

CHAPTER 10

Leader-Member Relationships

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Most organizational theorists believe that leadership is a central factor in the effectiveness of groups as well as organizations. In both the United States and Europe, belief in “the central importance of leadership has been accepted and institutionalized,” and intensive interest in the subject “is an international phenomenon” (Storey, 2005, p. 91). We assume that leadership is required in order to initiate structure, to coordinate activities, and to direct others toward the accomplishment of group goals. The preoccupation with leadership is driven in part by a longstanding desire to identify the means of achieving organizational effectiveness through managerial control, but it also is marked today by “an increasing tendency to assume and assert that leadership is the answer to a whole array of intractable problems” (p. 92).

Attention to the quality of leader-member relationships came about to some extent through the human relations assumptions that managers gain compliance from employees by promoting interpersonal relationships and satisfaction of social needs. Later on, in the 1960s and 1970s, emphasis shifted to the basic theme in human resource development theory that the role of leaders is to create the proper climate for the development of members’ abilities and to facilitate that development. In either case, *the study of leader-member relations, at least from a traditional point of view, has been preoccupied with a quest to identify the essence of effective leadership and with understanding effective leadership mainly in terms of influence* (Storey, 2005; Yukl, 2006).

Interpretive scholarship on leadership and leader-member communication also addresses themes that are similar to those in the traditional perspective, but much of this work in recent years really has shifted into the domain of critical scholarship. The very idea of organization implies not only coordinated action, including divisions of labor and role specialization, but also a hierarchy of authority in which those who occupy higher positions are accorded more status, privilege, and power than those who occupy lower positions. In Chapter 14, we will describe some emerging alternatives to traditional systems of hierarchy, but it is still generally true in the organizational world that a person at any given level of the organization is subordinate to another. Given this condition, McKenna (2004) aptly summarizes the critical perspective on leader-member relations: “Critical management theorists are not duped by this libertarian spin . . . that describes the postmodern organization as ‘having no centrally organized system of authority’ . . . power does centralize in definable clusters” (p. 22).

LIMITATIONS OF LEADERSHIP THEORY AND RESEARCH

Our discussion of leader-member relations is based on two general conditions of leadership research. First, leadership research historically has concerned leader behavior at middle and lower levels of organizations (Storey, 2005). Second, most leadership research has focused on the vertically linked, leader-member dyad (Yukl, 2006). This history is convenient for our purposes in this chapter, but it also has three limitations that we are obliged to address as well. If these limitations are evident in leadership theory and research, we suggest by comparison that they are absolutely rampant in trade literature and practice.

Executive Leadership

The first limitation concerns the issue of top management or executive-level leadership. Zaccaro and Horn (2003) concluded that less than 5% of the leadership research literature in the last half of the 20th century actually concerned *executive* leadership. Scholars began to shift more attention to executive leadership in the 1980s, but the subject poses some interesting challenges. Although executives enjoy high status and value, it is not clear that executive leadership actually has much direct influence on organizational effectiveness (Barker, 1997). This is not to say that executive leadership is unimportant. Higher level leadership is not so much a technical activity as it is an aesthetic activity (Ackoff, 1998). This kind of leadership involves values, symbolism, and creativity, i.e., “the production of solutions that are *not* expected” (p. 29). At the risk of oversimplifying Ackoff’s aesthetic analysis with an old cliché, executive leadership is more art than science. Hence, Storey (2005) described executive leadership as an essential, but *intangible*, organizational asset:

Being seen to have a competent leader, and indeed *being seen to be attending to* the task of building a constantly replenishing ‘leadership pool’ is virtually *de rigueur* [a social requirement] for any self-respecting organization. The symbolic presence of these attributes is arguably of even more importance than whether there is any evidence of their impact on organizational outcomes. (p. 96)

Leadership in the Dyad

The second limitation involves the focus on the dyad. We certainly talk about leadership of groups and teams and leadership as a determinant of organizational effectiveness, but we often examine leader behavior and its consequences at the level of the dyad. As Tjosvold (1985) noted, communication in vertically linked relationships “is central to organizational work” (p. 281), but focusing on this vertically linked dyad directs one’s attention to leader influence over organization members as individuals rather than leader influence in group or organizational processes (Yukl, 1999). This focus not only misses the point of Yukl’s concern about the consequences of leadership for group and organizational processes; it also ignores the influence that group and organizational characteristics exert on leader behavior (Storey, 2005). As we will note at various points in this chapter, leadership occurs in a larger social context, and this social context influences leader behavior and leadership effectiveness (Hogg et al., 2005).

The Leader as Individual

The third limitation rarely is identified as such in leadership literature, but it should be just as evident as the others. As implied by leader-follower and leader-member terminology, leadership theory and research conceives of leaders as individuals engaged in the direction of one or more other organization members. This conception of leadership certainly

figures prominently in the beliefs, language, and practices of society at large. We look to leaders as the individuals with the traits and abilities required to direct or guide the rest of us, and this tendency, according to Barker (1997), “serves two important social functions: hope for salvation and blame for failure” (p. 348). The chief executive officer receives lavish compensation when the corporation profits and the head coach gets fired when the team has a losing season because leaders are presumed to be the agents of (and accountable for) success and failure. Our concern here may seem at odds with the first limitation that we noted regarding executive leadership, but some scholars really have begun to challenge the leader-as-individual bias in leadership theory.

Gemmill and Oakley (1992) suggested that leadership emerges out of a social process of collaboration. Gastil (1994) noted that leadership functions within groups actually may be performed by many group members. In one case study of major strategic change at a large hospital, Denis, Langley, and Cazale (1996) found that the execution of strategic change actually “requires collaborative leadership involving constellations of actors playing distinct but tightly-knit roles” (p. 673). From this point of view, the locus of leadership is in collective action, not just in the behavior of leaders as individuals.

Barker (1997) identified this point of view as an emerging paradigm that “provides for examination of beliefs and assumptions behind leadership theories” (p. 355). He also noted that it is not a theory of leadership, and it does not necessarily require rejection of traditional assumptions that may be entirely appropriate in some situations. But Barker does point to a possibility that we also have suspected for a long time. Much of the leadership that results in success or failure occurs in micro practices distributed throughout an organization, and it is enacted by and transacted among many members.

We cannot strip the lower level, dyadic, and leader-as-individual framework out of our coverage in a survey text. The literature is what it is. To the extent that this framework obscures or diverts attention from alternative conceptions, we certainly want to call attention to its biases.

TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Theories of Leadership Behavior

Despite the overwhelming belief in the importance of leadership in organizations, no one has been able to develop a uniformly accepted theory of leadership behavior (Barker, 1997). Over the years, scholars have attempted to distinguish leaders from nonleaders on the basis of personality traits, to identify and describe ideal styles of leadership, and to determine the kinds of situations under which any given type of leadership behavior is likely to be effective or ineffective. Some have even argued that “leadership” and “management” involve two different and sometimes inconsistent forms of behavior (Bennis, 1976a, 1976b).

Leadership as Trait

The earliest theories of leadership attempted to distinguish leaders from nonleaders on the basis of certain personality traits. The list of distinguishing traits such as intelligence,

responsibility, character, and others like them typically sounds as if it came from the pages of the Boy Scout or Girl Scout Handbook. Despite many efforts to identify a clear and consistent set of characteristics of leaders, results of the trait approach are mixed. Jennings (1961) argued many years ago that the trait school was simply failing to identify any personality traits that would consistently distinguish leaders from followers. On the other hand, Koehler, Anatol, and Applbaum (1981) concluded that at least three specific traits are associated with effective leaders across a broad range of situations: *intelligence*, *adjustment*, and *deviancy*. The potential relevance of intelligence and adjustment may seem self-evident, but what about deviancy? The idea here is that good leaders need an intuitive understanding of when to break the rules, to innovate, and to change.

Despite the argument made by Koehler et al., years of trait research have not produced any agreement about their relevance to leadership (Barker, 1997), and trait theory inspires much more interest today in trade literature and among practitioners than it inspires among academic scholars. Even so, trait-based studies still show up on occasion in social science research. For example, Barlow, Jordan, and Hendrix (2003) found that advanced Air Force officers scored higher than midlevel officers on the character traits of selflessness and spiritual appreciation. In turn, midlevel officers scored higher than early career officers on both of these characteristics and also on integrity. Barlow et al. concluded that these character traits undergo development and growth among officers as they advance in their careers. In a study of Norwegian middle managers, Kornor and Nordvik (2004) found that self-reports of personality characteristics predicted self-reports of leadership style. Those with conscientious traits reported themselves to be production-oriented leaders, extraverts opted for change-oriented leadership, and managers with agreeable personalities preferred employee-oriented leadership.

