Montgomery Van Wart
Texas Tech University

Public-Sector Leadership Theory: An Assessment

This article reviews the mainstream leadership literature and its perennial debates and compares it to the public-sector (administrative) leadership literature. The mainstream leadership literature fully articulated the transformational models in the 1980s and began the serious work of integrating transactional and transformational types of leadership into comprehensive models in the 1990s. Many have considered this to be a major advance over the field's previous fragmentation and excessively narrow focus. This integration has not been reflected in the public-sector literature, in which the normative debates about what leaders should do has received most of the attention in the last decade. Although many types of leadership in the public sector have been discussed extensively, such as leadership by those in policy positions and working in community settings, administrative leadership within organizations has received scant attention and would benefit from a research agenda linking explicit and well-articulated models with concrete data in public-sector settings.

In 1995, Larry Terry noted the neglect of administrative or "bureaucratic leadership" in the public-sector literature. This article assesses the state of the administrative leadership literature. It examines the following questions:

- Is the study of administrative (that is, bureaucratic) leadership important?
- What are the reasons for the neglect of administrative leadership, including the difficulties associated with this type of research?
- Has the administrative leadership literature made significant strides since Terry's observation in 1995? If not, why?
- What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of the literature, whatever its overall robustness? In particular, how does it compare with the mainstream (that is, largely private-sector-focused) literature?
- What areas are ripe for research?

To address these questions, a relatively exhaustive review of public-sector leadership was conducted, as well as a thorough review of the major schools in the mainstream literature. Because of the many weaknesses in the literature (in scope, in numerous gaps, and in theory building), it is hoped this article can make a major contribution in defining the terrain of this complex and difficult area so that more rapid and coherent progress can be made.

The Importance and Challenges of Leadership Research

The Importance of Leadership

To most people, the importance of leadership is self-evident no matter what the setting. In organizations, *effective* leadership provides higher-quality and more efficient goods and services; it provides a sense of cohesiveness, personal development, and higher levels of satisfaction among those conducting the work; and it provides an overarching sense of direction and vision, an alignment with the environment, a healthy mechanism for innovation and creativity, and a resource for invigorating the organizational culture. This is no small order, especially in contemporary times.

Leadership is difficult in all eras, to be sure, but it seems that today's leaders face additional challenges. While the shared-power environment created in the second half of the twentieth century enhanced many aspects of democracy, "it also makes leadership more difficult" (Henton,

Montgomery Van Wart is the director of the Center for Public Service and an associate professor at Texas Tech University. His research interests include administrative ethics, public management, human resources management, and leadership. He is currently completing a book on administrative leadership for M.E. Sharpe. Email: monty.vanwart@ttu.edu.

Melville, and Walesh 1997, 14). The public has greater access to view leaders today—especially public-sector leaders—through the media focus, the Internet, and greater levels of public awareness. Yet the public shows less tolerance for leaders' mistakes, foibles, and structural challenges as its skepticism has grown (Yankelovich 1991). Further, there is evidence that as competition in the organizational universe has intensified in the new global economy, even among public-sector organizations, the range of skills necessary for leaders has grown (Bass 1985).

Reasons for Neglect and Difficulties in Administrative Leadership Research

If we accept—as most people do—that leadership is important and that leaders have a tough job in the best of times, it stands to reason that leadership research would be both prolific and valuable. Although the first part of this statement is documentably true in the mainstream literature—more than 7,500 empirical and quasi-empirical references were cited in the major handbook for the literature in 1990 (Bass 1990)—the latter is disputed among leadership experts. The most prominent researcher of his day, Ralph Stogdill urged his colleagues to largely abandon 40 years of work as utterly inconclusive in 1948 (which, as a whole, they did). In his landmark 1978 study on leadership 30 years later, James MacGregor Burns acidly stated, "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (1). Another particularly eminent scholar—Warren Bennis—came to the same conclusion in the mid-1980s: "Never have so many labored so long to say so little," and "leadership is the most studied and least understood topic of any in the social sciences" (Bennis and Nanus 1985, 4, 20). Although I will argue the situation improved dramatically in the mainstream in the 1990s, it is easier to understand the incredibly slow progress of leadership research, for all the attention, when one examines the challenges leadership research faces in generalizing beyond relatively small subsets.

One set of difficulties has to do with what Brunner calls "contextual complexity" (1997, 219). While there are significant similarities among leaders that are generally agreed upon (for instance, they have followers and affect the direction of the group), from a research perspective, the differences among leaders are far greater and more challenging. For example, the leader of paid employees and the leader of volunteers have very different jobs. Issues of contextual complexity apply to mission, organizational and environmental culture, structure, types of problems, types of opportunities, levels of discretion (Baliga and Hunt 1988, 130), and a host of other critically important areas. These types of issues led one of the earliest commentators on public-sector administrative leadership to conclude that "the differences in individuals who find themselves in ex-

ecutive positions and the variations in the life cycles of organizations produce practically limitless permutations and combinations" (Stone 1945, 210). As if these contextual, complex challenges were not enough, however, a researcher has other problems that inhibit generalizations in social science research when highly complex human phenomena are studied. An additional confounding factor in our list is the issue of proper definition, which is ultimately a normative problem. Because science cannot solve normative issues (Dahl 1947), this problem is central to the ability to build a body of work that is coherent as research and applied use. The final technical problem is the effect of observation and the observer. Even the "hardest" of the sciences has rediscovered this problem (Kiel 1994), yet it is a particularly pesky dilemma in amorphous areas such as leadership. One version of the predicament, simply stated, is that observed phenomena change through the act of observation. A second version of the problem is that because the observer determines the conceptual framework of the issue, the methods to be used, and the context to be studied, the results are affected far more by the investigators' biases than might be supposed.

For all of these challenges and all of the seemingly nonadditive (but certainly not nonproductive) leadership research done until the 1980s, efforts at more sophisticated, multifaceted approaches for comprehensive models have made a substantial improvement (Chemers 1997, 170; Hunt 1996). However, administrative leadership research (literature that is most interested in leadership in public-sector bureaucratic settings) has experienced neither the volume nor the integration of the mainstream. Why? Building on the ideas of Doig and Hargrove (1987), Terry (1995, 2–3) speculates on some reasons beyond the technical issues raised above, which certainly have not slowed down mainstream interest in leadership research. He offers three types of reasons.

