

# ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP THEORY: A REASSESSMENT AFTER 10 YEARS

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A variety of assessments through 2001 discussed the striking neglect of theory related to leadership in public sector organizational settings. For example, Jerry Gabris, Bob Golembiewski, and Doug Ihrke called on the field to 'improve on the emaciated condition of public leadership theory'. My assessment of administrative leadership soon thereafter, while trying to emphasize a recent uptick in volume, was nonetheless that 'the needs are great and the research opportunities are manifold'. My relatively negative assessment has been widely cited and needs to be re-evaluated a decade later since much progress has been made and the research needs have evolved substantially.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1995, Larry Terry discussed the striking neglect of theory related to leadership in public sector organizational settings and half dozen years later, Jerry Gabris, Bob Golembiewski and Doug Ihrke called on the field to 'improve on the emaciated condition of public leadership theory' (Gabris *et al.* 2001, p. 90). At the same time, Barbara Kellerman and Scott Webster noted that an 'enormous amount of work remains to be done before the literature reaches a critical mass' (Kellerman and Webster 2001, p. 485); however, their assessment focused almost exclusively on progress in political and community leadership and characterized the organizational area as one of 'lively debate' but still suffering from an 'amorphous nature' and having significant challenges in reconciling 'scholarship that is descriptive and that which is prescriptive'.

My assessment of administrative leadership soon thereafter, while trying to emphasize a recent uptick in volume, was nonetheless that 'the needs are great and the research opportunities are manifold' (Van Wart 2003, p. 225). My relatively negative assessment has been widely cited (as of 21 November 2012, the article had 220 Google Scholar citations and 47 Web of Science Citations) and needs to be re-evaluated a decade later to see what progress has been made. No comprehensive review of field of leadership has occurred in the intervening decade that has looked at the issues related to the leadership in administrative settings of government. Administrative leadership is broadly defined here as the people (at all levels) and the accompanying processes and networks that lead, manage, and guide government and non-profit agencies; it focuses on civil service and appointed leaders rather than political leaders, and focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on implementation and the technical aspects of policy development over policy advocacy. The literature in the field has clearly evolved, but why has it evolved, how has it evolved, and what are the new challenges it faces? Although a somewhat daunting task, it is important to take stock given the apparent fragmentation of the field.

This article assesses the state-of-the-field by addressing the following questions:

- *What are the major contextual factors affecting both public sector leadership as a practice and its study?* This is the 'why' question, and attempts to give some background about why administrative leadership is more important, and how it has become, albeit in

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lay terms, a point of discussion and heated debate in the popular press and political arenas around the world to a degree that would have been unimaginable in the past. Indeed, public administration as a field was a relatively obscure discipline to the general public, and leadership in it was of little popular concern, until the 1980s in the Westminster countries (e.g. Hood 1991; Riddell 1983; Wallis 2010), and the early 1990s in the USA (e.g. Gore 1993). Of course such issues now roil around the world (e.g. Cheung 2005; van der Meer 2011). Although the public's interest may often be critical and sometimes seems unrealistic, it is nonetheless going to be a part of major public debates about the role of government in the twenty-first century.

- *How does the scholarly public sector leadership literature in general, and the administrative leadership literature specifically, compare descriptively to what it was in 2003 in terms of volume, venue, and topics?* It is common for the 2003 assessment of administrative leadership to be cited as an argument that little has been done in specifying the nuances in leadership, as a function of individuals, as a process, as an organizational endeavour, as a values-based undertaking, and so on. Looking at a wide swath of the literature, can an argument still be made that the field has made little progress based on sheer quantitative effort? Most of the more important studies focusing on public sector leadership are cited throughout the various sections of the article, including the following section on context, but because of the size of the database it would be unwieldy to cite them all.
- *How have the perennial debates in the field evolved?* This question looks at the literature more qualitatively, from the perspective of updating the 2003 debate discussions. Because the nature of leadership for administrators is more complicated by demands for rigorous democratic accountability to elected politicians, to citizens, to the tax-paying public, and others than is the private sector, the issues have a significantly different 'flavour' than is typical in the mainstream literature (Anderson 2010). This is not to say that leadership in the private sector does not have its own set of equivalent challenges with the worldwide rise in competition, but it is to say that the differences between the sectors are as important as the similarities (Knott 1993; Lawler 2008). Because the Neo-Weberian paradigm has been regularly challenged by competing visions of the New Public Management and the New Public Governance models for over 20 and 10 years, respectively (Pollitt and Bouchaert 2011), a new perennial debate has been added reflecting the very different notions of leadership implied by the different perspectives. To overstate for clarity, this debate centres around the degree and situations in which administrative leaders should strive to be relatively neutral but professional 'conservators' of the public good (Terry 1995), change agents introducing more rigorous accountability often based on competition (e.g. Barzelay 1992; Lane 2000; Osborne and Gaebler 1992) or innovation (e.g. Borins 2000), or facilitators of the democratic process being especially sensitive to the needs to foster civic networks, public dialogue, and voice for the disenfranchised (e.g. Denhardt and Denhardt 2003; Kakabadse *et al.* 2003).
- *What appear to be the significant advances in the field and what are the contemporary challenges that the field faces?* This question starts with a brief assessment based on the descriptive data presented, as well as building on the evolution of the major debates, but then moves to a more holistic qualitative assessment of the field. In particular, one of the main advances in the mainstream literature has been the development of critical management theory along the lines recommended by Alvesson and Willmott (1992) into a critical leadership dialogue (Collinson and Grint 2005) because of a perception

of many scholars that the leadership literature was too captured by instrumental interests reflecting status quo biases. This section looks to see if and how the growth of this literature in the mainstream (Kanter 2003) has spilled over into discussions of administrative leadership.

- *What areas seem ripe for research?* Because this reflects the future, and the field is so vast, it is a relatively subjective exercise. To the degree possible, however, an attempt is made to look broadly at the field and what areas might be productively pursued in the next decade.

