Inventing a future for strategic leadership: phenomenal variety and epistemic opportunities

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to offer an epistemological vantage point for theory development in the case of strategic leadership, an emerging focus of scholarly attention in strategic management.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors invoke Rescher's epistemological platform for making the case, Rescher being one of the most influential philosophers in the USA.

Findings – The analysis suggests that since strategic leadership differs from supervisory leadership, both on organizational reach and incorporation of external elements, defining the strategic leadership problem exclusively as a difference in context – what Weick referred to as a strategy of knowledge growth by extension – is likely to prove unproductive. Rescher's platform can be put to use for specifying the two critical though inter-related epistemological challenges in the beginning of the theory development project: the choice of concepts, and the type of relations among the concepts. These epistemological challenges may be reframed as opportunities to capture the phenomenal variety embedded in these concepts, and to deploy a diversity of approaches to examine their correspondence.

Research limitations/implications – Contending and complementary views on strategic leadership, and hence concepts representing alternate views should be allowed. Bridges should be built between islands of scholarship, but these bridges are likely to be found in special issues of journals (devoted deliberately to nurture multiple perspectives), edited books and invited conferences.

Practical implications – Engagement with "strategic" leaders is an epistemological necessity for both theoretical and pragmatic reasons.

Originality/value – This paper demonstrates how epistemology can strengthen theory building in the case of strategic leadership. Given the signal importance of this phenomenon, good theories and, therefore, epistemological challenges should occupy a central stage of discussions in this early stage.

Keywords Strategic management, Strategic leadership, Epistemology

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

In spite of the long history of research on leadership, social scientists, primarily organization behavior scholars, have only recently begun to single out strategic leadership as a focus of attention (Boal and Schultz, 2007). In the meanwhile, the practice of "strategic leadership" appears to be animated by persistent myths, sometimes created by the trade press, other times by the personal experience of leaders. These myths' as Hambrick (2005) reminds us poignantly, invite critical scholarly scrutiny.

Yet, is the concept of strategic leadership self-evident? Should we approach models of strategic leadership as merely extensions of generic leadership phenomena to a

unique context? Or, should we build the concept and associated models from the persistent leadership myths that Hambrick (2005) referred to? These kinds of questions are fundamental to any theoretical enterprise, perhaps more so in the case of a topic as complicated as strategic leadership, because their answers calibrate the implicit, taken for granted assumptions within which research projects are undertaken. Yet these questions, currently left implicit and hence beyond critical scrutiny, are primarily epistemological, and cannot be answered within a specific discipline or a theoretical frame that serves as the appropriate reference point for the tactical, derivative questions of methods and theory development.

In this paper, we offer an epistemological vantage point for theory development in the case of strategic leadership. We are fueled by the metaphor of inventing a future for strategic leadership, focusing less on reviews of the existing literature but more on possibilities for generating insights. We make three points. First, the concept of "strategic leadership" may embrace a richer set of phenomena than captured in the current preoccupations in the leadership literature. Second, the research and scholarship on leadership can be enhanced by greater variety in terms of focus, perspectives and methods. Finally, we argue for integration: building bridges to cross-fertilize ideas between islands of scholarship.

Although strategy scholars have made significant advances in refining analytical approaches, a number of developments during the last decade and precipitating events in the immediate past have provided an opportune moment to bring leadership back into strategy. First, corporations have been spending between $6,000 (firms under 500 employees) and $7,500 (firms in excess of 10,000 employees) per person for leadership training, with annual expenses ranging from less than $100,000 to in excess of $750,000 each (Delahoussaye, 2001). Second, leadership style stereotypes such as "tough bosses" or "relationship managers" have been a staple of media attention and fascination. Third, chief executive officer (CEO) appointments and dismissals are greeted frequently with stock market responses belying attributions of omnipotence to top managers and their ability to deliver shareholder value. Fourth, post mortem analyses of firms almost always portray leaders as strong causal forces behind organizational successes and failures. Fifth, the financial meltdown of 2008 and the associated scandals have reopened calls for ethical leadership in industry and government.

The academic literature has sensed this opportunity and is poised to bring leadership back into strategy. Montgomery (2008) issued the most recent call to incorporate the role of leadership in strategy making to counterbalance the reliance on objective analysis that the literature spearheaded during the last two decades. Strategy process research (Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst, 2006) has often taken for granted the role of leadership, but given the chasm between the strategy process and content literatures, a chasm that has both enriched and handicapped the literature over the years, insights from the process literature have not seeped into the analytically oriented content literature. There has been a wealth of literature on the functions of leadership; thanks to both organizational behavior and human resource disciplines, disciplines whose insights, theories and concepts have sustained the cottage industry for training and consulting that has grown up around leadership. This literature on "leadership" has typically conceptualized the construct in terms of leader style and behavior and leader-follower relations. Cumulatively, findings from this research stream are far from convergent, but more importantly the applicability of leadership functions articulated by them to strategic levels is yet to be demonstrated.

An epistemological vantage point is useful, if not necessary, in this early stage of (theory) development of the strategic leadership construct. Epistemology lies at the center of any theoretical enterprise, and attention to epistemological issues has a heavy bearing on the quality of theoretical developments and conversations within an academic field. In contrast to methodology, epistemology focuses on a broader set of concerns that include underlying assumptions and worldviews, theoretical language (e.g. quality of concepts), and truth-value of statements to name just a few. Any analysis of a debate, or more generally, points of contention, in strategic leadership must address epistemological facets, the structure of the argument(s) propounded by each side, issues concerned with the validity, authority, and rationality of inferences – the core and unavoidable challenge in getting from some set of preliminary data to some form of outcome, be that an insight, a theoretical conclusion, or even a best practice deemed useful by practitioners.

