

# The Revolution in Leadership

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**B**ENSIMON, NEUMANN, AND BIRNBAUM'S ORIGINAL volume (1989) had the ambitious task of noting the importance of leadership, describing how leadership is defined, and reviewing six main theories of leadership across the interdisciplinary research base. It examined leadership within the context of organizational theory and reviewed how leadership had been explored in higher education research through the lens of the six theories: trait, behavioral, power and influence, contingency, cognitive, and cultural/symbolic.

## The Continued Need for Leadership in a Changed Context

In 1989, Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum noted that some policymakers and several blue ribbon commissions were calling for better, stronger, and bolder leadership. The need for leadership in higher education has only become more urgent as the fat days with regular increases from state governments are long over, and the days of accountability and assessment, globalization, and competition are here to stay, providing new pressures for colleges and universities. Policymakers regularly implore campuses to integrate technology, respond to community needs, and provide a higher quality education for less money. In these times of change and challenge, pleas for leadership have become frequent and repeated. The type of leadership required in this new context, however, may call for different skills and the reeducation of campus stakeholders if they want to be successful leaders. As

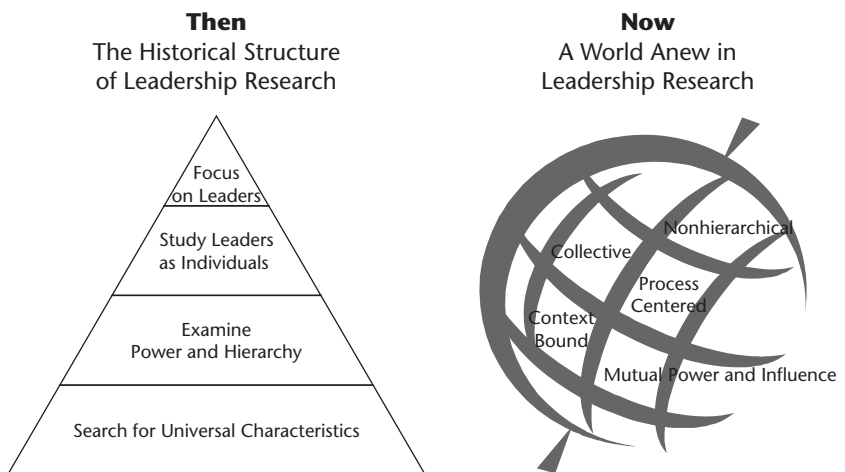
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Lakomski (2005) suggests, it is the end of leadership as we have known it in the past. For some the change is so dramatic they may no longer see this phenomenon as leadership.

In the past twenty years, a revolution has occurred in the way leadership is conceptualized across most fields and disciplines. Many ask what we mean by revolution. Leadership has been studied and written about for more than 2000 years (perhaps longer), and much of its history is hierarchical in nature and emphasizes social control. In the last twenty years, however, nonhierarchical and increasingly democratic forms of leadership have been conceptualized. We believe that both leadership research and the practice of leadership have changed and that these two processes are often linked (that is, leadership research changes as leadership practices change; and leadership practice changes as research conceptualizations change). This revolution in leadership research is visually represented in Figure 1. Moving away from static, highly structured, and value-neutral leadership frameworks, contemporary scholars have embraced dynamic, globalized, and process-oriented perspectives of leadership that emphasize cross-cultural understanding, collaboration, and social responsibility for others.

The heroic leaders were often the focus, but now teams and collectives are emphasized and studied. In addition, scientific views of leadership that have

**FIGURE 1**  
**The Revolution in Leadership Research**



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held sway for most of the last century have been challenged and tempered by other views of leadership as an art, craft, or spiritual practice. Further, the positivist approach to studying leadership has given way to studies from social constructivist, postmodern, and critical paradigms. Revolution also refers to the way that some long-forgotten topics have become important again within leadership. In other words concepts such as spirituality are “revolving” back into fashion. Throughout this manuscript, we refer to the ways that leadership has changed in ways that we consider revolutionary from its past as well as the way that older concepts are revolving back into importance.

