-case scenario, through fear tactics. On the other hand, if we accept that leadership is practiced in collectives, then leadership is a collective of people blazing paths together. In collective leadership, excessive power (particularly power in the hands of a few) can capsize leadership effectiveness, the future is far less amenable to planning, and leadership is not about decision-making—it is about sensemaking. Should leadership be studied from an entity perspective (leaders are independent individuals) or from a collectivist perspective (leadership can only be framed within the context of group dynamics)? How one answers the aforementioned question is important because it shapes how one goes about the study of leadership.

In 2009, this debate spilled over onto an e-mail Listserv for leadership people (this is an idea exchange forum sponsored by the Academy of Management; you can join it at http://aomlists.pace.edu/scripts/wa.exe?SUBED1=ldrnet-l&A=1 if you are interested). Someone asked the Listserv members whether society should be anthropomorphized—studied as if it were a person—or whether it is merely a collection of individuals. Most responses were adamant that organizations can only be understood as collections of individuals, and to do otherwise is to reify what is nothing more than an idea. As one respondent put it:

> The reason groups and organizations are not actors is because they are abstractions—they are groups of individuals who work together toward common goals or values. The evidence: direct perception. *Groups are composed of individuals and their bodies and minds are not interconnected.* [We added the italics.]

Others approached this question from an ethical perspective, arguing that to consider organizations as living beings tends to absolve individuals of responsibility for ethical wrongdoing. If society is reified, then Adolph Eichmann, a Nazi coordinator of the deportation and murder of Jews, was a pawn of a cultural reality he could not escape and consequently should not be held strictly accountable. Others pointed out that organizations have indeed been held accountable by U.S. courts; for example, Ford Motor Company had been convicted of manslaughter in Indiana for ignoring the tendency of the gas tank in the Ford Pinto to explode in rear-end accidents.

The collectivist camp in the Listserv debate argued that people in an organization interact and influence one another, and in so doing they assume a commonality of preferences, worldviews, and competencies that unite them. One respondent said, for example:

> Essentially . . . individuals have their own thoughts and actions but . . . these are reinforced, or disconfirmed and overturned, through sanctioned and permissible workgroup "interactions and event cycles." These "interactions and event cycles," through their repetition, then become the consensus among that workgroup for how to think and behave appropriately . . . the group's "collective construct." . . . "Only through interaction does a construct acquire meaning and structure." (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999: 256)

Workgroups then interact with each other, and the shared and accepted norms and beliefs are passed on, and reinforced, and become an institutionalized mind-set.

The arguments cut into some raw nerves among leadership scholars. Many of the major thinkers today cut their teeth on, and build a reputation around, the entity approach to organization and leadership. The research strategies they learned and honed so well (statistical methodologies) are structured for the entity approach and their use with collectivist research is problematic. Most of these researchers are psychologists, and psychology is about individuals. To make the transition to collectivism, they would have to turn loose from years of effort and rebuild themselves. No wonder they resist.

This leads us to an important element in the entity/collective debate. It has to do with epistemology, which is nothing more than the way in which we perceive and understand our environments. The epistemology underlying the entity paradigm, most explicitly and frequently, is called *positivism*. Positivism is well summed up in a quote by Orville Wright that I (Russ) found in the town of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, this summer. He said, "Isn't it astonishing that all these secrets have been preserved for so many years just so we may discover them!!" So we may discover them: That's the key phrase here. When one assumes a positivist perspective, one perceives the world in terms of material, concrete realities that curious people search for and discover. Orville and Wilbur Wright sought the secrets of flight. Leadership scholars are on a quest to find hidden formulas that will explain how to lead people effectively—no matter the time, space, or population. Some have looked for the secrets of leadership by examining the traits that leaders exhibit (height, social maturity, extroversion, etc.). Others have looked at relationships between leaders and followers, and yet others have looked at how some leader can make followers see their purpose in life differently. In their efforts to discover the secrets, these scholars are working to establish a science of leadership. We place these theories under the umbrella of entity approaches (individuals blazing paths).

Just as the entity approach has a unique underlying epistemology, so does the collectivist approach; it is called *constructionism*. Constructionism means simply that reality is what we define it to be, how we interpret it, or bring meaning to it. Two people can look at the same event and understand it differently—one can look at poverty and argue that poverty is secondary to society's need for a strong wealthy class; our nation survives or falls on whether we foster those who build the nation's wealth. Others can look at poverty and become incensed that we don't do more to help those who are needy—a Good Samaritan perspective. The Western world perceives the role of law as creating justice; the Eastern world perceives it as creating harmony. The West and the East see the same thing and create different realities to explain it.