## EFFECTS OF CHANGING CONTEXT ON LEADERSHIP

As the world changes, so do the expectations of leadership (Kee *et al.* 2007; Morse *et al.* 2007). A brief review of four areas – historical, cultural, economic, and political – will provide a contextual framework for some of the evolutionary pressures for administrative leaders and the leadership process itself in public settings.

### Historical context

An important factor in the success of the public sector is popular sentiment about the importance of good public leadership. Although most institutions in the contemporary world have lost some degree of credibility (Suleiman 2003), the elected or traditional ruling arms of government have been heavily criticized for corruption (e.g. the Arab world, Africa, and China), legislative gridlock (e.g. the USA), and poor long-term policy making (e.g. southern Europe). Good political leaders must work against systems that are often seen by the public as fundamentally flawed and which have highly negative stereotypes. Public administration in the advanced democracies has fared much better in terms of public perception, but has been battered as well by increased perceptions of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, excessive pay and benefits, and attention to scandals.

This comes after more than 20 years of much publicized reform, from New Public Management cuts, to ‘reinventing’ and reengineering many processes, to performance accountability improvements, to customer-focused initiatives. The loss of confidence in the public sector has led to a tremendous interest in exploring a variety of topics directly and indirectly related to leadership such as trust and credibility (Dirks and Ferrin 2002; Dull 2009; Newell *et al.* 2012; Van Ryzin 2011), ethical leadership (Adams and Balfour 1998; Cuilla 2004), public service motivation (Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010; Perry *et al.* 2010), organizational culture (Moynihan), and leadership that focuses on compassion in public service, also known as affective leadership (Newman *et al.* 2009).

The drop in confidence in government has led to a diminished sense of government’s contribution in the past, and, importantly, its role in society in the future. Of course few question the core functions of government such as defence and public safety, foreign affairs, safety standards, the basics of community planning, and the rudiments of social services. However, the confused sense of contribution has led to two major issues with which leaders must contend. First, what should the size and scope of government be? This is embedded in the discussions occurring around the globe about where to cut benefits and government in the short term, and about how to reduce expectations on government going forward. Second, what is the right paradigm for government in general and administration in particular (Pollitt and Bouchaert 2011)? Should administration be primarily in the traditional mode of a neutral, technocratic bureaucracy responding to its elected masters in rule-based systems (e.g. Chapman and O’Toole 2010; Ridley 1983; Rohr 1989)? Should administration try to replicate market-based models (Gingrich 2007;

Thatcher 1997) as closely as possible by enhancing competition? Or should it primarily be focused on enhancing collaboration among governments, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and the citizenry at-large (e.g. Crosby and Bryson 2005)? These conceptualizations are generally at the forefront of normative discussions (e.g. Fairholm 2004; Frederickson and Matkin 2007), and frequently affect empirically based research propositions (e.g. Hockey *et al.* 2005).

### **Cultural context**

Of the many cultural changes that have occurred since the end of the Cold War, none has been more dramatic than the increased challenges to cultural cohesion. The dominance of the market-based world economy has occasionally led to strategic alliances, but it has as often unleashed political-economic competition and cultural clashes as well. Examples include the splitting apart of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the spectacular change in the wealth distribution in China now fuelling tens of thousands of protests annually, the potential demise of the Euro after the Great Recession as northern and southern countries try to reach new economic consensus, the radicalization of an increasingly uncompromising right in Europe and the Anglophone world, and the rise of militant religious orthodoxy in the Muslim world.

The leadership literature addresses these types of issues in at least two different areas. In political terms, there is a robust literature on building community (e.g. Martin *et al.* 2009; Waugh and Streib 2006). In administrative terms, there is also a tremendous emphasis on the need for collaboration, the identification of examples, and the articulation of factors of success (Currie *et al.* 2008; Hubbard 2001) as well as a drive for additional tools in 'cultural competency' (Norman-Major and Gooden 2012). Some examples of the need for cohesive leadership styles also focus on the developing world (e.g. Haruna 2009).

### **Economic**

In the United States, the restructuring of the world economy largely around energy issues caused the private sector to restructure in the 1980s and, coincidentally, led to the popularity of transformational leadership (Bass 1985). The fiscal pressures on government became apparent in the USA in the 1990s and led to various 'reinventing' initiatives, blending drives to both streamline and start to 'marketize' government by increased contracting out and similar measures (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). The fiscal impact was felt even earlier in the Anglophone world as the UK, New Zealand, and Australia all launched aggressive public sector reform programmes aimed at reducing government size and privatizing many government operations in the 1980s (Chapman 1991; Mascarenhas 1993), often under the banner called the New Public Management (Martin 1999; Scott 1994). Continental Europe and Japan carried out less fundamental reform focusing on modernization only, but for rather different reasons (Pollitt and Bouchaert 2011). Russia and China have undergone radical reform since the end of the Cold War and the death of Mao, moving their formerly government-centric economic systems towards market-based systems (Pittinsky and Zhu 2005; Tang and Lo 2009) with increasingly powerful economic elites.

Society has a perception about the rapid speed of change stemming from the historic events of our time which may or may not be accurate when compared against many other times of transition. This has contributed to the sense of a need for transformational leadership to keep up with the change. However, in much of the developed world the public has wanted more input into the nature of change in the last 25 years, and this has increasingly been felt in the types of transformation being desired, moving from

more heroic versions in the 1980s and 1990s (Kotter 1990), to more connective and broad-based notions of change in the 2000s (Crosby and Bryson 2010; Morse 2010). An area that has experienced dramatic change is information technology which seems to be changing cultural patterns (Green and Roberts 2012). The need to keep up with the speed of change is captured in the literature on social skills to inform and empower people to deal with change (Trottier *et al.* 2008), encourage people to continuously learn, and encourage learning organizations that foster continuous improvement (Bass 2000). Traits like flexibility, resilience, and creativity are much encouraged (Hennessey 1998).