Leadership as Style

The stylistic approach to leadership behavior developed, in part, out of frustration with the earlier trait approach. As Koehler et al. pointed out, “Unlike the trait approach to leadership, the stylistic approach is concerned with what leaders do rather than the personal characteristics they possess” (p. 228). Three widely used models of leadership style include an early model developed by White and Lippitt (1960); the Blake and McCance (1991) Leadership Grid, an extension of earlier work by Blake and Mouton (1964, 1985); and transformational leadership theory, particularly a version elaborated by Bernie Bass (1985, 1996).

Early Style Theory. One early and classic version of stylistic theory was developed by White and Lippitt (1960). They identified three basic styles of leadership that they labeled as *laissez-faire*, *authoritarian*, and *democratic*.

Laissez-faire leaders relinquish virtually all control of decisions and group processes to members. Such leaders may remain available for consultation or problem solving, but they generally delegate all authority for tasks to members and avoid decisions and responsibilities. You might say with good reason that the idea of a “*laissez-faire* leader” is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, because this leader’s style is nonleadership.

Authoritarian leaders exercise strong command and control over decisions and tasks. They issue and enforce orders to ensure that their plans are executed in an acceptable

manner. They closely monitor and supervise the work of members. They demand respect for and compliance with their authority as leaders.

Democratic leaders are more oriented toward guiding and coaching members rather than completely controlling their activities. They share authority with members and seek member input in decision making. They delegate responsibilities, provide recognition, and promote development for their members.

The characteristics of democratic leadership style are similar to those of participative management practices under the human resource development model that we described in Chapter 4. Not surprisingly, democratic leadership, like participative management, has enjoyed favor in organizational communication theory and scholarship for many years as a generally preferred style.

The Leadership Grid. A second and more widely used stylistic approach to leadership is presented in Blake and McCaense's (1991) Leadership Grid. Extending from earlier work by Blake and Mouton (1964, 1985), Blake and McCaense argued that eight basic managerial (i.e., leadership) styles can be identified according to their degree of concern for production and concern for people. Five of these styles can be located in the Blake and McCaense Leadership Grid, in which the two dimensions of concern form axes. The remaining three are not displayed graphically in the grid. As the phrase "concern for," implies, Blake and McCaense's concept of style is more *attitudinal* than behavioral.

The 1, 1, or impoverished leader, is theoretically the least effective. Given low concern for both production and people, the impoverished leader exercises no initiative and abdicates any responsibility for group outcomes. According to Blake and McCaense, the 9, 1 authority-obedience and 1, 9 country club leaders are not much more effective. The authority-obedience leader basically regards people concerns as obstacles to production accomplishment. This leader may use punitive and even abusive strategies to subordinate people concerns to the all-important goal of production accomplishment. In contrast, the country club leader thinks of nothing but people concerns. This leader strives primarily to maintain morale, satisfaction, and harmony among group members, even if production has to suffer in order to accomplish maintenance functions.

The 5, 5, or middle-of-the-road leader, attempts to compromise and balance production and people concerns. The middle-of-the-road manager may believe that production and people concerns are competing and contradictory aspects of group behavior. In order to cope with the contradiction, the middle-of-the-road leader settles for moderately harmonious group relationships and adequate but not outstanding task performance.

The ideal style for leadership effectiveness presumably is the 9, 9 or team leader. Whereas the 5, 5 leader sees production and people concerns as competing, the team leader believes that group effectiveness depends on integration of people needs with production objectives. The 9, 9 team leader personifies the ideals of human resource development theory as described in Chapter 4. Specifically, group effectiveness is presumed to depend on the extent to which individual members are able to develop, assume responsibility, and function as a team. The team leader concentrates on bringing about this form of development.

Some writers (e.g., Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) have claimed that the Leadership Grid is based on earlier studies of leadership behavior at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) in Michigan and at Ohio State University (OSU). The ISR studies identified two basic styles

of leadership, job-centered and employee-centered. The OSU studies found two similar leadership variables—initiating structure and consideration. The OSU model regarded *both* variables as potential factors in a leader's behavior, whereas the ISR model viewed them as different styles. In either case, the job-centered and initiating structure factors represent a task dimension of leadership style, whereas employee-centered or consideration behavior represents a maintenance dimension. Despite the similarity of terms in all of these models, there are some important differences. The OSU and ISR models specifically are behavioral, whereas the Leadership Grid, as we noted earlier, is attitudinal. Moreover, Scientific Methods, Inc., the corporation holding the rights to the Leadership Grid, contends, "Blake and Mouton's research and writings are not based on either the ISR or the OSU studies" (Knause, 1990).

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership theory is classified appropriately as a theory of leadership style (Kirkbride, 2006), but this theory differs from earlier stylistic theories and models in some of its key assumptions. The first scholar to lay groundwork for the concept of transformational leadership may have been Burns (1978), who distinguished between transacting and transforming leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Bernie Bass (1985, 1996) elaborated this idea into a coherent theory that not only generates intensive academic interest, but also enjoys widespread popularity among practitioners today (Kirkbride, 2006; Yukl, 1999).

To begin with Burns's distinction, transactional leaders work on exchange principles, i.e., by providing rewards that are contingent on accomplishing goals and complying with leadership. Transformational leaders actually change members' values. More to the point, they motivate members to perform beyond expectations (Bass, 1985). Bass, along with Avolio (Avolio, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1998), developed a model of eight leadership styles that differs from earlier stylistic models in at least three respects. First, the styles are assumed to operate on a continuum of performance effectiveness (Kirkbride, 2006). Second, any given manager or leader may exhibit any or all of the styles (Bass & Avolio, 1998). Finally, whereas traditional leadership theories rely on concepts of rational processes, transformational theory is concerned with emotions, values, symbolic behavior, and "the role of the leader in making events meaningful for followers" (Yukl, 1999, p. 286).

The first (and least effective) style is *laissez-faire*, i.e., the nonleader leadership style much as White and Lippett defined it, where members are without direction and often in conflict with one another. The second and third styles are passive and active *management-by-exception* (MBE). MBE is still basically *laissez-faire*, but the MBE leader does pay attention to deviations from normal conditions (i.e., errors and problems) in order to correct the deviations and return to normal conditions. Expressed in terms of system theory, MBE aims for homeostasis and operates on negative feedback. In the passive form, the leader is roused into action only when problems become obvious. In the active form, the leader is vigilant, relying on elaborate systems to monitor and control activity. MBE is presumed at best to lead to marginal performance.

The fourth style, *contingent reward*, fits the basic definition of transactional leadership as an exchange process. The contingent reward or transactional leader understands the objectives, acquires and coordinates the resources that members need to accomplish objectives,

supports their efforts, and rewards accomplishment. According to Kirkbride (2006), “If done successfully, this style will produce performance at the required levels” (p. 26).

Moving member performance beyond “required levels” presumably requires something more than transactional leadership. The next four styles, in theory, lead progressively to performance beyond expectations, and each of the four is a form of transformational leadership. These styles are *individualized consideration*, *intellectual stimulation*, *inspirational motivation*, and *idealized influence*.

Individualized consideration involves leader recognition of individual differences, management of work in light of those differences, open communication, and member development. Intellectual stimulation involves the leader more actively as a facilitator, advisor, and catalyst for problem solving by members. Some of the attributes in these two styles also appear in descriptions of democratic and team leadership as well as participative management in human resource development.

The last two styles clearly move into the symbolic domain and involve member identification with leaders. The leader with an inspirationally motivating style has a vision for the future and is able to communicate about that vision in a clear, compelling, and engaging way so that members adopt that vision and pursue it. Finally, in idealized influence, the summit of transformational leadership, the leader is virtually iconic, i.e., a person who is perceived as the personification of the best organizational values and regarded as a model to emulate.

