Contingent Leadership – Paraphernalia to School Administration in Chaotic Times

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Background: Contingent Leadership model has been around before 1980s. Its application to education administration could be traced back to 1982 but was left behind the educational arena in the last two decades. Principals training institutes choose instructional leadership as the training focus for its substantial skills transfer. The research community strives to promote transactional and transformational leadership as the key to change schools. Practitioners know that no one leadership model is a panacea to their own situations.

Aims or focus of discussion: Dynamical Systems Theory covers more extensively the uncertain development in real life administration practices. The flexible Contingent Leadership becomes the logical, rational model for practitioners.

Arguments / comments / suggestions: I argue using critical incidents that embracing flexible action and preparing for possible stealth changes on assumptions in any situation is vital to tide through chaos. I justify my proposition with four changing contexts, namely, volume contingency, information density, changing values, and shifted meaning for the same action.

Conclusion: The model of Contingent Leadership should be included in the continuing professional development of school principals.

Introduction

Contingent Leadership model exists before 1980s and the conceptual Contingency Theory may even date back to 1967 (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967); yet left idle behind the educational arena in the past two decades. It is a breakthrough from traditional leadership models explained as traits and behaviours. “... traits required in a leader seem to depend, to some extent, on the demands of the particular situation and specific classes of followers.” (Owen, 1981).

Principals training institutes choose substantial skills transfer elements such as instructional leadership as their primary training focus. The research community strives to promote transactional and then transformational leadership as the key...
towards profound and sustainable change in schools (Bush and Jackson, 2002). Day, Parsons, Welsh and Harris (2002) observe that the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers in U.K. fails to differentiate between leaders who work in different circumstances, different kinds of schools or who are in different phases of their own personal and professional development lives. One size fits all seems to be the practice. This is not unique to U.K.

The school sector all over the world is experiencing large number of retiring principals and principals who choose to retire early, and the lack of qualified candidates willing to fill vacant principalships (e.g. Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Whitaker, 2003; d'Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2002; Gilman and Lanman-Givensm, 2001). In Hong Kong, we were told in newspaper (July 2004) that eight out of the 23 secondary schools in Tai Po (34.78%) will have principal turnover the coming September. That has serious influence to educational reforms.

Experienced practitioners claim that they know they will not follow a single route to decision-making. They acknowledge that they know about Contingency Theory, but to be competent in Contingent Leadership is another matter. We could not assume novice principals to be automatically competent and articulate in situational leadership. Should they make any unwelcome decision for the school, the public would not excuse them because of their inexperience. Endorse a need for situational and contingent leadership after the initiation training for beginner administrators would empower further investigation into the content of a appropriate skills curriculum.

In an era of acclaimed localized school management arrangement, political pressure for school reforms through distributed accountability is burgeoning. Leithwood (2000, 2001) names four basic mechanisms, vide. (1) Market, (2) Decentralization, (3) Professionalization and (4) Management (rational strategic planning). He appends that in reality, policies never arise by employing one single approach. Hence, he adds (5) Eclectic (sense making by implementers of reform). Eclectic improvisation bears strong inclination towards situational or contingent leadership. To most people, improvisation has to be learned.

In this paper, the potential contribution of including Contingent Leadership as an umbrella theory for in-service training of initiated school leaders is explored.

**Contingency Theory vs. Contingent Leadership**

Philip Hallinger publishes on principal leadership for more than two decades, from topics on instructional leadership, transformational leadership to impact of culture on leadership. Recently he summarizes his reflection (Hallinger, 2003) that the suitability or effectiveness of a particular leadership model is linked to factors in the external environment and the local context of a school. He argues also that the definition of instructional leadership and transformational leadership models are also evolving in response to the changing needs of schools in the context of global educational reforms. He believes in the synergistic power of leadership shared by individuals throughout the school organization (distributed leadership).

Hallinger’s view is inductive from the observation that whatever the leadership action, effectiveness varies under different situations at different times. No single style of management seems appropriate for all schools. Certain principal behaviours have different effects in different organizational settings. Contingency Theory becomes valid. The context of the school is a source of constraints, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand and address in order to lead. Here, the deduction does not involve time. The ‘different times’ at the beginning of this
paragraph actually refers to the same thing as ‘different situations’, both of which take context as static conditions. In this view, Contingency Theory reminds principals to use different models if they work in different schools.