First, there may be some belief that administrative leadership does not (or should not) exist to an appreciable degree because of a belief in a highly instrumental approach to leadership in the public sector. This is a legacy of both scientific management, with its technocratic focus, and beliefs in a strong model of overhead democracy (Redford 1969). The stronger these beliefs, the less likely administrative leadership would receive attention. Second, bureaucracies may be guided by powerful forces that are largely beyond the control of administrative leaders, making their contributions relatively insignificant. Both arguments tend to delimit the role and contribution of public administration. Finally, there may be a problem with attention being diverted from leadership research by related topics. Given the relatively small size of the pool of researchers compared to the number of possible topics in the field, this is a significant possibility. Researchers who are more empiri-

cally inclined may find bureaucratic routines (frontline and mid-level management) more accessible. Many of those interested in executive leadership may find political leadership more attractive, with its dramatic and accessible policy debates and discussions, rather than administrative leadership, with its more subtle and nuanced decision-making routines. Finally, those interested in the philosophical nature of leadership may be pulled into the normative debates about the amount of and manner in which discretion should be exercised by administrative leaders, rather than the changing and unchanging characteristics of administrative leadership. Although it is not conclusive, my assessment of the causal weights will be offered in the conclusion.

Operationally, "administrative leadership" in this article refers to leadership from the frontline supervisor (or even lead worker) to the nonpolitical head of the organization. The focus is not on elected legislative leaders and only on elected executives and their political designees, such as agency secretaries and directors, commissioners, or legislatively approved directors, to the degree that they include nonpolicy functions as a significant component of their responsibilities. There are many instances in which the line is hard to draw. The article first will review the mainstream leadership research as well as the administrative (public-sector) research. Next, the perennial debates (and research questions) of mainstream leadership theory will be compared to administrative leadership theory. This will culminate in a discussion of the state-of-the-art in administrative leadership research and a conclusion suggesting areas that may be productively mined in the future by scholars and pursued by practitioners.

Background on Leadership Research

Dominant Themes in the Mainstream Leadership Literature

It is certainly impossible to pigeonhole all of the mainstream leadership literature[1] into tight eras with sharp demarcations; however, it is possible to capture the dominant themes and interests for a heuristic overview. For those interested in a detailed history and more complex analysis, an excellent, exhaustive review can be found in *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership* (Bass 1990). However, figure 1 provides a simple, contemporary, practitioner-oriented model as a mental framework for the development of the leadership literature. Such practitioner models emphasize leader assessment, leader characteristics, and leader styles, all of which affect actual leader behaviors. As leaders evaluate their own and their organizations' effectiveness, they begin the cycle again. Scientific models tend to de-emphasize the leader-assessment phase

Figure 1   A Generic Practitioner Model of Organizational Leadership
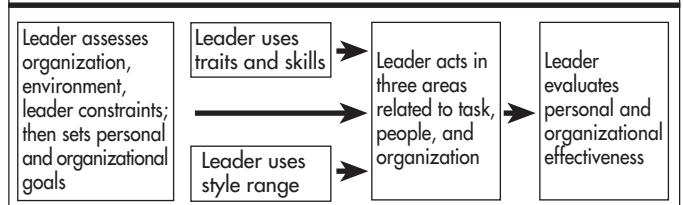
(as difficult to observe) and emphasize intervening organizational variables that affect leader success.

The nineteenth century was dominated by the notion of the "great man" thesis. Particular great men (women invariably were overlooked despite great personages in history such as Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I, or Clara Barton) somehow move history forward because of their exceptional characteristics as leaders. The stronger version of this theory holds that history is a handmaiden to men; great men actually change the shape and direction of history. Philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and William James firmly asserted that history would be different if a great man suddenly were incapacitated. Thomas Carlyle's 1841 essay on heroes and hero worship is an early popular version of this, as is Galton's 1869 study of hereditary genius (cited in Bass 1990). Such theories generally have an explicit class bias. A milder version of the theory is that as history proceeds on its irrevocable course, a few men will move history forward substantially and dramatically because of their greatness, especially in moments of crisis or great social need. Although these lines of thinking have more sophisticated echoes in the later trait and situational leadership periods, "hero worship" is certainly alive and well in popular culture and in biographies and autobiographies. Its core belief is that there are only a few, very rare, individuals in any society at any time with the unique characteristics to shape or express history. Although this thesis may serve sufficiently for case studies (essentially biographies), it is effectively irrefutable and therefore unusable as a scientific theory.

The scientific mood of the early twentieth century fostered the development of a more focused search for the basis of leaders. What traits and characteristics do leaders seem to share? Researchers developed personality tests and compared the results against those perceived to be leaders. By the 1940s, researchers had amassed very long lists of traits from numerous psychologically oriented studies (Bird 1940; Jenkins 1947). This tactic had two problems: First, the lists became longer and longer as research continued. Second—and more importantly—the traits and characteristics identified were not powerful predictors across situations. For example, leaders must be decisive, but they also must be flexible and inclusive. Without situational specificity, the endless list of traits offers little prescriptive as-

sistance and descriptively becomes little more than a laundry list. In 1948, Ralph Stogdill published a devastating critique of pure trait theory, and it fell into disfavor as being too one-dimensional to account for the complexity of leadership (Stogdill 1948).

The next major thrust was to look at the situational contexts that affect leaders in order to find meaningful patterns for theory building and useful advice. One early example was the work that came out of the Ohio State Leadership Studies (Hempill 1950; Hempill and Coons 1957), which started by testing 1,800 statements related to leadership behavior. By continually distilling the behaviors, researchers arrived at two underlying factors: consideration and initiation of structure. *Consideration* describes a variety of behaviors related to the development, inclusion, and the good feelings of subordinates. *Initiating structure* describes a variety of behaviors related to defining roles, control mechanisms, task focus, and work coordination, both inside and outside the unit. Coupled with the humanist or human relations revolution that was occurring in the 1950s and 1960s, these (and similar studies) spawned a series of useful—if often simplistic and largely bimodal—theories (Arygris 1957; Likert 1959; McGregor 1960; Maslow 1965; Fiedler 1967; Fiedler, Chemers, and Mahar 1976; Blake and Mouton 1964, 1965; Hersey and Blanchard 1969, 1972).