As we noted earlier, Bass’s version of transformational leadership has inspired many research studies, and there is evidence to support the performance continuum suggested in the theory (Kirkbride, 2006). Specifically, transformational leadership correlates more highly than transactional leadership with leadership effectiveness. In turn, transactional leadership is more effective than MBE, and MBE is more effective than laissez-faire. Yukl also stated that studies have shown a link between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness across different levels of management, types of organizations, and countries, but he also noted that possible situational influences have not been adequately tested. That observation leads us to the next section on situational theory of leadership.

Situational Theory

Just as trait theories have been criticized for failing to produce clear distinctions between leaders and nonleaders, stylistic theory has been criticized for assuming that any one style of leadership can be effective in all situations. Situational or contingency theories of leadership argue that no one leadership style is ideal and that the circumstances of leadership will determine whether a particular style will be effective or ineffective.

Frederick Fiedler (1967) devised one early and popular contingency theory. Fiedler argued that the effectiveness of a leadership style will be influenced by three factors:

1. Leader-member relations, or the degree of confidence and trust that members have in the leader.
2. Task structure, or the degree of certainty and routine as opposed to ambiguity and unpredictability in the task.

3. Position power, or the influence inherent in the leadership role (legitimate authority and ability to reward or punish).

Fiedler conducted a number of studies on directive and permissive styles of leadership under varying combinations of the three key situational factors. Results of these studies led him to propose a model of situational conditions under which each style would be most effective. Fiedler's model is presented in Table 10.1.

The group and task characteristics identified by Fiedler probably are not the only factors that influence the effectiveness of a given leadership style. Eblen (1987) found that the relationship between leadership style and employee commitment varied across organizational contexts. Given the two basic leadership variables from the OSU studies, initiating structure and consideration, her study indicated that consideration was positively related to employee commitment in hospitals, whereas initiating structure was positively related to commitment among employees in city government departments.

Hogg et al. (2005) found that salience of group identity for group members also affects the relationship between leadership style and leadership effectiveness in studies of service and manufacturing companies located in Wales and India. A personalized style was more effective in low-salience groups, whereas a depersonalized style was more effective in high-salience groups. In other words, when group members do not identify strongly with the group as an entity, a personalized relationship with the leader is more important for leadership effectiveness. When group identification is strong, it is more important for the leader to be perceived as "group prototypical" (p. 993) and act toward members as group members rather than individuals.

The issue of situational influences on leadership and organizational effectiveness is especially interesting in the case of transformational leadership theory because of its widespread

TABLE 10.1 Fiedler's Situational Model

<i>Group Situation</i>				
<i>Condition</i>	<i>Leader-Member Relations</i>	<i>Task Structure</i>	<i>Position Power</i>	<i>Leadership Style Correlated w/Productivity</i>
1	Good	Structured	Strong	Directive
2	Good	Structured	Weak	Directive
3	Good	Unstructured	Strong	Directive
4	Good	Unstructured	Weak	Permissive
5	Moderately Poor	Structured	Strong	Permissive
6	Moderately Poor	Structured	Weak	No Data
7	Moderately Poor	Unstructured	Strong	No Relationship
8	Moderately Poor	Unstructured	Weak	Directive

SOURCE: From *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*, by Frederick Fiedler, 1967. New York: McGraw-Hill. © Fred Fiedler. Reprinted with permission from author.

popularity. Even advocates for transformational leadership have suggested that it is best suited for organizations dealing with rapid change in turbulent environments (Kirkbride, 2006). Pawar and Eastman (1997) developed a theory that environmental stability, dominant organizational functions, organizational structure, and mode of organizational governance will determine the effectiveness of transformational leadership. Specifically, they hypothesized that transformational leadership is less likely to work in relatively stable, bureaucratic organizations with strong, technical core functions that can operate in relative isolation from the environment.

We are not aware of any studies that specifically test Pawar and Eastman's theory, but some studies have pointed to other situational limitations with transformational leadership. Ozaralli (2003) found in a small study of eight companies in Turkey that transformational leadership as well as organization members' sense of empowerment contributed substantially to the effectiveness of teams, but transformational leadership and empowerment themselves were not highly correlated. So what contributes to member empowerment? Ozaralli concluded that "*transactional* [emphasis added] leadership behaviors may also have a share in employee [member] empowerment" (p. 342).

Rafferty and Griffin (2004) reframed the basic transformational style in five dimensions (vision, inspirational communication, supportive leadership, intellectual stimulation, and personal recognition). They found in a study of nearly 1,400 public employees in Australia that the dimensions had different consequences for organizational outcomes including member commitment, self-efficacy (confidence to carry out tasks beyond prescribed requirements), and helping others. Leadership vision and personal recognition actually had negative relationships with members' commitment to stay with the organization. Supportive leadership, which generally is associated with organization members' satisfaction, was unrelated to commitment, self-efficacy, and helping others. Intellectual stimulation was related positively to commitment, but inspirational communication was the only one of the five dimensions to correlate positively with commitment, self-efficacy, and helping others.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Situational, as well as stylistic, theories of leadership also have one other very important limitation. They assume that leaders behave in a consistent manner toward all of the members within a group, exhibiting something like an "average leadership style" (ALS model). Graen (1976) challenged this assumption with a leader-member exchange (LMX) model, arguing that leaders discriminate significantly in their behavior toward members.

Fairhurst and Chandler (1989) examined the LMX model in a qualitative study of interaction between the manager and three employees in the warehouse division of a large manufacturing company. One member was an "in-group" member (worked under conditions of mutual trust, influence, and support with the manager), one was an "out-group" member (worked under conditions involving low trust and support along with exercise of the manager's formal authority), and the third was a "middle group" member, which fell between the conditions of the other two. Fairhurst and Chandler found both consistency and inconsistency in the manager's relationship with these three employees.

The manager used indirect and ambiguous communication to exercise unobtrusive control with all three employees. As described by Fairhurst and Chandler, he was “a control-based manager who tries to appear noncontrolling and participative” (p. 230). At the same time, the manager’s behavior and the patterns of interaction between the manager and employees clearly differed across in-group, middle-group, and out-group relationships. Both parties frequently challenged and disagreed with each other in the in-group relationship. The manager was somewhat more dominant in the middle-group relationship and exercised direct authority with the out-group member. Interestingly, the out-group member went to great lengths to maintain his out-group status with communicative behaviors that created social distance between the manager and himself.

Waldron (1991) reported results that are only partially consistent with Fairhurst and Chandler’s findings. In Waldron’s study, in-group members were able to communicate informally with their leaders about subjects that had no relationship to the work. In Albrecht and Ropp’s (1984) terms, we might say that these members had multiplex linkages with the supervisors, “a kind of latitude not available to out-group members” (p. 301). But some of the differences between in-groups and out-groups were so small that Waldron concluded that members in neither group exercise much control in defining their relationships with their leaders and that leaders maintain power over in-group members as well as out-group members.

Fairhurst (1993) has continued to find marked differences in leader-member communication among in-groups, middle-groups, and out-groups. In a much larger study than the original Fairhurst and Chandler work, Fairhurst found that in-group communication emphasized supportiveness, collegiality, and similarity. Out-group leader-member exchange involved face threats and competitive conflict, implying “an openly contentious and adversarial relationship” (p. 345). Middle groups reflected both accommodating and polarizing interactions.

One explanation for the inconsistency between the Waldron and Fairhurst studies may be that differences in relationship quality have more influence on members’ behavior than on leaders’ behavior. Lee and Jablin (1995) found evidence of this when they were studying what leaders and members do to maintain their relationships under stressful circumstances, for example, when the relationship is deteriorating or when one party wants to escalate the relationship to a level that is too close for the other party’s comfort.

Lee and Jablin found that leaders’ perceptions of the leader-member exchange quality (i.e., in-group vs. out-group) had no effect on the relationship maintenance strategies that they used with members in any situation. This is consistent with ALS theory and with the results in Waldron’s study. On the other hand, the quality of the leader-member exchange was very important to choices made by members in communicating with their leaders. Where relationship stress was caused by escalation, out-group members were more likely than in-group members to avoid communication. Where deterioration was occurring, out-group members were more likely than in-group members to use both direct *and* deceptive strategies to deal with the situation. You probably are asking, “How can that be?” It is a matter of timing. Because out-group members’ relations with leaders are rule-driven and formal, they can call attention directly and openly to any deviation from the rules. If this does not solve the problem with the leader, the out-group member may turn to deception and

distortion. This certainly looks like the kind of LMX in-group/out-group difference that Fairhurst has seen in her studies.

