

CHAPTER 1

The Nature of Organizational Leadership An Introduction

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Leadership has been a major topic of research in psychology for almost a century and has spawned thousands of empirical and conceptual studies. Despite this level of effort, however, the various parts of this literature still appear disconnected and directionless. In our opinion, a major cause of this state of the field is that many studies of leadership are context free; that is, low consideration is given to organizational variables that influence the nature and impact of leadership. Such research, especially prominent in the social and organizational psychology literatures, tends to focus on interpersonal processes between individuals, nominally leaders and followers. Studies that explicitly examine leadership within organizational contexts, particularly from the strategic management literature, seem incomplete for other reasons. They typically ignore the cognitive, interpersonal, and social richness of this phenomenon, in that they fail to come to grips with processes that would explain or account for outcomes. While model building in the strategic management literature is typically focused on the examination of leadership occurring at upper organization levels, any insights offered regarding the selection, development, and training of potential leaders are not often grounded in strong conceptual frameworks having significant empirical support. These observations

sometimes leave the student of leadership with the feeling that many wheels are spinning in a deepening rut.

One reason for the lack of progress in developing an integrated understanding of organizational leadership is that theorists of all stripes have sought to offer generic leadership theories and models that use many of the same constructs to explain leadership across different organizational levels. Such an approach assumes that leadership at the top of the organization reflects the same psychological and sociological dynamics as leadership at lower organizational levels. This lack of consideration to organizational level and other structural factors has contributed to a dearth of good empirical research on organizational leadership, particularly at the executive level.

Some writers have argued for qualitative shifts in the nature of leadership across organizational levels (Day & Lord, 1988; Hunt, 1991; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Zaccaro, 1996). This view recognizes that dimensions of organizational structure, specifically hierarchical level, degree of differentiation in function, and place in organizational space, moderate the nature of organizational leadership as well as its antecedents and consequences. Thus, performance demands on leaders change across organizational levels. This also means changes in the critical competencies and work requirements that form the basis for selection policies and that leader training and development programs must target. If leadership were to be studied *in situ*, researchers could then fully appreciate how the antecedents, dynamics, consequences, and criteria of leadership change as a function of such variables as organizational level, organizational structure, environmental complexity, and cultural and societal parameters.

In our view, a situated approach that examines the contextualized influences on organizational leadership is more likely to produce accurate, defensible, and ultimately more successful models and midrange theories of this phenomenon. If such an approach were to include a focus on top managers, this would culminate in fuller and more generalizable models of organizational leadership, including a better understanding of how executive leadership differs from lower-level leadership. There would also emerge from such efforts a more integrated conceptual framework for the spec-

ification and development of leader assessment, selection, training, and development programs.

This book presents a contextualized perspective of leadership that we hope will serve as a starting point for subsequent model building and theory development. An essential question is addressed across the chapters of this book: what does the organizational context imply for the problems to be confronted and the requisite behaviors, attributes, and outcomes of top leaders? We have chosen to focus primarily on executive leadership, because research and models on this aspect of leadership are particularly lacking in the industrial/organizational (I/O) literature.

The focus of this book is on the performance demands and problematics that chief executive officers (CEOs) need to manage or otherwise address if they and their organizations to be successful. We have derived these imperatives both inductively from reviews of case studies and work description studies (Hemphill, 1959; Isenberg, 1984; Kaplan, 1986; Kotter, 1982; Kraut, Pedigo, McKenna, & Dunnette, 1989; Levinson & Rosenthal, 1984; Luthans, Rosenkrantz, & Hennessey, 1985; Tornow & Pinto, 1976; Zaccaro, 1996) and deductively from several models and perspectives of organizational leadership (Day & Lord, 1988; Hunt, 1991; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987, 1990, 1991; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lord & Maher, 1993; Zaccaro, 1996). These reviews suggest seven fundamental performance imperatives in the life space of organizational leaders: cognitive, social, personal, political, technological, financial, and staffing demands and requirements that define the nature of organizational leadership work.

The next section of this chapter presents some central elements that can be used to describe organizational leadership. Our intention is not to try to develop the “best” definition of leadership; we agree with other observers (Bass, 1990; Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 1994) that this is not a useful direction to take. However, we will identify some defining qualities that are important, at least from the perspective of this book. We then briefly review and summarize major themes in the study of leadership to be found in the existing literature. Once again, this is not an end in and of itself, but is directed to sharpening the focus of this book for readers. Following this, we provide a more detailed description of the logic

for the above-mentioned leadership performance imperatives that are central to the rest of this book. In a sense, this contextualizes the approach that we have adopted. Finally, as is customary, we provide an overview of the chapters themselves.

Some Defining Elements of Organizational Leadership

Stogdill (1974, p. 259) noted that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.” We do not wish to add still another; indeed, we suspect that what we might offer would not satisfy all of the chapter authors, much less the entire community of leadership scholars. However, there are central defining elements of organizational leadership that have some consensus in the literature and provide a unifying perspective for the ideas offered here. For the purposes of our discussion, we make the following arguments:

- Organizational leadership involves processes and proximal outcomes (such as worker commitment) that contribute to the development and achievement of organizational purpose.
- Organizational leadership is identified by the application of nonroutine influence on organizational life.
- Leader influence is grounded in cognitive, social, and political processes.
- Organizational leadership is inherently bounded by system characteristics and dynamics, that is, leadership is contextually defined and caused.

Leadership and Organizational Purpose

Positions of leadership are established in work settings to help organizational subunits to achieve the purposes for which they exist within the larger system. Organizational purpose is operationalized as a direction for collective action. Leadership processes are directed at defining, establishing, identifying, or translating this direction for their followers and facilitating or enabling the organizational processes that should result in the achievement of this

purpose. Organizational purpose and direction becomes defined in many ways, including through mission, vision, strategy, goals, plans, and tasks. The operation of leadership is inextricably tied to the continual development and attainment of these organizational goal states.

This perspective of leadership is a functional one, meaning that leadership is at the service of collective effectiveness (Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Lord, 1977). Describing a similar approach to team leadership, Hackman and Walton (1986, p. 75) argued that the leader's "'main job is to do, or get done, whatever is not being adequately handled for group needs' (McGrath, 1962, p. 5). If a leader manages, by whatever means, to ensure that all functions critical to both task accomplishment and group maintenance are adequately taken care of, then the leader has done his or her job well." These assertions can be made whether leaders are leading groups, multiple groups combined into a department or a division, the organization as a whole, or conglomerates of multiple organizations. This defining element of organizational leadership also means that the success of the collective as a whole is a (if not the) major criterion for leader effectiveness.