Many hypothesized reasons for the change in leadership scholarship are described more thoroughly in the volume but are briefly mentioned in this introduction. The two major reasons suggested are that the context in which leadership takes place has changed and that new perspectives and ideas about leadership have been introduced from scholars and practitioners. These two forces are interdependent and are hard to separate. The radical social and political changes of the 1960s and 1970s opened the door for people to think about leadership in new ways from the past. Feminism and Marxism provided the foundation for different views of leadership. Many of the democratic, collaborative, and nonhierarchical trends in leadership are associated with the challenges to authority that took place during this time. Many of the trends reviewed in this book—collaboration, empowerment, multiculturalism, and leadership as a collective process—are related to these historical changes. In the 1980s and 1990s, the world economy shifted, creating a more interdependent system that has been called a global economy. The emphasis on interdependence reinforces the importance of collaboration and working in teams for enacting leadership. As people throughout the world connect and work together in greater frequency, cultural and social differences have become recognized and have been studied in relation to leadership. Various forms of technology have sped up decision time, connected people across the globe, and made more local forms of leadership possible (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, 2000), leading to the democratization of leadership as well as to a more complex and diffuse process. Interdependence is a central concept of the leadership revolution and will be found throughout the book as we review paradigms, theories, and concepts.

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The revolution in leadership, however, has not gone unchallenged. Two main countermovements—academic capitalism and managerialism—adopt hierarchical leadership with centralized forms of power. These movements will be described throughout the text but are mentioned here to demonstrate that it is not entirely a linear progression from hierarchical, individualistic forms of leadership to more collaborative, collective, and nonhierarchical forms. New views are emerging from traditional, functionalist circles of leadership, competing as countertendencies that draw individuals back to top-down, command, and control leadership.

## Organization of the Book

Given the major changes that have occurred, it is important to examine the state of leadership research in higher education. This volume updates the 1989 Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum volume. Rather than rewrite a book that nicely summarized research on leadership until the late 1980s, this book focuses on reviewing advances in paradigms, theories, concepts, and research concerns and agendas. The next chapter, “A World Apart,” reviews the new paradigms—social constructivism, postmodernism, and critical theory—that have been applied to the study of leadership and revolutionized how we think about leadership. Love and Estanek (2004) define a paradigm “as a system of assumptions about the nature of reality that is integrated, pervasive, holistic, and internally consistent. . . . It is from within a paradigm that human beings understand what is real, what is false, what is possible, and to what they should pay attention” (p. 1). This book examines how the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values of the social constructivist, postmodern, and critical theory paradigms have shaped the way leadership research is conducted. We choose these three paradigms, as they are the most cited new paradigms to be applied to leadership. The following chapter, “A World Anew,” updates several schools of thought presented in the original volume of this book—contingency theory, cultural theories, and cognitive theories—and describes new theories that have emerged such as complexity theory, organizational learning, processual theories, and team approach. Theories are complex explanations of social

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phenomena. When a variety of related theories emerge and are followed up by many different researchers, they form a school of thought. Because schools of thought represent what scholars believe are promising areas of study, they are emphasized and reviewed in the text. Theories and paradigms differ in important ways. Theories offer complex explanations for why and how a phenomenon (for example, leadership) occurs and are supported by empirical evidence, whereas paradigms are underlying assumptions that generally have no empirical grounding. Paradigms focus on macrolevel assumptions examining issues such as ontology (the nature of reality) or epistemology (the nature of knowledge).

The next chapter, “Revolutionary Concepts of Leadership,” reviews some of the main concepts that have emerged in the leadership research and literature such as ethics, empowerment, collaboration, and networks. Concepts are important ideas that are combined to develop theories but on their own represent important areas for people to consider as they examine the phenomenon. “Higher Education Leadership in the New World” presents the research specifically in higher education that has been conducted since 1989, focusing on developments that advance our thinking such as cognitive and cultural theories of leadership. “Revolutionary Leadership Concepts in Higher Education” reviews the degree to which the new concepts that have emerged in that general leadership literature have been pursued by higher education researchers. In the last two chapters, the implications of this vast body of new research are reviewed and directions for future research provided. Throughout the text, vignettes and summaries are presented to help bring the main concepts presented in this book to life and made more concrete. An appendix includes case studies designed to provide readers with opportunities to apply the theories and concepts reviewed in the book. We want to introduce one major assumption here that will be reinforced throughout the text: we do not believe there is any best way to lead. Instead, we believe that by understanding a variety of paradigms, theories, and concepts leaders can learn tools to approach various leadership situations that fit in particular contexts. In addition, leaders have varied strengths and weaknesses, and they can use these tools to complement and build on their personal styles.