Given some of these research findings, it might not be surprising that more recent studies have begun to attach value to LMX by distinguishing between “good” and “bad” LMX (Morrow, Suzuki, Crum, Ruben, & Pautsch, 2005). In effect, some recent LMX research has taken a prescriptive turn, suggesting that LMX can range from high to low in quality, and “the level of exchange quality predicts a variety of positive outcomes” (Hochwarter, 2005, p. 506). In particular, members of in-groups (the *de facto* higher quality condition) are more satisfied, more committed, and less likely to leave the organization. Lee (1999) also concluded from a review of LMX studies that “LMX quality *does* affect communication behaviors and attitudes between leaders and members” (p. 417).

In one study of employees in several different kinds of organizations, Lee (1999) found that LMX quality appears to have self-perpetuating consequences for members’ communication expectations. Members in high-quality conditions expected positive communication with leaders and motivated themselves to fulfill these expectations. Members in low-quality conditions had little expectation for positive communication with leaders and behaved in ways that served to confirm this expectation, “thereby recreating the state or quality of their low LMX” (p. 425).

In another study, also with employees drawn from a variety of organizations, Lee (2001) found that leaders “may build unfairness into work relationships with subordinates” under low LMX conditions, and he argued in light of this result that “leaders must offer opportunities for subordinates to improve the quality of LMXs” (p. 585). Should leaders themselves undertake an obligation to create high-quality exchange for all members? According to Sparrowe and Liden (1997), “An unresolved issue in LMX research is whether leaders should or should not differentiate among their members. . . . Our understanding of the differentiation process indicates that this is not a simple question” (p. 545).

As Lee’s studies and others suggest, too much differentiation disenfranchises out-group members in low-quality LMX conditions. On the other hand, providing high-quality LMX to everyone can overburden the leader. Moreover, Sparrowe and Liden remind us of one hard condition that permeates organizational life: We do not all perform at the same level, and “organizational effectiveness may be dependent upon internal selection processes and competition for promotions in which the differentiation process plays a crucial role” (p. 545).

In addition to the idea that differentiation might be something like a necessary evil in organizational life, it is not entirely clear that high-quality LMX consistently translates into desirable outcomes. Morrow et al. found that employee turnover was lowest under what they described as moderate LMX conditions, with higher turnover under both low- and high-quality LMX. Given the purpose of their study, the choice of a study population was interesting. They surveyed over-the-road truck drivers, i.e., employees who might have relatively little direct contact with their leaders for extended periods of time.

Hochwarter (2005) conducted a study of the relationship between LMX and members’ experience of job tension with results that might surprise many people, although Hochwarter actually predicted them. Hochwarter classified organization members’ affective dispositions on negative and positive scales. Negative and positive affective dispositions

as studied by Hochwarter are not polar opposites. Negative affect involves nervousness and distress. Positive affect involves interest and attentiveness. Potentially, a person could have both or neither, e.g., the apathetic member who is not distressed and definitely not interested. Organization members with high negative affect experienced their greatest job tension under conditions of moderate LMX quality. Job tension for low negative affect members did not change much over LMX conditions. Both high and low positive affect members experienced less job stress as LMX improved, but tension for low positive affect members went up again under high LMX conditions.

Again, these results were, for the most part, just what Hochwarter predicted, and he had elaborate theoretical arguments for these predictions. Before your eyes glaze over at the prospect of reading them, you may be comforted by the fact that we do not have enough space in the chapter to cover them. It is complicated, and that is our point here. Should leaders differentiate among their members? To reiterate Sparrowe and Liden's response, this is not a simple question. Indeed, given studies such as the one conducted by Hogg et al. (2005), in which personalized leadership (a kind of differentiation) worked well in low-salience groups and depersonalized leadership (undifferentiated) worked best in high-salience groups, claims regarding the consequences of high-quality LMX may be subject to all of the cautions that we described under situational theories of leadership.

Leadership as Development

In many organizational and professional settings, integration and development of new members, especially in management, professional, and certain trade occupations, occurs in mentor-protégé relationships. These relationships may be formal, but often are informal. In the traditional conception of the relationship, the new member becomes a protégé to an older or more established member who functions as a mentor (Higgins & Kram, 2001). We know of no leadership theory that specifically includes mentoring as a dimension of leadership, although Sparrowe and Liden (1997) used LMX as a framework for theorizing about sponsorship, an activity often associated with mentoring. We are identifying mentoring with leadership here because mentors lead protégés in a developmental sense. The mentor role entails teaching, guidance, counseling, appraisal, and other developmental activities, including sponsorship and promotion of the protégé's career advancement (Bolton, 1980; Shelton, 1981).

Although a mentor may also be a protégé's immediate superior, the mentor frequently occupies another role (e.g., a higher level manager or a more experienced peer at the same level of the organization). Moreover, the mentor role is inherently different from the definition of the conventional role of an immediate superior, in which the relationship is based on task rather than the objectives of career development.

Early studies of mentor-protégé relationships focused primarily on determining how common they are in the work world and whether protégé participation in such relationships actually leads to career advancement (e.g., McLane, 1980; Shelton & Curry, 1981). One investigation by Daniels and Logan (1983) specifically analyzed the communicative features of mentor-protégé relationships. They restricted their study to female managers and professionals, comparing those who participated as protégés in career development

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(mentor-protégé) relationships with others who only had experience as subordinates in conventional vertically linked relationships. Daniels and Logan found that levels of supportiveness, influence, satisfaction, and overall communicative activity were perceived to be much higher in career development relationships than in conventional vertically linked relationships. They also found that the mentor's supportiveness and upward influence were both important to protégés' satisfaction with the relationship.

We pointed out at the beginning of the chapter that leadership theory and research has focused mainly on the vertically linked dyad. This tendency is especially pronounced in transformational leadership theory (Yukl, 1999) and in LMX theory (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Similarly, the single dyadic relationship has gotten most of the attention in studies of mentor-protégé relationships. In 1985, Kathy Kram pointed out that people commonly rely on multiple relationships for career development support, not only from those in vertically linked relationships, but also from peers, professional colleagues, community members, and even family. In effect, they may have multiple career development relationships that Kram called "relationship constellations" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 264). Higgins and Kram suggested that the traditional mentor-protégé perspective is much less relevant today for four reasons:

1. The contract between organization members and their employers has changed substantially, especially in terms of limited (if any) job security.
2. The rapid pace of technology change, as we noted in Chapter 7, has increased the value of knowledge workers who are not only adaptive, but also continuous learners.
3. Organizational structures have changed with virtual organizations, frequent restructuring, and more boundary spanning.
4. Organizations are increasingly diverse in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality.

In some ways, these conditions increase the desirability of career development relationships, and they may make some kinds of development relationships more relevant than others. They constrain opportunities for some, yet also create new opportunities for others.

The consequences of these organizational changes involve not only a shift in focus from the single relationship concept to a multiple relationship concept, but also a need for more attention to *developmental networks* (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Career development support from this point of view can be occurring simultaneously in multiple relationships at multiple levels both inside and outside the organization and in the context of social networks where the developmental apparatus may be much like a support group.

Motivation and Control

It is almost impossible in American culture to talk about the effectiveness of leadership without addressing motivation and control because the function of leaders is the direction of others' activities toward organizational goals. Many theories of leadership are concerned at

least implicitly with the problem of motivating members. Even LMX theory, which begins with the premise that a leader's behavior is not the same with all members, values the power of "transformative leadership" in high-quality LMX conditions in which members "move beyond self-interest" (Fairhurst, 1993, p. 321).

