Introduction

All schools need leadership. This is not the issue. The issue is this—Do all schools need the same kind of leadership?

Once upon a time the primary distinction made by experts on the principalship was between management and leadership. Principals were exhorted to function less like managers and more like leaders (Duke, 1987). What it meant to function like a leader, however, varied greatly from one expert to the next. No one today maintains that all school principals exercise leadership in the same way. Some principals, in fact, are not perceived to exercise leadership at all. The question is—*Should* all principals exercise leadership in the same way?

A number of experts on school leadership write as if there is one best way to lead a school, regardless of the type of school or the challenges it faces. These individuals frequently place an adjective in front of leadership to capture the type of leadership they advocate. Instructional leadership. Democratic leadership. Moral leadership. Transformational leadership. Servant leadership. There is no lack of opinions when it comes to prescribing the best way to lead schools.

Reeves (2006) adopts a variation on this theme. Instead of advocating one superior type of leadership, he identifies different "dimensions" of leadership. Each dimension represents a different realm of responsibility, and each calls for leadership. Among the dimensions are visionary leadership, relational leadership, systems leadership, reflective leadership, collaborative leadership, and communicative leadership. Presumably effective leaders need to exercise leadership in all, or at least most, of these dimensions.

In this book, I opt for a position somewhat different from the ones held by many of my colleagues. For almost four decades, I have worked in schools, conducted research on schools, and consulted with schools. I have seen high-performing schools and low-performing schools, schools faced with the need to change rapidly and schools desperately trying to preserve their culture and identity, schools in troubled neighborhoods and schools in idyllic suburbs. In all honesty, I have not found that there is one best way to lead all of these schools. Having said this, I also must add that some

ways of leading clearly are more appropriate for certain circumstances than other ways of leading.

The past decade has witnessed growing recognition that there is not one best way to teach all students. My colleague Carol Ann Tomlinson and dozens of other experts have made a strong case for differentiating instruction based on the needs, interests, prior learning, and abilities of learners. I make a similar case in this book for differentiating leadership. Schools function in different contexts and face different challenges. These differences call for school leaders to differentiate their priorities, theories of action, and ways of leading. There is no compelling evidence that generic leadership of any type works well under all circumstances.

In this book you will be introduced to some actual principals and the different circumstances that they confronted. One faced the possibility of declining student achievement that attended the arrival of large numbers of English language learners. Another was charged with turning around a low-performing school. A third principal had to address the challenge of sustaining school improvements beyond impressive initial success. Three other principals dealt with the challenge of developing innovative new schools from scratch. In order to address each of these distinctive challenges effectively, the principals needed to decide where and how to focus the limited resources available to them. The essence of differentiating school leadership is to be found in the priorities identified for particular circumstances. Effective leadership is impossible when everything is considered a high priority. Table 0.1 provides an overview of the four challenges discussed in this book and the priorities associated with each one.

Table 0.1 Different Challenges, Different Priorities

Preventing school decline	Determine needs of new students Assess school's capacity to meet needs
Turning around a low-performing school	Focus on literacy, math, and discipline Achieve "quick wins" to boost confidence Cultivate teacher teams
Sustaining school improvements	Strengthen curriculum beyond literacy and math Develop a continuum of interventions Work on school reculturing
Designing an innovative school	Challenge assumptions about learning and teaching Examine a wide range of program options Mobilize broad-based support

SUPPORT FOR THE IDEA OF DIFFERENTIATING LEADERSHIP

That different circumstances call for different leadership is hardly a new idea. Organization theorists working primarily on the challenges of leading private businesses and military organizations began to stress the need for a differentiated view of leadership in the sixties.

Contingency theory. One of the first efforts to understand how leadership varies across different situations involved the study of military officers (Fiedler, 1964, 1967). Fiedler observed effective and ineffective leaders. He noted that the leadership style of effective leaders differed somewhat depending on the characteristics of the particular situation. Three characteristics, or what researchers call *situational variables,* were of particular importance: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power.

Leader-member relations are determined by how organization members feel about a leader. Do they trust the leader? Are they confident that the leader can accomplish the mission? Are they prepared to support the leader? When leaders enjoy positive relations with subordinates, they are much more likely to be effective. Under certain circumstances, however, leaders must proceed in the absence of positive relations.

Task structure, the second situational variable, involves the clarity of the task at hand. Fiedler found that tasks that were highly structured and clearly defined were associated with a greater level of control by the leader. Tasks that were vague and unclear, on the other hand, made it more difficult for leaders to exercise control. When a task is highly structured, people understand what needs to be done in order to complete the task and what they individually are expected to contribute to the undertaking. This high level of awareness presumably makes them more likely to follow directions and accept the leader's influence. Uncertainty regarding what must be accomplished and how it should be accomplished can cause followers to question leadership.

