

12
from: Leadership: Beyond Establishment Views, J.G. Hunt, U. Sekaran,
and C.A. Schriesheim (eds.), Southern Illinois University
Press, 1982

13

If You're Not Serving Bill and Barbara, Then You're Not Serving Leadership

HENRY MINTZBERG

This past Monday I had dinner with Bill and Barbara. Bill is an old, close friend. I wrote *The Nature of Managerial Work* (Mintzberg, 1973); Bill, by editing it, virtually rewrote it, and taught me a great deal about writing. Recently, he was promoted over his boss's boss to the position of Director of Distribution (head of marketing) of the National Film Board of Canada, with about 300 people in his charge. Bill drew Barbara out of the department in the Maritimes to head up his largest subunit, Canadian distribution, with a staff of 200. Thus, Bill and Barbara are now managers—leaders of one sort. Both are young and very bright, and both are concerned with trying to understand and better cope with their new responsibilities. When Barbara came across a paper of mine about the hemispheres of the brain and the management of organizations, and she expressed interest to Bill, he proposed the dinner—to talk about their concerns.

In preparing this overview, a few days later, one question dominated my thinking. Which of these eight contributions, or any others in the research literature, should I give to Bill and Barbara? Think about that. If the question makes you uneasy, then perhaps something is wrong with the research. If any of these presentations is potentially relevant to Bill and Barbara, then, without trying to trivialize it, I should be able to capture its essence in a sentence or two, at least to entice them to read it. Let me try.

Were Sheridan, Kerr, and Abelson ("Leadership Activation Theory:

My thanks to Bill Litwack and Barbara Janes for their contributions—both real and metaphoric—to this overview and to Sam Jelinek, Blair Sheppard, and Jim Waters for their comments.

An Opponent Process Model of Subordinate Responses to Leadership Behavior”) asked to pull one brief passage out of their chapter, my guess is that it would come from the last paragraph, probably the following, “The quality of specific leadership incidents may be as important in determining leader effectiveness as the frequency by which the leader engages in different activities.” Would that grab Bill and Barbara? Is there something new or startling in this comment, some clue to leader effectiveness? It would come as no surprise to Bill and Barbara that how they do things is at least as important as how often they do them. But their real concern is to get inside those hows. What is “quality”; what kind of quality works, and when? In the concluding “discussion” section, the authors comment that their “findings have important implications for leadership research.” But do they have important implications for leadership?

Trying to pull the essence out of the Dansereau, Alutto, Markham, and Dumas chapter (“Multiplexed Supervision and Leadership: An Application of Within and Between Analysis”) leads me, if they will excuse my paraphrasing, to the conclusion that sometimes leaders must treat their employees the same and sometimes differently. So? I am sure Bill and Barbara would agree. They might even say this is of some concern to them, though hardly a burning issue. But discovering the problem is not the point—dealing with it is. Again, does this chapter make a contribution to leadership, or to leadership research? Is it a reorientation for misguided managers, or misguided colleagues? And does anyone believe that the “Average Leadership Style model” or/and the “Vertical Dyad Linkage model,” at least as characterized by Dansereau et al., would be of any interest at all to Bill and Barbara, even if these were labeled comprehensibly?

Bill and Barbara might say that the Lord, Foti, and Phillips chapter (“A Theory of Leadership Categorization”) as well as that by Bales and Isenberg (“SYMLOG and Leadership Theory”) are not really about leadership, but about categorization in one case and group process in the other. Leadership seems to be an afterthought in both. The potential may be there, but the ideas are not sufficiently developed. In one case, Bill and Barbara would want to see the categories before being able to make an assessment of relevance; in the other they might ask that a broader perspective be taken of leadership (and of group process). Had they heard Isenberg say in response to a question, “This is not a good example—it’s a real-life example” (as opposed to one from a carefully controlled laboratory), perhaps they would have thought, “Maybe that’s the problem.”

Bill and Barbara would probably react in a more positive way as they began to read the Hunt and Osborn chapter (“Toward a Macro-Oriented Model of Leadership: An Odyssey”), happier with a broader, more comprehensive approach. Until, I suspect, they come to the notion of “discre-

tion." If they spoke in our terms, my guess is that they would say: "Hey, wait, discretion is not a variable, as you describe it, and certainly not a *dependent* one. We succeed by *creating* discretion. To help us, you have to probe into this notion deeply, to find out where we can find it. Not in general. In our jobs, on Tuesday, at 8:45. 'Macro variables' will aid in the search for 'the magical pot at the end of the rainbow' no more than micro variables; you'll need a telescope, and a shovel, not variables and questionnaires."

