



been reconsidered as it relates to nonprofit organization leadership (Salipante & Golden-Biddle, 1995). Selznick (1948) restated the control-flexibility tension (first put forward by Veblen) in terms of control and consent. Leadership decision making carries a tension point when applied in any organization but especially in the entrepreneurial venture. Entrepreneurial decisions need to take future impact into account. But at the same time, “entrepreneurial decisions must be fundamentally expedient decisions” (Drucker, 1959, p. 246).

A few more voices contributed to a growing understanding of the paradoxical complexity of organizations during the 1960s and 1970s (Andrews, 1971; Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; Chandler, 1962; Fiedler, 1967; Kelley, 1966; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; O’Dea, 1961; Vancil, 1976; Weick, 1979). Most of these (O’Dea is the exception) wrote from the perspective of for-profit organizations and strategic decision making, but none attempted a systematic study of the issues until the 1980s when a few more contributed to the study (Harvey, 1988; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Quinn, 1988; Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Scott, 1987). In so doing these students of paradox spurred an explosion of conceptual and philosophical scholarship that occurred from the 1990s until the present. Handy (1994), Keidel (1995), Bouchikhi (1998), Lewis and Dehler (2000), and Clegg (2002) are a few examples of the scores of scholars recently who have commented on the issues of paradox that affect leaders. The gap in this stream of scholarly dialog appears to be that, with one exception (Malony, 1999), none of the students of organizational paradox have explored this phenomenon as it relates to Christian leadership. Malony’s contribution approaches the subject from the point of view of leaders of religious organizations.

The purpose of this study is to celebrate through exploration the complexity of Christian leadership in terms of selected clusters of paradoxes. In doing this I will provide an interdisciplinary backdrop for review by Christian leadership researchers.

Thinking – Doing

A classic example of a fundamental leadership paradox is the one identified by Goethe (quoted in Edward Jones, 1914), who said, “Few have at once both thought and capacity for action. Thought expands, but lames; action animates, but narrows” (p.77). In this paradox we see illustrated how one dichotomous pole carries within it, if unchecked, the seeds of destruction of the other pole. Said another way, action, by its nature, ensures that tradeoffs are made

since one action means that other alternative actions potentially are foregone by the decision preventing the leader from gaining benefits from the alternatives. Thinking creates many alternatives for action but left to itself will result in inaction. Both thinking and doing each have positive inherent value and both are needed if leaders are to be effective. Peter Drucker (1992, p. 47), who emphasized the importance of *doing* in leadership, says in allusion to this paradox that the toughest balance the nonprofit leader has to handle is “between being too cautious and being rash.”

One of the scholars of leadership nearly a century ago, Edward Jones (1914, p.78), considered the work of a leader as essentially “mental labor.” He said, “Great men of action have usually been strong thinkers. Their action has been known because it has been performed in public; their thinking has been in private.” More recently Carroll and Gillen (1987) agree. If they are correct, we should find that a complex web of paradoxical mental tensions result from the output of a leader’s activity.

The Christian leader who prizes high moral ground faces this thinking-doing paradox in situations containing any difficult decision but especially decisions containing complicated moral dilemmas. On the one hand, thinking about a moral issue is required to ferret out the nuances of potential conflict as well as the rights and values potentially at risk. But by itself, the danger is that thinking about the moral dilemma can become a superficial sanctuary of protection against the risks of having to take a controversial action in a complex situation.

On the other hand, leaders have the divinely appointed responsibility to come to difficult decisions and to take actions when necessary. Action inherently limits moral debate and action taken without serious forethought will quickly narrow the range of possibilities to a point that at least will limit leadership effectiveness and at most cause organizational chaos.

In terms of moral dilemmas that leaders face, this thinking-doing paradox is related to another dilemma: using power for action versus withholding power through inaction. On the one hand, there is a risk that leaders will over-use (abuse) their legitimate power by taking actions that harm. At the same time, the opposite problem is just as pernicious: moral inaction when action is called for. As Pfeffer (1992) says, passivity plagues organizations. Leaders have the responsibility to exercise their legitimate power to deal with moral dilemmas. Not doing so can be just as devastating to organizational mission as the opposite problem.

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Head – Heart

Most leadership paradoxes result in tension and risk. Nowhere is this better illustrated for the Christian leader than in the

dysfunctional behaviors. Such a result may end up doing both the individual and the organization more harm than good.

The head-heart dichotomy is interrelated with a related paradox of being responsible for serving the organization at the same time as serving the individual. This paradox is explored next.