Some of the early work on the problem of motivation and control was driven by traditional human relations values and beliefs in the linkage between communication and effective supervision. In organizational communication, one important source of these values and beliefs is a series of graduate research projects directed by W. Charles Redding at Purdue University. These studies classified supervisors as effective or ineffective on the basis of ratings by higher level managers, then examined the supervisors' communicative dispositions. Redding (1972) drew five major conclusions from these studies:

1. The best supervisors tend to be more "communication-minded." For example, they enjoy talking and speaking in meetings, they are able to explain instructions and policies, and they enjoy conversing with subordinates.
2. The best supervisors tend to be willing, empathic listeners; they respond understandingly to so-called silly questions from employees; they are approachable; and they will listen to suggestions and complaints with an attitude of fair consideration and willingness to take appropriate action.
3. The best supervisors tend (with some notable exceptions) to "ask" or "persuade," in preference to "telling" or "demanding."
4. The best supervisors tend to be sensitive to the feelings of others. For example, they are careful to reprimand in private rather than in public.
5. The best supervisors tend to be more open in their passing along of information; they are in favor of giving advance notice of impending changes and of explaining the reasons behind policies and regulations. (p. 433)

Although the Purdue studies were not directly concerned with the effect of leaders' communicative behavior on member satisfaction and morale, the tone of Redding's conclusions bears a strong resemblance to the prescription that earlier human relations theorists offered: Management promotes compliance by promoting morale and satisfaction. Morale and satisfaction depend on effective interpersonal relations: namely, empathy, sensitivity to social needs, receptivity, and two-way communication—essentially the same communicative behaviors that the Purdue studies link with "effective supervision."

Satisfaction and Communication Climate

In a classic investigation closely related to the ideal of the Purdue studies, Jack Gibb (1961) made a more direct connection between leader communication and member satisfaction by distinguishing between climates of supportive and defensive interpersonal communication. According to Gibb, a supportive climate leads to member satisfaction and accuracy in communication, whereas a defensive climate leads to dissatisfaction and distortion of

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communication. He identified the communicative behaviors that trigger the development of these climates. The resulting model is summarized in Table 10.2.

The influence of the Purdue studies, Gibb's model, and other studies such as those on communication openness continued through the 1980s in many investigations of factors

TABLE 10.2 Descriptions of Gibb's Defensive and Supportive Communication Climates

Defensive

1. *Evaluation*: To pass judgment on another; to blame or praise; make moral assessments of another or question his [or her] motives; to question the other's standards.
2. *Control*: To try to do something to another; to attempt to change behavior or attitudes of others; implicit in attempts to change others is the assumption that they are inadequate.
3. *Strategy*: To manipulate another or make him or her think that he or she was making his or her own decisions; to engage in multiple and/or ambiguous motivations; to treat the other as a guinea pig.
4. *Neutrality*: To express a lack of concern for the other; the clinical, person-as-an-object-of-study attitude.
5. *Superiority*: To communicate that you are superior in position, wealth, intelligence, etc.; to arouse feelings of inadequacy in others; to express that you are not willing to enter into joint problem solving.
6. *Certainty*: Dogmatic; wanting to win an argument rather than solve a problem; seeing one's ideas as truths to be defended.

Supportive

1. *Description*: Nonjudgmental; to ask questions which are perceived as requests for information; to present feelings, emotions, events which do not ask the other to change his or her behavior.
2. *Problem Orientation*: To convey a desire to collaborate on mutual problem solving; to allow the other to set goals and solve problems; to imply that you do not desire to impose your solution.
3. *Spontaneity*: To express naturalness; free of deception; a "clean id"; straightforwardness; uncomplicated motives.
4. *Empathy*: To respect the other person and show it; to take his [or her] role; to identify with his [or her] problems; to share his [or her] feelings.
5. *Equality*: To be willing to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect; to attach little importance to differences in ability, worth, status, etc.
6. *Provisionalism*: To be willing to experiment with your own behavior; to investigate issues rather than taking sides; to solve problems, not debate.

SOURCE: From Gibb (1961). Used by permission.

in organization members' satisfaction with their jobs, leaders, and organizations. Most of these studies concern the relationship between some aspect of the leader's communicative behavior and member satisfaction. Generally, these studies affirm the claim that supportive, "people-oriented" styles of communication promote satisfaction.

Motivational Limits of Leadership and Supervision

The quality of communication between leaders and members, whether understood in the context of supervision or the context of leadership, is important, but we do not want to leave the impression that morale and satisfaction are completely dependent on the behavior of leaders and supervisors. Some researchers have tried to build a more comprehensive picture of the factors that influence satisfaction. An excellent example of this kind of work is a study by Eileen Ray and Katherine Miller (1991), who found that employee job satisfaction depends on a complex set of relationships among several factors. In their study, job satisfaction was negatively related to role ambiguity and positively related to fatigue that employees experienced. As role ambiguity increased, satisfaction went down, but to some extent, fatigue led to higher satisfaction. Apparently, satisfying work is tiring work. In turn, fatigue was related to perceived workload. Role ambiguity was positively related to perceived workload and negatively related to supportiveness of one's coworkers and supervisor. Interestingly, coworker support was more important than supervisor support in lowering role ambiguity, and employee perceptions of their coworkers' supportiveness depended on the strength of the network links that they had with those coworkers.

Some motivational theories in the human resource development era of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s also pointed to limits in the quality of leader-member relations to influence motivation and, thus, performance. The best example of this is Frederick Herzberg's (1966) motivator-hygiene theory. Like a number of other motivational theories of the 1960s, motivator-hygiene theory is based on Abraham Maslow's (1954) need hierarchy, but Herzberg added two novel and unique features to his theory:

1. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are *not* opposite conditions. The opposite of satisfaction is simply the absence of satisfaction.
2. The factors that lead to job satisfaction and, therefore, to motivation are different from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction.

Herzberg observed in his studies of organizations that six factors seemed to contribute to job satisfaction and motivations for high levels of performance. A different set of 10 factors was related to job dissatisfaction. The satisfiers, called *motivators*, and the dissatisfiers, called *hygiene factors*, are as follows: motivators include achievement, recognition, advancement, the work itself, responsibility, and potential for personal growth; hygiene factors include policy and administration, technical supervision, relationships with supervisor, relationships with peers, relationships with subordinates, salary, job security, personal life, work conditions, and status.

According to Herzberg, failure to provide for organization members' hygiene needs will lead to job dissatisfaction and poor performance, but merely meeting these needs does not produce motivation to improve performance. In Herzberg's view, positive relationships between leaders and members may prevent dissatisfaction, but relationship quality will not lead to better performance. Better performance depends on incorporating the six motivators into the work environment. Thus, as Wayne Pace (1983) explains:

A supervisor who does a good job of creating positive relationships with employees will be disappointed if he or she thinks that those employees will be motivated to work harder as a result . . . To motivate employees, the supervisor will need to find ways to give employees greater freedom and more responsibility for doing their work, or at least give them more recognition for work done well. (p. 89)

Member Behavior Toward Leaders

Feedback and Distortion

So far in this chapter we have focused on the way in which leaders behave toward members, but organization members also act toward their leaders in ways that affect the relationship and its outcomes. Historically, much of this research addressed two themes, upward distortion and feedback. We have not seen a study in many years that has attempted to describe or explain member feedback to leaders, but Jablin (1979) reviewed and summarized some studies of this type. The studies indicated generally that members provide more responsive feedback to leaders when the members have role clarity, and leaders tend to improve their own performance after receiving feedback from members.

Although most studies of upward distortion also occurred prior to Jablin's review, researchers in the 1980s continued to show some interest in this topic. Early studies of upward distortion indicated that members' mobility aspirations (desire for promotion and advancement) are *negatively* related to accuracy in upward communication, whereas trust in leaders is *positively* related (Read, 1962). As mobility aspirations go up, accuracy goes down. Increased trust is associated with increased accuracy. Other studies suggest that distortion is more likely to occur in rigid, machinelike organizational climates than in open, "organic" climates (Young, 1978).

Studies in the 1980s extended earlier research by attempting to identify other variables that influence distortion of upward communication. For example, Krivonos (1982) reviewed studies suggesting that members are more likely to distort information when that information reflects unfavorably on them. When he extended this research by distinguishing between task and nontask situations, he found that members are more likely to distort unfavorable information in a task situation but actually seem to relay unfavorable information more accurately than favorable information in a nontask situation. According to Krivonos, distortion of unfavorable information occurs in task situations because leaders exercise more power over members in such situations. The possible consequences of a "bad report" in a task situation are more ominous than they might be in a nontask situation. Because the nontask situation is less risky, members might capitalize on "pratfall effect" by accurately

reporting unfavorable information. Pratfall effect occurs when a person's admission of errors or mistakes actually increases his or her credibility with others.