When Bill and Barbara come to Bussom, Larson, and Vicars's presentation ("Unstructured Non Participant Observation and the Study of Leaders' Interpersonal Contacts"), I think they would say, "Ah, now we're getting closer." But in reading on, they might add: "But not yet. There's a wealth of data here—real data, not quantified abstraction—but it has yet to be mined, for our purposes. (That will take an impressive shovel.) If the researchers can really go further in their conclusions, then the chapter will serve our needs. (Aren't all managers police chiefs of a sort?)" In other words, for Bill and Barbara, it is not the methodology that counts, not even the data, but the ability of the researchers to deal with data creatively. Especially the anecdotes—the "quality" in addition to the frequency.

That leaves two chapters. Bill and Barbara would certainly appreciate the way Rosemary Stewart ("The Relevance of Some Studies of Managerial Work and Behavior to Leadership Research") writes—no jargon, accessible to leaders. And I think they would like her trichotomy, would find it useful to think about their jobs in terms of demands, constraints, and choices. Indeed, we spent Monday evening over dinner talking about such issues, though we did not use those labels. My guess is that Bill and Barbara would, as in the case earlier with discretion, say to her: "Couldn't you play some more at the margin of these three concepts? How can constraints be removed, choices created, and demands, if not avoided, at least partially circumvented and used to enhance choices? What is the link between these three notions and leader effectiveness? For example, are weak managers the ones who perceive no choices? Should we promote only managers who believe they have wide latitude for choice, avoiding the ones who always complain about demands and constraints?"

And then Bill and Barbara would come to the Lombardo and McCall presentation ("Leaders on Line: Observations from a Simulation of Managerial Work"). "Finally," they would say, "Henry doesn't know what he's talking about when he criticizes the laboratory approach. This presentation shows that a clear head (one free of overly specified methodology) and a creative mind can function within any rich data base, even a simulated one." Reading through the chapter, they might comment on the following points:

"The problem certainly is the appropriate unit of analysis—we spent Monday evening talking about problems. And leadership (in the narrow way used in a number of other chapters) does fold into problem solving."

"You bet being caught in the middle—for us between the organic structure (now they're learning our jargon) of filmmaking and the bureaucratic structure of government administration—is chaotic."

They would be nodding point after point (e.g., that "there are no simple dependent variables," to "stop thinking group"). At least, until they came to the argument near the end that "leadership can make a difference." There they would laugh, believing that Lombardo and McCall's need to make such a point only shows what a dismal state the research literature is in. You see, Bill and Barbara have worked under different commissioners (the Film Board's name for its chief executive). They might even say: "If you didn't have to waste energy arguing that it made a difference, maybe you could spend more time finding 'how, why, and when' instead of having to admit you 'do not know.'" Were Bill and Barbara in as poetic a mood as Lombardo and McCall, they might conclude that here, at last, was a song with a score as well as lyrics.

In summary then, I think Bill and Barbara would find two of the presentations of interest and a third potentially so, depending on how the data were used. That is somewhere between 25 and 38 percent of the chapters, a far better average, I am willing to bet, than most of the "establishment" research literature would receive if submitted to our "Bill and Barbara test."

In fact, after I had written all this I became curious as to what would happen if I actually carried out the test. Accordingly, because I recalled that somewhere in the literature we are told that managers are busy and don't like to read, I gave Bill and Barbara the short versions of the eight contributions—exactly the same ones that were given out to the symposium participants. (These averaged about five pages; Barbara, after reading them, asked for the full copies of five of the presentations—those of Lord et al., Bales and Isenberg, Bussom et al., Stewart, and Lombardo and McCall. Bill, in typical managerial fashion, and because of *our* deadlines, read them on a plane to China, and so could not ask for the full versions.) I told Bill and Barbara nothing at all when I gave them the chapters, except that I would like some "pithy" comments on each—and more general ones if they so wished—vis-à-vis the concerns they had expressed Monday evening. Barbara, in fact, expected something quite germane to those concerns.

In her opinion, she did not get it. Indeed, my anticipation of her reactions was rather optimistic. For his part, Bill reported that he was positively angered by this material. Their reactions are shown in the accompanying extract.

Bill and Barbara's Comments

Bill

Barbara

Overall

Many presentations go to incredible and convoluted lengths and explanations, only to finish by stating the obvious. Complex and overinflated jargon is often used to camouflage emaciated ideas. Many seem more interested in studying the subtleties of a particular research approach—or even worse, studying other studies—than they are in contributing to a real understanding of leadership itself.

Leadership is an important subject and one that interests me a lot, but if these contributions are an indication of the current state of leadership research, then the gulf between academia and the real world is even greater than I feared. What bothered me most, as I read the presentations, was the gnawing suspicion that all the research was being carried out as an end in itself. Hence relevance was really a side issue. Perhaps I am too much of a pragmatist, but I persist in thinking that research, even in academic circles, should mean something.

Stewart

The study seems to be taking an approach which is more pragmatic than most of the others and therefore it should be more useful. But while the propositions for future research touch on valid areas, it is still frustrating that the major result is simply to indicate additional research that needs to be done.