Hallinger uses another situation where directive instructional leadership may be appropriate: “‘turn around schools’ may need an urgent stimulus to convert a climate of low expectations into one of success.” (Hallinger, 2003) Suppose the school does turn around and improves much, insisting on a stringent climate and directive instructional imperative could be counter-productive. Here, time and context co-evolve, which is a concept advocated in Dynamical Systems Theory. Contingent Leadership plays in. Contingent Leadership has to “be conceptualized as a mutual influence process, rather than a one-way process in which leaders influence others. Effective leaders respond to the changing needs of their context.” Hallinger concludes, “the leader’s behaviours are shaped by the school context.”

Contingency Theory and Contingent Leadership are therefore slightly different in their training load for principals. Contingency Theory is a concept that principals need to be aware of. Contingent Leadership requires a more thoughtful training recipe, which shall be the next step after accepting it as paraphernalia to school administration. This paper is about Contingent Leadership with context change in time.

Why Chaotic Times?

Change is not a rational process. “Successful strategies are often opportunistic and adaptive, rather than calculated and planned” (Kay, 1993: p.356). “Schools that rushed into the growth plan soon ran into such problems as lack of a shared idea of where the school was going, conflicts over procedures, policies, and more significantly, decision making” (Stoll and Fink, 1994: p.169). They conclude that “Changing schools means changing cultures and is a slow process requiring patience and persistence” (p.174). It becomes chaotic when reforms are pushing too fast.

School reforms prevail despite no perceived success in overall qualitative improvement in the past. It is a mess in our impression because our community keeps changing expectations towards qualitative school improvements. To accommodate changing minds, a rational growth plan needs to adopt an evolutionary planning approach (Louis and Miles, 1990; Cockett, 1998). Evolutionary planning encourages change agents to start their action on a broad-brush master plan (equivalent to a vision), re-evaluate the situation as they move along and refine their plan on their way. Louis and Miles recommend experimenting small-scale innovative activities. Let them flourish without requiring shifts in the whole school, so as to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities that might be overlooked or viewed as distractions if a master plan were being followed.

After all, success stories are often results of serendipity, more than being a matter of strategic planning. “Indifferent management can be good enough to secure survival in some contexts, while even talented leadership can fail to prevent closure or amalgamation in others” (Glatter, 1997). The importance of recognizing the significance of context within which leadership and management is practised has not received due respect, and that is the core attention of Contingent Leadership.

Research behind this article is a grounded theory approach of theorization. It begins with the collection of evidence about some aspects of school changes. Without a good definition imported somewhere, pioneers need to harvest intuitive and expert selections of theory-generating critical incidents. Critical incidents has been used as a
formal tool to understand school cultures in the literature (Hunt, Tourish, & Hargie, 2000; Angelides, 2001). ‘Critical’ is a subjective judgement, often can be identified only after the consequences of such an incident are known. Angelides (2001) picks up as ‘critical incidents’ those events that involve surprises followed by reflections or, even, problems followed by solutions. He argues that analysis of critical incidents is useful to disclose concealed and taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs which constitute manifestations of school culture. I endorse the element of surprise, and begin with cases that have diverse opinion in which stakeholders engage themselves in long wrestles and the issues therefore attract enthusiastic reporting in the mass media. Tripp (1993) uses a more relaxed definition that includes as critical incidents commonplace events that occur in the everyday life of the classroom. They need not be sensational, nor events that involve noticeable tensions. Criticality is therefore based on the justification, the significance, and the meaning the beholder endorse to them. With this extended definition, we could include particular aspects of routine professional practices such as decision making for students under incomplete information as one kind of common but different in each case as an exemplar critical incident for discussion.

In the following sections, I shall count why contingent leadership model is valuable for pragmatic and empirical reasons, quoting stories and critical incidents from schools in Hong Kong and overseas to illustrate context changes as

1. Volume Contingency – The Drowning Kids metaphor,
2. Information Density variations – Available Information Behind School Routines
4. Shifted Meaning for the same Action – The Surplus Teachers Quandary

Drowning Kids Metaphor

Contingent Leadership is needed in response to different volume of work demand. Consider two scenarios side by side. The first is a metaphor of life saving around a natural pool under a small waterfall. The second one is an image about educating kids at schooling age.