As is commonly pointed out in both the management and leadership literature, it is the employees who deliver service and provide productivity, so the effects of change on them are as important as they are for leaders. Employees also need broader skill bases as they operate in flatter organizations (Lane and Wallis 2009), and supervisors and lower-level managers must be much more adaptable and well trained (Berman *et al.* 2010). In terms of recruiting, this has meant that employers have often been challenged to find candidates perceived to be well suited, even in economic downturns. In terms of managing employees, it requires that ideal leaders take the tasks of teaching, coaching, and mentoring seriously. Leaders who are excellent at the development role despite an increase in their own responsibilities (Van Wart and Berman 1999) have been dubbed superleaders by Manz and Sims (2000). The need to provide detailed and pragmatic advice for development has also refuelled the need for competency analysis of both leaders (Morse and Buss 2008) and followers (Kellerman 2008).

At the same time that organizational demands for change have expanded, management's need for daily operations leaders who are highly competent at getting results has also increased (Dull 2009). One of the tools that has re-energized transactional leadership is performance management, that is, the use of performance measurement at various levels to account for productivity (Moynihan and Ingraham 2004). Nowhere has this push for measurement been more evident than in education (Currie *et al.* 2005; Gleason and Knights 2008) and healthcare (Ferlie and Shortell 2001; Martin *et al.* 2009).

### *Political*

One change that has been greatly apparent is that the increasing globalization of commerce and corporations has also led to globalization of political issues. Reforms migrate around the world more rapidly (Verhoest *et al.* 2012), sometimes even despite lack of suitability (Haruna 2009; Hood 1995). So do governmental problems ranging from economic contagion, environmental spillover effects, immigration pressures, and ideological radicalization dilemmas such as terrorism. Pressures for global responses to problems have increased the importance of international solutions, in particular from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Although difficult to build and sustain, the importance of regional blocs such as the EU, the Union of South American Nations and the ASEAN, and international networks such as NATO and various powerful NGOs has increased enormously (Brillantes 1994). This has led to the increased need for public administrators to have better competencies in order to compete in general (Bertucci 2004; Raffel *et al.* 2009) in addition to more specific global leadership competencies (Saner 2001).

A second international political trend is the condemnation of public sector employees (see, e.g. Horton 2006) both directly through the restructuring of pay and pension plans, as well as on ways to minimize union political influence. Putting aside the empirical

arguments undergirding these attacks and the normative arguments made on all sides, at a functional level leaders of organizations in the public sector need to find ways to prevent employees from becoming disillusioned and discouraged. This makes the importance of transactional skills such as providing support, consideration, and empowerment (e.g. delegation to competent workers) on the one hand, and transformational skills such as inspiration (e.g. for the group and common good) and vision (e.g. sense-making and shared purpose) on the other, all the more important. At a conceptual and long-term strategic level, it means that public sector leaders must reposition their agencies to address legitimate public critique on the one hand (Boin *et al.* 2010; Svava 2008), and persuade people of the very real virtues of the public sector on the other (Grube 2012; Hubbard 2001). This enormous demand means that public leaders need to be more aware of the management and leadership literature, and that academics must work hard to convey their messages in ways that are comprehensible to users (Zaccaro and Horn 2003).

## PROFILE OF THE LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

In the 2003 study, the public leadership literature was reviewed via a computer-assisted search (both articles and books) and a detailed analysis of *Public Administration Review* by decade from its inception in 1940. This current literature review was conducted by a detailed analysis of 12 journals spanning 20 years. The content analysis reviewed three aspects of the literature: the comparative volume of the public sector literature over the two decades under investigation; the amount of focus on administrative leadership versus public sector leadership more generally; and the range of methods used. Because of the focus on administrative leadership, ten public administration journals were selected that had some degree of management focus; four were selected to ensure a strong international representation. The journals were: *Administration & Society*, *American Review of Public Administration*, *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, *International Public Management Journal*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Administration*, *Public Administration Review*, *Public Management Review*, and *Public Productivity and Management Review*.

Articles in the public administration journals were selected using a simple but effective device: the word 'leadership' was used in their title in a search reviewing the table of contents of each volume. This resulted in a pool of 99 articles for further analysis from the public administration sources. The two leadership journals are listed in Social Science Citation Index: *Leadership* and *Leadership Quarterly*. A search to collect a pool of articles reviewed the years 1992 through 2011 by abstract, and reviewed the full articles where the abstract was insufficient for the initial determination. Since most of the articles in these journals include the term leadership but were frequently not about public sector leadership, selection was based on content analysis of all abstracts/articles for a public leadership focus. The review of a population of 878 journal articles reduced the pool to 71 articles for inclusion in the study; articles that merely used public sector datasets but failed to make any sectoral distinctions were excluded. The exceptions to the timeframes in the two searches were *Public Management Review* and *Leadership* which were not initiated until 1999 and 2005, respectively.

### Relative volume

In order to gauge the growth of the subfield in general, the two decades covered by the study were compared. The first decade, 1992–2001, roughly matched the decade leading

TABLE 1 Number of public leadership articles by recent decades

Journals in public administration	No. of articles 1992–2001	No. of articles 2002–11	Total
<i>Administration &amp; Society</i>	5	7	12
<i>American Review of Public Administration</i>	1	1	2
<i>Australian Journal of Public Administration</i>	2	5	7
<i>International Public Management Journal</i>	0	1	1
<i>International Review of Administrative Sciences</i>	6	5	11
<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i>	1	7	8
<i>Public Administration</i>	2	8	10
<i>Public Administration Review</i>	8	28	36
<i>Public Management Review</i> *	0	4	4
<i>Public Productivity and Management Review</i>	5	3	8
Group totals	30	69	99
<b>Journals specializing in leadership</b>			
<i>Leadership</i> **	0	30	30
<i>Leadership Quarterly</i>	17	24	41
Group totals	17	54	71
Grand totals	45	123	170

\*Journal begun in 1999.

\*\*Journal begun in 2005.

up to the study published in early 2003 since it had been completed some time before and had waited in a queue for publication for over a year. The decade 2002–11 represented the decade after the study (Van Wart 2003).