More interesting and readable than most of the other presentations, but considering the competition, that is not exactly a rave review. I cannot say that I really learned anything new from it, apart from some terminology. The five propositions for leadership research, however, sounded more relevant than the work described in the other presentations.

Bussom et al.

The presentation spends most of its length defining the problem and explaining the approach taken—and it is quite practical and reasonable in this. But then it is very unclear about the analysis undertaken with the data, and ultimately says absolutely

A very promising beginning, but the presentation ended up going nowhere. Such an awful lot of work to establish that "there is a great amount of dissimilarity and complexity in how leaders carry out their interpersonal contacts." Eureka! The observa-

nothing about what it all might mean. [The complete chapter by Bussom et al., which Bill did not get a chance to read, does discuss the meaning of the analysis in considerably more detail.]

Lombardo and McCall

This presentation is clearer and simpler than the others. It is more concrete and practical, and seems more closely to describe what actually happens in real life. But it still doesn't say much about leadership. The presentation succeeds more in clarifying what the considerations are rather than in coming to real conclusions. On the other hand, much can be said for not trying to offer artificial conclusions. The presentation does suggest specific and reasonable directions for future study. Finally, a presentation that includes the observation "effectiveness is a function of who defines it" is light-years more helpful and realistic than the other contributions which give the impression that the issues being dealt with can be neatly defined and analyzed.

Dansereau et al.

At least this presentation is understandable. But if it is of interest at all, it is to those studying leadership and not to leaders themselves. Whatever insight it contains relates to research approaches and not to the actual exercise of leadership. The insights gained as a result of what

tional method is certainly valid, but is it being put to good use here?

At least this one is written in readable English. However, I did not find it particularly interesting or significant. Can one really learn much about the nuances of leadership behavior in a simulated situation? I doubt it; too many intangibles are absent. In the final analysis I think Lombardo and McCall are more interested in leadership research than in leadership.

A moderately interesting introduction followed by a boring discussion of research methods. What does all this have to say about leadership?

the presentation calls a "derivation" seem banal and self-evident, for example, that "it is possible for a superior to treat subordinates equally on one dimension and unequally on a second dimension." If this sort of thing passes for an acceptable and meaningful result in academia, then clearly the performance demands for academic research are less exciting than those for leaders in real life.

Lord et al.

Instead of studying what leadership is this presentation studies the structures of various theories of leadership. This is beyond navel-gazing—it is solipsism. Moreover, studying other studies is a perilous business that should not be undertaken lightly. If the quality of the presentations you gave me is any indication of the quality of the presentations being studied by this presentation (is that clear?), then it should not be undertaken at all. The whole thing is like a Russian matryoshka doll—doubtful studies enveloping doubtful studies enveloping studies that were banal, superficial, and uninteresting in the first place. To make matters worse, much of the presentation is written in a style that can only be described as excruciating.

Sheridan et al.

This presentation describes an "arousal and opponent process theory of motivation" that views

Much too theoretical to be relevant to me and written in very contorted prose. How can I take seriously a presentation that contains sentences like, "Though cognitively economical, this heuristic is not necessarily optimal"? The mathematical formulae left me dumbfounded.

Another awful title; (sounds like something written by Pavlov). The ensuing presentation is not

each "leadership behavior incident" as if it were neatly definable and separable. It thus betrays an ignorance of the variety and complexity of day-to-day managerial work. The study attempts to link the frequency of leadership incidents and their intensity in simplistic ways. I think such an attempt is doomed by definition because it is trying to measure things which are intrinsically nonquantifiable—at least on neat scales. It is like an art critic saying that if the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel were one foot higher and the index fingers of God and Adam one inch further apart, the impact would be 2 percent less. Such an approach is devoid of imagination and misses the point in a truly monumental way. The study forgets that "leadership" is a social and communications phenomenon that happens between human beings and not a set of rules for some managerial chess game. Moreover, most of the conclusions, even if by some accident they turned out to be accurate, are staggeringly banal and obvious—for example, "different leadership activities have varying motivational effects on the subordinate." The mind boggles. It also vastly oversimplifies the subtleties of job performance and "credible" treatment of subordinates. The appendix showing the questionnaire is quite interesting—but the article itself leaves the im-

much better. Only the appendix was written in clear English, but I did not really understand what it was supposed to prove. The conclusion, as stated, seemed incredibly banal. Did I miss something?

pression that the concrete questions contained in the questionnaire have been transformed into mush.

Bales and Isenberg

This presentation spends most of its length describing the general theory, model, or approach that was used—and tells very little about what the actual results were when the theory was applied to leadership. It culminates with a working definition of leadership that is vague and not particularly helpful. When you cut through the jargon the definition amounts to the following: “To lead is to exert a decisive determining influence . . . by whatever means.” It hardly seems worth the effort.