Position power concerns a leader's authority to reward and punish the actions of followers. A high level of position power is represented by the ability to control pay, incentives, and employment status. Without such control, leaders are at a disadvantage when trying to influence the conduct of followers.

Using the three situational variables, Fiedler (1964, 1967) defined a favorable situation as one in which leader-member relations were positive, the task was clearly defined, and the leader enjoyed strong position power. An unfavorable situation was characterized by negative leader-member relations, an unclear task structure, and relatively modest position power. Fiedler conducted research to determine whether one particular style of leadership was better suited to one situation than the other. He found that leaders with a high level of motivation to accomplish a task were more

effective in both the highly favorable and the highly unfavorable situations described above. Leaders who focused more on the quality of relations with followers were found to be more effective in situations that fell between the two extremes (e.g., where one of the situational variables was positive and the other two were negative). Fiedler failed, though, to provide an adequate explanation for these somewhat curious findings (Northouse, 2007, pp. 115–116).

Situational leadership. Around the same time that Fiedler was developing his contingency model, Hersey and Blanchard (1969) published a model that came to be known as *situational leadership.* Somewhat simpler than Fiedler's model, situational leadership involves two basic dimensions that, when combined, create the possibility of four relatively distinct leadership styles. The two dimensions are both related to subordinates' level of development.

The first dimension concerns subordinates' need for direction. Presumably employees in some situations require a greater amount of leader direction than employees in other situations. The second dimension concerns the need for support. Followers require a greater level of leader support under certain circumstances than others. Hersey and Blanchard used the two dimensions to propose four leadership styles.

A high supportive and low directive style of leadership is suited to situations in which subordinates are capable of assuming responsibility for day-to-day decisions. Rather than closely supervising employee behavior, the leader can be guided by the advice and concerns of employees. The leader focuses on providing helpful feedback and encouragement.

A high supportive and high directive style of leadership is called for when subordinates' efforts need to be focused on achieving specific goals according to relatively precise guidelines. Subordinates' input, once again, is highly valued. The leader must be sensitive to the needs of employees and provide ample feedback and encouragement.

The third leadership style is high directive and low supportive. The leader's interactions with subordinates focus on accomplishing specific goals, many of which may not be inherently interesting to subordinates. Less time is spent on providing support and encouragement. Situations that call for this style of leadership are perceived to necessitate close supervision.

A low supportive and low directive leadership style constitutes Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) fourth option. The leader's involvement in supervising goal-oriented effort and providing emotional support is relatively small. Subordinates are presumed to be capable of assuming a substantial degree of responsibility for accomplishing the work at hand and supporting each other in the process.

The strength of situational leadership is also its weakness. While simple and easy to understand, the model is hard to apply to complex situations characterized by varying levels of employee commitment and competence. The situational leadership model was developed deductively,

and relatively little research has been conducted to test the model under actual organizational circumstances. Northouse (2007, p. 99) also notes that Hersey and Blanchard fail to address the issue of one-to-one versus group leadership. Should leaders, in other words, focus on matching their style to each individual employee or to groups of employees?

Despite these and other shortcomings, the situational leadership model has the benefit of recognizing that leaders confront varying circumstances that are likely to require different combinations of skills.

Path-goal theory. A third approach to leadership that recognizes the need for differentiation is path-goal theory (House, 1971). Whereas situational leadership requires leaders to take into account the developmental level of subordinates, path-goal theory calls for a match of leadership style to characteristics of the work setting as well as characteristics of subordinates. A key assumption of path-goal theory is that the motivation of subordinates can vary with the tasks to be accomplished and the nature of the work environment. It is the leader's responsibility to assess employee motivation and choose a leadership style that is likely to promote a high level of motivation, given certain characteristics of the work environment. Leaders may need to remove obstacles that prevent employees from accomplishing their goals, offer incentives to encourage employees, and ensure that employees find their work meaningful.

Four leadership styles emerge from path-goal theory. Directive leadership calls for close supervision of work and the provision of explicit guidance concerning how work is to be done. It is most appropriate when employees are dogmatic and the tasks to be accomplished are ambiguous and complex. Supportive leadership requires leaders to relate to employees in a nurturing manner. Work environments characterized by repetitive and unchallenging tasks and employees who are unsatisfied and in need of affiliation benefit from supportive leadership, according to path-goal theory.