Constructionism is also about how perceptions of reality are created by interacting, interdependent people; hence collectives form around common understandings—often called *complex adaptive systems* or *culture*. Under this collectivist umbrella, we describe several approaches that assume that leadership is achieved though interaction, interdependencies, and thus, through constructionism. This, then, is the link between constructionism and the collectivist perspective discussed above: Both traffic in interdependent relationships and common understandings.

Underlying these debates are tensions and questions that we grapple with in this book: How do we understand the roles of entities and collectives in the study of social and organizational phenomena? Our bias is with the collectivists. One of us (Russ) is a complexity and social network researcher and the other (Leslie) is a constructionist researcher. You will see reference to some of our works in the reference lists. Even so, we respect all that has been accomplished by entity researchers and argue that their work most definitely helps inform the research of collectivists. We hope that our respect is far more evident than our bias.

■ Organization of the Book

Although theories of leadership cannot be separated into neat little packages that don't overlap, for the purposes of presenting them in an orderly fashion, we have grouped into three overarching parts: Part I, Leading Individuals; Part II, Leading Collectives; and Part III, Three More Explanations of Leadership Behavior. As noted above, Part I, which consists of the first seven chapters, is about the entity approach to leadership (although Chapter 5 on systems theory describes an important foray into collectivism that, while influential, left researchers befuddled about how to study its claims). In those chapters, we will talk about:

- *Scientific management* is a scientific approach to production with an associated scientific approach to management; this approach was popular at the beginning of the 20th century.
- *Human relations* was popular in the 1930s–1950s; remember the counselor in the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*, or Maslow's hierarchy of needs?
- *Structural-functionalism*, popular in the 1940 and 1950s, sought to understand the tension between rational organizational needs and irrational human demands.

- *Systems theory* was prevalent in the 1960s; systems theorists claimed that organizations were shaped by their environments. This one is not entirely entity-oriented, and researchers had difficulty seeing it as more than a metaphor.
- *Contingency theory*, developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, this theory built loosely on the open systems model but was egregiously positivistic. Leaders, rather than environments, were at the center of matters again.
- *LMX theory* described leadership in terms of the relationship between leader and follower.
- *Transformational theory* is about how leaders transform follower's sense of propriety.

Then, we transition to Part II, Leading Collectives, and we begin with conflict theory, noting how it draws together ideas and assumptions from both the entity and collective school of thought. The subject of conflict is fascinating and important. We will talk in particular about how to prevent conflict; once it starts, it's hard to stop. Collectivist perspectives of leadership and organization are covered in the rest of Part II, in Chapters 9–11:

- We discuss irrational decision-making (it's a garbage can) and sensemaking in Chapter 9.
- In Chapter 10 we get into *complexity theory*; this theory argues that real leadership is distributed across agents in a network and that positional leaders lead with effective management. Traditionalists will hate this one.
- We describe culture leadership in Chapter 11.

Finally, Part III includes Chapters 12–14—critical theory, institutionalism, and population ecology. These theories are more about the organizational context for leadership. *Critical theory* argues that if leaders are given a choice between enhancing their power and making the organization more effective, they will choose power. That is, organizations are products of leaders' preference for power rather than rational searches for effectiveness. Additionally, critical theory helps us interrogate taken-for-granted practices and ideas as issues of power, resources, and also conflict. *Institutional theory* says that organizational behavior is a product of cultural pressures (fads, norms, etc.) rather than effectiveness. *Population ecology* argues that it's all about the nature of the environment—organizations adapt to environmental whims in a dog-eat-dog, survival-of-the-fittest struggle to survive.

■ Features that Stimulate Thinking and Exploration

Here, we want to explain the pedagogical elements in this book. Bear with us. What is important here has little to with the organization of chapters and a lot to do with learning processes. We want you to know that we wrote to help you understand theories in context, how they influence one another, and how they might look and work in the real world. We want you to discuss the ideas, to understand how to ask researchable questions using them, and how to apply these theories to practical situations. In fact, you will note that we use the word *we* often. We are not always talking about ourselves when we say, *we*; rather, we're talking about *you and us*. We are trying

to engage you in the conversation, in the ideas, in the search for answers. This book is as much a seminar as a lecture.