These early implicit and explicit situational theories were certainly useful, for several reasons. First, they were useful as an antidote to the excessively hierarchical, authoritarian styles that had developed in the first half of the twentieth century with the rise and dominance of large organizations in both the private and public sectors. Second, they were useful as teaching tools for incipient and practicing managers, who appreciated the elegant constructs even though they were descriptively simplistic. As a class, however, these theories generally failed to meet scientific standards because they tried to explain too much with too few variables. Among the major theories, only Vroom's normative decision model broke out of this pattern because it self-consciously focused on a single dimension of leadership style—the role of participation—and identified seven problem attributes and two classes of cases (group and individual) (Vroom and Yetton 1973; Vroom and Jago 1988). Although the situational perspective still forms the basis of most leadership theories today, it has done so either in a strictly managerial context (that is, a narrow level of analysis) on a factor-by-factor basis, or it has been subsumed by more comprehensive approaches to leadership at the macro level.

While ethical dimensions were mentioned occasionally in the mainstream literature, the coverage was invariably peripheral because it avoided normative issues. The first major text devoted to ethical issues was Robert Greenleaf's book, *Servant Leadership* (1977), but it did not receive mainstream attention. In contrast, James Macgregor Burns' book on leadership burst on the scene in 1978 and had unusually heavy ethical overtones.[2] However, it was not the ethical dimension that catapulted it to prominence, but its transformational theme. Both Greenleaf (a former business executive) and Burns (a political scientist) were outside the normal academic circles in leadership, which primarily came from business and psychology. A number of contemporary mainstream leadership theorists, both popular and academic, continue in this tradition to one degree or another, such as DePree (1989), Rost (1990), Block (1993), Gardner (1989), Bennis, Parikh, and Lessem (1994, in contrast with Bennis' other work), and Zand (1997), among others. This theme was covered earlier and more frequently (at least in terms of ethical uses of discretion) in the public-sector literature, but that was not part of the mainstream literature and will be discussed separately.

Until 1978, the focus of the mainstream literature was leadership at lower levels, which was amenable to small group and experimental methods and simplified variable models, while executive leadership (and its external demands) and the more amorphous abilities to induce dramatic change were largely ignored.[3] Burns' book on leadership dramatically changed that interest by introducing the notion that transactional leadership was what was largely being studied, and that the other highly important arena—transformational leadership—was largely being ignored.[4] This hit an especially responsive cord in the nonexperimental camp, which had already been explicitly stating that, nationally, there was a surfeit of managers (who use a "transactional" mode) and a terrible deficit of leaders (who use a "transformational" mode) (Zaleznik 1977). Overall, this school agreed that leaders have a special responsibility for understanding a changing environment, that they facilitate more dramatic changes, and that they can energize followers far beyond what traditional exchange theory would suggest.

Overstating for clarity, three subschools emerged that emphasized different aspects of these "larger-than-life" leaders.[5] The transformational school emphasized vision and overarching organizational change (Burns 1978; Bass 1985; Bennis and Nanus 1985; Tichy and Devanna 1986). The charismatic school focused on the influence processes of individuals and the specific behaviors used to arouse inspiration and higher levels of action in followers (House 1977; Conger and Kanungo 1998; Meindl 1990). Less articulated in terms of leadership theory was an entrepreneurial school that urged leaders to make practical process and cultural changes that would dramatically improve quality or productivity; it shared a change emphasis with the transformational school and an internal focus with the char-

ismatic school (Peters and Austin 1985; Hammer and Champy 1993; Champy 1995).

The infusion of the transformational leadership school(s) led to both a reinvigoration of academic and nonacademic studies of leadership and a good deal of confusion initially. Was the transactional leadership that the situationalists had studied so assiduously really just mundane management? Or was the new transformational leadership just an extension of basic skills that its adherents were poorly equipped to explain with more conventional scientific methodologies? Even before the 1980s, some work had been done to create holistic models that tried to explain more aspects of leadership (Yukl 1971; Winter 1979). Yet it was not until the 1980s that work began in earnest and that conventional models routinely incorporated transactional and transformational elements.

Bass' work is a good example in this regard. Even his original work on transformational leadership (1985) has strong transactional elements (transformational leaders being those who not only master transactional skills, but capitalize on transformational skills as well),[6] which were strengthened in later work (Bass and Avolio 1990; Bass 1996). In the authoritative *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*, Bass asserted that the field "has broken out of its normal confinement to the study of [small group and supervisory] behaviors" to more studies on executives, more inclusion of perspectives from political science, and more cross-fertilization among schools of thought (Bass

1990, xi). Not surprisingly, fresh efforts to find integrative models were common in the 1990s (Hunt 1996; Chemers 1997; Yukl 1998) (see table 1 for a summary of the eras of mainstream leadership theory and research). To be sure, this cursory review does not do justice to the wealth of perspectives on specific leadership topics, but space and purpose preclude a more in-depth treatment.[7]

The Public-Sector Literature on Leadership Theory and Research

Although the literature on leadership with a public-sector focus is a fraction of that in the private sector, it is has been substantial albeit relatively unfocused. One way to begin a brief review is to look at the track record of *PAR*. In doing an informal content analysis of the journal since its inception—using a rather loose definition of leadership that includes the broader management topics, most executive topics, much of the explicit discretion literature, and that part of the organizational change literature that has a strong leadership component—the author found 110 articles relating to the topic in 61 years. However, using a stricter criterion—that leadership was an explicit focus of the article—only about 25 articles qualified, or about four per decade on average.