Upward Influence

More recently, scholars have turned their attention away from traditional topics such as feedback and upward distortion in order to explore new themes about member behaviors in communicating with leaders. One newer theme concerns members' use of influence tactics in upward communication. Put another way, we know that leaders are trying to manage members, but how does the member manage the leader? As a result of the same organizational changes that Higgins and Kram noted in their reframing of the mentor-protégé concept, the opportunities for exerting influence also have changed. Hence, the issue of upward influence has generated dozens of research investigations and theoretical models through the 1980s and 1990s. Much of this work is summarized in an extensive monograph by Waldron (1999).

Waldron reviewed studies of a dozen different contextual factors under the general categories of relationship factors, individual differences, and situational factors. We will note only a few that either relate directly to other topics in this chapter or otherwise seem to us to be particularly important.

One contextual factor of interest to several researchers is LMX. We already have described LMX mainly from the standpoint of leader behaviors, but LMX also sets a context for members' communication with leaders. Krone (1992) found that members in high-quality LMX conditions used open, logic-based tactics rather than covert, deceptive tactics in the attempts to influence leaders. Deluga and Perry (1991) got similar results, specifically, limited use of hard tactics such as coercion in high-quality LMX. One benefit for leaders in fostering undifferentiated, high-quality LMX may be that members are likely to be more honest, direct, and reasonable with attempts at influencing those leaders.

High-quality LMX may amount to a kind of leadership style, but Waldron treats leadership style as a different contextual factor. Here, again, studies have indicated a link between leadership style and members' use of upward influence tactics. Ansari and Kapoor (1987) found that followers working under participative styles of leadership tended to use reasoning tactics in upward influence attempts. Where leadership style is low in both initiation and consideration (i.e., laissez-faire), Chacko (1990) found that members use so-called hard tactics.

One additional factor worth considering is power, or, more to the point, the degree of power difference between leader and member. Generally speaking, research on upward influence assumes at least implicitly that upward influence is a different process from downward influence simply because of power inequalities. Many tactics used in upward influence might be similar to the tactics used in downward influence, but that does not mean that the less powerful party uses them in the same way that the more powerful party uses them. More powerful members appear to use a greater variety of influence tactics with leaders and to use them more frequently than less powerful members do (Ferris & Judge, 1991). Waldron and Hunt (1992) also found that upward influence tactics are associated with members' position in the organizational hierarchy. Higher level members are more likely to use direct tactics in their attempts to influence leaders.

INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE

The idea that leadership is largely symbolic seems to fit easily into the interpretive viewpoint, but the interpretive perspective is still concerned mainly with the collective, pluralistic construction of social reality and negotiated order rather than the leader's solo act of influencing members. Most of the research and writing on transformational leadership theory, which explicitly emphasizes symbolism, actually has been done within the traditional perspective, although a new book by Gail T. Fairhurst (2007) on the topic of discursive leadership is likely to set the stage for extensive interpretive inquiry in this area. Moreover, most of the contemporary work that applies interpretive methods to leader-member communication does so from a critical point of view as described in the next section. Except for a large number of rhetorical studies on major political or social movement leaders, there seem to be relatively few truly interpretive studies of leadership communication per se. The examples that we include here are concerned with the symbolic power of leader discourse and its relationship to other processes that, as Yukl put it, make events meaningful for members.

Leadership, Structure, and Meaning

Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) studied how organization members align their actions with the identity of the organization in a corporate context. These two European researchers use the term "brand" to refer to corporate identity and use "internal brand building" to refer to the alignment process. They also do something that might alarm most interpretive scholars: They state some beliefs about what they expected to find in their study.

Vallaster and de Chernatony note that the literature of corporate branding points mainly to structural aspects of organizations that express identity as drivers for internal brand building. Drawing on Giddens's structuration theory, they describe how structures of interpretive schemes, norms, and resources constrain and enable organization members. Members do not create these systems, but they do reproduce and transform them. But why do some instances of such reproduction succeed in becoming institutionalized whereas others fail? Vallaster and de Chernatony contend that structuration theory cannot answer this question, and they refer to other critics of structuration theory to support this claim. They believe that leadership is an additional and crucial ingredient in aligning individual action with brand identity.

Their study involved extensive interviews with persons from multiple levels of management in nine Austrian and German corporations as well as close examination of corporate documents. After extracting what they called "distinct categories of meaning" from the texts of interviews and documents, they organized them into "theoretical memos" from which they derived relationships among corporate structures, individual action, and leadership.

The result of their work suggested that correspondence between the formal corporate identity and the culture of the organization "was widely acknowledged as a key component of the firm's overall corporate branding strategy" (p. 767). In other words, alignment of individual members actions with the brand depends on consistency between the

desired corporate identity and the actual corporate culture. They also found that corporate design (graphics, logo, and brand-related language) supported member identification with the brand. Salary and incentive systems generally were not tailored specifically to reward identification and alignment, mainly out of concern that such reward systems are too controlling.

What about leadership? Vallaster and de Chernatony concluded from their study that “successful leaders are those who consistently and repeatedly communicate messages to employees about the brand identity and commitment to living the brand’s promise” (p. 772). They noted that the symbolism of leader discourse does not ensure alignment of individual action with the corporate identity, but it does provide a significant statement of values and priorities. In addition, by showing their own commitment to the brand values and identity, successful leaders “act as facilitators between structures and individuals, creating a framework that encourages brand supporting employee behaviours” (p. 773).

Leadership and Ethics

Another area in which interpretive approaches have been applied to leadership communication is the area of leaders’ ethical responsibilities. Seeger and Ulmer (2003) used the case of Enron Corporation to show how ethical failures in leadership can lead to catastrophe. Their study is based mainly on works of other journalists and scholars who covered or studied Enron rather than on direct examination of leader discourse, but they relied on some basic interpretive assumptions to guide their study.

Seeger and Ulmer begin with the proposition that “leadership is inherently a communication-based process involving clarifying goals and methods, motivating and persuading followers, resolving conflict, and framing meaning” (p. 63). Working from this proposition, they identified three basic, communication-based leader responsibilities in the literature of ethics and leadership. These responsibilities are “(a) communicating appropriate values to create a moral climate; (b) maintaining adequate communication to be informed of organizational operations; and (c) maintaining openness to signs of problems” (p. 63). Then, they proceeded to show through examination of reports about leader discourse and behavior how Enron’s senior executives, especially Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling, not only failed in these responsibilities, but also acted in ways that were antithetical to them.

Enron Corporation developed from humble beginnings as a gas pipeline company. It was transformed under Ken Lay’s leadership into a multinational enterprise regarded widely by many business and government leaders as America’s premier energy company. In 2001, the company collapsed in a wave of accounting and financial scandals and the realization by investors that the idea of Enron as a highly profitable leader in innovation was an illusion built on fraud and irrational business models.

On the surface, Enron had the appearance of an ethically responsible company, right down to its 1996 Statement of Human Rights emphasizing respect, integrity, communication, and excellence (also known in the company as RICE). Although all employees were required to sign a RICE compliance agreement, RICE in practice was not taken seriously because executives fostered and rewarded a very different set of values.

Lay actually emphasized an entrepreneurial vision of aggressive and radical innovation. Seeger and Ulmer show how this vision, under Skilling, was “driven to new levels of excess and eventually corrupted into a self-serving ethic of greed” (p. 71). In spite of the lip service given to RICE, Lay and Skilling actually modeled values of privilege, wealth, arrogance, and the acceptability of power abuse and rule breaking when it suits one’s ends to do so. Others ranging from Andy Fastow, the chief financial officer who concocted schemes to hide Enron’s debt, to Enron energy traders, who manipulated electricity supplies to spike prices in California, flourished in this culture of corruption.

Rather than assuming a responsibility to be informed, Enron executives also engaged in what one Securities and Exchange Commission officer described as “willful blindness” (p. 73). Enron was a decentralized organization made even more so when Skilling eliminated several levels from the formal organizational structure. The resulting four-level system was very flexible and very fast. Relatively autonomous units could act on opportunities, seeking approval only at the final stages of deal making or sometimes not at all. As you have seen at other points in the book, this kind of decentralization and flexibility is associated with the idea of member empowerment, but Seeger and Ulmer suggest that Lay and Skilling actually did not want to know details of operations because being unaware of them created plausible deniability if anything went wrong. The result was an environment with “little oversight or control and few reviews of decisions” (p. 73).