You will see a lot of Roundtable sections in the book. These sections contain questions intended to help you discuss certain ideas with each other (study these ideas in groups rather than alone, if possible). The Diary items at the end of each chapter include additional Roundtable questions if you need more. Research Topic sections are included to help you understand how to use theory to formulate your own research questions. Additionally, there are Theory to Practice sections when we take a theory and apply it to a real-world problem—one that you are very likely to have confronted if you have ever worked inside an organization! Finally, there are sections labeled, "Link Forward, or Link Back." These features help you jump around the book to see how similar ideas are perceived by different theorists or at different points in time. It is a way to link themes, to help you see patterns. We don't want you to read theory as a linear progression from one idea to the next; rather, we want you to see how ideas interact to shape one another, inform one another, contradict one another, or complete one another. There are simulations and activities—games and such that you can do together to dig deeper into an idea (there is one in the complexity chapter that we think you will love). In other words, we want you to interact with this book rather than just read it. We want you to have a discussion about theory with us; we can't be with you in person, but we can be there through this book.

■ The Applicability of Leadership Theories

The book is focused on P–12 and higher education leadership. However, as the late leadership theorist (and educational administration scholar, like us), Joe Rost, said, leadership is leadership, whether you do it in schools, in businesses, in hospitals, government, nonprofits, or the armed forces. Thus, we invite others to use this book because ultimately it is about leadership more than education. Education is the backdrop. We are trying to help educators solve the problems of education, but the same ideas will work across disciplines as well.

So, now let's talk about leadership!

Part I

Leading Individuals

The first section of the book discusses "entity-based theories." Entity theories focus on individuals. Often, though not always, these theories privilege a postpositivist epistemology, which means that they suggest that knowledge, truth and reality are objective and objectifiable; that they hold across time, space and population. How do such suggestions operate in the real world? Consider, for example, how some theories suggest that if a school leader develops a rule and communicates this rule with enough clarity, that the rule will be well understood throughout the school, and that individuals will implement the rule with few if any problems. If staff fails to implement the rule, then, perhaps some form of reward will be withheld.

The example described above entails many of the assumptions and ideas that are at the core of entity-based theories. First, the example features individuals, and although communication is mentioned, emphasis is placed on individual communication and individual reception of communication. There is little interaction stressed in this example. Second, the example suggests that if the leader is a strong and clear enough communicator, the staff members will all understand the new rule. This suggests that the rules—or any form of talk and text—can be communicated in ways that span across time, space, and variable populations. No mention of sensemaking is offered, which means that humans are assumed to simply follow if given clear enough ideas and rules.

Keep your eyes open for some of these central ideas and assumptions over the next few chapters. Before closing, though, it is important to note that while we refer to these individual-centered theories as "entity approaches," others have described these theories as traditional or heroic theories (Kezar, 2001).

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Managing Tasks
Scientific Management

Closed systems theory and the efficiency movement of the early 20th century were inevitable by-products of the Industrial Revolution. That revolution spawned the assembly line and standardization, and factory owners wanted to squeeze even greater returns out of their machines. The result was a "scientific" search for efficient production techniques, efficient management procedures, and efficient organizational structure. Efforts in these three areas produced, respectively, the fields of scientific management, administration management, and bureaucracy theory. Scientific management, which was championed by researchers such as Frederick Taylor, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, and others, studied details of the production process to reduce wasted effort. Administration managers, notably Henri Fayol and Mary Parker Follett, sought strategies such as command unity, division of work, and centralization of decision making, for making the administration process more efficient. Bureaucracy theory, which is indelibly linked with the work of German sociologist Max Weber, proposed organizational structures that enabled efficiency, reduced conflict, and made it possible to coordinate the massive governmental and private sector organizations that emerged in the 20th century. Collectively, these theories are referred to as machine theory.

Machine theory derives its name from the perception that its models ignore worker needs and external pressures and conceptualize organizations and leadership much as one would approach the management of machinery. One might consider this a rather inhumane approach to management, but we shall see that this reputation is not entirely justified. Indeed, machine theory's focus on worker concerns likely helped spawn a large middle class in Western society and the concurrent reversal of economic and social dynamics that led philosophers such as Karl Marx and Thomas Malthus to predict rampant poverty and worker revolution. Nonetheless, one can certainly see where the expression, *machine theory*, comes from, for these models focus rather heavily on work-flow strategies for improving worker efficiency. The models seek ways to