Participative leadership, the third style, focuses on involving employees in decision making. It is best suited to situations in which tasks are unclear and unstructured and employees are capable of functioning autonomously. The last leadership style, achievement-oriented leadership, addresses employees' need to be challenged. Work environments characterized by tasks that are difficult and employees who need to perform at high levels call for achievement-oriented leadership.

One strength of path-goal theory is its focus on having leaders do what is necessary to assist subordinates in accomplishing what they are expected to accomplish. The theory also recognizes that all employees may not share the same level of motivation. The theory unfortunately offers little guidance to leaders about what to do when employees are characterized by varying levels of motivation. Adjusting leadership style to individual employees in the same organization may seem logical in theory, but in practice, such an approach can be challenging. Leaders who treat employees differently are open to accusations of discrimination and favoritism.

Recent work on leadership. In the decades since the development of contingency theory, situational leadership, and path-goal theory, interest in differentiating leadership has continued to grow. In one of the more popular approaches, an effort is made to match leadership style with the emotional needs of different groups (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Six leadership styles are identified, each linked to a particular emotional climate.

Visionary leadership, for example, helps people in need of an inspiring new direction in their life or work. When individuals need to improve performance, coaching leadership is suited to building their long-term capabilities. Affilative leadership addresses situations in which rifts among group members need to be healed and cooperation promoted. Achieving consensus and eliciting buy in for new initiatives is the primary focus of democratic leadership. When groups are expected to produce high-quality results and achieve ambitious goals, pacesetting leadership is recommended. Commanding leadership is called for when a crisis looms or a quick turnaround in performance is necessitated.

None of the work cited so far was undertaken with school leaders in mind. This gap has begun to be addressed by Kise and Russell (2008) in *Differentiated School Leadership: Effective Collaboration, Communication, and Change Through Personality Type.* The authors recognize the value of understanding different personality types when adopting a leadership style. Such knowledge can be used to promote effective teamwork in schools and foster leadership at all levels of school operations.

BEGINNING WITH THE SITUATION, NOT THE LEADERSHIP STYLE

All of the work mentioned above contributes greatly to making the case that one type of leadership is not universally appropriate. For the most part, though, these theories and models begin with the identification of leadership styles. With the exception of Fiedler's early work, the leadership styles were developed deductively and then matched to the presumed requirements of hypothetical situations.

The approach taken in this book is somewhat different. It is not a style-based approach. The starting points for inquiry are actual situations facing contemporary school principals. Spillane (2005), in writing about distributed leadership, notes, "The situation both enables and constrains leadership practice." He goes on to point out that aspects of "the situation define and are defined by leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers" (p. 147). Drawing on published and unpublished accounts of different leadership situations as well as empirical research on school leadership, key functions associated with leadership for particular situations are identified. All principals, of course, must possess a wide range of

skills and knowledge. Depending on the situation, however, certain skills and knowledge may be especially important. Knowing what to focus on and when to focus on it can spell the difference between success and failure. Principals are likely to experience serious problems when they fail to appreciate the special qualities of a situation and the kinds of leadership actions that it calls for.

There are potentially a variety of ways to characterize a school "situation." Situations may be distinguished by the level of the school (elementary, middle, high), the size of the school, the school program (college preparatory, vocational-technical, alternative), and the location of the school (urban, suburban, rural). While each of these variations may necessitate adjustments in leadership, they will not be the foci of discussion in this book. *Differentiating School Leadership* concentrates on four challenges that are sufficiently distinct to call for different sets of organizational priorities. No claim is made, of course, that these are the only challenges to call for different approaches by principals.

The first challenge to be addressed in this book involves the prospect of school decline. No school is exempt from the possibility of falling performance. Every principal knows that any success his or her school currently is experiencing may be jeopardized by a variety of factors: an unexpected influx of at-risk students, a larger-than-anticipated drop in revenue, new state and federal mandates, a large turnover in key personnel. While some principals are able to negotiate such straits, others flounder. Their schools enter a downward spiral where each poor judgment and inadequate response serves to accelerate the negative impact on teaching and learning. Part I of this book examines what principals can do to confront a challenge to school performance and prevent sustained decline.

Part II is devoted to a second set of circumstances, one involving a school that is consistently low performing. In this era of educational accountability, such schools must be turned around, or they face a series of sanctions that eventually can lead to reconstitution or closure. What must a principal focus on in order to affect a dramatic increase in student achievement? Studies of successful school turnarounds are yielding a wealth of data on the specific steps that principals need to take in order to address academic problems and improve instruction quickly.