It should also be noted that functional leadership is not usually defined by a specific set of behaviors but rather by generic responses that are prescribed for and will vary by different problem situations. That is, the emphasis switches from "what leaders *should do*" to "what *needs to be done* for effective performance" (Hackman & Walton, 1986, p. 77). Thus, leadership is defined in terms of those activities that promote team and organizational goal attainment by being responsive to contextual demands (Mumford, 1986).

Senior organizational leaders generally carry the construction of organizational purpose and direction. The leadership performance imperatives that derive from the organizational context become entwined in this obligation as well as in the content of organizational directions (see Chapter Seven, this volume). For example, the complexity of the senior leader's operating environment requires considerable cognitive resources to build the frame of reference that provides the rationale for organizational strategy (see Chapter Two, this volume). Similarly, organizational goals and strategies need to be responsive to the requirements of multiple

stakeholders and constituencies, indicating the social imperatives confronting senior leaders (see Chapter Four, this volume). Finally, a little-noted observation about organizational goal setting is that when such directions are created, they reflect in part the senior leader's personal and self-defined (career) imperatives. Thus, when leaders develop and implement organizational strategies, they do so from and within the context of these and the other imperatives discussed here.

Leadership as Nonroutine Influence

Leadership does not reside in the routine activities of organizational work. Instead, it occurs in response to, or in anticipation of, nonroutine organizational events. This defining element was suggested by Katz and Kahn (1978), who considered "the essence of organizational leadership to be the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization" (p. 528).

Nonroutine events can be defined as any situation that constitutes a potential or actual hindrance to organizational goal progress. Thus, organizational leadership can be construed as large- (and small-)scale social problem solving, where leaders are constructing the nature of organizational problems, developing and evaluating potential solutions, and planning, implementing, and monitoring selected solutions within complex social domains (Fleishman et al., 1991; Zaccaro et al., 1995). This is not to suggest that leadership (as social problem solving) is necessarily reactive. The boundary management obligations widely assigned to organizational leaders (Katz & Kahn, 1978) require that leaders be attuned to environmental events, interpreting and defining them for their followers, anticipating the emergence of potential goal blockages, and planning accordingly. Thus, successful organizational leadership is quite proactive in its problem solving.

This defining element of leadership as involving nonroutine influence reflects two other points. First, critical organizational leadership is more likely to be reflected in responses to ill-defined problems (Mumford, 1986; Fleishman et al., 1991), defined as those for which the starting parameters, the permissible solution paths, and the solution goals are unspecified (Holyoak, 1984). In

such situations, leaders need to construct the nature of the problem, as well as the parameters of potential solution strategies, before they can begin to devise resolutions to the problem. In well-defined problems, solutions are grounded mostly in the experience of the leaders in prior similar situations. Such solutions are also not likely to require significant large-scale change in organizational routine.

The second point is that leadership typically involves discretion and choice in what solutions are appropriate in particular problem domains (Hunt, Osborn, & Martin, 1981; Jacobs & Jaques, 1990; Zaccaro et al., 1995). Thus, as Jacobs and Jaques (1990, pp. 281–282) argue, “Leadership must be viewed as a process which occurs only in situations in which there is decision discretion. To the extent discretion exists, there is an opportunity for leadership to be exercised. If there is no discretion, there is no such opportunity.”

Team or organizational actions that are completely specified by procedure or practice or are fully elicited by the situation do not usually require the intervention of leaders. Such actions are likely to be encoded as part of the organizational rule or normative structures (although, leadership is involved in the evolution of these structures). Instead, leadership is necessitated by organizationally relevant events that present alternative interpretations and by problems in which multiple solution paths are viable or requisite solutions need to be implemented. Individuals in leadership roles are then responsible for making the choices that define subsequent collective responses.

In this sense, the performance imperatives we highlight can be construed as representing a cluster of ill-defined discretionary problems or obligations requiring collective action for organizational success. For example, the nature and rate of technological change can pose a number of challenges to organizational leaders: how information is to be gathered and distributed, how to interpret the resulting flood of data, and how to gain competitive advantages from technological advances in both production and human resource systems are just a few of these. In the same way, financial imperatives challenge executives to make and integrate a variety of long- and short-term strategic decisions. Senior staffing imperatives follow these challenges as executives strive to create the right human resource combinations for their strategic choices. Thus, a functional or social problem-solving perspective of leadership is

necessarily grounded in a contextual framework that presents fundamental performance imperatives demanding organizational choices.

Leadership as Managing Social and Cognitive Phenomena

Most definitions of leadership stress social or interpersonal influence processes as key elements. Thus, persuasion, the management of social and political processes, and the use of social power are ubiquitous constructs in the leadership literature. In addition, as suggested by the problem-solving perspective, the execution of effective cognitive processes is equally critical to leader effectiveness. To illustrate, cognitive requirements include interpreting and modeling environmental events for organizational members, determining the nature of problems to be solved, and engaging in long-term strategic thinking. In general, models of leadership, particularly those in the psychological literature, have focused on social processes directed toward the implementation of solutions to organizational problems. A full exposition of leadership must also include the cognitive processes leaders use to plan collective action.

Some researchers in the organizational and management literatures have indeed emphasized the role of leaders in organizational sense making, where collective actions are given meaning through the leader's interpretation and cognitive modeling of environmental events (Huff, 1990; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993). Along these lines, Jacobs and Jaques (1991, p. 434) noted:

Executive leaders "add value" to their organizations in large part by giving a sense of understanding and purpose to the overall activities of the organization. In excellent organizations, there almost always is a feeling that the "boss" knows what he is doing, that he has shared this information downward, that it makes sense, and that it is going to work.

Such understandings, defined as frames of reference by Jacobs and Jaques (1987, 1990; see also Chapter Two, this volume), become crucial mediators of leadership influence in organizations.

An organizational frame of reference is a cognitive representation of the elements and events that comprise the leader's operating environment. Such models contain the pattern of relationships among these events and elements. Accordingly, the logic and rationale for an articulated organization strategy become grounded in the causal relationships interpreted by top executives as existing among the critical events in organizational space.