Hunt and Osborn

As research, it may be exemplary. As something that is relevant and meaningful to managers, it is of limited interest. To say “managers are seen as those who stand between and link subordinates with their organization” is not only wrong, it is offensive. It implies that these subordinates are somehow not already part of the organization but need to be linked to it. It is the sort of facile and meaningless jargon which leads in the following sentence to the “discovery” that managers interact with their subordinates! Two plus two also equals four. I still have no idea who the contribution was written for. The conclusions

A mildly interesting foray into the much plowed field of group dynamics. Readable, but I doubt that it holds any surprises for a reasonably alert manager. The problem with “how to” guides to interpersonal skills is that good leaders do not need them (that’s how they got to be leaders!) and bad ones cannot really be taught to use them.

Obviously aimed at academics, not at managers. Even the title put me off. Could scarcely wade my way through the jargon. After a first reading, from which I gleaned very little, I considered rereading, then decided it was not worth the effort.

seem slim, obvious, and not particularly useful in understanding what leadership is and how managers manifest it. In sum, the presentation was too interested in its research model and not interested enough in showing how the model and the supposed results stemming from it related to the work of managers.

I should emphasize that I wrote my comments on the material before I ever saw Bill and Barbara's (and made no changes subsequently), while they wrote their comments without ever seeing mine or being given any clue about them. Let me reiterate that these are two well-educated, bright, articulate people who can handle concepts. If you cannot get through to Bill and Barbara, then I firmly believe you have no chance of getting through to any important segment of the leadership community out there.

The Question of Constituency

When I first wrote all this, I asked myself if I was belittling a lot of hard work. Is the Bill and Barbara test a fair one? Shouldn't researchers be given a chance to sort things out before having to be judged relevant? Is there not a place for pure, as opposed to applied, research on leadership? And then I said, "Damn it, no." Leadership researchers have had almost a century to sort things out. (In his *Handbook of Leadership*, Stogdill, 1974, traces research on leadership traits back to 1904.) The absence of such a test is what has left the field in such a mess. I believe in pure research—that having to come up with a "how to" conclusion can spoil a useful line of thinking. But I have also discovered that intelligent practitioners are as interested as researchers in the results of pure research—and by that I mean descriptive insights devoid of prescription. So long as the results have some relevance to their own concerns. And are expressed in clear English. I have never come across a good insight in organizational behavior or management that could not be so expressed. Jargon is too often a smokescreen that clouds the emptiness of the findings. The Bill and Barbara test is designed to blow it away.

Let me emphasize that I am not promoting a public relations campaign, not making a call to include some kind of executive summary at the front of every research report. I am talking about how the research is conceived

in the first place and how the results are then developed—who they are designed to serve. And I fully recognize all the dangers of fooling some practitioners with slick writing that has no substance. But those are not the practitioners I have in mind for this test. I am talking about intelligent practitioners, ones who can handle concepts and see through shallowness. There are plenty of them out there. If you like, imagine the test will be restricted to Ph.Ds. in organizational behavior who have become full-time line managers.

My point is that if leadership researchers can talk only to each other, then they ultimately serve nobody. They form a closed system which ingests resources and offers nothing in return. If the field of leadership is to function effectively, then it must have a constituency. Without that it lacks a “belay,” to use McCall’s nice term. Interestingly, the authors of the two chapters I believe most directly relevant to leaders have clear belays. Rosemary Stewart has spent her career training practicing managers: she has to have something to tell them or they will simply go away. Likewise Lombardo and McCall work at the Center for Creative Leadership, where they are constantly in touch with practicing managers. The rest of us, myself included, can hide in the university if we so choose; these people cannot.

As implied, I believe that constituency is first of all leaders themselves—and in our society that means mostly (or at least conveniently) managers. Managers want to know how to select other managers, how to train them, above all how they themselves can lead more effectively. But it is not only advice they need, perhaps not even primarily advice, at least from us as researchers. They need insight—startling insight, ideas that will change their perceptions. With such insight, they—or the staff people and consultants close to them—will know what to change. How many of the presentations in this book, or in the research journals over the past ten years, properly translated, provide that kind of insight? How many would you give to the managers you know—say to your dean, to help him serve you more effectively? Better still, how many would you take to heart if *you* became dean?

A second constituency—less easily pinned down—is society itself, increasingly concerned about the quality of its leadership. America, with its Carters and Reagans, previously its Fords and Nixons, is facing a crisis of immense proportions in its political leadership. Is that not an issue that leadership researchers should address? Do you? Can you? Do consideration and initiating structure or the Vertical Dyad Linkage model help us to understand what were Carter’s problems? (I must add an afterthought here. The morning following the U.S. presidential election, a radio commentator suggested that Jimmy Carter’s problem was that “he was not really in contact with his constituents”—the South, new immigrants, the poor, and so forth.

The implication, that leadership is the capacity to connect to a relevant constituency, has its own intriguing implication: that leadership researchers have themselves exhibited no leadership.)