Serving the Organization – Serving the Individual

Like their counterparts in for-profit and government organizations, Christian leaders of religious nonprofit organizations have the responsibility of creating an environment that imposes upon the individuals aligned with the group (Cf. Weick, 1979). This interplay between the individual's needs and the group's needs is fundamental to the Christian leadership.

Several scholars have explored several facets of this tension. Malony (1999) discusses this in terms of running an efficient organization but ensuring that people feel recognized. Bouchikhi (1998), March (1991), and Keidel (1995) acknowledge the paradox of collectivism and individualism in organizations. Clegg, Cunha, and Cunha (2002) examined several interrelated paradoxes including the control-freedom paradox relevant in this discussion. Lewis and Dehler (2000) account for the need to foster autonomy at the same time as fostering interdependence in the organizations. Pascale (1990) highlights the collegiality-individuality tension.

Nutt, Backoff, and Hogan (2000) revealed that there are several major leadership issues that emerge from the connection between *equity* (human resource needs) and *productivity* (effective processes). This inseparable connection between issues of people and issues of tasks has been recognized by Fiedler (1967) and Solovy (2002) and is similar to that inferred by the Ohio State University studies and the University of Michigan studies on leadership (Kahn & Katz, 1960; Stogdill & Coons, 1951).

This tension point can be informed by three other paradoxes. Freedom of will of subjects who join organizations is by nature in conflict with the need for control and order of the will by the organization. "All organization is founded on paradox: on the one hand it contains free, creative, independent human subjects; on the other hand the relation between these subjects aspires to be one of organization, order and control" (Clegg, Cunha, & Cunha, 2002, p. 483). In religious traditions where freedom of the will is a central tenet of creation theology, this tension can become especially acute as leaders attempt to honor the divine creation of humans with free

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will at the same time as pursuing the organizational goals. Another related paradox is the tension that the leader faces in terms of trust and accountability. Trust is an essential part of any team; it allows for communication of ideas without fear of reprisal. However, when trust is total, it creates a void of accountability (adapted from Langfred, 2004). The third related paradox is the need for leaders to encourage debate where individuals represent their points of view while creating unity. According to Collins (2001), good-to-great management teams consist of people who debate vigorously in search of the best answers, yet who unify behind decisions, regardless of parochial interests.

In this discussion the distinction between leadership and administration, i.e., that the two are not identical though they overlap and that both are expected of leaders, is important (Bennis, 1989). Given the tension that all leaders face, perhaps we should



not new to Christians. The Christian experience is rooted in the paradox of faith. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is never built on 100% certainty but rather on the foundation of lack of complete information (Smith & Berg, 1997).

“Paradox is the environment in which religious leaders

It can be argued that considering paradox in one's own life as a leader is an act of worship to a complex Creator. The moments in which a leader experiences tension struggling to maintain balance as a mediator serving two extremes are the moments of worship. Further, just as in the natural sciences the complexity of the universe testifies to the awesome power of our Creator, so in the world of human relationships, we see evidences of complex situations involving human interactions. Celebrating complexity welcomes meditation and reverent exploration that does not require either solution or resolution to the many tensions created by paradox. It simply allows for the possibility of acceptance of what is akin to the faith experience believing that God walks beside you in the midst of the tension.

Lewis and Dehler (2000, p. 711) say that "comprehending paradox begins with an understanding of contradictions. Unlike continua or either/or choices, contradictions denote opposing sides of the same coin. Yet, people naturally accentuate polarities, interpreting phenomena through simple, dichotomized frames of reference." They describe paradox as providing a learning space to examine "the ambivalence of mixed feelings, conflicting demands and uncertainty" (p. 723). This is not easily accomplished since we tend to resist living in the midst of a contradiction (Wacker, Taylor, & Means, 2000). Like other leaders, Christian administrators of for-profit and nonprofit organizations may be tempted to explain or resolve paradoxes. Paradoxically, we attempt to resolve that which cannot be resolved. This may be especially true of leaders who are more directive in their decision-making style. Such leaders have a low tolerance for ambiguity and are oriented toward task concerns and efficiency. On their surface paradoxes appear inefficient. But their efficiency may elude us since it may lie at a much deeper level.

A complexity viewpoint on leadership (one could hardly call it a theory) may lead us to understandings that help explain some leadership behaviors heretofore not understood. For example, a better understanding of how Christian leaders work their way through paradoxes may help us better understand the decision making.

Final Questions

While many scholars have contributed to the dialog by offering conceptual analysis, few have attempted empirical study of leadership in terms of these tensions. Several opportunities exist for further research. The following are representative questions worth investigating:

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