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The synergistic leadership theory

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Abstract *Modernist theories in leadership were traditionally dominated by masculine incorporation and lacked feminine presence in development and language. The synergistic theory of leadership (SLT) seeks to explicate the need for a post-modernist leadership theory by providing an alternative to, and not a replacement for, traditional theories. Six aspects particular to the SLT influence the ideas and include issues concerning diversity and the inclusion of the female voice in the theory. Four factors are key to the relational and interactive nature of the theory, which provides a useful framework for building and understanding the interdependent relationships. In a tetrahedron model, the theory uses four factors, including leadership behavior, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, beliefs, and values to demonstrate aspects not only of leadership but its effects on various institutions and positions. Developed through a qualitative approach, the theory has been validated qualitatively and quantitatively nationwide and is currently being validated internationally.*

The synergistic leadership theory

For two decades theories in leadership and management have been challenged for failure to include feminine presence or voice in the theory development (Brown and Irby, 1994; Shakeshaft and Nowell, 1984). In an early analysis of leadership theories, Shakeshaft (1989) found gender-biased language and the absence of females in related research studies. In 1999, we examined 24 leadership theories (Table I) commonly taught in leadership and management courses, focusing on the original development of each theory as well as the theory itself. These theories were examined for:

- the inclusion of the female experience and attitudes;
- gender as a significant variable in development of the theory;
- females in the sample population;
- use of non-sexist language; and
- generalizability of the theory to both male and female leaders (Brown *et al.*, 1999; Irby *et al.*, 1999).

Nine generalizations emerged:

- (1) "Great men" leadership models excluded the female experience in theory development.
- (2) Theory development was limited to males, as corporate leadership positions were exclusive to males.
- (3) Male-dominated agencies and/or corporations sponsored many of the studies which led to leadership theories: military; Xerox corporation;



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Type of theory	Name of theory	Primary writers
Organizational	Fusion process	Bakke (1953)
	Complex learning organizations	Etzioni (1975)
	Structure in fives	Mintzberg (1983)
	Learning organizations	Senge (1990)
	Organizational framework	Bolman and Deal (1991)
Organizational behavior	Social system theory	Homans (1950); Getzels and Guba (1955)
Management	Needs hierarchy theory	Maslow (1955); Porter (1964)
	Functions of executive	Barnard (1938)
	3-D theory	Reddin (1970)
Leadership	Theory Z	Ouchi (1981)
	Total quality management	Deming (1988)
	Strategic management	Nahavandi (1993)
	Iowa studies	Lewin <i>et al.</i> (1939)
	Leadership factors	Stogdill (1948)
	Ohio state studies	Halpin and Winer (1957)
		Hemphill and Coons (1957)
		McGregor (1957)
		Misumi <i>et al.</i> (1958)
		Bowers and Seashore (1966)
		Likert (1961)
		Fiedler (1967)
		Blake and Mouton (1968)
	Hersey and Blanchard (1969)	
	Evans (1970)	
	Burns, 1978; Bass and Avdio (1994)	

Table I.
Twenty-four theories
analyzed

General Electric; American Management Association, Exxon, Bell Telephone Labs; Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

- (4) Sexist language was present, as leader/manager was defined in male terms ("he," "his," "fine fellow").
- (5) Females, when mentioned, were not expected to have the same career aspirations as males. Further, females were expected to behave like men to achieve like men. If females did not produce the same results as males, their results were simply ignored.
- (6) While some of the theories advocated democratic leadership styles, the theories themselves were undemocratic because only one gender was represented in the theory development.
- (7) Several theories opposed paternalism as a leadership style, yet they affirmed it in gender-biased descriptions of leaders.
- (8) Some of the theories recognized the need for a participative, democratic, employee-friendly, and consensus-building approach to leadership; however, when these models were not present, theorists did not consider this absence as attributable to the fact that female leaders were not included in the theory development.

- (9) The theories were generalized to both males and females, even though they did not take into account the female experience or significantly include females in the sample population for development.