In short, without a constituency, I believe leadership research can go nowhere. And for the most part, the research has no constituency.

The State of the Leadership Literature

This volume is entitled "Beyond Establishment Views". Those who have occupied the overviewer position before me have decried the state of leadership research, as have many others. So much so that this has become the establishment view. So let me say that I think the literature on leadership is in great shape. But not the "establishment" research literature, by which I mean the material that fills the refereed journals.

When I first looked at that literature, in the mid-1960s, I was frankly appalled: traits pursued fruitlessly for decades, consideration and initiating structure being rediscovered in the research year after year, risky shifts that were eventually discredited, and so on. And what has changed since the 1960s? Every theory that has since come into vogue—and I shall not name them for fear of losing all my friends—has for me fallen with a dull thud. None that I can think of has ever touched a central nerve of leadership—approached its essence. Even the old ones endure. I find in these chapters, intended to move beyond establishment views, that consideration and initiating structure are not dead—they come up repeatedly. Sometimes I think I must be awfully dense: I just do not get the point, and never have.

Even the titles of the theories—new no less than old—reveal the nature of their content—plodding and detached. Since the beginning, there seems to have been a steady convergence on the peripheral at best, and all too often on the trivial and the irrelevant.

Early in their program, our doctoral students read Kaplan's *The Conduct of Inquiry*. In looking at it again recently, I was struck by the author's inclusion, under "Validation of Theories," of the criterion of their "esthetic qualities": "A scientist sometimes needs the courage, not only of his convictions, but also of his esthetic sensibilities" (1964, p. 319). Picking up on this, I suspect that if a theory is not beautiful, then the odds are good that it is not very useful. Which theory of leadership is beautiful? Consideration and initiating structure? The Vertical Dyad Linkage model? About which leadership theory can we say, as did Watson about the double helix, "the structure was too pretty not to be true" (1968, p. 134). When I read most of the literature, I want to say, "The structure is so ugly it has to be false." What Kaplan

wrote in 1946 seems to apply to the leadership literature of 1980: "The esthetic norm . . . has little bearing on behavioral science in its present state, which may be characterized—without undue offense to anyone, I trust [!]—as one of almost unrelieved ugliness" (p. 319).

The literature that is in great shape is another literature. It is the literature of biographies, the more articulate practitioner literature, and the literature of a fifth column of academic types, but outside the establishment—from people such as Weick, Sayles, Kotter, McCall. (I would have included Rosemary Stewart, but she described herself at this symposium as an outsider in this gathering of leadership researchers. I too was going to say that. But why? Rosemary Stewart has spent her career studying leaders; I am a professor of management policy whose best known work is a study of leaders, and even now our research on strategy formation is all wrapped up with trying to understand the influence of leadership, among other factors, on that process [Mintzberg & Waters, 1980]. Neither I nor Rosemary Stewart am an outsider to the study of leadership. I and apparently she as well simply feel compelled to disassociate ourselves from what leadership research has become in so much of the literature.)¹

In other words, I believe we know a good deal more about leadership than we realize (and I want to return to that word "know"). But the knowledge is in other places, and it is being generated by people doing other things—people outside the mainstream of academic research. Let me take one example. Consider a special issue entitled "Leadership" of the *Executive* magazine, put out by the Cornell business and public administration school. I am going to give it to Bill and Barbara, asking them to look especially at the article by Thomas Peters (1980), of the McKinsey consulting firm, because I think it touches one of those central nerves. Peters makes the simple point—based on "the experience of a score of companies that have executed major shifts of direction with notable skill and efficiency" (p. 12), that effective leadership is related to "brute persistence" or obsession. "Repeatedly and conspicuously, the chief executive officers of these companies exhibited a common pattern of behavior: namely, obsessive at-

1. My study of five managers reported in *The Nature of Managerial Work* was actually my dissertation in a doctoral program in management policy. I believed that without an understanding of managerial work, we had no hope of understanding any issue related to management policy. I wrote the book for policy people and, much to my surprise, it was the organization behavior people who adopted it. Leadership, in the narrow sense—relationships between the leader and the led—was the "least convincing" of the roles I discussed, in the opinion of Karl Weick (1974, p. 117) and myself as well. In his review of the book, Weick wondered how much was to be gained by "invoking the concept of leadership" (p. 117) at all, as opposed to attaching it to the other roles.

tention to a myriad of small ways of shifting the organization's attention to the desired new theme" (p. 12). Supporting this, Peters found the attributes of "consistency in support of the theme, usually over a period of years," the focussing of the theme on "building or enhancing just one or two basic organizational skills" such as customer service or cost reduction, "conscious use of symbolic behavior," "strong encouragement of experimentation," "an extraordinary amount of time in the field" often bypassing formal authority, and so on (p. 12). When I told Barbara, after she had given me her comments on the presentations, that I would give her this magazine, and described this article briefly, she said, "Now *that* sounds interesting!"