Imagine that you know life saving, what would you do when you pass by the pool and see one kid drowning? You jump in and save. This is the personal level of help. Well, that is how caring parents jump in to help their kids on homework and revisions. Often their eagerness damages their kids’ interest to learn.

How about seeing two drowning kids? You work harder and take an additional round of effort. Good! Then, how about five more drowning kids at the same time? You call for more helpers. Team effort and grouping strategies work. Oh, that is what remedial classes and tutorial schools in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan exist for.

How about more frequent incidents of kids drowning? As responsible citizen, you call for programmes to educate parents and kids, to prevent unattended access for kids to the pool, to train every kid on proper swimming, and maybe to provide lifeguards all the time as an insurance. Mass level control and other more sophisticated measures pay. In education, researchers and politicians call for a change in focus on the purpose of education and the way education should be delivered in schools in order to reduce failure from schools.

What then if there are still more incidents of drowning kids? Propose to the municipal or amenities bureau to have the pool barred from access, or even change the landscape and at least the meaning to the usage of the pool. Go political. In education,
the equivalent is relentless monitoring and greater demand for curriculum reforms and urgent school improvement.

Whatever the choice might be, the metaphor demonstrates that the best solution varies with the situation, more succinctly with changing frequency and severity of like incidents. It is a question of ‘When to do what?’ Cost of continuous surveillance, stand-by emergency unit, etc. become part of the context for considerations to fit.

Decisions subjected to volume contingency in schools in Hong Kong include pressure to add girls toilets in recent years of sex imbalance in student intake for secondary schools. With regard to the implementation of inclusive education, the demand for additional facilities to cater for students with special educational needs (SEN) is keen but the cost could be high. The number of SEN students to any single school is few in any years, yet the type of special need may differ with every single SEN student in consecutive years.

In cities such as San Francisco and Toronto, the number of minority immigrants fluctuates violently. The provision of remedial classes for English as a Second Language and the installation of portable classrooms in overcrowded city campus is another example that fits the imperative of volume contingency.

Practitioners need a local theory (adapted theory to be used as working hypothesis for projection of present causes upon future happenings) to deal with the context at the time and in the space that an administration decision was to be made. Hard work serves the purpose in some situation but could be totally useless in others. Charismatic leadership is sometimes efficient in motivating followers if the critical mass needed is small but negotiation skills could be more useful in face of sizable and determined political interest groups. Insisting on a definite plan sometimes does more harm than help. Compromising could be a more productive strategy to drive a minority agenda forward in another situation. Leadership has to be contingent in changing or oscillating contexts. Evolutionary strategic planning techniques have to be developed and learned through simulations.

**Available Information Behind School Routines**

Leadership style may need some change along with the development of changing relationships in a dynamic situation. Be prepared that support and opposition co-exists in most potentially intriguing cases that may eventually develop into a hot issue. The relative strength of supporters and opponents changes dynamically with changes in density of available information. More often decision is demanded in early stages when incomplete and even contradictory information is in hand. Contingent Leadership reminds us to avoid getting trapped by early promises, and be prepared for changing opportunities and new threats.

Decision-making on behalf of others is a routine in the school community. Related to mild emergency in schools, whether students should be vacated in anticipation of black rainstorm-warning signal in the subtropical Hong Kong? Related to school image management, whether a discipline offence in classrooms of the submissive Asian culture should be excused? In entertaining top down push for reforms in the unionized American schools, new tasks may emerge long after employment contracts are signed. Who should take up these new tasks? ...

The norm is that “The decision-making phase of change generally begins with critical and ambivalent change and unpredictable upheaval until enough information is understood in order to make a decision” (Sullivan, 2004). In many cases, full information could never be available, partly because participating members are not genuine to their espoused theory of operation (Argyris, 1990; 1992 Ch.20), partly
because the relationship imbalance consequent to telling the truth is too uneasy for everyone. This happens when the administrator digs too deep and reaches the regime of the undiscussables (Argyris, 1990), or when the investigation hits against the interests of the shadow system (Stacey, 1996). The list of reasons for incomplete information could go on.