The public administration articles for the 1992–2001 period numbered 30, with *Public Administration Review* leading (8 articles) and followed by *International Review of Administrative Sciences* (6). During the same time, *Leadership Quarterly* had 17 articles that met the criterion set-up for inclusion. The more recent decade, 2002–11, included 69 articles in public administration journals, with *Public Administration Review* spiking up to 28, followed by *Public Administration* (8), *Administration & Society* (7), and *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (7). This was slightly more than a twofold increase. The two leadership journals produced 54 articles for inclusion, a threefold increase. The overall increase in volume was an impressive 173 per cent. This is somewhat biased by the two journals with later launch dates; without those articles in the second decade and assuming that articles published in them would not have been published in the other journals in the study (a highly conservative assumption), the volume would still have increased nearly 100 per cent. See table 1 for the breakdown by journal and decade.

### General focus of the public sector leadership literature in the selected journals

Public leadership can cover a variety of leadership foci. A common conceptualization of the literature divides it into political leadership (e.g. elected leaders, policy leadership, facilitative political leadership, reform initiated and driven by political leaders), community leadership (focusing on the cooperation of sectors), and administrative leadership (focusing on non-elected leader functions in public agencies). To capture these very broad distinctions, the coding categories 'primarily administrative', 'political systems', and 'other' were used. 'Other' included community-based leadership, non-profit leadership, as well as articles that were explicitly addressed to the education or military professions.

TABLE 2 *Public leadership focus: administrative or political system*

Journals in public administration	Primarily administrative	Political system	Other
<i>Administration &amp; Society</i>	5	5	2
<i>American Review of Public Administration</i>	1	1	
<i>Australian Journal of Public Administration</i>	2	5	
<i>International Public Management Journal</i>	1		
<i>International Review of Administrative Sciences</i>	4	7	
<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i>	7	1	
<i>Public Administration</i>	6	3	1
<i>Public Administration Review</i>	27	8	1
<i>Public Management Review</i>	1	2	1
<i>Public Productivity and Management Review</i>	7	1	
Group totals	61	33	5
<b>Journals specializing in leadership</b>			
<i>Leadership</i>	7	12	11
<i>Leadership Quarterly</i>	5	26	10
Group totals	12	38	21
Grand totals	73	71	26

Articles in the 'other' category were often the most difficult to characterize clearly and thus it is less useful as a descriptor, but it does serve to keep the political/administrative categories fairly well defined. Most of the literature was easy to sort, but approximately 20 per cent had considerable overlap and judgment calls were needed. When articles covered both the political and administrative systems as a system, they were classified as political leadership. Thus, most important for this particular study, articles categorized as administrative leadership were explicitly administrative in focus.

In the public administration journals there were 61 articles with an administrative focus, 33 with a political systems focus, and 5 other. The leadership journals had a very different profile with a dozen focused primarily on administration, 38 on political systems, and 21 on other (see table 2 for a breakdown). In general, articles in *Leadership Quarterly* paid great attention to political leadership but gave rather scant focus to administrative leadership as any more than an element of political leadership. On the other hand, the administrative leadership topics addressed in *Leadership* with broad theory implications included multisector partnerships, two articles on the challenges related to New Public Management, the use of influence in the public agencies, and an article on the differences of developing leaders across the sectors. Two additional articles reflecting administrative leadership but having narrower theoretical ramifications include an article on police leadership in demonstrations and managing the National Health Service in England. In summary, *Leadership* was substantially more focused on administrative leadership as a context factor of major significance than *Leadership Quarterly*.

### Methods used in public administration journals

The maturation and sophistication of a literature is not only dependent on the volume and specificity of focus, but on the balance of methods used. Often there is a concern that there be a sufficient number of empirical studies and that more sophisticated methods of factor analysis and modelling be used. The interest here was not to enter the methodological debate about how much should be empirical and to make judgments that

TABLE 3 *Methods used in public administration journals*

Journals in public administration	Data-based	Case study	Comparative case study	Biography	Theoretical
<i>Administration &amp; Society</i>	4	2	1	1	4
<i>American Review of Public Administration</i>	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Australian Journal of Public Administration</i>	3	3	1	0	
<i>International Public Management Journal</i>	0	0	0	0	1
<i>International Review of Administrative Sciences</i>	4	5	0	0	2
<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i>	6	0	1	0	1
<i>Public Administration</i>	3	2	2	0	3
<i>Public Administration Review</i>	14	7	1	6	8
<i>Public Management Review</i>	1	1	1	0	1
<i>Public Productivity and Management Review</i>	6	0	0	0	2
Totals	41	20	8	7	23

simple descriptive data are *necessarily* inferior to regression analysis (which is addressed later in the critical discourse of the literature), but to get a general sense of the balance of methods.

Data-based methods included the use of surveys, the analysis of performance data, and meta-analysis and rigorous content analysis of aspects of the literature. Surveys were the most common and nearly all of them used regression analysis and modelling. Case studies included studies examining a single unit, department, or organization, utilizing data that were meant to test hypotheses in a specific setting or provide lessons from a specific situation. Comparative case study signified that there were two or more settings involved. Biography included cases about individuals; sometimes biographies used a framework but frequently it was more expository. Articles were considered theoretical when normative arguments were the primary content (the proper paradigm for the field to use, values to adopt, etc.), and the use of data or 'scientific' theory building did not rely on data on hand (e.g. articles that set up a series of propositions for the field to test). As table 3 indicates, of the 99 public administration articles reviewed, 41 were data based, 20 were case based, 8 were comparative case based, and 23 were theoretical in focus.

It is also interesting to note that only one or two books of significance about administrative leadership generally appeared each decade from the 1950s to the 1990s. Few of them were ideal as class texts. In the last decade there have been at least nine major books, several of which are already in second editions (Denhardt and Denhardt 2006; Fairholm and Fairholm 2009; Joyce 2012; Morse and Buss 2008; Morse *et al.* 2007; Newell *et al.* 2012; Raffel *et al.* 2009; Van Wart 2011, 2012a).

In sum, the profile of the public sector literature indicates that the volume of work has increased dramatically, administrative leadership has been a primary focus of attention, and the methods used have been varied, with a large number of data-based methods, supplemented by other empirical techniques. Only a quarter of the literature was theory based. Teaching materials have become much more substantial as well.