Why should this be the case? Why should the interesting material be in the practitioner literature, or in a very different kind of research literature? To go beyond establishment views, I should do more than comment on the state of the literature—I should make tangible suggestions as to how it can be improved. The previous overviews have, I believe, been rather mild in their prescriptions. I wish to go farther out on a limb, saying things that may seem a little outrageous. That way I can better make my points. And so the reader is warned that from here on everything is meant to be overstatement (including this).

Some Overstated Prescriptions

I believe that the root of the problem in what I have been calling the mainstream research literature on leadership is methodological. In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Pirsig (1974) makes the intriguing point that we cannot define "quality" (and presumably cannot measure it), but we "know" it when we see it. I am struck by the same thing about leadership. We are unable to define it, we fail at measuring it, but we sure seem to know it when we see it. And why not? Is good leadership not one kind of quality. And therein seems to lie the difference between one kind of literature and the other—the fact that there appears to be two kinds of knowing. There are those things we know formally, or analytically—by definitions and measures. And there are those things we know informally, intuitively—deep in our brains, although we do not know why. An expert has been defined as someone with no elementary knowledge. An amusing point, because it appears to contain a grain of truth. That truth seems to be that the expert is all too often someone who blocks out the second kind of knowing. He or she "knows" analytically, but not intuitively. The expert has certain sophisticated knowledge—which may or may not be relevant—but he or she lacks certain basic elementary knowledge. And leadership seems to require a

good deal of elementary knowledge. That is probably why everybody seems to understand it except the experts, at least formally. Thus we have the Lombardo and McCall comment that leaders know far better than researchers what leadership is all about, but the researchers don't know how to ask them and the leaders don't know how to tell the researchers.

Let me illustrate. It has become fashionable among researchers (not practitioners) to argue that leadership does not matter. A well-known colleague of ours, who has been saying these things, visited us at McGill recently and I asked him why it is that those who make this claim always seem to fight so hard when deans are being changed. Our colleague smiled, slightly embarrassed, admitting that he had in fact been deeply involved in such a process recently. When asked why, he answered, "Just in case!" A cute answer, for a cute hypothesis. But pure bull! In his practical mind, he doesn't believe it any more than I do. We both "know" very well that leadership matters, that while some situations are unmanageable, in the vast majority of cases leadership can make an enormous difference. Both he and I have seen what has happened to different business schools under different deans.

And if we "know" leadership makes a difference, then I think we "know" a good deal more, for example that effective leaders probably do exhibit certain traits or styles under certain conditions. But we do not know them in the establishment literature, for there we are forbidden to discuss what cannot be defined or measured precisely. Another thing we know is how fundamentally intuitive the job of leading is, and how lacking in inherent structure. Indeed, here we know formally as well as informally: we know about the brevity, variety, and fragmentation of the job, its oral characteristics and its emphasis on soft data, the absence of patterning in the work, the dynamic and unprogrammed nature of its decision making. If the job is so unstructured, then how can research with so much structure capture it? If the job is so intuitive, then how can research that precludes the use of intuition—by keeping the researchers so far removed from its rich reality—help us to understand it?

Pirsig writes: "The subject for analysis, the patient on the table, was no longer Quality, but analysis itself. Quality was healthy and in good shape. Analysis, however, seemed to have something wrong with it that prevented it from seeing the obvious" (1974, p. 213). Likewise our patient is not leadership but leadership research, specifically methodology. Until it is changed to help generate other kinds of knowledge—knowledge less obsessed with definition and measurement—I do not believe it will serve leadership. What we need are research methods that are unconventional—not unconventional for the world at large but for the world of experts—methods that

do not get in the way. Methodology has been the problem in leadership research because of the nature of *this particular* phenomenon. We need to study leadership *simply, directly, and imaginatively*—that is all. In this regard, let me take another look at the three chapters that I believe are or might be of use to Bill and Barbara.

Rosemary Stewart asks us to look at leader behavior. I ask you to look at her behavior, as a researcher, over time. What struck me about her contribution—knowing her previous work—is how she has loosened up on methodology (and the diary was hardly a highly rigorous method to begin with). She has become far more eclectic, not only using a wider variety of methods, but also reverting to almost no method at all for some of her data. More interesting is the absence of numbers in her chapter. In general, her only numbers are those that identify the year of each reference. Even her tables are all words. As Rosemary Stewart herself commented at this symposium: “I have tried to measure various things. Most of them I’ve given up.” Similarly, the Lombardo and McCall contribution is one of words, based on the simplest of methods (at least once the simulation was built!). They just observed what their managers did, and drew some conclusions—*simply, directly, and with imagination*. And Bussom et al., interestingly, argue the case for *unstructured* observation (although as they note, theirs was structured, but not highly so—they just observed and recorded). They certainly present numbers, but these are believable numbers, close to what managers actually do.