These frames of reference are not the sole province and responsibility of senior leaders. All leaders need to interpret their operating environment and convey that understanding to their constituencies. However, Jacobs and Jaques (1987; Jacobs & Lewis, 1992), relying on the notion of requisite variety (Ashby, 1952), argued that the complexity of the organizational causal map must correspond to the complexity of the operating environment being patterned. Therefore, the frames of reference or causal maps that senior leaders develop must be more complex than those of leaders at lower organizational levels. That is because executive leaders must accommodate many more causal elements, and the connections among these elements are decidedly more complex at higher levels (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; Zaccaro, 1996). The required development of increasingly complex frames of reference at upper organizational levels compels the need, then, for higher-order cognitive processes.

We do not mean to argue that the use of cognitive and social leadership processes is entirely independent. In many instances of effective leadership, these processes become inextricably entwined. For example, functionally diverse teams (where members have varied specializations within the organization) can help leaders interpret environmental ambiguity and reduce uncertainty. This is particularly true in top management teams, where environmental complexity is typically stronger than for lower-level leaders (Zaccaro, 1996). If the top executive team is constructed with individuals of varying functional expertise, the team as a whole has considerably more resources to develop more complex representations of the organization's operating environment. However, team members will often stay silent and defer to the CEO unless social processes permit them to contribute to environmental interpretation (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; see Chapters Three and Eight, this volume).

Leadership and the Organizational Context

Most theories of organizational leadership in the psychological literature are largely context free. For example, leadership is typically considered without adequate regard for the structural considerations that affect and moderate its conduct. We maintain, however, that organizational leadership cannot be modeled effectively without attending to such considerations.

One particularly strong influence is the organizational level at which leadership occurs. Not only do the fundamental demands and work requirements of leaders change at different levels (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Zaccaro, 1996); the hierarchical context of leadership has profound effects on the personal, interpersonal, and organizational choices that can be made, as well as the import that a given choice might have. Clearly a CEO's stating a preference for a site for a new factory is different from the case of a department manager's stating his or her preferences. Organizational level matters profoundly yet, surprisingly, has been ignored in all but a few leadership models in the literature.

What has been argued about leadership at different organizational levels? Katz and Kahn (1978) specified three distinct patterns of organizational leadership. The first pattern concerns the administrative use of existing organizational structures to maintain effective organizational operations. If problems arise to disrupt these operations, existing organizational mechanisms and procedures are used to resolve them. Indeed, Katz and Kahn note that "such acts are often seen as so institutionalized as to require little if any leadership" (p. 537). This leadership pattern occurs at lower organizational levels. The second leadership pattern, occurring at middle organizational levels, involves the embellishment and operationalization of formal structural elements. Such actions require a two-way orientation by the leader (that is, toward both superiors and subordinates), as well as significant human relations skills. The third pattern of organizational leadership, which occurs at the top of organizations, concerns structural origination or change in the organization as a reflection of new policy formulations. Taken together, the distribution of separate leadership patterns across organizational levels that Katz and Kahn proposed suggests significant qualitative differences between the nature of junior and senior

leadership. Similar models specifying differences across levels of organizational leadership have been proposed in separate theoretical formulations by Jacobs and Jaques (1987), Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Fleishman, and Reiter-Palmon (1993), and Bentz (1987).

In our view, a contextual model of leadership would be different from approaches that emphasize context as implying situational moderators (Fiedler, 1967, 1971, 1978; Gupta, 1984, 1988; Howell & Dorfman, 1981). In the latter, the situation is viewed as determining which leadership response (and sometimes which leaders; Fiedler, 1967, 1971) is likely to be the most effective. Generally, these models produce classifications of leader-situation matches that produce effectiveness. Such conceptualizations are important and do contribute to understanding organizational leadership. However, they tend to understate the role of the organizational context in influencing and mediating the fundamental nature of leadership work, including those forces that animate or retard leader initiatives or behaviors, themselves. This context shapes the performance imperatives that both stimulate and define the parameters of appropriate leadership action. It implies qualitative shifts in the ways that leaders acquire information in their roles and go on to make sense of this information. It changes if and when (and then how and what) leaders plan appropriate collective responses. It changes the nature and role of key processes such as how leaders influence and manage their followers. It clearly affects the range and scope of their influence. The organizational context even changes the mechanisms by which leaders acquire their role and develop their legitimacy. These effects extend beyond those typically modeled in situational contingency approaches in the current leadership literature. Thus, unlike the situation as moderator, we view situation or context as boundary conditions for theory building and model specification.

Major Conceptual Approaches to Leadership

These defining elements and the contextual perspective of organizational leadership were our guiding principles when we planned this book with the chapter authors. As such, we are promoting an alternative view in this book, or perhaps more accurately, we are

angling for a more holistic perspective in modeling organizational leadership, albeit at one level of the organization. By way of contrast, we have abstracted from a survey of leadership research four established traditions: social and interpersonal exchange, strategic management, organizational systems theory, and performance effectiveness models of leadership. We examine each of these briefly and highlight their major limitations. We do this not to discredit established traditions in research on leadership but to argue for the value of the approach we have chosen to follow in this book.

Social and Interpersonal Exchange

The social exchange approach to leadership is perhaps the most popular and pervasive perspective in the literature. The major unit of analysis in this approach is the relationship between the leader and his or her followers: leaders provide direction, guidance, and activity structuring to a collective; members of the collective in turn grant the leader permission to influence them (therefore conferring legitimacy), as well as reverence and respect. Leader effectiveness is defined as a function of the dynamic that occurs between leader and followers.

As might be expected, models from this approach focus on one or more of three elements: characteristics of the leader, characteristics of the followers, and characteristics of their relationship. In defining key leader characteristics that contribute to a successful exchange, researchers have focused mainly on the leader's predominant interaction style. Specifically, leaders vary in terms of their primary tendency to adopt a structuring task-oriented style toward their subordinates or a considerate, socioemotional style. For example, Fleishman and his colleagues defined initiating structure and consideration as key leadership behaviors (Fleishman, 1953, 1973; Fleishman & Harris, 1962, Halpin & Winer, 1957; Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Stogdill & Coons, 1957). Likert (1961) argued for task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors as differentiating effective from ineffective managers. In his contingency model, Fiedler (1964, 1971) used his least-preferred coworker (LPC) scale to define a similar task (low LPC) versus group-oriented (high LPC) dimension. Similar stylistic differences have been proposed by Blake

and Mouton (1964), House and Dessler (1974), Katz, Maccoby, and Morse (1950), and Hersey and Blanchard (1969).