## EVOLUTION OF THE PERENNIAL DEBATES

Another, more qualitative, way of profiling the field is to look at the evolution of some of the most prominent perennial debates in the field. The four debates discussed in the 2003 study were: does leadership make a difference, what is the proper focus, what is the best style for leaders to use, and are leaders born or made? These discussions are updated and a fifth is added: how and where is administrative leadership distinct from generic notions of organizational leadership?

### Does leadership make a difference?

In the 2003 study, the point was made that the mainstream literature had largely moved on to a more sophisticated version of this question after providing extensive empirical evidence of its importance, while the public sector literature had not provided empirical evidence (see Hennessey 1998 for an exception) and in general was largely a normative debate about the proper paradigm for government to adopt. 'Unfortunately, there is a tendency to treat all situations in which leadership is important as a single monolith, rather than exploring the ramifications of different types of leadership in different contexts, with varying missions, organizational structures, accountability mechanisms, environmental constraints, and so on' (Van Wart 2003, p. 223).

Empirical evidence in the public sector now abounds from a variety of areas; some recent examples come from emergency management (McGuire and Silvia 2009), English local governments (Andrews and Boyne 2010), and US federal workers (Fernandez 2008). Broader explorations of the importance of leadership include institution building (Boin and Christensen 2008) and leadership style versatility (Trottier *et al.* 2008). As a substantial element in social systems, of course leadership matters to some degree; the more sophisticated question for social scientists is *when* and *how much* leadership matters. However, there are always many factors impinging on organizational functions, and leadership may or may not be the most important. Indeed, substitutes theory preaches that good leadership institutes structures which actually minimize its role over time (Kerr and Jermier 1978); in an ironic sense then, some of the best organizations may need the least leadership, at least of the individually oriented kind.

The question, then, is not whether leadership is the most important factor or is so minor as to be ignored, but rather to get a sense of when it is important, and the precise nature and processes of leadership that lead to success in the specific situation regarding the criterion studied such as performance, accountability, employee satisfaction, organizational change, etc. So, like the mainstream, the administrative literature has generally, but not fully, moved on to the varying contributions and processes of leadership, rather than bold assertions that it is the most important factor or, on the contrary that its importance is vastly exaggerated.

### What is the proper focus?

The 2003 study indicated that the mainstream leadership literature was still in the throes of transformational leadership and its variants, and had given minimal attention to a more coherent version of values leadership. Some of the mainstream issues receiving fresh attention since then are distributed leadership (Pearce and Conger 2003), collaborative and network leadership (Archer and Cameron 2008; Considine 2012; Kanter 2003), and ethical leadership (Brown and Treviño 2006).

In terms of public sector leadership literature in 2003, the two major paradigms highlighted were the traditional hierarchical model versus the public choice model

emphasizing market values. The traditional paradigm emphasized technical performance and hierarchical reporting, due process, and employee-friendly organizations. This paradigm might emphasize the need for improvements and innovations leading to efficient and effective management (Borins 2000; Dawson 2001) or stress the importance of constitutional values and stewardship (Terry 1995). The public choice model (also known as New Public Management or Reinventing Government) emphasized customer and client orientation, competitive and comparable forms of accountability, and greater employee empowerment coupled with managerial flexibility (Gore 1993). Although both paradigms could imply a smaller scope for administrative government, it was more explicit in the public choice model.

A third model has since gathered a substantial following which is network based (Kettl 2006). It emphasizes collaborative processes leading to shared outcomes among agencies and sectors, and greater democratic accountability to ensure responsiveness and inclusiveness. The model is also known as facilitative leadership in political discourse (Greasley and Stoker 2008; Vogelsang-Coombs 2007; Svava 1994) and collaborative leadership in organizational settings (Ansell and Gash 2008; Crosby and Bryson 2005). When collaborative leadership has a strong values component, it is sometimes called the new public service (Denhardt and Campbell 2006; Denhardt and Denhardt 2003) or public values leadership (Getha-Taylor 2009). The values-based perspective in the literature has been particularly critical of a market-based conception of the field and the role of leaders in it (Hockey *et al.* 2005). Other commentators have been quick to point out that hierarchy is not dead (Gabris and Ihrke 2007; Hill and Lynn 2005). The world has entered intense political debates about the merits of subjecting the public sector to more market scrutiny, especially after the 2008 recession. In the academic community the collaborative model has been very popular, which is largely community based with administration taking a subsidiary role; it is often called integrative leadership (Bono *et al.* 2010; Ospina and Foldy 2010; Page 2010).

However, the network theory that undergirds community leadership has not been without its critics, if only to remind the more enthusiastic supporters (e.g. Dunleavy *et al.* 2006) that all models have relative strengths and weaknesses depending on the situation (McGuire 2006; Martin *et al.* 2009; Menzel 2006; O'Toole and Meier 2004; Silvia and McGuire 2010). In sum, the paradigm debate has not cooled off but the discussion has become more sophisticated as it has largely outgrown the simplistic either-hierarchy-or-markets debate and more studies have become data based. However, it has also become rather complex for the lay reader, and the network and new values-leadership orientation have yet to receive significant attention from the public outside academe or to lead to a renewed confidence in public service.

### **What is the best style to use?**

Style is generally considered a mid-range conceptualization of recognizable patterns of leader characteristics and behaviours. The use of styles is a very popular device in both the popular and academic literature because of the ability to divide leadership in up to a dozen elements, depending on the taxonomy (Van Wart 2011, pp. 51–68). Of course the real questions related to style are quite nuanced by situation since there is no single universal style to fit situations as different as disciplining an employee for illegal activities to encouraging a high performing team to working with external organizations. The 2003 assessment of this debate in the mainstream was that it was extensive and sophisticated, but in the public sector it was, at best, fragmented and, at worst, non-cumulative (Van Wart 2003).