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## Key Terms and Theories

Because this volume builds on the earlier ASHE-ERIC volume, *Making Sense of Administrative Leadership: The “L” Word in Higher Education* (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989), it is important to briefly note and define the theories that were central to the earlier volume—trait, behavioral, power and influence, contingency, cognitive, and cultural/symbolic. Although we direct readers to the original volume for lengthy discussions of these various theories, the following definitions will help when these concepts are brought up in this volume. In addition, Table 1 summarizes the major assumptions, key findings, and criticisms of each of these six theories, facilitating comparisons across conceptual approaches. Moreover, a distinction is made in these various schools of thought related to *leader* and *leadership*. In trait and behavioral theories, leadership is synonymous with leader. Later theories of culture and power and influence examine leadership as a process, and leader is no longer synonymous with leadership.

Trait theories identify specific personal characteristics that contribute to a person’s ability to assume and successfully function in positions of leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989). An example of a study from a trait perspective is a survey of leaders that examines the top five traits they feel make them effective. The traits reviewed might include integrity, competence, intelligence, or experience. Researchers using this theory tend to identify identical traits for all leaders, transcending all contexts, and thus focus their efforts on developing a definitive list of leadership traits. Further, trait theorists assume the existence of objective trait definitions and thus assert that people perceive traits similarly.

Behavioral theories study leadership by examining the roles, categories of behavior, and tasks associated with leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989). Behavioral studies identify tasks such as planning, fundraising, or mentoring as key to understanding leadership. These studies also examine leader orientation to tasks versus relationships, attempting to identify whether one or the other orientation is more effective. Behaviors tend to be generic ones, applicable to all types of leaders and organizations. Similar to trait theories, behavioral theories rely solely on leaders for understanding leadership.

**TABLE 1**

**Six Leadership Theories Reviewed in Making Sense of Administrative Leadership**

	<i>Trait</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>	<i>Power and Influence</i>	<i>Contingency</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Cultural/Symbolic</i>
Definition and Emergence	Seeks to identify a definitive list of individual traits associated with successful leaders Prominent in early twentieth century but continues to be researched today	Examines the behaviors of effective leaders Gained prominence in midtwentieth century	Sees leadership as a social exchange process characterized by the acquisition and demonstration of power Prominent throughout the twentieth century	Leaders and leadership behaviors influenced by situational variables (task, followers' characteristics) Focus of research during the last half of the twentieth century	Examines the influence of cognitive processes (attribution, error judgment) on leadership Emerged in late twentieth century	Explores the symbolic and cultural functions of leadership (how a leader's use of rituals can inspire change) Gained prominence at the end of the twentieth century
Major Assumptions and Contributions	Leader-centered theory Leaders possess specific traits that distinguish them from followers Universal (objective) definitions of traits exist	Leader-centered theory Leaders use a combination of task and relational behaviors to guide interactions with subordinates	Leaders use power to influence followers More recent research considers the reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers	Different leaders and leadership behaviors called for in different situations Situational factors influence who emerges as a leader	Cognitive processes influence perceptions of leaders and leadership behaviors Introduced the possibility of leadership as a socially	Leadership seen as a social construct that differs across cultural contexts Individuals foster shared meaning and cultural norms through interactions

(Continued)