Other leadership theorists within the social exchange tradition have focused heavily on characteristics of the subordinate. Hollander (1958, 1979; Hollander & Julian, 1970) examined the role of followers in granting “legitimacy” to the leader to be innovative. Lord and his colleagues (Cronshaw & Lord, 1987; Lord, Foti, & Phillips, 1982; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1993; Rush, Thomas, & Lord, 1982) have taken these notions further to describe the leadership schemas that followers develop and use to bestow leadership status on individuals. Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1982) argue that the maturity level of subordinates determines what behavioral style the leader should adopt when seeking to influence a group. Leadership substitutes theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978; Howell & Dorfman, 1981) cites the experience, ability, and commitment of subordinates as moderating the efficacy of leadership influence.

The characteristics of leader-subordinate relationships that have been investigated include their overall quality (Fiedler, 1964, 1971), the degree to which they are mutually influential (Vroom & Jago, 1974, 1978, 1995), their variability across individual subordinates (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987), and the sense of empowerment they engender (Bass, 1985, 1996; Bass & Avolio, 1990, 1993; House, 1977; House & Shamir, 1993). Fiedler conditioned the situational favorability for leadership influence on whether the leaders and followers experienced good versus poor relations. Vroom and his colleagues examined the factors that determined whether the exchange between leader and follower was a participative one, where influence flows in both directions, or a directive/autocratic one, where influence flows solely from leader. While most of these models emphasize an average leadership behavioral style displayed across subordinates, Dansereau, Graen, and their colleagues argued that the quality of leader-follower relationships varied across members within the same collective unit. Some relationships were participative, close, and characterized by a high level of trust, while others were more formal, directive, and less trustful. Finally, research on inspirational leadership by Bass and his colleagues has

focused on a dynamic established between leader and follower that reflects an intense reverence and loyalty to the leader and a strong sense of empowerment in the follower.

Taken together, these models and theories constitute a huge proportion of research in the leadership literature. They have contributed to a broad and deep understanding of the following topics:

- What constitutes an effective exchange between leaders and subordinates
- How leader qualities and behaviors facilitate subordinate and small group effectiveness
- How the contributions of various leadership styles to subordinate effectiveness are moderated by a variety of situational factors
- How the characteristics and information processing of subordinates contribute to effective leadership

The social exchange approach has greatly enhanced our fundamental knowledge about leadership. Nonetheless, this approach has several limitations that constrain an understanding of organizational leadership. Social exchange models and theories emphasize individual, small group, and direct leadership. The focus is on the direct interaction of leader and followers. Such leadership does reside at all levels of the organization, but other forms of indirect or mediated leadership also exist. For example, middle-level managers are typically tasked with providing meaning and direction to subordinates several levels down whom they rarely see face-to-face. At the top of the organization, executives are engaged in sense making and direction setting for followers they may never meet. Most of the theories noted do not attempt to model or explain this form of influence. Indeed, these theories do not fundamentally explain executive leadership very well. Day and Lord (1988) observed of the existing leadership literature that “the topic of executive leadership . . . has not been a major concern of leadership researchers or theorists. Their focus has been primarily lower-level leadership” (p. 458).

Although several of the social exchange theories do provide what can be called a contingent or contextual perspective (Fiedler, 1964, 1971; House & Dessler, 1974; House & Mitchell, 1974), they

do not significantly account for organizational contextual variables. For example, none of these theories explicates how the processes and relationships they model would (must) change at different organizational levels. Along this line, Zaccaro (1995, 1998) argued that the postulates of Fiedler's contingency model and his cognitive resources model do not apply easily to the executive leader effectiveness.

As a final illustration, the functional leadership behaviors and processes that are necessary for effectiveness at different organizational levels and in different kinds of organizations are broader than the stylistic approaches typical of this tradition (Day & Lord, 1988). Thus, the social exchange models either do not consider, or obscure in their theorizing, the importance of such leadership processes as information acquisition, sense making, sense giving, systematic social networking, boundary spanning, and long-term and long-range strategic decision making (Fleishman et al., 1991).

Strategic Management

Models of strategic decision making and management argue that organizational effectiveness emerges from a coalignment between the organization and its environment; the role of senior organizational leaders is to create and manage this fit (Bourgeois, 1985; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967; Wortman, 1982). The major unit analysis in this leadership research tradition is the strategic decision-making activities of top executives. Thus, strategic management models describe how executives make the strategic decisions that are intended to facilitate organization-environment coalignment. Researchers in this approach focus on key leadership processes: environment scanning, sense making and sense giving, the specification of strategic choices, and the selection and implementation of appropriate strategies.

Some models within the strategic management tradition actually deemphasize the contributions of top executives to organizational effectiveness (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), arguing that organizational and environmental parameters (such as resource availability, the fit of the organization with its environmental niche, and the strategic predisposition of the organization) primarily account for organizational outcomes. Other

theorists have adapted a contingency model (Gupta, 1984, 1988) in which effectiveness is a product of the fit between the organization's strategic orientation and the characteristics of its top managers. Thus, this approach defines strategy as a determinant rather than a consequence of executive selection and action. For example, Gupta (1988, p. 160) noted:

By definition, the notion that matching executives to organizational strategies enhances organizational performance assumes that strategies get specified prior to executive selection; in other words, for most CEOs, strategies are assumed to be a given and the CEO's primary task is assumed to consist of the implementation rather than formulation of strategies.

Other leadership models have placed a more central role on the thought processes and characteristics of top leaders. Rational and normative models argue that the responsibility of executives is to make strategic decisions based on a careful analysis of environmental contingencies and organizational strengths and weaknesses and an application of objective criteria to strategic choices to determine the most appropriate organizational strategy (Bourgeois, 1984, 1985; Hitt & Tyler, 1991; Pearce, 1981). Thus, strategic leaders are viewed as mostly rational and optimizing informational processors.