These findings illustrate outmoded and exclusionary premises related to leadership theory and reaffirm Shakeshaft and Nowell's (1984) strong assertion that conceptualization of leadership theory was formulated through "a male lens" and was "subsequently applied to both males and females" (p. 187). For several years, major researchers in the field of women's leadership issues have called for a reconceptualization of management and organizational theory which takes females into account (Brown and Irby, 1995; Gossetti and Rusch, 1995; Hartsock, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1992; Tallerico, 1999). We have emphasized the need for a theory which includes the female experience, yet which is relevant for both male and female leaders (Irby and Brown, 2000).

In this article, we:

- (1) present the need for an additional leadership theory;
- (2) discuss the position of post-modernism of the synergistic leadership theory;
- (3) explain the development of the theory;
- (4) describe the synergistic leadership theory;
- (5) share unique aspects of the synergistic leadership theory;
- (6) enumerate the purposes and applications of the theory; and
- (7) comment on the theory's validation.

Need for an additional leadership theory

The perpetuation of male-based theories in leadership preparation generates essentially five problems. First, leadership theories frequently taught do not reflect currently advocated leadership practices or organizational paradigms. Despite the fact that feminine-attributed approaches, such as collaborative arrangements, teacher empowerment models, including site-based decision-making, inquiry group problem solving, including qualitative analysis of data, nurturance and celebration of diversity, reflection on practice, community building, constructivism, and provision of affective focus are widely advocated in current literature and are widely practiced, no theory exists which fully incorporates these feminine-aligned practices.

Second, the theories most commonly taught in leadership preparation programs are not applicable to all learners. In a recent study of superintendents, female superintendents indicated that the theories taught in their preparation programs were irrelevant (Iselt *et al.*, 2001).

Third, the male-based leadership theories advanced in coursework, texts, and discussion perpetuate barriers that women leaders encounter. In an analysis of the 13 educational administration textbooks published between 1990 and 1994, Papalewis (1994) determined that only one made any reference to the presence of women in the field of administration, and that single

reference evoked negative connotations. Further, Gossetti and Rusch (1995) stated that many leadership tradebooks offering advice to women “perpetuate our idea of a leader as the embodiment of all that is male” (p. 18). If the current higher educational system is successful in acculturating a succeeding generation in the traditional paradigm of leadership, in modeling and imaging current administrators in organizations, then we can expect the succeeding generation of administrators to continue to be predominately male, above 83 per cent (Marshall, 1992). Perpetuation of these theories contributes to discrimination against women leaders in public schools, often manifested through “filtering methods” (Timpano, 1976). “Recruiting filters” include limiting job applicants to those within the district when few women are certified as administrators. “Application filters” work by downgrading an applicant for a top position by suggesting she apply for a lesser administrative or teaching position. “Selection criteria” include letting men skip one or more rungs on the career ladder but requiring women to climb each step. “Interview filters” present questions about family or marital status that are not asked of males (Timpano, 1976). Additionally, when boards hire superintendents, they frequently do so with the male leadership model in mind (Grogan and Henry, 1995). We submit that the leadership and management theory base predominant in educational administration courses inhibits women’s opportunities to obtain and succeed in leadership positions.

Fourth, the theories promote stereotypical norms for organizations. In our dynamic society, leaders must consider multiple perspectives, as they help to view in more than one way the concept of leadership (Gossetti and Rusch, 1995). Theories not inclusive of the female leader’s experiences inhibit such broader perspectives (Brown and Irby, 1995). A recent study of perceptions of male and female leaders revealed that the majority of men and women managers indicated that an effective management style was a masculine style, due to stereotypical role models of managers and leaders in most organizations (Sparrow and Rigg, 1994). Further, the study showed that women are chastised if they do not adopt a masculine leadership style, since feminine styles tend to be judged as deficient (Sparrow and Rigg, 1994). This indirect discrimination results in organizational norms that do not allow for diversity (Sparrow and Rigg, 1994).

Fifth, these theories fail to give voice to a marginalized group in the population of chief executive officers. Women are considered to have “outsider” status and, as a result, experience isolation and exclusion (Bell, 1995, p. 289) in the male-dominated field of school administration. As long as theories taught are limited to male models of leadership, the female leader’s experiences will neither be valued, nor will her voice be heard, rendering our understanding of leadership incomplete.