Numerous overarching style analyses have now been conducted dividing leadership into 3–6 elements (Fernandez 2005, 2008; Fernandez *et al.* 2010; Trottier *et al.* 2008) which normally factor in more traditional directive and transactional leadership styles. Administrative leadership literature focused primarily on transactional styles (e.g. supportive, participative, and achievement) is lacking with few exceptions (e.g. Kim 2002) since transactional leadership has gone out of vogue, even though it is still a staple of day-to-day leadership (Yukl 2002). In earlier studies, transformational and strategic leadership had received scant empirical attention (e.g. Nutt and Backoff 1996; Rago 1996) and non-empirical commentary was frequently highly critical (e.g. Terry 1998). In the last decade, however, transformational leadership has been examined as promoting entrepreneurial activity (Currie *et al.* 2011); in relation to personality and charisma (Javidan and Waldman 2003), in sequential case studies (Wallis 2010), in amount (Trottier *et al.* 2008; Wright and Pandey 2010), in building civic capacity (Sun and Anderson 2012), and in combination with performance information (Moynihan *et al.* 2012). It has also been used to compare politicians' behaviours (e.g. Jung and Moon 2008; Martin and Simons 2002).

The newer emphasis on distributed leadership has been much lauded (e.g. Lawler 2008) but little studied in well-designed empirical studies (for a fine exception, see Timperley 2005). The use of collaborative leadership has also been much extolled (e.g. Dunoon 2002), and some empirical analysis of the behaviour is beginning to emerge, especially in emergency management (e.g. McGuire and Silvia 2009; Van Wart and Kapucu 2011). Other style frames have been used, such as dividing agency behaviour (and indirectly leader behaviour) into strategic camps discussed by Miles and Snow (1978) as prospectors, defenders, analyzers, and reactors (Meier *et al.* 2007).

### **Are leaders born or made?**

The question of born or made is important not only for leadership, but for recruitment and training as well. If leaders are born, that is, largely gifted, then there is reason to recruit for that 'top' talent and focus training more narrowly on those innately suited. If leadership is made, then life's experiences and development opportunities become more important, and subsequently training will likely be more broadly provided. Fiedler (1967) argued that we are largely hard-wired, and advocated selecting leaders based on the situation. The underlying assumption of most of the applied leadership literature is that a substantial portion of leadership is learned, and therefore significantly enhanced via developmental experiences, education, mentoring, and training.

It was noted in the 2003 review that the age-old debate about nature-versus-nurture as it related to leadership was sophomoric in terms of a strict dichotomy. It was argued that it is largely a matter of degree. Even the socio-biologists have given a sliding range of likely inherited ability of leaders using matched twin pairs, ranging from 30 to 44 per cent (Arvey *et al.* 2006, 2007; Chaturvedi *et al.* 2012). Outside the leadership literature, the question has also taken on a more pragmatic tenor. First, as the ethical leadership debate has asserted, leadership is not only about traits, skills, and behaviours, but about values too (Fairholm and Fairholm 2009). When are those values learned or assimilated? Second, the division of the acquisition of abilities and values between pre- and post-birth is not particularly helpful. For all intents and purposes, early childhood might as well be inherited as a part of birthright.

The effect of education in young adulthood and training in full adulthood is considerable. Social learning theory (Bandura 1986) indicates that ongoing learning continues in social contexts such as organizations. Public service motivation theory has raised

the question about how much prosocial motivation affects public performance from all experience prior to joining the organization however assimilated (Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010; Perry 2007). Thus, while the evidence suggests not ignoring innate talents, on the other hand, the evidence points out even more strongly that it is unwise to adopt a perspective that the ability to continue to learn stops in early childhood, especially in terms of sophisticated skills sets and intellectual capacity needed by leaders. To the degree that the literature looks at the formation and development of individual competencies (see Van Wart 2011 for a review of this literature), it has progressed substantially.

### **How and where is administrative leadership distinctive from mainstream organizational leadership?**

The debate about the differences among the sectors, as well as the significance of those differences, has increased in the last 50 years. In the 1950s and 1960s there was a quiet assumption that the sectors were different; the introduction of public choice in the 1970s prompted a reexamination of underlying assumptions; in the 1980s and 1990s there was the introduction of substantial reforms around the world to increase competition and market forces; and more recently there has been a renewed onslaught against the public sector which has picked up steam since the recession starting in 2008 (Pollitt and Bouchaert 2011).

Various researchers have studied these differences in a range of agencies (e.g. Feeney 2008) and settings such as networks (Herranz 2008). For example, Knott (1993) demonstrated the sector differences using principal-agent theory. Thach and Thompson (2007) provided an excellent study of the differences between the competencies needed in the two sectors. Anderson (2010) looked at behavioural differences among organizational leaders in Sweden and found that public managers were more achievement oriented, private leaders more power oriented, and both had a similar change orientation. Numerous researchers have found that there were substantial value differences among the sectors (e.g. Anderson *et al.* 2012; Van Der Wal *et al.* 2006). Pinnington (2011) provides an empirically based argument for more distinctiveness in leadership training because of sectoral differences. Meier and O'Toole (2011) have called for a more coherent empirical mapping of this range of differences by supplying a series of propositions to test.

While theoretically or empirically defining the differences in the sectors is useful, the cutting edge aspect of the normative debate is about the reason for and importance of these differences. For simplicity, the debate can be divided into three schools of thought: the dissimilar-purpose thesis, the underlying-similarity thesis, and the convergence-of-sectors thesis. The dissimilar-purpose thesis tends to point out that the public sector is authorized and controlled largely by law, its mandate is ultimately the collective public good, and it has a long-term horizon. The private sector uses the market as its source of creation and control, the customer as its focus, and has a short-term horizon. This rationale leads some to call for a separate study of public sector leadership as its own field of study based on its unique character, function, and jurisdiction (e.g. Getha-Taylor *et al.* 2011).

The underlying-similarity thesis emphasizes that the sectors can be more alike, or normatively, should be more alike. One variant of this thesis is that public sector organizations can or should be run in a more 'business-like' fashion. While this thesis is not new (Wilson 1887) and is much in evidence in current political rhetoric and public opinion, the running-government-like-a-business thesis has been severely criticized in the academic literature as too instrumentally oriented, naïve, and excessive (for early critiques, see Hood 1991, 1995). These critics are much more cautious about New Public

Management techniques for improvement, largely arguing that they are tools, not answers, to improving public services. A second variant of the underlying-similarity thesis, but coming from an entirely different perspective based on a systems approach to problem-solving, is that organizations are more aligned when they work in collaborative networks such as is found in the emergency management system to cope with disasters and in public–private partnerships.