An alternate or augmenting view suggests that the personal qualities and characteristics of top leaders play an inordinate role in strategic decision making. For example, Hambrick (1989, p. 5) noted:

In the face of the complex, multitudinous, and ambiguous information that typifies the top management task, no two strategists will identify the same array of options for the firm; they will rarely prefer the same options; if, by remote chance, they were to pick the same options, they almost certainly would not implement them identically. Biases, blinders, egos, aptitudes, experiences, fatigue, and other human factors in the executive ranks greatly affect what happens to companies.

Recent work has also focused on the top management team processes and characteristics that influence strategic decision making (Amason, 1996; Hambrick, 1994). Such research adds team

processes and demographics to executive values and belief systems as primary determinants of executive decision-making processes.

The strategic management approach has greatly increased our understanding of organizational and executive leadership. Unlike the social exchange perspective, the emphasis here is primarily on the cognitive and planning processes of executives. In particular, researchers in this tradition consider environmental scanning and analysis as key leadership processes, a point not readily apparent in most leadership literatures (Fleishman et al., 1991; Zaccaro et al., 1995). Further, this body of research deals with large-scale leadership, that is, leadership of large collectives and organizations. Thus, it showcases indirect or mediated leadership processes that are prominent in any but small-sized organizations. In addition, several of the models in this tradition feature a contextual perspective that specifies the environmental and organizational forces shaping strategic decisions. As such, this perspective is represented within several chapters in this book.

Despite these strengths, several limitations are clear. Strategic management models do not describe the direct interpersonal processes, so prominent in the social exchange tradition, but still vitally important in strategic implementation. This is readily apparent in the research on top management teams, where much of the focus is team demographics and their meaning for strategic outcomes. Few studies have examined team processes in these settings (see Amason, 1996; Smith, Smith, Olian, & Sims, 1994, as exceptions), and even fewer explore the role of top executives in shaping these processes.

Organizational Systems

In common with the strategic management approach, the models in this leadership research tradition emphasize the boundary spanning and internal coordination responsibilities of leaders within open social systems. However, unlike the strategic management approach, these models postulate guiding principles that apply to leaders at different organizational levels, but also describe the differences in performance requirements at successive levels.

This perspective is grounded heavily in the work of Katz and Kahn (1978), who described organizations as open systems in close transactional relationship with their resource-providing environments.

Organizations convert environmental inputs into usable outcomes through a set of interlocking throughput processes. These processes become the basis of connected subsystems within the organization—in particular, the production subsystem that is most directly responsible for resource conversion. The production subsystem is buttressed by two other subsystems, supportive and maintenance, that are responsible for procuring material and personnel resources, respectively. Adaptive subsystems are established to look outward, providing environmental outreach and input for the organization. Managerial subsystems overlay all of these patterned activities.

Katz and Kahn (1978) noted two critical aspects of social behavior patterns that are particularly defining for managerial subsystem roles. First, the system character of organizations means that “movement in one part leads in predictable fashion to movement in other parts” (p. 3). Further, discrete patterns of functional responses are collectively interconnected to define the responses of larger units and subsystems. An essential function of management is to coordinate the activities of integrated units. Although this requirement exists in fundamental form at all organizational levels, the complexity of such coordination increases at successive levels as the number and variability of interacting social units also increases.

The second aspect of social behavior patterns is their susceptibility to shifting environmental dynamics. The embedding environments of organization are rarely in stasis, and their fluctuations can have profound implications for resource procurement and output receptivity. Accordingly, a major responsibility of organizational leaders is to monitor the external environments of their units and promote system adaptation to critical changes. Again, this responsibility extends to leaders at all organizational levels. However, the “external environment” for the first-line supervisor is the larger organization, whereas the top executive needs to span the boundary between the entire organization and more complex and unstructured environment. Nevertheless, both are responsible for facilitating system responsiveness.

For top executives, the responsibility for facilitating system coordination extends to other organizations that are linked in a partnering arrangement with their constituent companies. Such “interorganizational relationships” (Hall, 1991; Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980) also reflect a systemic response to environmental de-

mands that operate on all members of a particular niche. A response by one organization in such an arrangement clearly has implications for the activities of other linked organizations. Their actions also often require careful coordination to gain industry-wide advantages (such as political lobbying efforts)

The organizational systems approach, then, emphasizes the role of the leader in coordinating and maintaining system interconnectiveness and promoting system adaptiveness to external change. This perspective places a premium on both the unity and distinctiveness of leadership functions across organizational levels. Earlier, we provided a brief summary of models that describe qualitative differences in upper- and lower-level organizational leaders (Bentz, 1987; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987, 1990, 1991; Hunt, 1991; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Mumford et al., 1993; Zaccaro, 1996). After reviewing the executive leadership literature, primarily from the organizational systems perspective (but including models from social exchange and strategic management traditions), Zaccaro (1996, pp. 357, 360) offered the following conclusions:

- Leader performance requirements can be described in terms of three distinct levels in organizational space.
- All organizational leaders engage in direction setting (such as goal setting, planning, strategy making, and envisioning) for their constituent units. Such direction setting incorporates an increasingly longer time frame at higher organizational levels.
- All organizational leaders engage in boundary-spanning activities, linking their constituent units with their environments. At lower organizational levels, this environment is the broader organization. At upper levels, boundary spanning and environmental analysis occur increasingly within the organization's external environment.
- All organizational leaders are responsible for operational maintenance and coordination within the organization. At upper levels, operational influence becomes increasingly indirect.
- The effective accomplishment of executive performance functions facilitates organizational performance and success.
- Characteristics of the operating environment influence the nature and quality of executive performance requirements.

These conclusions reflect the leader's responsibility at all levels to maintain system effectiveness and viability. They also highlight the dual external and internal systemic perspective of the leader's requisite functions (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

This approach is a significant addition to the other traditions. It provides an organization-wide perspective, while denoting how leadership changes at successfully higher organizational levels. Thus, it can speak to both small group and large-scale leadership. Organizational systems models describe contextual influences on leadership by virtue of specifying key environmental dynamics that alter system requirements (Aldrich, 1979, Hall, 1991; Katz & Kahn, 1978). As such, this perspective is reflected in several chapters in this book.