School admitting mediocre students would feel that the ability of students fluctuates between successive years. Yet, annual school plans have to be made before the results of Secondary One school places allocation are released to schools. Textbooks have to be decided before the school could have a chance to assess the ability of the new intake. Teachers are appropriated to new classes without matching compatibility with students’ motivational inclinations; and sometimes teachers are hired after all management arrangements are set. This is another scenario that decision has to be made despite incomplete information.

To be aware of the ontology of complex decision-making is both an individual and organizational learning process. We need to learn from errors and be prepared to re-design new strategy along the way. Adjustment and improvisation are necessary skills to nurture mutual respect and trust for long term collaboration. These are key features allowing successful Contingent Leadership, which again have to be learned.

The External School Review Inspections

Educational reform imposes increasing pace of pressure on school, wave after wave, yet things stay the same. These scenario forecasts how changing values and perceptions in the environment make it impossible for schools to become both flexible and stable in re-institutionalization of previous change demands.

“... when the national priorities change, the funding runs out, and the policy makers and researchers move on to other things, it is the teachers who are left with the job of implementation.” (Carter and Halsall, 1998:p.77)

Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) mandated that all publicly funded schools should run as School-Based Management schools (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988) starting 2000. A Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI) team was established. To speed up the coverage of QAI to every school, schools are required to produce an Annual School Development Plan and a mandatory Annual Internal Self-Evaluation. The surveys and the subsequent documents are to be ready for External School Review inspections once every four years. The first cohort of school to undergo this External School Review was done in January 2004.

Pressure is enormous if schools care about any unfavourable ranking being posted on the web for the next four years. Most principals comply with whatever criteria the External School Review team use to rate schools and their subsequent recommendations. The review team could be critical friends.

Could these recommendations bring about genuine school improvement in the long run? May be not. Cynical critics conjecture that in another four years time, new fad models of evaluation will arise and the criteria would be very different. Long term preparation is in vain. This echoes what Tsoukas (1994) describes, “not only do teachers currently have to contend with these varying expectations, but that society keeps changing its mind about what the purposes of education should be, and about the way in which teachers might realize these purposes” (in Carter, 1998: p.5). The emerging pattern is that School External Review becomes just a dissipating exercise to 'prove rather than improve quality' (Carter, 1998).

In this incident, ambiguity in the purpose of education, reinforced with the diverse interpretation of ‘contextual’ fit in education delivery, cause average schools a
loser in chases after fad emphases. Consider the necessary cultural changes and the
time required, contrast it with Cheung and Cheng’s (1997) model for implementing
multi-level self-management in schools, re-engineered practices to suit the
improvement targets of a previous External Review or QAI will only end up in a
reactive failure. Logically, success in self-organization (Unfreezing, Changing) and
institutionalization (Reinforcing) stages is itself an obstacle towards being ready again
to adapt (Unfreezing) for the next fad model of school review. Carter (1998)
continues,

With varying statements, varying interpretations and varying demands coming from an
array of interested bodies, it is not surprising that there is confusion about what the real
intentions of education are, or should be. (p.6)

Critical incidents for tidal drifts of public value in Hong Kong include the big
debate on the use of Chinese as the Medium of Instruction (CMI); and the basis for
the allocation of Secondary One School Places. It is a shift from sub-cultural
acceptance of meritocracy to hidden undiscussable parentocracy in the pursuits for
school places both in primary one and secondary one. The vigorous responses of
interest-bearing parents in these two issues surprise reform designers. Elsewhere, tidal
drifts of public value are found in the issue of funding private schools with public
money in California, and in the issue on vocational component in grammar schools in
U.K. Whichever direction the wind blows, schools are always the target of attack by
disgruntled parents and opposition politicians.

To remain flexible and to preserve adaptability sound like better strategy for
improving schools. To build capacity (Earl &Lee, 2000; Harris & Hopkins, 2001) and
to transfer energy from “the concern for the measurement of demonstrable
effectiveness” to “a concern to tackle underlying problems rather than merely the
measurement of outcomes” (Carter, 1998) is a worthwhile guiding principle behind
Contingent Leadership.