The convergence-of-sectors thesis argues that the various forces will cause the sectors to converge over time (Kettl 2005). For example, Morales *et al.* () found evidence of modest convergence in Dutch public and private sectors, but substantial distinctness remained. There is also evidence that the private sector is making an effort to pay more attention to self-regulation and the common good, especially related to environmental concerns (e.g. Raines and Prakash 2005), but the private sector is so large and diverse that arguments can be made to the contrary as well (Transparency International 2011). The importance of these three theses is that their assumptions cause public sector leaders to think and act in significantly different ways. For example, in looking at UK education reform efforts influenced by New Public Management, one scholar found that while efficiency and service had increased, equity was reduced (Boyne *et al.* 2003).

## ADVANCES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

While early reviews by Terry (1995) and Van Wart (2003) cite a relative paucity of materials as well as a lack of a clear identity, the empirical review reported above shows enormous quantitative improvement in both articles and books devoted to the topic, as well as a far greater self-consciousness of the subfield. The content analysis indicates a good variety of methods and perspectives, and the qualitative review indicates significant improvement in the cohesiveness of the literature.

There are some particular areas of note. One addresses the recommendation (Van Wart 2003, p. 225) for comprehensive frameworks and modelling techniques that are customized to the public sector environment. Fairholm (2004) used a five-perspectives approach to frame the complexity of leadership as scientific management, excellence management, values leadership, trust-culture leadership, and whole-soul leadership. Fernandez has framed leadership in several studies using different venues such as education and the US Federal government (Fernandez 2005; Fernandez *et al.* 2010). Van Wart (2004, 2011, 2012a) provides a framework called the leadership action cycle. As a broad framework it has been used to look at competencies needed in catastrophes (Van Wart and Kapucu 2011), reform in Italy (Van Wart 2012b), and emergency management networks (Silvia and McGuire 2010).

Another related framework called integrative leadership is defined ‘as bringing diverse groups and organizations together in semi-permanent ways – and typically across sector boundaries – to remedy complex public problems and achieve the common good’ (Crosby and Bryson 2010). It is broader than administrative leadership in that it focuses on multiple sectors, but narrower in that some topics related to internal operations and management are largely ignored. A symposium in *Leadership Quarterly* was devoted to this topic in 2010. The community-based focus has received extensive attention in its own right as already cited. The collaboration, network, and partnership literature has also been extremely robust (e.g. Armistead *et al.* 2007; Lester and Krejci 2007; Sullivan *et al.* 2012).

The relationship between performance and leadership has been much more carefully linked theoretically (e.g. Moynihan and Ingraham 2004) and has been studied in applied

settings using the Federal Human Capital Survey (now the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey) and other similar large-scale organizational assessments (e.g. Trottier *et al.* 2008).

Many biographical case studies have been published in *Public Administration Review* and *Public Integrity* about successful executive leadership (Lambright and Quinn 2011). While articles usually do not use the comparative analysis format sometimes recommended as more powerful (Theakston 1997), there are some exceptions (e.g. Wallis 2010) and books that do use a comparative format (Ricucci 2012).

Perhaps the single biggest enhancement to the literature has been the more focused discussion on the ethical dimension as well as closer examination of the underlying assumptions. In the 2003 review of the literature it was noted that ‘the normative debate... has long since stopped producing useful insights in terms of leadership studies’ (Van Wart 2003, p. 224). Essentially, some commentators were providing plans and intellectual support for reinvention with a strong market-oriented, incentives, and privatization base (Gore 1993; Osborne and Gaebler 1992), while many leading figures in the public administration academic community argued against the new values (e.g. de Leon and Denhardt 2000; Terry 1998). These latter arguments have gained further clarity (e.g. Denhardt and Campbell 2006; Denhardt and Denhardt 2003; Perry 2007), although this school of thought has done less to specify the more concrete leadership implications outside the ethical dimension.

The reaction to New Public Management has coincided with the rise of a very broad critique in the mainstream as well as an upswing in interest in the collaborative and governance paradigms. While these related schools are not organized under a single name, their themes are similar and their criticism is often biting. Discussed here as the new leadership dialogues stemming from sources such as critical management theory, social constructionism, and ecological ethics, there are distinctive foci that can be identified. Briefly, the new leadership dialogues have four elements about which they take issue with traditional leadership theory (as it was largely constituted in the heyday of the transformational leadership vogue): it is too hierarchical, heroic, and power-centric; it is too disconnected from systems; it is too disconnected from ethical values; and it is too biased towards logical positivist methods.

One argument is that transformational change is easily manipulated by powerful elites and the status quo, so simply assuming that the environment requires change is inappropriate. Disadvantaged groups such as women, minorities, and the poor need to be proactively included in genuine public discourse (e.g. Ford 2006). This critique argues that more attention needs to be paid to internal distribution of power (Lawler 2008) and a more relational approach (Uhl-Bien 2006).

Modernism emphasizes breaking down systems into its parts for analysis, but often fails to put the parts back together holistically from the postmodern perspective. Thus the reaction to this has been an increased interest in contextualizing leadership dynamics to ensure that the phenomenon is not lost in the analysis (Wallace and Tomlinson 2010). Contemporary trends for networks and collaboration in public sector leadership have already been extensively discussed and will not be repeated here. As important as networks and collaboration are in the contemporary world, critique of them too has added value in that they have both limits and potentially a dark side (Raab and Milward 2003; Silvia and McGuire 2010). Of course the integral leadership movement has been a pragmatic proponent of systems thinking (Crosby and Bryson 2010).

Another important critique repudiates the notion of the claim that science is about value neutrality for the most part, if only because the decision about what to study is a value

judgment. This critique (highly aligned with both social constructivism and public ethics theory) resonates with particular strength in discussions about public administration and its leadership (Kakabadse *et al.* 2003), no matter whether one is talking about the supposed neutrality of administrators in the idealized politics–administration dichotomy, or the neutrality of market forces, or even in networks. Models of leadership that emphasize the role of leaders as stewards and conservators (Terry 1995), facilitators (Svara 1994), compassionate actors (Newman *et al.* 2009), public-oriented servants (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003), values-based leadership (Getha-Taylor 2009), and spiritual leadership (Fry 2003) have been prolific and detailed in the values they support.