Over ten years ago, a small number of scholars were including female perspectives in their descriptions of leadership. Rosener (1990) offered the term “interactive leadership”, as a style of leadership that encourages participation and shared power among all employees regardless of gender. Her research included both the male and female perspective in management styles. According to Tong (1989), a feminist leader is concerned and seeks to resolve inequities concerning

gender, race, class, sexuality, and economic status. This type of leader publicly protects individual freedoms, gender equity, ethnic and class equality, and promotes collective action as a way of attacking social problems (McCall, 1995). A feminist leader works closely with personnel and develops personal relationships with co-workers that bond the members of the organization (Morgen, 1994). More specific to educational leadership, the inclusivity of women has been voiced recently by Brunner (1999) and Grogan and Blackmon (2001). Brunner (1999), in discussing power, related that females define power differently than do males. Females define it as collaboration, working together, non-hierarchical, consensus building, or "power to" (Brunner and Duncan, 1998, p. 54). Grogan (1998) found that female leaders value collaboration, personal input, and family obligations, and were more sensitive than males to a teacher's schedule and more able to combine professional and personal dialogue in the workplace. She proposed a leadership that is caring. Covey (1990), without mentioning women leaders, but coming close to being inclusive of the feminine dimensions of leadership, did refer to value-added leadership, correlated to Grogan's caring leadership, as leadership that impacts employees personally and interpersonally more than anything else in the organization. Sergiovanni (1994), again not relating specifically to women but coming close to feminine leadership dimensions, proposed four stages of value-added leadership. First, a leader should lead by bartering, offering something in exchange for something else because exchange is satisfying to both parties. (This step may be antithetical to Brunner's (1999) concept of "power to" in which nothing is expected in return; rather, power is shared.) Second, positive work environments should be created where employees are able to build relationships and reach their individual goals. Third, a strong emphasis should be placed on the importance of leaders working together as a team to propose and develop new goals while at the same time increasing the value of their role. Finally, organizations are more likely to prosper when leaders are provided with the appropriate resources and means to ensure quality work. Sergiovanni (1991) also related authentic leadership to "the head, the heart, and the hand." Similarly, without mentioning women, but including, as did Sergiovanni, the leader in relation to the organization, Bolman and Deal (1997) emphasized the relationship of the organization and leadership by introducing the human resource frame which is built on the core assumption that organizations exist to serve human needs and that people and organizations need each other. They suggested that a positive team player, within an organization, must be willing to work and put forth efforts to improve his/her organization and their communities. Relating to the organization, Senge (1990) introduced a systems theory, without the specific mention of females in the organization, that viewed schools as learning organizations. He suggested that an organization must be studied as a whole, taking into consideration the interrelationships among its parts and its relationship with the external environment.

The above-mentioned leadership or leadership and organizational concepts, with the exception of Senge's organizational theory, would not be considered a theory as defined by Kerlinger (1986). He stated theory:

... is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena (p. 9).

Most of the theories that continue to be taught in educational leadership/administration programs do adhere to this definition of theory; however, notably, over ten years ago Shakeshaft (1986) and Ortiz and Marshall (1988) pointed out the failure to include gender issues in administrative theory. Despite this call for more gender-inclusive theories, over a 20-year period has transpired with little attention given to this critical issue – critical in the sense that most of the students in educational leadership programs at present are female. It is imperative, and it is time that current theories be enhanced with an additional theory inclusive of women. The synergistic leadership theory (SLT), positioned in post-modernism, is such a theory.

The need for a leadership theory positioned in post-modernism

While modernism includes all things behavioral, scientific, logical, empirical, and male-dominated, post-modernism stresses the deconstruction of modernism (English, 1999) and the critique of truths applied to all humanity (Lyotard, 1984). Cannella (1998) stated that post-modernism encourages the creation of “openness to the unexplained, the ambiguous, the hidden” and constructs such questions as, “What are the messages that underlie institutionalized educational systems as they are applied to diversity?” Post-modernism challenges:

- the hegemony of modernism to center and marginalize, creating positions of privilege, dominance and exclusion, silencing alternative views and voices (English, 1997); and
- the ideas of “progress” inherent in the presentation of the development of a “field” (English, 1997).