The Surplus Teachers Quandary

This critical incident testifies how meaning shifts with a slight change in the
presage condition prior to making the same decision. Presage condition is often
beyond manipulation. In this connection, decision and choice are always contingent
and reactive to contemporary context.

As a matter of normal dynamic fluctuation patterns in local student population,
schools might have surplus teachers because of shrinking student intake or strategic
reduction in the number of classes, etc. In times of economic prosperity, surplus is
readily absorbed by re-deployment, by natural wastage, and/or by secondment to other
posts. In times of economic downturn and reduction in educational reform projects, all
alternative opportunities shrink. Job security is in higher priority among teachers.
Natural wastage is limited to retirement and sickness.

Early March 2003, EMB decided that surplus teachers would not be tolerated for
the academic year 2003/04. At that time, surplus teachers in the four hundred publicly
financed secondary schools were estimated around 360. Schools are given 10 days to
identify who are in excess and these surpluses are to be dissipated in school-based
manner before May 2003. Teachers concerned should know why and how they are
picked to become redundant. To be fair, they should be allowed to appeal to the school
sponsor to declare their worth to stay.

As prompts for school-based problem solving, successful examples were quoted
where teachers in the same school engage themselves in sharing a job as half-time
teachers, earning their own private time to take care of their own children, to finish
further study, etc. EMB takes on the view that it is the legal responsibility of schools to look for ways to terminate tenure with surplus teachers, not EMB which provides full public subsidy on salary and stipulated expenditure in subsidized schools.

One school reported in mid March that all her staff has signed up an agreement to share salaries of 45 staffs in the establishment among the 49 on the payroll. Their remaining problems would be technical in connection with provident fund retention, annual experience increment calculation, and the total amount of salary remuneration paid to the schools. The Permanent Secretary of Education and Manpower (PSEM, Mrs. Fanny Law) gave her support to the proposal and promised to pave the way for paying the highest paid 45 staff salary as a lump sum to the school. All other technical concerns would be calculated to the best advantage of the teachers concerned. Technical obstacles are removed, and this salary pool sharing resolution sounds good.

In June 2003 at the heat of another round of debate concerning job hunting by surplus teachers from primary schools, compounded with the demand of new graduates from the teachers training institutions to have a chance for employment, EMB reiterated the same advice including salary pool sharing. This time, PSEM faced violent oppositions.

In this incident, nuance lies on the enacted list of surplus teachers. (I shall explain further below.) Once enacted, the staffs split into different interest categories, each anticipates differential impacts on different ground, and each responds accordingly to their best interest. It is vitally important that administrators be aware of such differentiation when enacting a mandate, and to make the right recommendation at the right time.

Analysis in the Light of Dynamical Systems Theory

The four critical incidents vary in levels of particulars, some are rare, and some are common and ubiquitous. Complexity confuses. The sense of turbulence and chaos is alleviated for all four critical incidents when we read the description and enjoy the benefit of hindsight. With retrospective intelligence, we could make sense of what has happened. The most important difference between retrospective judgment and on site realtime judgment is that all intervening factors in the process have already been frozen in time. No further surprise to fear of. Noise could be easily filtered out in retrospective intelligence because irrelevant interceptions died out as time unfolds.

Dynamical Systems Theory (DST) (Brooke-Smith, 2003) deals with pattern of change as it unfolds in time. DST embraces Complexity theories and Chaos theory. Instead of planning directly to manipulate changes as in Transformational Leadership, DST proponents deliberate to remove obstacles and to pave the right conditions to allow change patterns to unfold in time. In any case, the outcome does not always bear direct relationship with the kind of action made alone. Context and information density shuffles appropriate action cards. Time distorts priority and values. Timing twists meaning of the same action.

1. **Non-linearity Plays in**

Linearity implies predictability. Non-linearity could lead to surprises. Chaos Theory and Complexity theories are the two sides of the coin characterizing the non-linear paradigm. The mechanism behind could be the same, that a small initial input will amplify through repeated cycles of positive feedback (deviation-amplifying) that influence individual decision. This reiterates and eventually forms a new pattern of preference for the entire community. (Tse, 2003a)
Depending on the circumstances, educational systems demonstrate the characteristics of either a linear system or non-linear system at different times. In the Volume Contingency scenarios and the Available Information Density scenario, the vital parameter changes with time, and they obey both linearity and non-linearity depending on how fast these changes happen together. They are chaotic because one cannot predict precisely how many drowning accidents may happen today, judged merely from the data of this week. Scheduled resource allocation could be a mismatch to the volume of workload. Decision could have been made before more relevant information comes in, but information comes in during the process of implementation of the changed decision and judged the decision a mistake. Public stricture and insubordination at the bottom rank at the time of turbulence would inform onset of chaos.