Willful blindness also extended to ignoring or avoiding signs of problems rather than being open to them. As we noted in Chapter 3, distortion or shaping of upward communication by members to fit what they believe leaders want to hear is a well-known phenomenon. According to Seeger and Ulmer, instead of creating a system that encouraged identification and attention to problems, “Enron executives created the opposite” (p. 74). Lay and Skilling were obsessed with the value of the company’s stock, and negative information that might affect that value was unwelcome. The culture of discouraging bad news was sufficiently pervasive that Sherron Watkins, the first inside whistle-blower to go to Lay with concerns about the potential disaster of accounting scandals, concealed her identity with an anonymous memo. At least some of what Watkins knew had been deciphered by financial analysts, and questions had been raised about the company in the *Wall Street Journal*, but Andy Fastow was not fired until banks literally refused to do business with Enron. Fastow himself instilled fear of reporting bad news in outside financial firms by threatening them with the loss of Enron’s lucrative investment banking business if their analysts produced unfavorable reports about the company.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The critical perspective has inspired entire books on the subject of leadership (e.g., Maxcy, 1991). As we note elsewhere in this book, power is a central theme in the critical perspective, especially where, through manipulation of symbols and discourse, “the interests of those with power are disguised as universal interests serving all members of the organization” (Frost, 1987, p. 506). Drawing on earlier work by Conrad (1983) and Conrad and Ryan (1985), Brenton (1993) described power as “a dynamic process of signification and legitimation involving interactions between leaders and followers” (p. 228), so the arena of leader-member

relations is rich territory for critical scholars. In arguing for his collectivist vision of leadership, Barker (1997) characterized leadership as a social construction that has distorted the concept into an essentially manipulative enterprise. He suggested, for example, that Burns's original concept of transformational leadership emphasized a relational context, but Bass and others reinterpreted it to fit the traditional influence paradigm "as simply an extension of their old views" (p. 350). Gemmill and Oakley (1992) went even further, characterizing this traditional paradigm as a myth that serves mainly to preserve existing systems.

Critical scholarship on leader-member communication addresses a range of issues, but most of this work covers three basic topics:

- The discourse of individual leaders in their efforts to influence members.
- The consequences of discursive practices of leadership and management groups in general.
- The discourse of resistance to leadership.

Leader as Individual Agent

Although the critical point of view actually challenges the value of viewing leadership as the activity of an individual, one way to understand the dynamic of power in leader-member relations is to examine the discourse of individual leaders as they attempt to influence members. Harrison and Young (2005) provide an example of this approach in a study of the government agency that administers Canada's system of socialized health care. The agency was subjected to a major reorganization, including formation of an entirely new and large branch over a four-month period in 2000. Harrison and Young studied the discourse of the person who was appointed to lead the new branch in an effort to understand "how [a leader's] concealed messages contribute to the success or failure of discursive events, specifically at a time of organizational transformation" (p. 42). In this case, Harrison and Young focused on two specific messages. One was an informal speech delivered by the leader during his first meeting with his team of senior managers. The other was a memorandum distributed six weeks later by e-mail to all employees in the new branch.

The leader was a veteran of many years of service in traditional bureaucratic systems, and he was comfortable with directive, command-and-control leadership. At the same time, he was sensitive to "new capitalist" (neoliberal) trends toward globalization, market economies, technology, and innovation in which value is placed on transformational leadership and worker empowerment, i.e., a vision of the leader "not as a commander, but as a coach, mentor, facilitator, and motivator" (p. 47). According to Harrison and Young, the differences between the speech to the senior managers and the e-mail to all employees reflect a tension between these two visions of leadership.

The speech had two basic aims. The first was forging unity and social cohesion in the ranks of senior management through a discourse of internal identification and characterization of outside forces and agents that pose threats to the group. The second was motivating and inspiring management to meet the deadline for making the new branch fully operational by invoking a sense of challenge and opportunity along with moral obligation on the part of management to act.

In the e-mail message to all employees, the leader espoused values of transparency, consultation, and open communication, but he also established “a subtle separation” (p. 63) between management and the employees. For example, he encouraged all employees to contact members of his staff (referring to senior management) and talk to their managers about concerns. The memorandum described plans for the branch as well as actions already taken with the implication that certain decisions were made already and not open to question. Moreover, the leader used a concealment strategy regarding “hot issues” involved in the reorganization by depersonalizing decisions about those issues. The discourse described purposes, goals, and challenges without any reference to how they were defined and who was doing the defining.

According to Harrison and Young, the consequences of the two messages also were quite different. The speech to senior management, a new capitalist exercise in the discourse of transformational leadership, fostered management team spirit and subsequent cooperation with the leader. The memorandum to employees, intended on the surface to be inclusive, was undercut by the values of traditional, bureaucratic management. The leader’s offer at the outset of a seemingly participatory system was interpreted as a sham, and people “knew they were being moved around like pawns on a chessboard” (p. 67). Harrison and Young seem to attribute the difference to the leader’s own internal conflicts about the two styles of management, but the difference also could be quite deliberate and strategic, although the result for the employees was disappointment and cynicism about the change.

Leadership Discourse in General

One portal into the subject of leadership discourse in general is the language of management. Fairclough (2004) contends that “the language of management has colonized public institutions and organizations” (p. 105). It dominates organizational discourse and shapes our understanding of organizational experience. One variation of this managerial language is managerial pseudojargon as described in a study by Watson (2004).

According to Watson, “Managerial pseudojargon is a form of language widely used in corporate settings” (p. 67). The form is not really the kind of specialized language used within a community of experts such as physicians, lawyers, or engineers, but it appears on the surface to be such a language.

Managerial pseudojargon is based on terms and phrases that one does not generally hear in ordinary language outside corporations and institutions, although some of it may be quite familiar to you. It includes words and phrases such as thinking outside the box, tasked with, repurposed, strategic vision, customer focused, rightsizing, driving forward the mission, value added, performance metrics, and seamless process.

The list provides just a few examples. Watson collected many other examples of and stories about managerial pseudojargon to understand how it functions from a critical standpoint.

Watson identified two distinct categories of pseudojargon. One involves use of metaphors to make abstract aspects of organizational life seem to be concrete. He noted that sports metaphors, e.g., hit a home run, scoring inside the red zone, and playing hurt, are especially prominent in this category. Such metaphors may very well offer a kind of shorthand expression with meanings that are intuitively obvious to many organization members, but consider

a statement such as, “You must think outside the box.” In one sense, all of us may know what this means, i.e., a concrete, visual metaphor for the abstract process of escaping constraints on creative problem solving. In another sense, the phrase is little more than a cliché, and it does nothing to illuminate just how one is supposed to get out of the box.

Reading Watson’s study reminded your authors of another example that all three of us have heard in corporate and government organizations. The phrase “steep learning curve” is used to describe a task that is difficult to master. In fact, as Atherton (2003) noted, the underlying concepts of a learning curve are just the opposite; steep curves are easy, shallow curves are hard, and the person who characterizes something difficult as a steep learning curve unwittingly reveals a misunderstanding of the concept. Not surprisingly, many participants in one survey examined by Watson admitted that they use managerial pseudojargon without knowing what it really means.

The second category of pseudojargon identified by Watson has an ideological function. It is not used merely to make abstract ideas more concrete. It is used instead to reinforce and legitimize the power of leadership and management. Here the language becomes or at least takes on the appearance of being instrumental and technical. Consider an executive officer speaking to other organization members about “selecting the right metrics to assess effective leveraging of resources in an integrated process to realize the strategic vision.” Such a statement certainly sounds authoritative, emanating from expertise or maybe even profound insight. According to Watson, “The language demands respect from non-experts” (p. 79), obliging the member to place trust in the leader. At the same time, the language actually mystifies the work of management and leadership. How is a metric selected or a resource leveraged or a process integrated? It all sounds rather complex. Moreover, the language emphasizes technical means while obscuring the ends served by these means. As Watson explains it, “Outcomes are emphasized as important, but they are utterly nonspecific in terms of human values” (p. 79).