In the 1940s, articles by Finer (1940) and Leys (1943) defined the administrative discretion debate—how much discretion should public administrators have, and under what conditions—that was taken up so vigorously again

Table 1	Eras of Mainstream Leadership Theory and Research	
Era	**Major time frame**	**Major characteristics/examples of proponents**
Great Man	Pre-1900; continues to be popular in biographies.	• Emphasis on emergence of a great figure such as a Napoleon, George Washington, or Martin Luther, who has substantial affect on society. • Era influenced by notions of rational social change by uniquely talented and insightful individuals.
Trait	1900–48; current resurgence of recognition of importance of natural talents.	• Emphasis on the individual traits (physical, personal, motivational, aptitudes) and skills (communication and ability to influence) that leaders bring to all leadership tasks. • Era influenced by scientific methodologies in general (especially industrial measurement) and scientific management in particular (for instance, the definition of roles and assignment of competencies to those roles).
Contingency	1948–80s; continues as the basis of most rigorous models but with vastly expanded situational repertoire.	• Emphasis on the situational variables leaders must deal with, especially performance and follower variables. Shift from traits and skills to behaviors (for example, energy levels and communication skills to role clarification and staff motivation). Dominated by bimodal models in its heyday. • Era influenced by the rise of human relations theory, behavioral science (in areas such as motivation theory), and the use of small group experimental designs in psychology.
Transformational	1978–present.	• Emphasis on leaders who create change in deep structures, major processes, or overall culture. Leader mechanisms may be compelling vision, brilliant technical insight, and/or charismatic quality. • Era influenced by the loss of American dominance in business, finance, and science, and the need to re-energize various industries which had slipped into complacency.
Servant	1977–present.	• Emphasis on the ethical responsibilities to followers, stakeholders, and society. Business theorists tend to emphasize service to followers; political theorists emphasize citizens; public administration analysts tend emphasize legal compliance and/or citizens. • Era influenced by social sensitivities raised in the 1960s and 1970s.
Multifaceted	1990s–present.	• Emphasis on integrating the major schools, especially the transactional schools (trait and behavior issues largely representing management interests) and transformational schools (visionary, entrepreneurial, and charismatic). • Era affected by a highly competitive global economy and the need to provide a more sophisticated and holistic approach to leadership.

in the 1990s. Donald Stone wrote "Notes on the Government Executive: His Role and His Method" in 1945, which is as good an equivalent to Follett's "The Essentials of Leadership" ([1933] 1996) or Barnard's *Functions of the Executive* ([1938] 1987) as ever appeared in the journal.

The trickle of high-quality pieces continued in which Lawton (1954) followed in Stone's footsteps, and Dimock (1958) provided a well-grounded assessment of leadership development. The first piece based exclusively on empirical evidence was by Golembiewski (1959), in which he brought together the literature on small groups in public-sector settings.

Guyot (1962) presented the only empirical study in the 1960s to study variation in the motivation of public and private leaders. Fisher (1962) complained that federal managers do not have management training, and James Fesler (1960) provided a superb editorial comment on the importance of studying leadership and its many contexts. Other topics addressed were influence and social power (Altshular 1965; Lundstedt 1965).

No important articles appeared in the 1970s, which mirrors the low profile of leadership publication in the popular literature. Yet the lacuna is made up by the resurgence of interest in leadership topics in the 1980s. DiIulio (1989) reasserted the importance of both leadership and the management component. Probably the three best articles on the training and development of leaders were written during this time (Likert 1981; Flanders and Utterback 1985; Faerman, Quinn, and Thompson 1987). Stone (1981) and Dimock (1986) wrote essays on the importance and nurturing of innovation and creativity in organizations by leaders. Empirical pieces also appeared on followership (Gilbert and Hyde 1988) and leader action planning (Young and Norris 1988).

Because leadership is so highly related to reform, and because of the volume and debate over the proper type of reforms to make that occurred throughout the decade, leadership is at least indirectly discussed in nearly every issue after 1992. This is particularly true for the debate about administrative discretion, which largely pitted an "entrepreneurial" camp against a "stewardship" camp. Although they cannot do justice to the full range of topics in these two idealized perspectives, good examples are provided in Bellone and Goerl's "Reconciling Public Entrepreneurship and Democracy" (1992) and Terry's "Administrative Leadership, Neo-Managerialism, and the Public Management Movement" (1998). Some of the best and most focused empirically based studies in *PAR* appeared in the 1990s (Hennessey 1998; Moon 1999; Considine and Lewis 1999; Borins 2000).

Generalizing about the leadership literature in *PAR* as one barometer of the field, the following observations can be made: First, until the last decade, leadership was largely considered an executive phenomenon, and thus when small group and lower-level leadership was the focus of the mainstream leadership literature in the 1960s and 1970s, leadership topics were lightly covered. Second, there were only a handful of empirical pieces on leadership in the first 50 years of the journal. Finally, in terms of the "thoughtful essay" tradition, many of the best examples occur in book reviews, with Donald Stone, John Corson, and Paul Appleby being frequent contributors. Though important, *PAR* is but one source—what other contributions were being made to a distinctively public-sector leadership literature?

In the first half of the century during the trait period, public-sector sites were frequently examined, although no distinctive perspective emerged (Jenkins 1947). The first in an important genre of executive studies was done by Macmahon and Millett (1939), in this case regarding federal administrators. The tradition of biographies and autobiographies of important administrative leaders was also established (Pinchot 1947). In the 1950s, a series of good leadership studies in the administrative realm was produced, most notably by Bernstein (1958). However, Selznick's classic, *Leadership in Administration* (1957), is probably the single best overall treatment of the subject in terms of timelessness. In the 1960s, Corson (with Shale) wrote his second book on senior administrative leaders (1966), and Graubard and Holton edited a series of essays on political and administrative leadership (1962). Downs' (1967) well-known book on bureaucracy is notable for its popular, if negative, typology of leaders. Again, the 1970s produced little of special note, with the exception of the administrative role in iron-triangle politics (Heclo 1977) and several good studies of military and quasi-military leadership (Winter 1979; Jermier and Berkes 1979).

With the introduction of the transformational and charismatic literatures in the 1980s, the resurgence of more general interest in leadership was mirrored in the administrative leadership literature. The administrative leader as entrepreneur was introduced by Eugene Lewis (1980) and expanded upon by Doig and Hargrove (1987). Kaufman provided a definitive executive study (1981); Cleveland (1985) and Gardner (1989) provided masterfully well-rounded essays in the Selznick tradition. The more specialized studies on public-sector leadership continued to be primarily for the military (Van Fleet and Yukl 1986; Taylor and Rosenback 1984).