**TABLE 1 (Continued)**  
**Six Leadership Theories Reviewed in Making Sense of Administrative Leadership**

Trait	Behavioral	Power and Influence	Contingency	Cognitive	Cultural/Symbolic
Theory intuitively appealing, given the perceived difference between leaders and followers	and achieve leadership goals Views leadership as something that can be learned Provides specific skills for leaders to be trained in	Introduces a process-oriented view of leadership that emphasizes the needs and values of followers as well as leaders	Provides predictive models of leadership effectiveness by assessing the match between the leader's style and the situation Expands views of leadership to include context, not just individuals, as an important source of influence on leadership	constructed rather than objective phenomenon Examined the cognitive processes of followers as well as leaders	Symbolic processes (rituals, stories) make leadership meaningful Values and beliefs important to understand leadership Helped highlight perceptions, context, interaction, and symbolism

Key Insights	Abundance of empirical research documents the importance of key leadership traits (self-confidence, integrity, social ability, determination, and intelligence)	Leadership process comprises task and relational behaviors Leadership effectiveness is product of the leader's ability to balance task and relational behaviors	Leaders draw on multiple sources of power (reward, expert, coercive) to influence followers Leaders' authority and influence constrained by followers' expectations	Leadership effectiveness a product of matching the leader's style with the needs of the situation	Cognitive biases influence leadership attributions and judgments of both leaders and followers	Effective leaders use cultural symbols, language, rituals, and so on to influence followers
		Research attempts to determine which behaviors are most appropriate for particular situations	Transformational leaders draw on charisma, visionary leadership, and authentic concern for others to influence and motivate followers			

(Continued)

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**Six Leadership Theories Reviewed in Making Sense of Administrative Leadership**

	<i>Trait</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>	<i>Power and Influence</i>	<i>Contingency</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Cultural/Symbolic</i>
Criticisms and Limitations	Has not resulted in a definitive list of leadership traits Traits difficult to measure Does not consider leadership context	Inadequate relationship established between leaders' behaviors and outcomes Has not generated a universal style of leadership Does not adequately address the influence of leadership contexts	Lacks conceptual clarity and as a result is difficult to measure empirically Perpetuates directive and hierarchical views of leadership	Ambiguous concepts make empirical research challenging Difficult to translate into practice, given the numerous variables that must be assessed before determining a leader's effectiveness	Limited practical use, given the difficulty associated with assessing and changing the cognitive processes of others	Lacks empirical research connecting cultural leadership practices to organizational outcomes

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Power and influence theories consider leadership in terms of the source and amount of power available to leaders and the manner in which the leaders exercise that power. Reciprocal approaches to studying leadership focus on the process as relational and emphasize followership as critical to success (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 1998). A researcher using power and influence theories might study the ability of leaders to use persuasion to achieve desired organizational outcomes.

Contingency theories emphasize the way situational factors such as the groups (for example, followers) involved or the external environment affect leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989). The followers, however, are seen mostly as having limited human agency and as reactive to the leader. Contingency theorists in higher education explore different organizational subsystems, including the bureaucratic, collegial, political, and symbolic subsystems. Leadership becomes more closely related to perspective or vantage point through contingency theory.

Cognitive theories focus on the influence of cognitive processes (such as perception) to develop an understanding of leadership. These theories frequently inform the development of leadership research that is centered on understanding how followers make leadership attributions. For example, attribution studies have examined the degree to which followers attribute change to leaders, compared with the actual work leaders do to enact change.

Finally, cultural theories explore the importance of context for understanding leadership, emphasize interaction, and explore the symbolic functions of leadership. A study of leadership through a cultural lens might examine a leader's use of rituals and traditions to inspire people toward change.

## **Challenges and Missed Opportunities in the Study of Leadership in Higher Education**

Many of the struggles and tensions described in the earlier volume still hold true and will be reinforced in this volume. The difficulty in precisely defining leadership continues to remain a challenge. Various theories provide additional lenses, but there continues to be no agreed-upon definition of leadership. The application of new theories and concepts from the general leadership literature

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to the higher education literature also remains incomplete. For example, the importance of the leadership process in producing learning so that people can be more successful in creating change, providing organizational direction, and supporting organizational effectiveness is not emphasized in the higher education literature and is critical in the leadership literature or business. The lack of these important ideas represents missed opportunities to more fully understand leadership in the higher education setting. For example, the importance of examining leadership in the organizational context remains important today. Many studies have reinforced that leadership is affected by the organizational context and that leadership is perceived in an institutional context (Birnbaum, 1992). As Birnbaum has quipped in various articles, good leadership depends on the perspectives of the individuals in an organization whose opinions are shaped by the institutional history and culture. We would add that not only the organizational context affects perceptions but also the societal influences and previous experiences of individuals. Context needs to be thought of much more broadly than the organization, but many studies examine leadership without grounding it in any context. In addition, practitioners' embracing a more complex representation of leadership continues to be of importance. The continued popularity of and interest in books that promise leaders that they will have a recipe for success by following ten simple steps demonstrate that complex and holistic views are still not favored.