Additionally, post-modernism:

- examines regimes of truth, language, and power that have dominated thought (Slattery, 1995, as cited in Cannella, 1998);
- socially critiques institutionalized systems and the truth assumptions underlying those systems (Slattery, 1995, as cited in Cannella, 1998);
- recognizes that those who have been identified as different have been labeled the “other”, especially related to gender and racial perspectives (Slattery, 1995, as cited in Cannella, 1998); and
- promotes a discourse that both accepts and critiques diverse cultural practices (Slattery, 1995, as cited in Cannella, 1998).

Modernism fails to take into consideration new ideas transformed from old and presents a case for the construction of discontinuities as a series of shifting centers, or paradigms, each with a new constellation of revolving facts (English, 1999). From a post-modern perspective, the shifts come to resemble “continuities”, and there is no paradigm shift (English, 1999). In other words,

post-modernism does not advocate a binary “either/or” criteria for the existence of new theories over old theories, but merely a co-existence or continuity of theories that are mutually co-dependent and, thus, suspended one in the other. This, then, is the reasoning behind constant theory analysis: not to replace the old, but merely to continue the dialogue.

The synergistic leadership theory is positioned in post-modern thought in that it addresses the challenges and promotes the views of post-modernism. Additionally, we do not advocate that a new theory replace old ones; rather, that the new theory be accepted into the discourse of leadership development issues.

The synergistic leadership theory development

Theory, herein, is defined as “any general set of ideas that guide action” (Flinders and Mills, 1993, p. xii), including “everyday explanations of a particular event or characteristic” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 31). The SLT theory development approach employed was qualitative. According to Morse (1997), there is a difference in quantitatively (QNT) and qualitatively (QLT) derived theories. QNT is “invented” or created by investigators through processes of reasoning and deduction using available knowledge, the wisdom of personal experience, and responding – a process known as “theorizing.” The theory is created apart from empirical data, but the results of previous empirical research may comprise some components of the theory. QLT is constructed from the empirical world during the process of inquiry and is as accurate as possible, representing the empirical world. Data analysis consists of organizing reality with inferences that are subsequently systematically confirmed in the process of inquiry. Theories developed through QLT are rich in description, and the theoretical boundaries have been derived from the context and not from the researcher’s arbitrary goals for delimiting the scope. QLT produces a theory that resembles reality.

Development and initial validation and procedural fidelity

Triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was used in this qualitative theory development to address questions of validity. Denzin (1978) identified four basic types of triangulation; we employed three of these:

- (1) data triangulation – the use of a variety of data sources in a study;
- (2) investigator triangulation – the use of several different researchers or evaluators; and
- (3) methodological triangulation – the use of multiple methods to study a single problem.

Data triangulation occurred by using multiple sources of data – current books regarding females’ realities, current research reflective of women’s voice, and data from interviews with women school executives and scholars in the field of educational and management leadership preparation programs. As conceptualizations emerged, interplay of the data occurred in recursive discourse and investigation. Investigator triangulation occurred using three principal

investigators in the coding and interpretation of data. Methodological triangulation occurred with document content analysis of textbooks and research studies, interviews of female school executives, and open-ended surveys.

Procedural fidelity was monitored by recording times and processes of major changes in the database, providing a history of our analysis processes.

- Data were gathered from an exhaustive review of the literature, books and research studies related to females in leadership or management positions. Both educational and trade books were used.
- A purposive sample of 30 women, nationally, from education and business were selected for inclusion in the study. Included were: ten women school executives from urban (three), suburban (four), and rural (three) school districts (must have been in this position for three years); ten women executives of corporations (must have been in the position for three years); five women from educational leadership programs and five women from business leadership programs at senior level professorships.
- Data were used from books and research studies regarding women's ways of leading.
- In browsing of documents or the coding of data, the researchers created categories (each investigator separately at first, then combined in consensus, after discussion).
- As new understandings developed, 20 women leaders were asked to review the data and provide feedback.
- Explorations of meanings were further explored through open-ended interviews (transcribed and entered as additional data for further exploration) with ten female scholars – school executives – and with ten women who were teaching in leadership preparation programs. These explorations of meanings, linking them with wider data, were reflected upon in context.
- Notes were made and discussed, furthering the development of the data.
- Data discussions illuminated the concept and provided clarification, exploration, and “dimensionalizing” of concepts.
- Additional annotations were added to the concept formation.
- All results became the basis of further questioning and further in-depth recursive dialogue.