The volume of materials produced in the 1990s requires more selectivity for the present purpose. Many public-sector leadership books have elements that are applicable for administrative leaders but really focus on local and national policy makers (such as councils, mayors, state legislators, etc.) and civic leaders (Chrislip and Larson 1994; Heifetz 1994; Svara 1994; Henton, Melville, and Walesh 1997;

Luke 1998). Some emphasize specific elements of leadership such as planning (Bryson and Crosby 1992), complexity (Kiel 1994), problem focus (R. Terry 1993), public-service values (Rost 1990; Fairholm 1991; Riccucci 1995), and frontline leaders (Vinzant and Crothers 1998). Larry Terry (1995) provided a full-length argument supporting leadership as stewardship (which he calls conservatorship). Much of the more narrowly focused leadership literature continued to be for the military (Hunt, Dodge, and Wong 1999). The *International Journal of Public Administration* sponsored a symposium about transformational leadership, edited by the distinguished leadership expert Bernard Bass in 1996. In 2001, Rusaw provided the first book designed as an overarching textbook with a review of the literature. Previously, broad treatments had been available only in chapter formats in most of the standard generic textbooks in the field.

No review of the literature would be complete without some mention of leadership education and training—that is, the application of scholarly work and the genesis of applied research from training settings. Although some of the larger public administration programs with greater resources have substantial offerings in organizational leadership, few of the moderate and smaller programs nationally have the faculty resources to do so. Nonetheless, leadership books and articles are sprinkled throughout management classes in educational curricula, even if in an auxiliary capacity. There are numerous leadership training programs for leaders at all levels of government and at various levels in organizations. Many use leadership-feedback instruments (often called 360-degree instruments) that provide anonymous feedback from subordinates, superiors, and sometimes colleagues. For example, the Center for Creative Leadership uses the proprietary assessment tool "Benchmarks" as the basis of one of its programs. Some rely heavily on case studies, such as the State and Local Executive Program at Harvard's Kennedy School. Many are eclectic or holistic, such as the Federal Executive Institute. Nearly all major federal agencies have their own leadership programs, and the military and public safety areas are particularly keen on leadership training. Many fine state and local programs are located at universities, such as the University of Virginia (Center for Public Service), University of Texas–Austin (Governor's Center), and Arizona State University (Advanced Public Executive Program). A number of the scholars who publish in this area are affiliated with such programs. Finally, it should be noted that the Office of Personnel Management has done a good deal of applied research (OPM 1997, 1999), which it shares with its partners in state governments.

Why do the literatures vary today? The mainstream was pushed into more integrative leadership models in the 1980s by the "new economy," which was triggered by the economic shocks of the 1970s. Substantially higher levels of productivity and customer focus required a much more encompassing model or set of models than the largely transactional approaches had achieved. Reformation efforts in the public sector lagged by nearly a decade (despite the fanfare of 1992–94). Integrative models tailored to public-sector settings simply may be following traditional delayed development, but they also may have been stymied by the enormous normative debates that typified the field in the 1990s.

Perennial Debates in Mainstream Leadership Theory

Another way to review the leadership literature is to examine the major debates that have shaped both leadership paradigms and research agendas. For simplicity, only four of the broadest are discussed here:

- The "proper" focus?
- Does it make a difference?
- Are leaders born or made?
- The best style?

What Should Leaders Focus On: Technical Performance, Development of People, or Organizational Alignment?

We expect leaders to "get things done," to maintain good systems, to provide the resources and training for production, to maintain efficiency and effectiveness through various controls, to make sure that technical problems are handled correctly, and to coordinate functional operations. These and other more technical aspects of production are one level of leadership focus. This focus is implicit in much of the management literature from scientific management, classical management (for example, POSDCORB), the productivity literature, and the contemporary measurement and benchmark literature. It is particularly relevant for leadership in the lower levels of the organization closest to production.

Another perspective is that leaders do not do the work: They depend on followers to actually do the work. Therefore, followers' training, motivation, maturation and continued development, and overall satisfaction are critical to production and organizational effectiveness. Indeed, some of the foremost researchers on the stumbling blocks for leaders state, "many studies of managerial performance have found that the most critical skill for beginning managers, and one most often lacking, is interpersonal competence, or the ability to deal with 'people problems'" (McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison 1988, 19). This strain of thought blossomed during the humanist era, beginning with Maslow in the 1940s and peaking during the 1960s with writers like Argyris, McGregor, and Likert and the

situationalists in the 1970s. In the situational leadership research, it was the other half of the task–people dualism. It is still very popular today, especially in the team leadership literature (Katzenbach and Smith 1993), the excellence literature such as Tom Peters (1994), and the charismatic elements of the transformational leadership literature.

The emergence of the transformational leadership paradigm in the 1980s brought the idea that "the essential function of leadership is to produce adaptive or useful change" (Kotter 1990). This notion was, in reality, resurrected from the great man theories in political science and Weberian charismatic theory in sociology. Similarly, Edgar Schein asserted that *the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture*" (1985, 2, emphasis in original).

Certainly not a major theme in the mainstream, if not altogether absent, was the notion that leadership is a service to the people, end consumers, society, and the public interest (rather than followers). It is common for biographies of religious and social leaders to advance this most strongly, but exemplars in public service do so nearly as strongly (Cooper and Wright 1992; Riccucci 1995). This notion does not displace technical performance, follower development, or organizational alignment, but it often largely ignores these dimensions as "givens." Although relatively uncommon in the mainstream, it has been a prominent element of the scholarly discussion in the public administration literature.

Lastly—and logically—leadership can be seen as a composite of several or all of these notions. Such a composite perspective has both logical and emotional appeal. Leaders typically are called upon to do and be all of these things—perform, develop followers, align their organizations, and foster the common good. Yet it also sidesteps the problem to some degree. Most leaders must make difficult choices about what to focus on and what they should glean from the act of leadership. What is the appropriate balance, and who determines it? Such normative questions loom large when reckoning the merits of the checkered histories of administrative leaders such as Robert Moses (Caro 1974), J. Edgar Hoover (Powers 1987), and more recently, Robert Citrone. For an array of possible definitions related to administrative leadership, see table 2.

To What Degree Does Leadership Make a Difference?

