

Introduction

EDITORS

This introduction to the International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration describes some of the motivation for developing the book and several assumptions on which is based much of the work represented in its 31 chapters. A synopsis of the contents of those chapters is also provided.

SOME KEY ASSUMPTIONS

It is sometimes suggested that the search for an adequate understanding of leadership is doomed to fail. After all, there is little evidence of agreement about the concept in spite of prodigious efforts dating back hundreds if not thousands of years. Such a view is captured, for example, in Bennis' observation that:

Of all the hazy and confounding areas in social psychology, leadership theory undoubtedly contends for top nomination. Probably more has been written and less is known about leadership than any other topic in the behavioural sciences. (1959, page 259)

We do not find this state of affairs discouraging (nor entirely accurate) and, of course, it did not prevent Bennis from proceeding either. One reason for our desire to continue in the face of such discouraging words is that a great deal of leadership research aspires to develop a general theory, a theory which applies to all or most domains of organized human activity. This aspiration inevitably produces decontextualized and, therefore, abstract categories of practice. Howard Gardner's (1995) depiction of leadership as story telling is a case in point. These efforts at general theory development, however, fly in the face of what we know from cognitive science about the domain-specific nature of human expertise and a parallel disenchantment in the corporate world with the concept of the general manager. Taking seriously the specific organizational context for leadership produces much clearer ideas about the meaning of leadership. This is an admonition to focus on

building middle-level or domain-specific theories of leadership. When this is done, we find concepts of leadership that are actually quite concrete and sufficiently precise to offer significant guidance for practice. The *International Handbook* focuses its treatment of leadership on middle-level theory and research: on educational leadership most generally and, with only several exceptions, leadership in the context of K-12 schools.

Bennis' quotation also reminds us that the concept of leadership has been a preoccupation of many people for a very long time. The implication of his remark is that if we have not 'got it right' by now there is not much chance of ever getting it right. In contrast, from our perspective leadership is not something that one should aspire to get right once and for all. As the social context of leadership changes, so too does the nature and meaning of 'effective' leadership. Many years ago, the distinguished psychologist and measurement theorist Cronbach (1975), argued convincingly that the half life of the knowledge produced by the social sciences was quite brief because the socially constructed world serving as the object of study did not stand still. This is essentially the point we are making in respect to leadership theory and research. It is properly conceived of as a never-ending inquiry. So we are not of the view that the knowledge described in the *International Handbook* is anything more than the state-of-the-art at the present time, the current stage in a journey in which the horizon changes with the changing topography.

We think it also useful to recognize that the same standards of clarity are not appropriately applied to all concepts or systems. Lofti Zadeh, the father of 'fuzzy logic', explains it this way:

As the complexity of a system [or concept] increases, our ability to make precise yet significant statements about its behaviour diminishes until a threshold is reached beyond which precision and significance (or relevance) become almost mutually exclusive characteristics. (quoted in McNeil and Freiberger, 1993, p. 43)

If past efforts to understand leadership have taught us anything it is that it is indeed a complex concept and practice. So it may be appropriate to frame the central objective of the *International Handbook* as a search for just the right degree of haziness.

THE MEANING OF LEADERSHIP

Change without leadership is a common experience. Leadership without change is a conceptual impossibility. While agreement about the precise meaning of leadership is nowhere to be found, the setting of meaningful directions and, the exercise of influence (or power) are central parts of virtually all perspectives. Differences among perspectives on leadership concern, for example, how meaningful direction setting occurs, what is the nature of that direction, types of influence or power used in moving groups and organizations toward those directions, and who gets to exercise such influence and power under what circumstances. Sources of insight about leadership are to be found in pursuing such specific questions. As with most other complex intellectual projects, god is in the details. And many of these details are explored in the thirty-one chapters of this text.

THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

Why produce another book on leadership since such texts are being published faster than anyone can possibly read them? Among recent English language treatments of educational leadership, the *Handbook of Research in Educational Administration* (Boyan, 1988), sponsored by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), most closely parallels the scope and intents of this *International Handbook*. The AERA Handbook is an impressive volume which, when it was published in 1988, captured the state-of-the-art of knowledge in administration in an exceptionally comprehensive and rigorous manner. Identifying central differences between these two volumes helps clarify both the need for the *International Handbook*, and the issues considered to be especially crucial by its' editors and authors. There are six such differences.

The context for leadership

In his summary chapter of the AERA Handbook, Willower argues that 'Change in the field [of Educational Administration] stems from at least two sources, inquiry itself and context... the social and political environment and the spirit of the times are basic contextual sources of change' (1988, p. 730). Curiously, however, little formal attention was

devoted to the changing context for leadership beyond the brief analysis that Willower was able to add in his concluding remarks. This is in sharp contrast to the *International Handbook* which devotes its first section entirely to this matter and addresses context, although less directly, in many other chapters, as well; the international nature of the chapter authorships and the research to which the authors refer results in considerable sensitivity to contextual forces shaping the contemporary practice of leadership.

Greater sensitivity to context is warranted by the contingent nature of leadership, as well as by the speed of changes having a direct bearing on schools and their leadership which has escalated significantly in the past eight years. This is the case in virtually all developed countries. Further, economic globalization and competition have created demands on schools to respond much more sensitively and quickly to changes in the wider society. Schools are much less protected now from political and economic issues in their wider communities. Increasingly they are being identified as a central part of both the problem and the solution. This reality has significant consequences for contemporary conceptions of effective school leadership.

Leadership vs. administration

While the AERA volume did not neglect leadership, it was more preoccupied with educational administration as a concept, a function, and a field of study. Accordingly, substantial attention was paid in the volume to policy processes, economics and finance, and organizational theory-themes touched on but treated less extensively in the present volume. Some of the reasons for this shift in emphasis are to be found in the quite recent school restructuring movement's preoccupation with the redistribution of power and responsibility from the middle (the district or local education authority) to both central governments and local schools, each with quite distinct and distinctly different functions. At the school level, this has fostered greater interest in the empowerment of teachers and community members including more shared leadership.

From this redistribution of power and responsibility has emerged a decidedly non-bureaucratic image of the ideal educational organization - flatter, more problem- than task-focused, and with highly permeable boundaries. This is an organization less in need of control and more in need of both support and capacity development. Organizational needs such as these seem more likely to be served by practices commonly

associated with the concept of leadership, as the term is used in North American literature, or 'management', as that term is used in much of the European literature, than by practices commonly evoked by the term administration. The *International Handbook* is decidedly preoccupied with leadership concepts, although it does not entirely ignore administrative practice.

Leadership development

Associated with this emerging image of the educational organization, alluded to above, is heightened awareness of the importance of ongoing professional growth on the part of educators in all roles, not least those providing leadership to their colleagues. Only one completely reliable prediction probably can be made about schools of the future; they will face a growing stream of new challenges and complex problems in need of attention and demanding of new knowledge, skills and dispositions on the part of their members. This prediction is what makes so attractive, at present, inquiry into the processes of 'organizational learning', and the conditions which influence such individual and collective learning. Continuous professional growth on the part of leaders is more obviously important now than it was in 1988 and this helps account for the greater attention devoted to leadership development in this volume than in the AERA volume. Such growth, with its potentially diverse and unpredictable consequences, also is being viewed as a more promising source of school improvement than the rationally planned processes featured in the AERA volume (see Firestone and Corbett, 1988, Chapter 16).

Cognitive perspectives

Virtually no attention was devoted in the AERA Handbook to the mind of the leader or administrator. Boyan (1988, Chapter 4) included a brief review of personality traits, drawing attention to the results of a small handful of studies conducted with educational administrators. Immegart's (1988, Chapter 13) treatment of the same issue was confined almost exclusively to research outside of education. For the most part, the leader's mind was still treated as a 'black box' with most attention devoted to their behaviours and practices. The substantial influence of cognitive science, by 1988, on the study of teacher thinking had yet to

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