Because of the possibility of non-linear behaviour of the system, changing one element of an educational system may lead to unexpected changes in other parts of the system (Reilly, 2000: p.12). The External School Review scenario involves too many interacting agents in the next four years. Transformation plans need to be contingent to every position of the changing context. In the Surplus Teachers Quandary, the vital nuance is on the spotting of surplus teachers.

2. **Outcome is sensitive to nuances of initial conditions**

Under the ambit of Chaos Theory, bifurcation is a point where the same input in a decision system may result in drastically different outcome. Decisions of the interacting members switch from one trend to another. In a linear management control system, organizational scientists assume that an input of x units would always result in a predictable proportionate return of y units of outcome. This is true when quantitative improvement of school education is the target. By injected $x into the system, we could readily estimate how many more places would be available at a certain district. However, many management problems in real life do not follow linearity. Outcome could be surprising and each surprising outcome demands adjustments of any earlier plan for intended changes. The interpretation is further complicated because initial condition does not refer to the very early point of time alone. It is a moving ‘initial’ as people stops, re-evaluate the case, bring along their impressions and adjust their expectations. The Available Information incidents should testify to this.

3. **Discover the Bifurcation Point**

In the Surplus Teachers Quandary, preferences of every interacting member within the decision system (the school) flip over once a decision is attempted to name who should be considered redundant. The Principal in the case makes a thoughtful timing to propose salary sharing as a strategy to resist naming and labeling the redundant. Sharing the salary pool means accepting the salary at a discount, as if an insurance premium is paid in order to confirm job security for everyone. This protects the entire staff. After signing the agreement, teachers are still free to seek employment elsewhere. Whoever succeeds contributes a significant relief to the financial burden for remaining staffs. The contribution would be hailed. Everyone would be happy.

Once a list of redundant teachers is prepared, teaching staffs split into two camps, namely, those who are safe and those who are redundant. Those who are redundant have to look for another job. They suffer from being discriminated and labeled as being inferior. They are hurt throughout the job seeking and the interviewing processes. They become a burden to staffs in the safe category who committed for their insurance. To share the salary with the staff in the redundant category is purely a virtue of altruism. When it comes to pragmatic dollar issues, individuals would have
diverse reasons to be reluctant to contribute – domestic expenditure, children studying abroad, mortgages to be paid, deficit property assets (a term to describe the bad situation that the market price of the flat they hire-purchased under a mortgage term with the bank has dropped so much that even if they sell the property at the market price, they still owe the bank a substantial amount of loan to be reimbursed right away) to be recovered, etc. Principals would find it difficult to convince all teaching staff to subscribe into a salary pool sharing agreement. It would be much easier to secure internal spirit of collaboration by pointing the finger towards outside – the erroneous planning of the EMB. It is also easy to network with other schools under similar difficulties to protest against central administration. The problem at the school level is readily solved if EMB is forced to pay the extra salary. This consensus would be ready and unanimous.

Hence with some luck, the same proposal might work in a few unique setting in March but would no longer work after the name lists of redundant teachers were issued. EMB made a serious mistake in pushing for the decision to be made promptly before April 2003.

In Volume Contingency and Available Information scenarios, conflicting and contradictory information sustain Chaos. Arrival of significant information triggers onset of a new bifurcation point. In the External Inspection Quandary, loss of faith is the bifurcation point.

4. Connection with Dynamical Systems Theory

Dynamical Systems Theory is the umbrella theory about non-linearity, embracing a Theory of Autopoiesis, Chaos Theory and the family of Complexity Theories. (Tse, 2003b) Chaos Theory advises that there is order behind disorder. In the Surplus Teachers Quandary, we saw some clear rational decision behind the superficial turmoil of choice. There is bifurcation at some point of input once the redundant teacher list is announced. The flipping occurs because of drastic change in the meaning of the diverse individual choices. Every member conducts similar evaluation process for his/her own decision. It is the predicted fractal self-similarity pattern anticipated from Chaos Theory. The collective choice returns to the original attractor (norm) of maintaining status quo, once the list is enacted. No strange attractor survives though the proposal of salary pool sharing has the potential of setting a new norm (settling in a strange attractor) to the subsidized school sector.