Burns (1978, 265) tells the cynical story of a Frenchman sitting in a cafe who hears a disturbance, runs to the window, and cries: "There goes the mob. I am their leader. I must follow them!" Such a story suggests that, at a minimum, we place too great an emphasis on the effect that leaders have. At its loftiest level—do leaders make a difference?—the question is essentially philosophical because of its inability to provide meaningful control groups and define what leadership means, other than in operational terms. No matter whether it is the great man or transformational theorists comparing Hitlers to Chamberlains, or situational theorists working with small groups comparing the results of finite solution problems, the answer is generally yes. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that leaders do not act in a vacuum—they are a part of the flow of history and set in a culture filled with crises, opportunities, and even dumb luck. In practical terms, however, the question of whether leaders make any difference gets translated into the questions of how much difference and when?

In its various permutations, the question of how much difference leaders make takes up the largest part of the literature, especially when the question relates to the effect of specific behaviors, traits, and skills or their clusters. At a global level, the transformational and great man devotees generally assert that great leaders can make a

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Table 2 Possible Definitions of Leadership in an Administrative Context

Leadership can focus strictly on the ends (getting things done), the means by which things get done (the followers), or aligning the organization with external needs and opportunities (which can result in substantive change). A definition of leadership can also emphasize the spirit with which leadership is conducted: In the public sector, this is invariably a public service commitment. Of course, definitions are a blend of several of these elements but with different emphases. One's definition tends to vary based on normative preferences and one's concrete situation and experience.

1. **Administrative leadership is the process of providing the results required by authorized processes in an efficient, effective, and legal manner.** (This narrower definition might apply well to a frontline supervisor and would tend to be preferred by those endorsing strict political accountability.)

2. **Administrative leadership is the process of developing/supporting followers who provide the results.** (Since all leaders have followers, and since it is the followers who actually perform the work and provide its quality, it is better to focus on them than the direct service/product. This is a common view in service industries with mottoes such as Our Employees Are Our Number 1 Priority.)

3. **Administrative leadership is the process of aligning the organization with its environment, especially the necessary macro-level changes necessary, and realigning the culture as appropriate.** (This definition tends to fit executive leadership better and emphasizes the "big picture." Many public sector analysts are concerned about the application of this definition because of a breakdown in democratic accountability.)

4. **The key element to administrative leadership is its service focus.** (Although leadership functions and foci may vary, administrative leaders need to be responsive, open, aware of competing interests, dedicated to the common good, etc., so that they create a sense of public trust for their stewardship roles.)

5. **Leadership is a composite of providing technical performance, internal direction to followers, external organizational direction—all with a public service orientation.** (This definition implicitly recognizes the complex and demanding challenge for leaders; however, it eschews the tough decision about defining the proper emphasis or focus that leaders may need to—and operationally do—make.)

great difference. Some of the best practical writers, however, caution that leaders' effects are only modest because of the great constraints and the inertia they face (Barnard [1938] 1987; Gardner 1989). The stories about Truman pitying the incoming Eisenhower because his orders would not be followed as in the Army, and Kennedy ordering the missiles out of Turkey only to find out during the Cuban missile crisis that they were still there, reflect this perspective. It is likely that this wisdom is directed at the excessive reliance on formal authority and insulated rationalistic thinking that some inexperienced or weaker leaders exhibit.

Another particularly important dimension of the effect of leadership relates to the levels at which leadership occurs. At the extreme, some theorists emphasize leadership that is almost exclusively equivalent to grand change (Zaleznik 1977) and minimize and even denigrate the notion that leadership occurs throughout the organization. To the contrary, the small group research of the 1950s through the 1970s seemed to suggest that leadership is fundamentally similar at any level. A few, especially the customer service and excellence literatures, emphasize the importance of frontline supervisors (Peters 1994; Buckingham and Coffman 1999). More comprehensive models of the current leadership literature tend to emphasize the idea that different types of leadership are required at different levels, especially because of the increasing levels of discretion allowed as one climbs higher in the organization (Hunt 1996). Different styles simply require different types of skills (Katz 1955).

Are Leaders Born or Made?[8]

An implicit assumption of the great man theory is that leaders (invariably the heads of state and major businesses such as banks and mercantile houses) are essentially born, probably allowing for some significant early training as well. That is, you either have the "stuff" of leadership or you don't, and most do not. Of course, in an age when leadership generally required either membership in the privileged classes (that is, the "right stuff" included education, wealth, connections, and senior appointments) or, in rare instances, extraordinary brilliance in a time of crisis (such as a Napoleon),[9] this has more than a little truth to it. In a more democratic era, such factors have less force, especially because leadership is conceived so much more broadly in terms of position.

Today, the question is generally framed as one of degree rather than as a strict dichotomy. To what degree can leaders be "made," and how? The developmental portion actually has two major components according to most researchers and thoughtful practitioners. While part of leadership is the result of formal training, it actually may be the smaller component. Experience is likely the more important teacher. In the extreme, this position states that leadership cannot be taught, but it can be learned.

More formal training is not without its virtues, too, providing technical skills and credibility, management knowledge, external awareness, coaching, and encouragement for reflection. Leaders must have (or in some instances acquire) the basic technical knowledge of the organization, often more for credibility than the executive function itself; formal training can assist greatly here. Management is a different profession altogether from doing line work; again, training can greatly facilitate the learning process, especially for new managers. Thus, while the black-and-white debate about leaders being made or born is largely considered sophomoric, the more sophisticated debate about the *relative* importance of innate abilities, experience (unplanned or rotational), and formal training is alive and well.

What Is the Best Style to Use?

Although leadership style is really just an aggregation of traits, skills, and behaviors, it has been an extremely popular topic of research and debate in its own right. One of the most significant issues has been definitional: What is leadership style? Although leadership style can be thought of as the cumulative effect of *all* traits, skills, and behaviors, it generally describes what is perceived as the key—or at least a prominent—aspect of the universal set of leadership characteristics. Examples include follower participation, such as Zand (1997, 143), who discusses command, consign, consult, and concur styles; change styles, such as risk averse or risk accepting; and personality styles, such as those based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Other leadership style definitions involve communication, individual versus group approaches to leadership, value orientations—especially involving integrity, and power-and-influence typologies.