These processes support the principle of qualitative research and grounded theory method in which inquiry is interactive, building on the results of previous inquiries and constructing new ideas out of old ones.

Description of the synergistic leadership theory

Based on a systems theory approach (Banathy, 1992; Senge, 1990; Von Bertalanffy, 1976) and inclusive of women's voice, yet applicable to both male

and female leaders, the synergistic leadership theory[1] is relational and interactive, rather than linear, with four factors interacting in substantial ways:

- (1) leadership behavior;
- (2) organizational structure;
- (3) external forces; and
- (4) attitudes, beliefs, and values (Figure 1).

The tetrahedron, Fuller's (1979) interpretation of the minimal system with the fewest possible points, is the basis for the model of the theory. The four factors of our theory are identified in four stellar points with six interaction pairs. Among these complex interrelationships, or interaction pairs, are situated experiences related to each other in some way. These related experiences are thoughts defining insiderness and outsiderness of the tetrahedron – insiderness being the events within or the interactions present within the defined planes and outsiderness being the all the rest of the experiences or events outside the defined or considered set. The model can be rotated around any axis and still retain its shape – any corner can become the apex and, therefore, no structural hierarchy exists. All elements in the considered set are interconnected. We place on the inside both male and female leadership behaviors, a range between closed and open organizational structures, and infinite possibilities of external forces and attitudes, beliefs, and values.

This theory has multiple vantage points, taking a macro perspective of the interactions among beliefs, external forces, people, and organizations. Such perspectives are critical in creating complete pictures or realities. For example, if Michaelangelo had focused only from the one vantage point of a hand in painting the Sistine Chapel, he would not have created the masterpiece depicting interaction between heaven and earth. Just as the artist's rendition of reality must be from multiple vantage points with the interplay between subject or object and environment, so must ours.

In considering the reality of schools, if we were to focus only on leadership behavior, we would lose sight of the broad canvas and the nature of the interactive system of organizations, external forces, beliefs, attitudes, and values and leadership behavior. Bolman and Deal (1997) advocated that successful leaders consider the broad view of the context in which they work. When determining success or effectiveness of leaders, if we were to focus only on the leader who may be perceived as ineffective, overlooking the many tensions and dynamics interacting to create this perception of the "ineffective leader," we would not be considering all pertinent information and we would not have taken the broad view of contextual factors into consideration.

The four factors of the synergistic leadership theory

The synergistic leadership theory includes four factors and advocates multiple perspectives. More than a way of framing and reframing concepts of the organization or of leadership, SLT emphasizes the dynamic interactions of the four stellar points (four factors) of the tetrahedral model (Figure 1).