Complexity Theories acknowledge complexity when a large number of interacting members adopt the same simple rules, and that their independent decisions could be influenced by the collective decisions of other interacting members. A collective decision on salary sharing involves all members of the staff. One opposition vote is adequate to turn many away from their original supportive votes (The Butterfly effect in Chaos Theory). The collective decision would also be influenced by decisions in other similar situations that are developing in other schools (fractal self-similarity). Similar scenario has been described in the school suspension debate during the SARS threat in 1993 (Tse, 2003a). It is rational that teachers would monitor responses from other parts of the school sector in order to protect their own interest. The interaction will be ongoing and the query whether an altruistic sharing, if adopted, is justifiable would reiterate throughout the year, started soon after knowing that no other school follows suit.

Contingent Leadership as Paraphernalia

Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) cite the work of Bossert et al. (1982) who explicitly adopt a contingent approach to leadership, asserting that “successful leaders
must adapt to their particular context as they seek to shape the internal processes of schools towards desired ends. They identify both the community and the institutional context of schools as exogenous variables influencing the principals’ leadership.”

We can take for granted that all leaders would embrace Volume contingency as common sense. School principals would not normally organize private cars to take students for school picnic. Coaches would be arranged and picnic site would be selected to fit. Interpretation to any critical incident is contingent to available information. Thoughtful and well-scheduled routines help harvest the right amount of information at the right time for decision making. Full understanding of the propensities of various vocal stakeholders help justify ad hoc decisions. Decision-makers have to adjust to fit new situation once the central issue gets clear. The training needed would be in the prevention of falling into one’s own trap of early promises in a premature stage. Sharp sensitivity to early nuances of critical incidents and political acumen is another area that requires training and networking for successful Contingent Leadership. Mentoring beginning principals could help.

Sensitivity to changing community preferences involves connecting the role as principal to the larger context of the school, the parents, the alumni, community leaders, the constituencies and the bigger national and global trend. It is a life-long learning process. Old success stories could only be references for future events. Learn from history and from generalized theories but allow for adaptations. The future could only be met with contingent personal and local theory. Breakthroughs are more often serendipity than knowledgeable planning. Bifurcation points are difficult to discover. Where they are known, they are accumulated treasures of past human wisdom. The test King Solomon made to decide who is the mother of the baby, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” are examples of significant bifurcation points recorded in the Bible. Competency in this respect is the product of learning from incumbent mentors, searching meaning from grand narratives, discriminating trivial significance from critical incidents, reflecting from personal experiences and extensive reading combined. Learn to keep maintaining a delicate balance between being confident that the best known decision has been made, yet not sure if it is the ultimate best solution if further information and opportunities arrive. This is the fascinating style of Contingent Leadership. It is consistent with the philosophy that all scientific theories are tentative to the best contemporary knowledge.

Conclusion

It has been cautioned that Chaos Theory could be an attractive but over-reached concept to social scientists. The extended application of the chaos metaphor could have gone beyond the limit of its conceptual or empirical utility (Wallace and Pocklington, 2002: p.11; Wallace, 2003).

In this paper, I have argued for the significance and the need of adopting a Contingent Leadership style in school administration. From a study on effective school leadership, Harris, Day & Hadfield (2001) observe that effective headteachers “managed ongoing tensions and dilemmas through principled, values-led contingency (sic) leadership” and “their leadership behaviour was contingent on context and situation” (p.35). If uncertainty and varying community preferences are the prevailing rules co-existing with fair privilege to free schooling, the pressure to compromise with all stakeholders is daunting. We should not assume that initial training of principals on instructional leadership and further nurture on transformational leadership as is adequate for practitioners. Contingent Leadership, though intrinsically
broad and difficult to comprehend, must be included as a component of continuous development for school administrators. The scope, content and approach of the training could then be the issue for a separate paper.

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