Nonetheless, like the others, this approach too has some limitations. Although it does provide a contextual perspective, models in this approach rarely distinguish the range of performance imperatives in the leader's operating environment that influence leadership activity. Further, these imperatives are often systematically linked, just as are the organizations they influence. That is, the intensity and quality of one imperative (say, technological) can have reverberations that alter the intensity and quality of other imperatives (say, cognitive, social, and staffing). The nature of this interconnectiveness also changes across organizational levels. The strategic management tradition attends more closely than the systems approach to these dynamics (although not in a thorough, finely grained sense), but does not specify how they change across levels. The systems approach provides some fundamental constructs for cross-level model building but needs to attend specifically to the nature of contextual imperatives that impinge on organizations' systems.

Finally, the organizational systems approach emphasizes the importance of leadership processes for organizational effectiveness. This assumption is also apparent in several of the models within the strategic management perspective. Nonetheless, despite some well-articulated exceptions (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987, 1990, 1991), there has not been sufficient attention given to the links among leader attributes, the leadership functions articulated by systems models, and organizational effectiveness. Further, the models do not consider systematically leader training,

development, and selection systems that have as their ultimate end the improvement of organizational functioning. That is the focus of the last leadership research tradition described here.

Leader Effectiveness

A central assumption in organizational leadership research is that leaders and leadership processes make a difference in organizational effectiveness. Although a number of theorists and researchers have offered countering notions or evidence (Aldrich, 1979; Bourgeois, 1984; Calder, 1977; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Lieberman & O'Connor, 1972; Meindl, 1990; Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Miles & Snow, 1978; Romanelli & Tushman, 1986; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977; Starbuck, 1983), the predominant view, supported by empirical findings, is that "top executives matter" (Hambrick & Mason, 1984, p. 194; see Barrick, Day, Lord, & Alexander, 1991; Day & Lord, 1988; Hitt & Tyler, 1991; Weiner & Mahoney, 1981). Accordingly, some perspectives of organizational leaders emphasize the connections between leader attributes and organizational effectiveness. A result of this tradition is a focus on leader assessment, selection, training, and development systems that enhance these attributes.

Zaccaro (1996) defined executive attributes as personal qualities that facilitate the successful accomplishment of executive performance requirements, which in turn drive organizational success. These attributes also provide a framework for the construction of measures and tools that can be used for executive selection and assessment and training and development programs that target one or more of them. Thus, a key focus in this research tradition is identifying and validating personal qualities linked to indexes of leadership and organizational effectiveness.

Perhaps the oldest tradition in leadership research is the search for critical leader traits. Early forms of this research, although prodigious, did not yield consistent evidence for particular attributes, and hence researchers moved in other directions (see early reviews by Bird, 1940; Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959, although the conclusions of these reviews have often been misinterpreted). More recent efforts have renewed the argument for leader attributes by

correcting for earlier methodological and statistical limitations (Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986), updating reviews of this literature and highlighting consistent patterns (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Lord et al., 1986; Zaccaro, 1996), and by offering conceptual models linking key attributes to leadership performance processes required for organizational effectiveness (House, 1988; Hunt, 1991; Mumford et al., 1993). Unfortunately, research that validates the connections between particular attributes and key leadership processes and organizational effectiveness, respectively, has lagged behind this theoretical interest.

The performance effectiveness approach emphasizes leader assessment and development. Two examples of this focus are the longitudinal assessment center research conducted at American Telephone & Telegraph (ATT) (Bray, 1982; Bray, Campbell, & Grant, 1974; Howard & Bray, 1988) and the investigations of leader development by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). The ATT research developed assessment center procedures in which a number of exercises and tasks are used to identify managerial characteristics that purportedly predict career advancement. In a longitudinal research program, these researchers associated scores from assessment centers with managers' rate and level of promotion over a twenty-year span. They found that such characteristics as need for power, interpersonal and cognitive skills, and motivational orientations were significant predictors of attained level. Although this research has been important for identifying characteristics relevant for one index of leader effectiveness, it also provided a viable means of leader assessment, albeit one that has been fraught with debate (Klimoski & Strickland, 1977).

Research by CCL has focused on identifying the characteristics of top executives who succeed versus those who derail in their career (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). They found that managers who were emotionally unstable and not able to handle high pressure were defensive, and those who put personal advancement ahead of personal integrity, had weak interpersonal skills, and were narrowly focused in terms of technical and cognitive skills were more likely to fail after reaching higher levels of management. Note that these were managers who were as successful at lower organizational levels as those executives who tended to succeed in their careers. Their shortcomings emerged, presumably as critical predictors of

effectiveness, only when they attained top executive positions. This research therefore argues for different effectiveness models at successive levels of the organization.

The development of executives is a difficult task. Research by McCauley and others at CCL has focused on the role of work experiences and developmental relationships as key antecedents and mediators of executive growth (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994; McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998). A consistent premise in this work and in related research (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992) is that the complex cognitive and social competencies required for effective executive work emerge from training and work experiences that push the leader to the limits of his or her retained schemas and ways of behaving. When these comfortable patterns of thinking and behaving no longer suffice in completing required work assignments, individuals who are likely to succeed at higher levels of organizational leadership can develop new functional schemas and behavior patterns.

In sum, the performance effectiveness approach has promoted research on the attributes linked to leader and organizational success, as well as the means of assessing and developing these attributes. Nonetheless, it has not yet contributed a level of understanding commensurate with the conceptual advances in the other traditions described. One limitation has been a lack of consideration given to the diversity of organizational imperatives that will influence the leader's performance efforts. Such imperatives create a rich operating environment for the leader that renders as insufficient narrowly defined leader assessment and development systems. Validation research, so vital to affirming leader performance effectiveness models, has consistently lagged behind the conceptual models that have emerged in this tradition (Zaccaro, 1996).

Summary

These four research traditions in leadership have made tremendous contributions to our understanding of leadership; nevertheless, each has limitations, particularly in terms of modeling, assessing, and developing executive leadership. We believe that a more thorough specification of the performance imperatives that operate for organizational leaders, particularly at the top, will begin to address

some of these limitations and perhaps promote a greater integration of these research approaches.

Performance Imperatives for Organizational Leadership

As used in this book, an operational imperative is analogous to a functional requirement, derived from factors or forces that coexist in the context or operating environment of a senior leader. Our list of imperatives has been gleaned from the descriptive, theoretical, and inferential literatures in the area (Zaccaro, 1996). Although there may be alternative ways of characterizing them, we believe the following are a reasonably complete set.