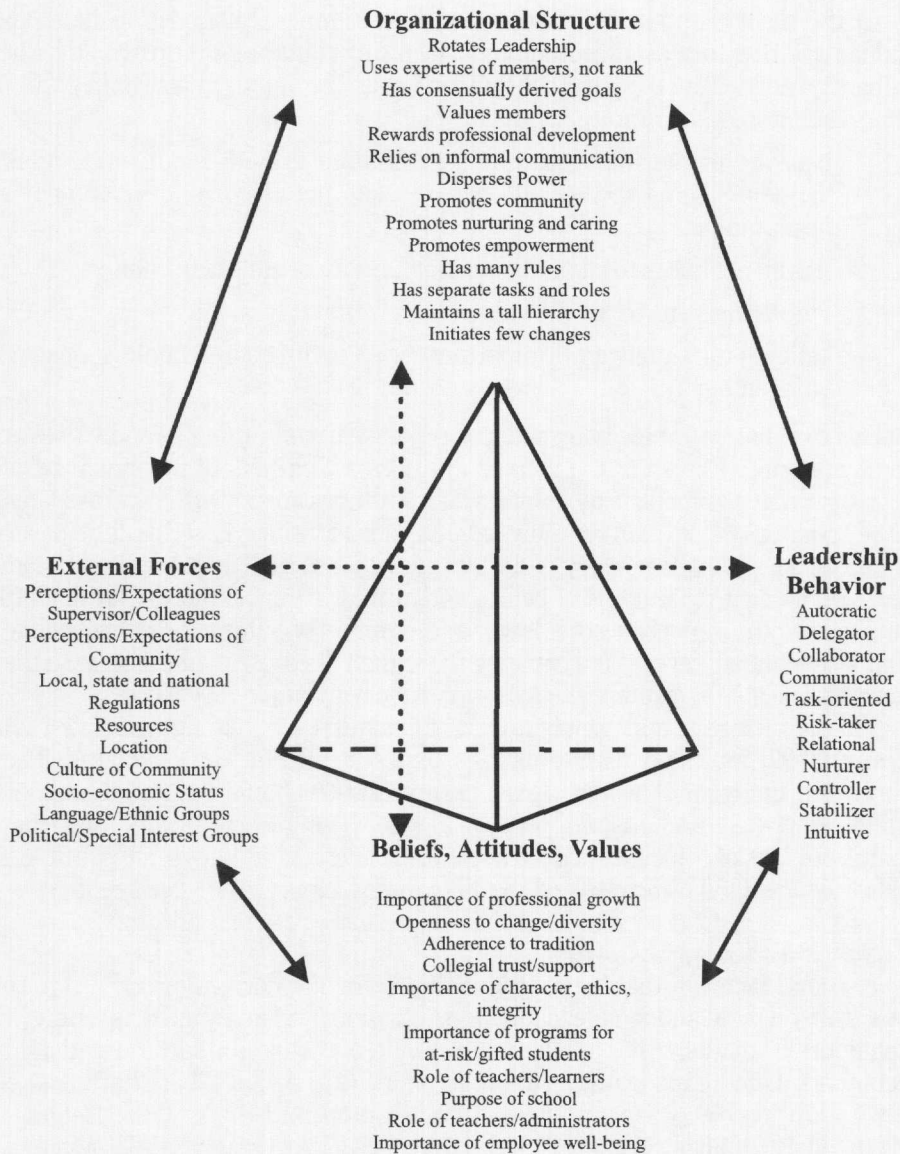


Figure 1. Tetrahedral model for the synergistic leadership theory

Note: Examples under the factors are not all-inclusive
Source: Irby *et al.* (2000)

Factor 1: attitudes, beliefs, and values

The first factor of the theory is attitudes, beliefs, and values. According to Wolff and Ball (1999), personal, community, and organizational perceptions and decisions are influenced by beliefs, attitudes, and values. Daresh (2001) recognized the interconnectedness of attitudes, Values, and beliefs with the leader, others, and the organization.



In the theory, as shown on the model in Figure 1, attitudes, beliefs, and values are depicted as dichotomous, as an individual or group would either adhere or not adhere to specific attitudes, beliefs, or values at a certain point in time. Dichotomous examples include:

- believes in the importance of professional growth for all individuals including self or does not believe that professional development is important;
- has an openness to change; does not have an openness to change;
- values diversity; does not value diversity; or
- believes that integrity is important for all involved in schooling; does not value integrity.

Beliefs can change as new information is processed, while attitudes and values are more enduring. Daresh (2001) defined attitudes as “clusters of individual beliefs that survive the immediate moment” (p. 31). Attitudes are powerful, and as Daresh (2001) pointed out, “we can certainly have incorrect attitudes based on false beliefs; this does not make the potency of the attitude any less real” (p. 32). Values become more permanent realizations of beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, Daresh (2001) emphasized the importance of a leader’s recognition of values and acknowledged that leaders must develop the capacity to examine their own values because they must also be able to examine the values of those with whom they work.

Values, attitudes, and beliefs are the foundation for guiding principles, and Covey (1992) indicated that “principles apply at all times in all places. They surface in the form of values, ideas, norms, and teachings that uplift, ennoble, fulfill, empower, and inspire people” (p. 19). The theory asserts that these manifestations of principles will be tensional if interactions between the attitudes, beliefs, values, and principles and the other three factors are not congruent.

Factor 2: leadership behavior

The second factor of the theory, leadership behavior, derives directly from the literature on male and female leadership behaviors and is depicted as a range of behaviors from autocratic to nurturer. Many reports ascribe specific leadership behaviors as more masculine or more feminine (e.g. Avila, 1993; Chaffins *et al.*, 1995; Durgin, 1998; Grogan, 1996, 1998; Gupton and Slick, 1996; Helgeson, 1990; Hurty, 1995; LeCompte, 1996; Loden, 1985; McCreight, 1998; McGrew-Zoubi, 1993; Palmer, 1983; Pigford and Tonnsen, 1993; Reardon, 1995; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1986; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sheehy, 1997; Smith and Smits, 1994; “The Top 500,” 1998; Valentine, 1995). The range of behaviors include those ascribed to female leaders, such as interdependence, cooperation, receptivity, merging, acceptance, and being aware of patterns, wholes, and context; as well as those ascribed to male leaders, including self-assertion, separation, independence, control, and competition (Marshall, 1993).