An expert has also been defined as someone who avoids all the many pitfalls on his or her way to the grand fallacy. I think the grand fallacy in leadership research has been rigor—artificial rigor, detached rigor, rigor not for insight, but for its own sake. That kind of rigor has interfered with the researchers’ capacity to understand what goes on. All those statistical tests, questionnaire designs, and the like contain the pitfalls. We sometimes forget that “significance” is not a word owned by the statisticians. It matters more that the conclusions be significant than the results. Does one kind of significance in fact interfere with the other?

With this in mind, let me present some methodological challenges, reiterating first that I am purposely overstating and second that I mean these comments to apply *only to leadership research*, not to research in management or even in organizational behavior in general. My challenges are not meant to promote a “one best way”; rather they are designed to avoid what I believe to be the “one worst way” to do research on leadership.

First, get rid of constructs, at least before collecting the data. Stop trying to fit the world into your abstract categories, especially ones so far removed from how leaders actually behave. I do not know what initiating structure has to do with answering the telephone at 9:43; I have never been able to identify

any clear degree of discretion in a single managerial decision; I have no idea what intensity of behavior means as a general construct, or amount of control, or even participation. Isolating some abstract construct and then measuring it in some detached way serves no one. (What construct, no matter how half-baked, cannot be measured on a seven-point scale?) We do not need to measure constructs, we need to enrich them—to give them some real meaning, through deep probes into leadership activity. What does participation really mean and what forms can it take? How do leaders exercise control? How does discretion manifest itself in the complex job of being a leader? Discretion itself is an enormously complicated issue. My MBA students recently described the heads of a school board they are studying as having the capacity “to prepare themselves for doom.” Is that discretion? In other words, do your research *in order* to create richer, more relevant constructs, and when you have them, do more research to enrich them still further. And then, one day, when intelligent practitioners believe you really have something insightful—and you yourselves truly find it beautiful—then go out and test. But don’t hold your breath waiting.

Second, get rid of instruments. Following from the first point, throw away your questionnaires and set foot in places where real leaders and rich behaviors can be found. Watch them, talk to them, talk to the people around them. Study what is really going on out there, as I believe Stewart, Bussom et al., and Lombardo and McCall (in one sense) tried to do. Don’t let instruments get in the way of your intuition. Some years ago we did a paper describing how 25 strategic decisions were made in organizations. Then came the first request for our “instrument” and they have been coming regularly ever since. On receiving that first request I had to laugh to myself: all I had was a typed list of 21 banal questions. Research is not instruments. It is detective work. Bussom et al. found out that my instrument in *The Nature of Managerial Work* was a clipboard, a pen (preferably a pencil, with a good eraser), and a watch. What matters is being there, with your eyes wide open, and then what you do with what you see. The point is, keep yourself open. There is a rich complicated reality out there. Let it surprise you. If it doesn’t, then you haven’t learned anything.

Third, get rid of measurement, or, at least, if you insist on it, measure in organizational terms. In other words, if you have to count, count real things. Not your own inventions, brought to an artificial life on seven-point scales. There are indeed a great many interesting things to count out there. (We are studying strategies in an airline by counting aircraft bought, new routes opened up, and the like.) But I am not sure that counting is what we need to get at the essence of leadership. I counted a great deal in *The Nature of Managerial Work*, and I think that helped me understand what managers do. But not what makes a manager successful. That will require more in-

tensive probes into the ways individual managers work—*how* they perform their different tasks, not *what* tasks they perform.

What is so sacred about measurement anyway? I think it was Charlie Brown's friend, Peppermint Patty, who said that "Nothing spoils arithmetic faster than a lot of numbers." Does the same thing apply to leadership research? The organizational behavior literature tells us quite clearly that organizational goals are often displaced by attempts to quantify them. I wonder if researchers in OB ever considered applying that finding to themselves. Is it not possible that the ultimate goal of research—insight—is being displaced in fields such as leadership by an overemphasis on quantification? For example, it could be that the more organization itself is able to measure performance or effectiveness in certain managerial jobs, the less leadership counts in those jobs. If true, that could have damaging consequences on studies, such as the one by Hunt and Osborn, which use samples of leaders selected on the basis of the presence of objective measures of effectiveness. To repeat what I said earlier, maybe what matters in leadership is beyond measurement. Maybe highly structured research will not allow us to understand people who function intuitively yet perhaps succeed by acting in counterintuitive fashion (yet still intuitively), as Lombardo and McCall suggest. What is wrong with words anyway? To my mind, words are what distinguish the establishment research literature from both the practitioner and the fifth-column research literature, the more closed-ended studies from the open-ended probes, the literature that serves itself from the literature that serves leaders.