A slightly different approach to style looks at it related to function. Much of the situational literature addresses style in this light. Leaders have to get work done ("initiate structure") and work through people ("consideration"). How they are perceived to balance these factors can be defined operationally as their style. A somewhat different, but very useful, insight into functional style preference has to do with the type of situation the leader prefers or excels in: a maintenance situation, a project or task force situation, a line versus function situation, a start-up, or turning a business around (McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison 1988).

Another important set of issues regarding style has to do with whether and to what degree style can be changed in adults.[10] Not many have taken the hard line that changing style is nearly impossible. Fiedler (1967; Fiedler, Chemers, and Mahar 1976) is probably most prominent

in this regard, largely advising that it is better to figure out the situation first and find the appropriate leader second. Yet, even assuming that change in style is possible, most serious researchers warn against excessive expectations of dramatic change, although radical style change anecdotes pepper the popular literature. If style can be changed, then the important issue that emerges is *how* (which largely becomes an applied training issue)? Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1972) have been the most popular in this regard, teaching people to compare their style preference (defined by worker participation in decision making) with the style needs of various situations. In addition to style need (situational demands), style preference, and style range (a leader's repertoire of different styles) is the issue of style quality. Just because one practices a style extensively does not mean that one is proficient in its use.

Although these debates have strong echoes in the public-sector literature, the differences in the debate structures are as important as the similarities.

Debates and Discussions in Administrative Leadership Theory

Of the four major questions, only the first (focus) is discussed as robustly in the public-sector literature as it is in the mainstream; indeed, from a normative philosophical basis, the administrative leadership literature probably argues this issue even more thoroughly. However, the question of proper focus is translated into the discretion debate, which has taken numerous forms affecting the proper role of administrative leaders. For the sake of simplicity, the first era (1883–1940s) can be conceptualized as a time when the dichotomy between the political world of policy decisions and the world of technical and neutral implementation was the overarching ideal. It was argued that good administrative leaders made many technical decisions but referred policy decisions to their political superiors. The role of discretion was largely ignored or downplayed. The second era (1940–1980s) was a less idealistic model that recognized that the interplay of the political and administrative worlds is far more intertwined than a simple dichotomy would explain. The dominant model during this period was administrative responsibility, that is, the appropriate and modest use of significant discretion. The recent era (since the 1990s), driven by a worldwide government reform agenda, has interjected entrepreneurial uses of discretion for public administrators. The debate about what to reform in government (the size, the cost, the processes, the structures, the accountability mechanisms, etc.) and how to reform it has stirred huge controversies in the scholarly community. To the degree that it is embraced, the newest model encourages creative and robust uses of discretion and diffuses authority among more stakeholders and control mechanisms.

The discretion debate has shaped the proper focus debate primarily in terms of a management orientation (transactional) versus a change orientation (transformational). If leaders should not exercise significant discretion or be too activist, then they should *not* play a substantial change role but should focus more on management issues. In a contrary position, many in the New Public Management school echo the mainstream school of the 1980s in asserting that public administrators are uniquely qualified to play a large role, which otherwise would leave a critical leadership vacuum. Another element in the proper focus discussion that is robust in the public-sector literature adds—or sometimes substitutes altogether—the inclusion of customers/clients/citizens and the public good generally. Although the different schools disagree rather caustically about the way to frame these notions and the proper terms to use, there tends to be rather impressive agreement that external constituencies and the common good are a fundamental focus of public-sector administrators that is not to be taken for granted.

The debate about the importance of leadership is much more muted and underdeveloped. Although some argue from the perspective of democratic theory that administrative leaders should *not* be important from a strictly political perspective, most public administration scholars and almost all practitioners simply assume or assert the importance of public administrators. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to treat all situations in which leadership is important as a single monolith, rather than exploring the ramifications of different types of leadership in different contexts with varying missions, organizational structures, accountability mechanisms, environmental constraints, and so on. This means that the technology of leadership is much less articulated on the public-sector side than the private-sector side. Attempts at scholarly syntheses that reflect sophisticated multifunctional, multilevel, and multisituational models that were in evidence in the mainstream by the 1990s are largely lacking in either monographs or the journal literature in the public sector.

Part of the weakness of the literature resides in its non-integrated character, with the ironic exception of many surprisingly good chapter overviews on leadership in general public administration and public management textbooks. The serious debate about the best style to use is cut into many parts and is rarely as explicitly or holistically discussed as in the mainstream leadership literature. Fragments of this literature are found in management topics such as total quality management, motivation, and routine problem solving in places such as *Public Productivity and Management Review*, and part of the literature is found in executive topics such as strategic planning and organiza-

tional change and development in journals such as *Public Administration Quarterly*. The ethics–values literature, for all of its normative robustness, generally offers few concrete recommendations on this score beyond general admonitions to be responsive, trustworthy, honest, courageous, and prudent.

The final debate, about whether leaders are born or made, is also not particularly well developed from a theoretical perspective. In the 1960s, the situational models presented relatively elementary task–people matrices. Both task and people skills could be taught, and a more humanistic approach that was less reliant on directive styles was generally encouraged. This was generally adopted in the public-sector literature. In the 1980s, when the mainstream field was searching for a more comprehensive and complex model, some good examples of sophisticated training models did emerge on the public-sector side (Flanders and Utterback 1985; Faerman, Quinn, and Thompson 1987) but this part of the literature was largely dormant in the 1990s. The "born" side of the argument recognizes the importance of recruitment and selection of exceptional individuals. Such discussions have been relatively common in a human resources context, especially in reports recommending ways to strengthen the public sector (for instance, the Volcker Commission in 1990 and the Winter Commission in 1993), but have not been integrated into an explicit leadership discussion.

Conclusion

The mainstream leadership literature, which is a multidisciplinary field dominated by business administration and psychology, has been huge. Although the field has been active for a century, partial and simplistic approaches to this complex phenomenon did not really contribute much to the overall understanding of leadership until the 1980s, when transformational approaches were (re)introduced. That is, many of the elements of leadership—select traits, skills, or behaviors—were better understood, but a more sophisticated model that could accommodate entirely different missions and environments was lacking. A major effort in the 1990s was to provide syntheses that are sophisticated enough for researchers and elegant enough for practitioners. Although some have contributed or used public-sector examples in the mainstream literature, that has not been integrated into a distinctive public-sector leadership literature focusing on the significant constraints and unique environment of administrative leaders. The administrative leadership literature is substantial if very broadly defined, especially in the last decade. However, the broader, tangential literature about administrative leadership is dispersed in topics such as reform, ethics, and management, and an explicit focus on the detailed dynamics of leadership is largely lacking.