Factor 3: external forces. External forces, as depicted in the model, are those influencers outside the control of the organization or the leader that interact with

the organization and the leader and that inherently embody a set of values, attitudes and beliefs. Significant external influencers or forces relate to local, national, and international community and conditions, governmental regulations, laws, demographics, cultural climate, technological advances, economic situations, political climate, family conditions, and geography. Additionally, Norton *et al.* (1996) include "parents, taxpayers, business, professional community, and so on" (p. 339). External forces within Getzel's (1978) social systems model are the local community, administrative community, social community, instrumental community, ethnic community, and ideological community. Getzel's model of community, in our own interpretation, includes existing hegemonic structures that also interact with other factors within the theory. These examples of external forces, as well as others, including those listed in the model, interact in significant, non-trivial ways with the other factors in the synergistic leadership theory.

Factor 4: organizational structure

Organizational structure refers to characteristics of organizations and how they operate. The synergistic leadership theory model (Figure 1) depicts organizational structures as ranging from open, feminist organizations to tightly bureaucratic ones. Bureaucratic organizations include division of labor, rules, hierarchy of authority, impersonality, and competence (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1996), whereas feminist organizations are characterized by practices such as participative decision making, systems of rotating leadership, promotion of community and cooperation, and power sharing (Koen, 1984; Rothschild, 1992; Martin, 1993).

Feminist researchers examine and critique organizational bureaucracy and hierarchy and contest the impersonal, role-based, and instrumental social relations characteristic of bureaucracy (Morgan, 1994). Feminist organization theory asserts that organizations of any kind should pay attention to the personal needs of members, not just the instrumental needs of the organization (Morgan, 1994).

The feminist organization is simultaneously a workplace, a site of political engagement, and the social center of employees' lives. In contrast to the bureaucratic model where employees are expected to leave their personal problems at home, here personal problems are often shared. Feminist organizations are driven by the ideas, actions, sentiments, and values of the current staff. As a result, the staff tend to feel highly invested in these types of organizations and to sense a high congruence between themselves and the organization because they participated in shaping its rules, goals, and practices (Morgan, 1994).

Studies of feminist organizations have rarely surfaced in the well-known leadership and management literature (Ferguson, 1994; Feree and Martin, 1995), nor have they surfaced in mainstream leadership theory (Irby *et al.*, 1999). There exist organizational theories[2] which depict a contingency approach to organizational structure and which embrace some feminine leadership behaviors; however, no leadership theory, other than the synergistic leadership theory, openly acknowledges the feminine organization as a major component.

Aspects particular to the synergistic theory of leadership

Six aspects particular to the theory are:

- (1) female leaders were included in its development;
- (2) female leaders may be impacted by external forces, organizational structures, and beliefs, attitudes and values in ways male leaders are not, and vice versa;
- (3) female leadership behaviors may interact with the factors in ways unlike the leadership behaviors of males;
- (4) the theory acknowledges a range of behaviors and organizational structures inclusive of those considered "feminine";
- (5) leaders at various positions or levels, i.e. teacher leaders to superintendents, may be impacted by the factors of the theory in different ways; and
- (6) the interaction of the factors can cause harmony or tension for the educational leader.

Purposes and applications of the synergistic leadership theory

The purposes of the synergistic leadership theory are to:

- (1) add to existing leadership theory to include:
 - a theory situated in post-modernism;
 - a theory reflective of females' leadership experiences;
 - a theory applicable to both male and female leaders; and
 - a theory that addresses gender, cultural, and political issues;
- (2) enhance relevancy of theory presented in leadership training programs; and
- (3) create a framework for describing interactions and dynamic tensions among leadership behaviors, organizational structures, external forces, and attitudes and beliefs.