Fourth, get rid of variables, and especially the notion of dependence and independence. The logical consequence of getting rid of constructs, instruments, and measurement is getting rid of variables. That way we can stop pretending that the world is divided into dependent and independent variables. Since von Bertalanffy, it has been clear that the world is a system in which everything impacts on everything else. Again, let us study the world as it comes.

Fifth, perhaps get rid of definitions. We often tie ourselves up in knots trying to define things that are easily "known" in other ways. Kaplan (1964) makes the intriguing point that a definition is not contained in that one sentence so labeled; it must be inferred from the entire text. (How often have we read a piece in which the definition-in-use—that is, the definition that can be inferred from the entire text—directly contradicts the reconstructed definition—the formal one.) Indeed, the object of leadership research is to define leadership! That is what all those years of research have been all about. What sense does it make to sit back in the abstract and throw out a one sentence definition at the outset, or debate different ones?

To summarize, *get rid of methodology that gets in the way*. This is not a plea for fuzzy thinking or fishing at random, not a suggestion to go knock at the door of some organization and say: "Hi. Are there any leaders here because I'd like to study leadership." A sense of focus is necessary in research, as is some orderly way to collect data. But as I have stated elsewhere (Mintzberg, 1979), I firmly believe that the best methodologies to study organizational and managerial phenomena are usually the simplest, most direct ones, the ones that give full vent to the researcher's imagination. And I believe that is what has characterized all the best research on leadership too, research from outside the establishment.

Some Leadership Concerns

One final note, on this issue of focus—the content of research rather than the method of doing it. When I published *The Nature of Managerial Work*, I hoped that subsequent research would probe deeply into some of the manager's roles or activities, to try to get at *how* managers worked—essentially the issue of style and its relationship to effectiveness. I also hoped that what I saw as the most important issue in the book would be taken up and investigated. That is the problem of superficiality, that managers, in whose decisions the future of our society is entrusted, are forced by the very nature of their work to make these decisions quickly and superficially. Instead I see a number of replications emerging. That is good for the ego. But I have always felt that *The Nature of Managerial Work* exposes perhaps 1 percent of that proverbial iceberg. Would it not be more useful to go after chunks of the other 99? There is so much to investigate. Above all, we need to understand the whole integrated phenomenon of leadership—leader by leader or, as Lombardo and McCall suggest, issue by issue. And that will mean studying managers a few at a time, intensively, looking at their activities as well as their styles as well as their effectiveness as well as their situations. And style is more, much more, than how managers deal with subordinates; it is how quickly they make their decisions, what kinds of data they prefer, which contacts they favor, how often they tour their facilities and how they do so, and a thousand other things, informational and decisional as well as interpersonal.

In the context of such research, we need to address the real concerns of managers and organizations. For example, we need to find out:

What discretion means in the context of managing an organization, and how it is found or created.

What the leader's role is in the formation of an organizational culture

or ideology; in the words of Selznick (1957), how a leader infuses his organization with purpose; what charisma means, what it has to do with the vision of the leader.

What the word "planning" means in the context of the work of managing an organization; how a manager's vision of the future gets translated into concrete action, formally and informally.

How managers balance the conflicting needs for change and continuity in their organizations.

Why turnover is so high in some important managerial jobs (such as police chiefs who, Bussom et al. tell us, average 13 months' tenure).

What inhibits the emergence of strong leaders in certain situations (the U.S. presidency?; General Motors?); or more to the point, what conditions nurture "great" leaders.

As for the problem of superficiality, I have done somewhat of a flip on this one. I used to think that managers had to learn to be superficial in order to succeed, to become, if you like, effective in their superficiality (for example, by being able to judge the people making proposals if they could not understand the proposals themselves). Now I am beginning to think that superficiality may be at the root of many of the problems of our large organizations. Could the growing crises of leadership, behavior, and performance of large organizations—public as well as private, capitalistic not much less than communistic—be related to superficiality, to the problems leaders of giant organizations have in knowing what is going on, in keeping in touch? Are such leaders being increasingly forced to know in the expert's way—through detached information systems and the like? (In other words, do these leaders face the same problems mainstream researchers do in trying to understand their data? Is there a bureaucratic mode that is prevailing in—and destroying—research and practice alike?) Increasingly, our organizations seem to survive and grow for political reasons. They sustain themselves through power relationships rather than effective service to their clientele (a point reflected in the most recent literature of organization theory, e.g., Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Are many of our large organizations too political, too detached, above all too large to serve us? Is this a problem of leadership? I certainly believe so. Is it one that leadership researchers should care about? I certainly hope so.

Back to Bill and Barbara

Let me come back to the Bill and Barbara test in conclusion, because I am perfectly serious about it. Announce that any request for research

funding or any submission to a journal will have to undergo screening by an intelligent practitioner. A member of that constituency will have to find it relevant before it is approved. Then watch what happens. That is my challenge to you—if you really want to change things, instead of just decrying them. If you cannot serve leaders, then how can you hope to serve leadership?