Cognitive Imperative

This imperative refers to the complex information processing and problem-solving demands that organizational leaders, particularly executives, need to confront to be successful. These demands derive from the multiplicity and interconnectiveness of causal factors operating to affect corporate success. In addition, the recent rapidly burgeoning advances in information technology have resulted in exponential increases in the data flowing to executive decision makers. Attending to, processing, and interpreting these factors are central to resolving such problems as organizational sense making and charting long-term strategic directions. Moreover, the environment for executive leaders is typically unstructured and ill defined; thus, successful performance in such environments requires qualitatively different cognitive skills and capacities than leadership at lower levels.

Social Imperative

This imperative reflects the behavioral complexity that is required of organizational leaders. Such complexity results from the social complexity (that is, the number, nature, and variability of relationships) in the leader's operating environment. For example, executives need to coordinate and supervise the activities of multiple (or even all) units within the organization. This leads to greater so-

cial complexity because leaders need to integrate these units, even when their members have conflicting goals and demands. Executives are also required to adopt multiple organizational roles simultaneously when relating to constituencies, with many of these roles specifying competing behavioral requirements. Further, executive leaders have the responsibility for maintaining relationships, even while implementing organization-wide change, a responsibility that involves the development and nurturance of large social networks and the acquisition of social capital. These social imperatives suggest that the social skills and competencies required for executive leadership also differ qualitatively from those required for lower-level leadership. At lower levels, social demands are less complex because leaders are typically in charge of fewer subordinates and organizational units, and they supervise more functionally homogeneous units.

Personal Imperative

This imperative refers to demands on leaders for the timely and skillful execution of such activities as career and reputation management and the acquisition of power. This is especially true as executives seek to place their own stamp on the organization. These imperatives become critical forces during periods of executive succession and CEO transitions. They are also reflected in the personal values that executives bring to organizational visioning and strategic decision making. Some crucial questions reflect personal imperatives: How does a new CEO develop or staff a new top management team without disrupting important and functional dynamics that carry over from previous CEO tenures? How does the nature of departure by the previous CEO influence the selection, entry, and tenure of the new CEO? What are the critical reputation and impression management techniques that contribute to successful CEO succession and transition?

Political Imperative

Closely related to the personal imperative is pressure coming from the political environment within which most organizational leaders need to operate. Such pressures stem from the role that power

plays in organizations. The acquisition of power, the timely and judicious use of power, and even the appropriate application of power sharing are part of the story. A special aspect of the political imperative has to do with the routine need for building and maintaining coalitions. Thus, paradoxically, the operation of executive leadership is often described as more collegial and less authoritative than at lower levels. Such leadership requires more persuasion as an influence tactic and coalition building among top decision makers. The use of power inevitably gives rise to a significant amount of conflict at top organizational levels. How CEOs confront and resolve these dynamics plays an important role in organizational performance and adaptation. Finally, most, if not all, of the strategic and tactical decisions made by organizational leaders, particularly those in top executive teams, will be influenced in part by the political network within which the organization is embedded. That is, organizational strategic decisions are determined not only by internal political dynamics but external ones as well.

This last point means that political imperatives are also driven by the interorganizational relationships executives need to establish and maintain on behalf of their organizations. Well-constructed interorganizational relationships are highly instrumental for organizational success. The acquisition of resources and political advocacy are two critical reasons for the development of interorganizational relationships (Galaskiewicz, 1985), and power plays a crucial role here as well. Top executives need to apply the judicious use of power and persuasion to position their organization close to the center of interorganizational networks, where links are strongest to resource bases. Effective political advocacy also requires the welding together of diverse and common interests into a powerful coalition. This imperative will drive much of the strategic implementation efforts of top executives.

Technological Imperative

Today's organizations operate in the context of an information age in which technology has revolutionized the operating environment of organizational leaders. This technology, with its corresponding impact on organizational information flow, presents leaders with challenges and opportunities that can fundamentally restructure

how they accomplish the tasks of organizational leadership and change. Key questions regarding technological imperatives need to be considered in a theory of organizational leadership. How does information technology change the strategic decision processes of leaders, particularly top executives? What kinds of support systems (such as decision support systems and control systems) are available to assist in leadership and decision making? How do executives use technology in the service of organizational transformation and change? How does technology operate to change or deny traditional leadership roles or functions.

Financial Imperative

This imperative is perhaps the most fundamental source of pressures on senior organizational leaders. Financial and industry factors in an executive's operating environment may prompt an orientation toward short-term thinking, in which decisions regarding acquisitions and mergers are made in the context of fairly immediate gain rather than long-term organizational investment and adaptation. Competitive dynamics in the organizational environment also provide financial imperatives that may force a short-term perspective on top organizational executives. Most theories of executive leadership promote the idea that effective leaders adopt a long-term perspective—one that is strategic and visionary. However, such theories need to consider the financial and competitive imperatives that shorten this perspective. Thus, executive compensation as well as investor pressures interact here. Furthermore, the links among such imperatives, executive actions, and organizational decline need to be noted.

Senior Staffing Imperative

The previous imperatives imply a set of forces that would require that the staffing of senior organizational positions be done with individuals who possess a particular set of skills, dispositions, and capabilities. This, in turn, demands that renewed attention be given to the traditional staffing concerns of recruitment, assessment for selection, training and development, and performance assessment as they are applied to senior organizational leaders. More specifically,

given that the nature of work at the top is problematic in the ways so described, just how should we go about measuring and preparing organizational leaders of the future? Thus, whereas the previous imperatives can be used to describe the context of the modern senior leader, this last imperative represents, in the abstract, pressure on the organization to respond appropriately in its senior staffing demands.

Staffing imperatives also embrace the CEO's management of the executive team. Much of the popular literature and current models and theories in organizational studies tend to treat senior organizational leadership as a solitary phenomenon. However, much of the CEO's work is collective work emphasizing the coordinated contributions of multiple executives. Although some of the forces that operate here reflect social imperatives, the CEO's management of this process represents another aspect of staffing imperatives. Thus, key questions associated with this imperative include how staffing decisions contribute to and shape top-level human resource management concerns and how the senior leader is responsible for, interacts with, and indeed is affected by the top management team.