Although it is hard to determine the exact reasons for neglect in this area, it is possible to assess the broad reasons. The technical difficulties of leadership research, especially the empirical elements, have not deterred those in the mainstream. Yet given the subtle nature of decision making by administrators in a system of democratically elected leaders with multiple branches of government, this seems to have been a significant detraction for public-sector researchers. This has been compounded by a noticeable lack of administrative leadership theory development that has not been in the service of organizational, ethical, policy, or political studies. Beliefs that activist administrative leadership styles are not appropriate, or insignificant given the other powerful players, seem to have produced self-selection before the decision to research the area. That is, those with these beliefs have already largely gone into political science and policy areas rather than public administration and public management. If this has been a significant problem in the past, it seems the call for organizational excellence, reform, entrepreneurialism, and robust stewardship over the last 20 years has compensated for this tendency. The final problem—the diversion of attention—seems to be a major problem when examining much of the leadership-related materials. Most of the best empiricism, coupled with disciplined theory building and testing, is at the management level. The most problematic diversion (in terms of extending understanding of administrative leadership), albeit a healthy discussion in its own right, has been the normative debate about administrative discretion in which schools use extreme cases to make arguments rather than more balanced assessments and recommendations of realistic trends.

The strength of the administrative leadership literature, such as it is, has been its hearty normative discussions about the proper role of administrators in a democratic system. Entrepreneurial behavior cannot be blithely endorsed when public administrators are entrusted with the authority of the state. Yet the increased size, cost, and regulatory intervention of the state means that new modes must also be considered—no matter whether they are explicitly entrepreneurial or more robust stewardship roles—as enormous pressures for reform escalate.

As a literature, the weaknesses are more pronounced than the strengths. The normative debate about the right amount and use of more activist leadership approaches for administrative leaders has long since stopped producing useful insights in terms of leadership studies. All schools of thought have tended to treat transformational elements of leadership either too simplistically or too universally. After all, the leadership of a frontline supervisor and a chief executive officer, or the leadership of an auditor as opposed to a state lottery executive, are likely to be remark-

ably different. Good leadership theory, if it is at the macro level, must accommodate these substantial differences. The field has had remarkably few empirical studies that are not largely descriptive and has overly emphasized leadership as an executive function. Finally, contemporary syntheses of public-sector leadership models that define the actual relationships of the numerous leadership competencies in various environmental contexts are simply absent. Indeed, no matter where you look in or for this subfield, the needs are great and the research opportunities are manifold.

These needs can be crystallized into a dual leadership agenda. First, there is a striking need for a comprehensive leadership model that integrates transactional and transformational elements. While simplistic models such as figure 1 are good for heuristic purposes, such a comprehensive model must be far more articulated to have the requisite explanatory power for the variety of situations and factors inherent in the vast world of public-sector leadership.[11] Second, such comprehensive models must be subjected to empirical research to test the strength of relationships under various conditions and over time. This is particularly important in an age when change skills, vision articulation, and innovation are in greater demand. With well-articulated models, this is not as difficult as it might seem. Such models should undergird leadership survey feedback programs (360-degree instruments used in leadership training), which in turn provide excellent (and large) databases. Another way to examine such models is through the types of surveys commissioned by the International City/County Management Association. Yet another way is to do a series of in-depth interviews with key organizational leaders. The key is to discipline ourselves to create models that are powerful enough to handle the complex leadership phenomenon and then to harness them in our research. Not only will it produce better science, it will be extremely useful in sharing our insights with the practitioner community.

Notes

1. By "mainstream," I refer to literature that self-consciously labels itself as a part of the leadership literature and addresses itself to broad audiences. I exclude literatures that are meant for the consumption of a single discipline with specialized interests and terms. Thus, although many of the studies of public-sector administration are found in the mainstream, many of the issues and materials are not. Needless to say, as with all distinctions regarding large bodies of work, such differentiations are meant more for general insight and convenience than as rigorous taxonomies.

2. For example, Burns states that "moral leadership emerges from and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs of followers" (4), and later he adds that "transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (20).

3. Of course, Weber ([1922] 1963) introduced the notion of charismatic leadership quite clearly, and it had been used by those influenced by sociology and political science such as Willner (1968), Dow (1969) and Downton (1973). Even Freud made it clear that leadership involved more than simple exchange processes implicit in most situational theories.

4. Although part of this avoidance may have been the result of a pro-experimental or positivist perspective, part of it may have been an eschewal of the great man school (which clearly has transformational trappings), which was disdained as antiscientific.

5. Because the overlap is so extensive for the subschools, these distinctions are more for analytical insight than articulation of groups that would necessarily self-identify with these monikers.

6. For example, he notes, "we find that leaders will exhibit a variety of patterns of transformational and transactional leadership. Most leaders do both but in different amounts" (1985, 22).

7. Examples of these topics include the types of leaders, leadership styles, the types and effects of followers, the relevance of societal and organizational cultures on leadership, and the operation of power, or mid- and micro-level theory such as leader role theory, group development theory, path-goal theory, leader–member exchange theory, and attribution theory, among many others.

8. This is a variation of the nature–nurture debate found in some form in most of the social sciences.

9. The time-of-crisis motif is prominent in the change literature (Kanter, Stein, and Jick 1992) as well as the leadership literature. Transformationalists reminded us there are exceptional leadership opportunities, which may or may not be filled, when there is a dramatic crisis, a leadership turnover, or at select stages of the organizational life cycle (especially the birth-to-growth and the maturity-to-decline phases).

10. This debate is related to the made–born argument, but with a critical difference. While the made–born argument is about whether a leader can master any style, the style debate focuses on whether a leader can learn styles other than their native or preferred style.

11. For example, I am completing a book that uses an overarching framework somewhat more articulated than figure 1 and that incorporates 62 subelements.

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