Achieving a turnaround is one thing; sustaining it can be quite a different matter. The history of educational reform is littered with examples of promising changes that failed to become institutionalized. Understanding why so many reforms are short-lived is one key to sustaining school improvements. Part III investigates what it takes to lead improving schools so that momentum is not lost over time. Key elements of such leadership include strengthening the entire academic program, expanding the school's capacity to help students, and reculturing the school.

Part IV concerns the challenge of designing a school from scratch and then bringing the school to life. The leaders on which Chapter 7 focuses

were especially interested in developing new models for learning and teaching. They were willing to challenge prevailing assumptions about schooling and explore a range of possibilities. Once they had completed the design process, they also were able to mobilize the support necessary to open their schools.

These four challenging situations, of course, barely scratch the surface of possibilities. One can imagine the leadership needed to close a well-established school or move a school from "good to great." The kind of leadership needed to run a successful charter school is likely to be quite different from that required in many regular school settings. Leading a school in the aftermath of a disaster such as Hurricane Katrina presents unique challenges. So too does leading a nonpublic school that depends on tuitions and donations. Putting the four previously mentioned situations under the microscope, however, should be sufficient to illustrate the fact that school leadership is not a "one-size-fits-all" proposition.

The book concludes with two chapters that address some lessons on leadership. Chapter 8 departs from the preceding discussions of how school leaders succeed when faced with qualitatively different challenges. Instead, the focus is the various ways that school leaders can undermine their own effectiveness. The possible mistakes range from misdiagnosing the cause of school problems to failing to follow up and follow through. Chapter 9 considers the implications of differentiating school leadership for the preparation, selection, evaluation, and study of school leaders.

TIME AND FOCUS

One of the guiding assumptions for this book is the fact that virtually all principals have more to do than time available to do it. It does not matter whether the principal heads a small elementary school or a huge comprehensive high school. Principals must constantly live with the realization that there is always another phone call that needs to be made, another classroom that should be visited, and another student or teacher who could have benefited from a brief conversation.

Nearly a quarter century ago in another book on school leadership, I wondered why some principals were more effective than others, when few, if any, principals accomplished everything they needed or were expected to do (Duke, 1987). While I am still wondering about this perplexing matter, I am confident that two keys to differential effectiveness among principals involve (a) their ability to focus and (b) what they choose to focus on.

Some principals, it seems, are incapable of zeroing in on a set of priorities. Why this should be the case is debatable. Perhaps they lack a vision of what an effective school should look like, a vision that can guide them during times of confusion and conflict. Perhaps they dislike

telling people that they cannot have what they want under a particular set of circumstances. Or perhaps they naively assume that careful planning and a high level of commitment from the staff are sufficient to enable a school to address a lengthy list of concerns simultaneously. Whatever the reason, the schools led by these principals are places where people often are unsure about which functions are most important for achieving their mission. Clear direction from the top is missing, and staff members are left to wonder about how best to allocate their limited time and energy.

Other principals manifest a keen understanding of the need for priorities. They recognize time and energy are scarce resources that need to be focused. Unfortunately, these principals choose to focus on the wrong priorities. They may decide, for example, to launch a major public relations campaign in order to win the support of parents and community members. It would have been better, though, to concentrate on improving instruction in reading, thereby helping students to raise their academic performance. When students do well academically, there is little need for elaborate public relations initiatives.

Determining where to focus time and energy is a matter of *organizational diagnostics.* Organizational diagnostics encompass the processes by which organization leaders assess the impediments that stand between them and the achievement of their organizations' missions. Some of these impediments derive from the environments in which schools operate. Schools cannot be separated from their contexts. Every context is characterized by challenges. Challenges also can arise within schools. Schools, in other words, can generate their own impediments. The four challenges in this book—avoiding school decline, achieving school turnaround, sustaining school improvement, and creating a new school—entail both environmental and internal components.

Once principals diagnose the nature of the challenge or challenges that need to be addressed, they must decide where and how to focus their own limited time and energy and that of their staffs. Arriving at decisions regarding organizational focus is the primary work of school leaders. Individual staff members may be unwilling or unable to see beyond the needs of their particular unit or program. Principals, however, are positioned to look across all units and programs in order to consider the mission and welfare of the entire school. Determining what must be done to address particular challenges calls for the careful collection and assessment of various types of data—data on past and present student performance, data on the quality of teaching, data on school attendance and student behavior, data on curriculum alignment, data on program effectiveness, and so on. The primary purpose of this book is to help school leaders and those who aspire to school leadership to diagnose different challenges and determine how best to focus efforts in order to respond to these challenges successfully.