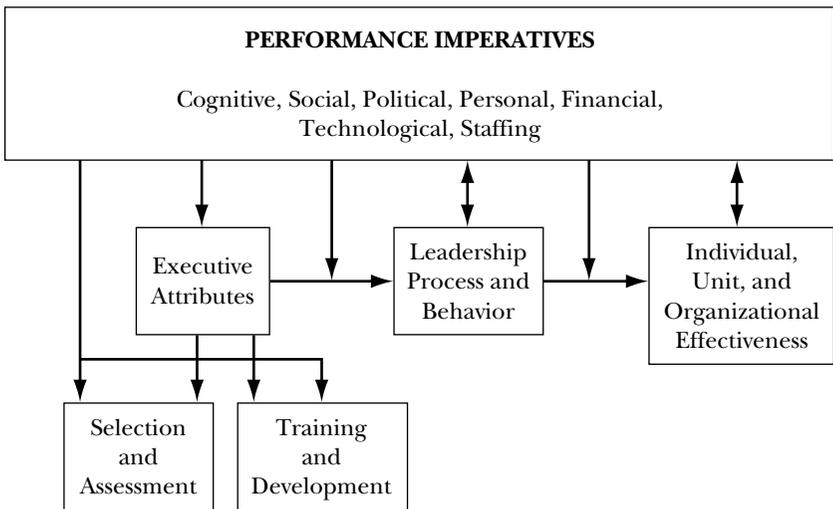
Summary

Our basic premise for this book is that these imperatives define the context of executive leadership action and its effects on organizational effectiveness. Figure 1.1 illustrates how we view the influence and operation of leader performance imperatives. The model specifically links executive characteristics with executive performance requirements and executive performance with organizational success. Executive characteristics are also the foundation for leader assessment and development. We would argue that performance imperatives act as direct influences, mediators, and moderators of these phenomena; they create the boundary conditions theory building and model specification regarding the linkages in Figure 1.1.

Plan of This Book

This book addresses these imperatives more thoroughly and weaves them into postulates for effective leadership at the top of the or-

Figure 1.1. Performance Imperatives and Executive Leadership.



Source: Adapted from Zaccaro (1996). Used with permission.

ganization. One edited book cannot fully explicate or capture the complex role of organizationally contextual factors on leadership. Our hope, rather, is to initiate this discussion with an eye toward enriching and augmenting other existing research traditions, because they all have merit at some level.

This book is divided into three parts. Part One presents definitional information about the performance imperatives and describes leadership attributes and processes that are engaged by the presence of these demands. Part Two explores issues related to the identification and growth of effective executives. Part Three provides some integrative conclusions regarding the chapters and some principles to guide future leadership research.

In Chapter Two, T. Owen Jacobs and Michael L. McGee describe an organizational stratification model that specifies changes in cognitive demands as a function of organization level. They also describe the conceptual skills and abilities required at each successive level to address the cognitive imperative operating at that level. Phyllis Johnson, Kevin Daniels, and Anne Huff follow in

Chapter Three with a description of managerial mental maps and, in particular, how their animation into action, rather than their mere content, conveys meaning. They also describe several factors that mediate the translation of cognition into action. Taken together, these two chapters offer an understanding of how executives address cognitive imperatives by modeling the information complexity in their operating environment and then using their subsequent cognitive representations to guide decision making and action.

The next two chapters examine executive leadership processes and capabilities that derive from social imperatives. In Chapter Four, Robert Hooijberg and Marguerite Schneider define the role of social capabilities, in particular, behavioral complexity and social intelligence, as contributors to the essential executive leadership task of creating organizational structure. This chapter thus integrates executive responses to cognitive and social demands. Daniel J. Brass describes in Chapter Five the role of social relationships as capital for executive action. He explores the dimensions of the relationships that make up social capital and how leaders acquire social capital. Together, these chapters provide a framework for defining executive responses to social imperatives through linked individual and social terms. The leader attributes that Hooijberg and Schneider put forth influence the construction of the elaborated and far-flung social networks that Brass describes. We would speculate perhaps along with these authors that executives with these attributes are also likely to use social capital in more effective and organizationally beneficial ways.

Catherine M. Daily and Dan R. Dalton explore in Chapter Six the political and power dynamics that characterize the contest for corporate control, particularly between CEOs and boards of directors. They describe and contrast two models of this relationship, agency theory and stewardship theory, and argue that firm performance acts as a prime mediator determining corporate control. Thus, they capture several aspects of political and financial leadership imperatives.

In Chapter 7, Stephen J. Zaccaro and Deanna Banks describe the nature and influence of executive visions. Although all of the performance imperatives are implicated in vision formation and articulation, personal imperatives have a particular role. Visions are

grounded in the personal values that executive visionaries bring to organizational work. Values influence how executives scan the environment, what factors they attend to, what opportunities they seek and employ, whom they select as their managers, and the emotional appeal behind vision communication. In Chapter Eight, Richard J. Klimoski and K. Lee Kiechel Koles examine the role of leader performance imperatives in the top management teams. CEOs manage corporations through their top management teams. Formation of the team recalls staffing and personal imperatives, and the management of team processes implicates social and political imperatives. The strategic decision-making requirements of the top management team define the cognitive imperatives confronting these teams, while financial imperatives provide the boundaries for such decisions. Both Chapters Seven and Eight examine phenomena common to executive leadership and describe how the various performance imperatives contextualize how these phenomena play out.

Although financial imperatives are implicated in several chapters, Chapter Nine, by Yan Zhang, Nandini Rajagopalan, and Deepak K. Datta, examines these themes more closely. These authors focus on strategic choices and their link to firm performance. They review the influences of executives' demographic characteristics and executive compensation, respectively, on strategic choices and firm performance and conclude with an integrated model linking these variables.

Chapters Ten through Twelve extend the ideas in this book to several human resource management practices. As such, they cover themes that are of particular relevance to I/O psychologists. Ann Howard in Chapter Ten examines best practices in the selection of organizational executives. Cynthia D. McCauley follows in Chapter Eleven by examining issues related to the development of executives. In Chapter Twelve, David V. Day describes themes related to the assessment of leadership outcomes.

We have asked Robert G. Lord to examine all of the chapters in this book and provide concluding commentary in Chapter Thirteen. We also feel that we would be remiss if we did not include a chapter that examines methodological issues related to the executive leadership research. Accordingly, Chapter Fourteen by John E. Mathieu offers several guiding principles for conducting such research.

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