## **New Directions in Higher Education Leadership**

Even though higher education researchers have missed some important opportunities for exploring leadership, the literature has changed markedly in the last fifteen years. For example, the earlier volume focused primarily on research about college presidents, but the leadership literature has broadened and now examines deans, department chairs, and professional staff across the university, students, and nonpositional change agents. Leadership is studied as a phenomenon that can be found throughout the institution. Another major change is that the controversy about whether leaders must exert direct authority and control to be considered leaders has been resolved. No longer is the literature concerned with the perception that presidents and other leaders are weak if they do not mandate

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change or exert power. Instead, models of servant leaders and collective leadership have replaced the command-and-control leader reflective of much of the writings on leadership in the 1970s and 1980s. This change will be demonstrated through a variety of leadership theories, including team leadership, organizational learning, and cultural and symbolic use of leadership. In addition, the main concepts described in leadership also reflect this change from command and control to power sharing such as the emphasis on collaboration and leadership as a social movement. During this period of change, Birnbaum (1992) noted that people questioned whether leadership mattered. It was a timely question when authoritative forms of leadership were falling out of favor. People found themselves confused about whether leadership existed or was important outside the authoritative, directive forms of leadership described throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This skepticism and concern about leadership, however, have passed away as new forms of leadership have emerged and become institutionalized, embracing a more collective and empowering view of leadership. Birnbaum (1992) describes some of these fallacies of leadership that were generally embraced in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, for many years it was assumed that the vision of the institution must be developed by the president. That view has been replaced by a belief that a shared vision developed by constituents is a more effective form of leadership. Many other myths have been challenged in the leadership literature over the past fifteen years such as the importance of charisma to successful leadership, the myth that leaders should be distant from followers, or that some definable traits or styles that make leaders effective can be used in all situations (see Woodard, Love, and Komives, 2000, for more details of myths). It is hard to know whether they were myths or whether views of effective leadership have merely changed. Regardless, the picture of leadership today is vastly different from fifteen years ago. In fact one might say that we have had a revolution in our views of leadership. It is this revolution that is the underlying theme of this volume.

## Contributions of This Book

This volume complements and is different from other recent leadership texts. Most textbooks such as Northouse's *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (2004) review the classic theories and empirical research on leadership and provide

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readers with little if any information about the new trends and approaches for studying leadership. Northouse's work examines trait, style, exchanges between leaders and members, and situational and transformational leadership theories, for example. Other texts tend to focus on one of the new theories of leadership such as complexity (Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 1994), learning (Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*, 1990a), or relational (Lipman-Blumen's *The Connective Edge*, 1996). This volume is one of the first to summarize and review the newer theories and concepts of leadership. It can be used in leadership courses to complement classic texts or to introduce the revolution and leadership literature.

This volume is also novel in that it presents a thorough discussion of the influential role paradigms play in framing contemporary studies of leadership. Few books mention research paradigms and how they affect the study of leadership. Some journal articles reference paradigms but usually focus on one particular paradigm in which the author's study was conducted. Comparing and contrasting paradigms and examining each one's strengths and weaknesses relative to the study of leadership are important contributions of this book.

Because it is one of the few to synthesize the literature on higher education research and compare it with the general leadership literature, this work provides an opportunity to establish a research agenda for the field of higher education for the coming years. It will be particularly helpful for graduate students and new scholars attempting to familiarize themselves with this vast literature base. And the book provides an introduction to a set of concepts, theories, and paradigms that can inform leadership practitioners' thinking about leadership in complex and multifaceted ways, bringing together various works that they have read.