Managerial pseudojargon also seems to have an international reach. Watson’s study was conducted in Britain, and some of his examples, such as sports metaphors, are situated specifically in British culture, so we used American equivalents here. But most of Watson’s examples, especially those with ideological functions, are examples that we also see frequently in American usage.

The Discourse of Resistance

A third area of interest in critical studies of leadership is resistance. Critical theory tends to see ordinary organization members as somewhat unaware of oppression insofar as they have internalized management interests as their own. As Frost (1987) puts it, because power is a “real but unperceived part of the interpretive framework of actors, it is virtually impossible for some of the actors to recognize that their interests are not being met” (p. 506). But even assuming this condition to be true for at least some actors, critical theory also seems to recognize that this is not the case for all actors. Members do resist the efforts of leaders to influence and control them.

Recognition of resistance in organizational settings certainly is not new, and it is not a unique insight in the critical perspective. The Hawthorne Studies of the 1920s, described

in Chapter 4, revealed the power of informal workgroup norms to prevail over management plans. Scholars in traditional and interpretive perspectives also have studied resistance in organizational communication, but the traditional aim is to overcome or at least manage resistance, and the interpretive aim is to understand how it plays out in the negotiation of organization order. The critical perspective is concerned with the contribution of resistance to workplace emancipation and democratization, concepts that we discuss in more detail in Chapter 14.

Resistance studies often are focused mostly on the communicative actions of members. One investigation by Brenton (1993) actually explores the legitimizing discourse of leaders against the delegitimizing discourse of member resistance in a case where leaders ultimately lost the battle for legitimacy.

Brenton's study focused on conflict that developed over a 10-year period within a church congregation. The church elders, as the formal leaders of the congregation, had exercised absolute authority over church affairs. They controlled all of the church's formal systems of communication and decision making. According to Brenton, this authority largely was accepted and unquestioned by most, but not all, of the members. Three members of the congregation ultimately came together as plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the elders. The plaintiffs obtained a court order for the elders to release certain church documents. When the elders refused, one plaintiff and an elder got into a physical confrontation that was featured in local media. The confrontation led to two discursive events that Brenton examined to show how the discourse of resistance overcame the discourse of legitimacy.

In the first event, the plaintiff who had gotten into the physical confrontation with the elder spoke out during a regular ritual of public confession in the morning church service to apologize and ask forgiveness for his role in the confrontation, but he also took advantage of the occasion to directly challenge the authority of the elders and point out that the elders, by refusing to comply with the court order, were placing themselves above the law. Brenton called this discourse tactic "defamiliarizing the context of utterance" (p. 236). This particular ritual has very clear expectations for how it is to be performed (familiarity). The disgruntled church member used the ritual in a way that conformed to those expectations in one sense, but also violated them in another (defamiliarizing). Breaking the cultural rules in this way might have been risky, but the effect, according to Brenton, was a "potent symbolic action" (p. 236). In any case, the elders responded with a statement of their own on the evening of the same day.

This second event, the elders' release of their own statement, was an "attempt to reproduce the legitimacy of their authority" (p. 231). Their statement offered no apology or assumption of responsibility for the confrontation. They suggested instead that the plaintiffs were trying to exceed the scope of the court order by demanding records that were confidential and not covered by that order; that their refusal to turn over the records was a rational choice in a situation with few options. But the elders also faced a dilemma in this response. On one hand, they were portraying themselves as victims. On the other hand, they needed to show strength, which they did in the message by identifying the elders as distinct from the rest of the congregation.

Although the court order to release church records ultimately was overturned on appeal, the elders were forced in the process to make previously implicit claims of absolute authority over the church much more explicit. For most of the congregation, this was a turning point. Brenton concludes, "Members of the congregation who would never have questioned

the implicit ideology . . . would not accept the explicit claims that elders made about the extent of their authority” (p. 239). The elders won the battle over the records, but lost the war over legitimacy of their authority in the church.

SUMMARY

Leadership generally is regarded as essential to group and organizational effectiveness. Leadership and supervision by superiors are presumed to be necessary in order to initiate structure and direct members toward organizational goals. The study of leader-member relations in our culture has been preoccupied with a quest to identify the essence of effective leadership and with understanding effective leadership mainly in terms of influence. The literature of leadership theory and research tends to focus on lower levels of organizations, on the dyadic (especially vertically linked) relationship, and on an individualized conception of leaders.

Leadership itself has been studied as a trait and as a style in an effort to identify ideal leadership behaviors, but situational theorists suggest that no one approach to leadership is right for all situations. Trait-based research has produced no agreement among scholars on a consistent set of traits that either distinguishes leaders from nonleaders or relates to leadership effectiveness. Stylistic theories have identified clear forms of leadership behavior. Models such as the Leadership Grid suggest that team leadership is an ideal arrangement, and transformational leadership theory suggests that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership and that transactional forms are more effective than laissez-faire forms. However, situational constraints including task structure, group characteristics, and traits of members may influence the effectiveness of a given style.

Advocates of leader-member exchange theory also have shown that leaders do not act in a consistent way toward all members, but treat different members in different ways. Studies suggesting that LMX can be relatively good or bad also imply prescriptions for leadership effectiveness that appear to be subject to situational constraints.

Leadership also may be viewed as a developmental activity in the context of mentor-protégé relationships. New conditions in organizational environments, however, suggest that a shift from mentor-protégé to developmental network concepts is now a more appropriate way to understand career development support.

One pervasive issue in the study of leadership and supervision centers on motivation and control, i.e., the means by which superiors are able to direct subordinates. Early human relations theory emphasized especially the connection between subordinates' satisfaction and subordinates' compliance with superiors, stressing especially the quality of supervisory communication in promoting satisfaction. The Purdue studies of effective supervision and Gibb's model of defensive and supportive communication both are testaments to human relations principles, providing support for the argument that effective supervision is related to positive, open, and receptive communication behaviors. It is not clear whether any of these factors is connected with task performance, and human resource development theories of motivation such as Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory challenge the idea that the quality of leader-member relationships will motivate subordinates to perform better.

Although a climate of open, supportive, and trust-based communication may be the ideal in leader-member relationships, leaders' claims that they have adopted these ideals may be

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based more on wishful thinking than on fact. Studies of leaders' communicative behaviors in attempts of compliance gaining, influence, and conflict management with members suggest that coercive, threatening, autocratic, and punitive tactics are still quite common. Factors such as low self-esteem and confidence in one's supervisory abilities, external locus of control, and mistrust of members continue to promote defensive styles of communication.

Members' behaviors toward superiors also are far removed from a picture-perfect representation of openness and supportiveness. Studies continue to show that distortion is a common occurrence in upward communication and that various situational factors may contribute to this phenomenon. Moreover, although members generally are in a less powerful position in the leader-member relationship, they certainly are not powerless. They can and do attempt to influence their leaders. Situational constraints including LMX, leadership style, and degree of power difference also shape upward influence attempts.

True interpretive studies of leader-member relations are relatively uncommon, in part because much of this work has moved in a critical direction. Interpretive studies have suggested that leaders are important figures in mediating the relationship between organizational structures and the actions of organization members and in shaping meanings of organizational experience for members. Interpretive work also has addressed the potentially serious consequences of ethical failures in leadership.

Since power involves signification and legitimation in interactions between leaders and members, the arena of leader-member relations is rich territory for critical scholars. Critical scholarship on leader-member communication addresses a range of issues, but most of this work covers the discourse of individual leaders in their efforts to influence members, the consequences of discursive practices of leadership and management groups in general, and the discourse of resistance to leadership. Critical scholarship has provided insights on the ways in which leaders' concealed messages influence organization members; the degree to which the language of management and leadership "colonizes" organizations, legitimizes leadership, and mystifies leadership; and the ways in which the delegitimizing discourse of resistance can overcome the legitimizing discourse of leadership.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Some scholars believe that the leader-member relationship is the most important level at which organizational communication occurs. What is the basis for this belief? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Identify some of the reasons for researchers' preoccupation with the study of leader-member relationships and superior-subordinate communication.
3. After studying the chapter discussion, write a summary of what we think we know about leadership and superior-subordinate communication. Are there any problems with some of the conclusions that we have drawn? Discuss your summary with others in your class.
4. What is the connection, if any, between effective leadership or supervision and performance of organization members?

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