Modernism and positivist science have been closely intertwined. Positivist science has emphasized empirical verification and tended to reject metaphysical analysis (e.g. values, first principles). Thus the experimental model, high-power mathematical analysis such as regression analysis, and tackling problems that can be examined with data are its focus. This approach to leadership – an endeavour fraught with values, emotions, and aspirations – is very limited according to the postmodern perspective, which has strongly encouraged qualitative studies to provide context, depth of meaning, insights lost in statistical analysis, and human purpose. While not necessarily arguing that positivist methods are wrong *per se*, they do argue that they only capture a small portion of the leadership phenomenon (Tierney 1996). The British-based journal *Leadership* has made championing these various critical perspectives its primary focus (Collinson and Grint 2005), but examples are found in other journals and by others who consider themselves relatively traditional in their scholarship approaches. A compatible, but traditionalist, critique is that performance management (a pre-eminently modernist method) is highly prone to excessive expectations (Radin 2006) and has become an ‘unprecedented obsession’ distorting public leadership (Brookes 2011, p. 175).

All in all, despite the contrary positions it often takes adding further fragmentation to a field that struggles with coherence, the new leadership dialogues have ultimately made the field much more insightful and rich. Thus, the field has included more relational, systems, values, and methodologically diverse approaches in the last decade.

### LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

A key limitation of this study is the difficulty in covering the subject and allied fields in sufficient detail. Therefore, some generalization was inevitable and innumerable studies did not get the attention they would get in a book-length treatment. Relatedly, while the article discussed public leadership, its primary focus was administrative leadership. Further, while ten public administration and two leadership journals were reviewed, some worthy journals were excluded in setting reasonable parameters of the content review. Finally, to the degree that this study was a reassessment after ten years, it was not an exact replication. The first study looked at a longer time span and fewer sources, while this one compared a shorter time span with a much broader review of sources. Nonetheless, the evolution of the debates was cumulative and the basic point of reference was the same.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FIELD OF ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

The substantial development of the field of public leadership (political, community, and organizational) in the last decade, and the better articulation of administrative leadership in particular, provides excellent opportunities for further research. Public leadership as

a province of study has provided an excellent source of field studies, ranging from presidents and government ministers, to governors and mayors and other elected officials in the tradition of Burns (1978). Community leadership has led the field of leadership in examples of important and successful collaboration and has pushed the discussion of just what contemporary governance really means.

The opportunities in administrative leadership are extensive. Here I provide eight recommendations after reviewing the field but this is certainly not an exhaustive list. (1) The further development of existing comprehensive frameworks, and the testing of broad empirical models is very promising. Without a few widely-accepted, broad conceptualizations of a field, it is difficult to make sense of specific findings and insights. Additional new broad conceptualizations are also possible. For example, no researchers have yet successfully integrated the hierarchical, market-based, and network leadership into a single *leadership* model as was done in the case of the shared leadership model (attempting to integrate vertical and horizontal leadership). A major problem in the field of leadership in general, which flows into the subfield of administrative leadership, is the Balkanization of the field with innumerable aspects of leadership, each with its own special and often conflicting terms. Comprehensive analyses that help bridge and make sense out of the field are necessary if research progress is to be made and practitioners are not to throw their hands up in dismay. This study has attempted to assist in that vein.

(2) 'Normal science' studies showing the differences and similarities among the sectors are needed in much greater numbers because the overall profile is not clear, the comparison of subareas is very shallow, and it is likely to change somewhat over time. (3) In the same vein, additional studies within the administrative landscape providing specific competency profiles and findings as is occurring in education and emergency management are needed. Such profiles need to be specifically designed, and not use leadership survey feedback questionnaires (completed during training programmes) as is common currently. Well-designed studies would be welcomed by various public sector industries, jurisdictions, and levels of administration. Although adequate competency frameworks are being designed and updated by governments around the world, the academic community can contribute more. (4) The effects of the virtual revolution on organizations have been poorly integrated into leadership studies in the mainstream. The effects on public sector leadership in terms of e-government (variously linking administrators, elected officials, citizens, businesses, and governments) are very important for public leadership but almost completely ignored to date outside the political realm.

(5) While there has been some study on the convergence thesis, this area can benefit from a more sophisticated notion of where cultural convergence is occurring in terms of leadership and where divergence may be increasing, especially in light of market failures and disasters causing governments' role to be reasserted. This area is of particular interest in light of the complex changes occurring after the Recession of 2008 in which the public sector's role was simultaneously much enhanced, much criticized, and forced to undergo a new round of internal reform in many countries. (6) The comparative analysis of administrative leadership similar to the Globe Studies (House 2003) has yet to occur in a meaningful way. Scholars need to band together to develop more country-spanning studies on leadership.

(7) Studies and models that do a better job of providing guidance to public sector leaders on how to motivate employees discouraged by a negative environment, inspire and reinvigorate organizations about their common good missions, and include a broader set of stakeholders in ways that do not conflict with representative democracy would be

useful. The discussions to date have focused more on the need to motivate, inspire, and include, rather than how to perform these important behaviours (see as a positive example, McGuire 2006). (8) There is great opportunity for comparative biography using a more rigorous standardized framework. This has been well done for innovative leadership some time ago (Doig and Hargrove 1987), ethics (Cooper and Wright 1992), and management (Ricucci 2012) but such studies have yet to occur with explicit leadership frameworks.

All in all, the field of administrative leadership has made enormous progress in the last decade even though it is hard to argue that the field is fully mature. While the enormous gaps reported in the last comprehensive review have largely received at least some degree of scholarly attention, fragmentation and conflicting nomenclature continue to be a problem, but at a more sophisticated level. Given the positive trajectory and increasing need for good public sector leaders and the wider call for more focused study, the prospects for continued advances seem very bright.

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