The synergistic leadership theory can be practically applied to educational settings in a variety of ways:

- (1) The SLT is not focused on just the leader or just the organization; rather, the theory calls attention to a number of interconnected behaviors, beliefs, values, structures, and forces that impact the leader, the people within the organization, and the structure of the organization. As a result, one can analyze and describe particular interactions that may account for tension, conflict, or harmony at specific points in time or over time. If an analysis of all factors is conducted and it is found that tension exists between even two of the factors, then the effectiveness of the leader or the organization itself can be negatively impacted.
- (2) Descriptive of the holistic environment of leading and of those lead within an organization, the SLT can serve to build an understanding of that environment to aid in decisions made by the leader. For example, leaders cannot make decisions in isolation, failing to take into account the impact their decisions will have upon the organization (the people within) and external forces.

- (3) The SLT is beneficial in determining why or why not an individual is perceived as successful within the organization. For example, if an individual's leadership behaviors are more inclusive of the feminine dimensions of leadership, but the organization is a closed bureaucratic one, with external forces also supporting such, then the tetrahedron, with the SLT's four factors as shown in the model in Figure 1, will be distorted, out of shape, and unharmonious, and the leader will not be perceived as successful. If the leader can determine the specific tension or breakdown in the four factors of the SLT, then he/she is better positioned to alter those negative perceptions by:
- trying to change the organizational structure and/or the external forces;
 - attempting to accommodate and adopt another set of leadership behaviors; and
 - realigning personal values and belief structures to that of the organization and/or the external forces. It is possible that the individual will determine that he/she does not "fit" within the organization or that the change effort is too great – subsequently, exiting the organization may be the best decision.
- (4) Not only is the SLT beneficial in determining "fit" while an individual is working within an organization, it can also be of assistance in job selection. The theory can be used in organizational and personal leadership analysis prior to accepting a particular leadership position. Once the individual analyzes his/her own leadership behaviors, the prospective organizational structure, the external forces, and his/her own values, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as those held by key people in the organization, the individual can then predict whether he/she can be successful and whether he/she can maximize the organization's success. The lack of congruency among the four factors would indicate a lack of "fit" for the specific position.
- (5) The SLT fosters reflective practice, as it encourages the individual to engage in self-assessment. Specifically, the SLT requires the individual to assess his/her leadership behaviors in relation to the organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, beliefs, and values. Constant vigilance in the engagement of reflection on whether or not the four factors are harmonious or contentious is critical to leadership and organizational success.

Validation of the theory

In bringing a new theory to the forefront, validation is essential. To some extent, the theory development itself, through QLT, is a means for doing so. Combining QLT with empirical validation, the synergistic leadership theory:

- possesses explanatory power across a range of positions and by gender (generalizability) (Trautman, 2000);
- is practical and useful in understanding interactive systems (Trautman, 2000);

- is parsimonious (simply integrates a large number of variables) (Holtkamp, 2001); and
- promotes dialogue around a model that is cognizant of female, as well as male, realities (Trautman, 2000; Truslow, 2001).

Reliability has been established *in situ* in the context of the leader, the external forces, the organization, and values, beliefs, and attitudes (Trautman, 2000; Truslow, 2001). Synergistic leadership theory has been validated across American ethnic cultures and geographic locations (Holtkamp, 2001; Trautman, 2000) and is currently being validated internationally (Schlosberg, 2001).

Notes

1. The theory receives its name from the early futurist and global thinker, R. Buckminster Fuller, who sought to use the language of metaphor to describe geometry as thinking. Fuller (1979) defined synergy as a means of behavior of integral, aggregate, whole systems unpredicted by behaviors of any of their components or subassemblies of their components taken separately from the whole. In other words, synergy is the basic principle of all interactive systems. Fuller established the minimum number of events to define a system – four events and six relationships.
2. Mintzberg's (1983) five structures for effective organizations; Bolman and Deal's (1991) organizational framework; Etzioni's (1975) complex organizations; Senge's (1990) learning organization. Further, Lamber *et al.* (1995) promoted an addition to the existing leadership theory base with the introduction of a theory of constructivist leadership which presupposes that all members of the community learn to lead and construct their own meaning of leadership according to the community needs. Lambert (1998) called for a need to build leadership capacity in schools and to change the definition of leadership from exclusive, or privileged, to inclusive of the entire learning community.

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