To sketch the epistemological possibilities for developing the construct of strategic leadership, we invoke the Rescherian epistemological platform for making our case, opting for this over several other platforms. Nicholas Rescher has been the pre-eminent philosopher of science in the USA for over three decades, and has contributed management tools such as Delphi forecasting. His focus on "usability of knowledge" makes his epistemological platform uniquely attractive to management theories given their aspiration to be of assistance to managers. One advantage of the Rescherian platform is the availability in the literature of the discussion of both its significant differences from other platforms, and its key vulnerabilities (e.g. Yolton, 1979). For us a major attraction is its ability to accommodate several epistemological orientations, without giving some (e.g. positivism) a privileged status over others (e.g. historiography).

The plan of the paper is as follows. In the ensuing section, we comment on the current state of theorizing on the concept of strategic leadership to identify the major foci of epistemological attention. Next, we summarize the thrust of our epistemological project, building our summary on Rescher (1992). In the ensuing two sections, we examine successively the concept of strategic leadership and the perspectives that may be useful to examine this phenomenon. In the final section, we discuss implications for the study of strategic leadership.

The concept of strategic leadership
Strategic versus supervisory leadership
There have been recent calls to focus scholarly attention on strategic leadership, in addition to "supervisory leadership," calls that echo House and Aditya's (1997) in their exhaustive review of the leadership literature. Building on Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), House and Aditya (1997, p. 446) offered a definition of strategic leaders: "executives who have overall responsibility for an organization," locating strategic leadership at the nexus of executives and organizations. That is, if there is no formal organization, then we're not dealing with strategic leadership. This definition has inspired many others, and in Table I, we have displayed a selective, but representative set of definitions, many of which have built on their predecessors, identifying where possible for each definition, key facets such as level of analysis, stakeholders and processes.

The definitions in Table I, in many cases, reflect the respective authors' struggles to distinguish strategic from supervisory leadership, as well as to map out the content of strategic leadership. These definitions differ somewhat from one another, some more abstract than others, still some more ambitious than their counterparts, all, however,

Author	Definition	Elements
Ireland and Hitt (2005, p. 43)	A person's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future for the organization	(l) – Individual (s) – Organization (trait based)
House and Aditya (1997, p. 444)	Strategic leadership is directed toward giving purpose, meaning, and guidance to organizations	(l) – Individual or organization (s) – Organization
Burgelman and Grove (2007, p. 967)	Strategic leadership – how top management designs the strategy-making process – is the means with which leadership style exerts its influence on corporate longevity	(l) – Individual or group (TMT) (s) – Organization (process based)
Boal (2004, p. 1504)	Strategic leadership is a series of decisions and activities, both process-oriented and substantive in nature, through which, over time, the past, the present, and the future of the organization coalesce. Strategic leadership forges a bridge between the past, the present, and the future, by reaffirming core values and identity to ensure continuity and integrity as the organization struggles with known and unknown realities and possibilities. Strategic leadership develops, focuses, and enables an organization's structural, human, and social capital and capabilities to meet real time opportunities and threats. Finally, strategic leadership makes sense of and gives meaning to environmental turbulence and ambiguity, and provides a vision and road map that allows an organization to evolve and innovate	(l) – Organization (s) – Unspecified (p) – Decisions, affirming values, developing capabilities, meaning-making, providing a vision (process based)
Elenkov et al. (2005, p. 666)	Strategic leadership is defined as the process of forming a vision for the future, communicating it to subordinates, stimulating and motivating followers, and engaging in strategy-supportive exchanges with peers and subordinates	(l) – Individual or organization (s) – Peers and subordinates (p) – Forming a vision, communication, motivation, engaging with peers and subordinates (process based)

Notes: p = processes, l = level, s = stakeholders

Table I.
Illustrative examples of
strategic leadership

sharing some common themes, explicit or otherwise. Thus, Burgelman and Grove (2007) focus on autonomous and induced processes, pitching their definition at a higher level of abstraction than others. Similarly, Boal (2004) by far has offered the most ambitious definition, focusing strategic leadership on both individual and organizational levels of analysis. Underneath these differences among the various definitions lurk two major shared understandings on how to distinguish strategic leadership from supervisory leadership, understandings pertaining to reach and incorporation of external elements.

Reach. The influence of strategic leadership extends to the whole organization or its major segments, whereas supervisory leaders exert their influence primarily on their immediate subordinates. We will term this "reach", with supervisory leadership having significantly broader reach than strategic leadership in terms of impact and consequences. Facets of reach have been addressed in the literature; for example some have referred to this term "cascading" (Waldman and Yammarino, 1999, p. 263), indicating the flow of influence of leadership acts to lower levels of organization. The broader reach of strategic leadership has several implications. First, unlike supervisory leaders, strategic leaders are expected to influence some, if not many, in their organizations that are not their direct reports. Second, and as a consequence, in addition to the behavioral mechanisms used by supervisory leaders, strategic leaders may have to employ, and hence be judged by, the impersonal devices such as design of organization structures and incentive systems (Hofer and Schendel, 1978) for influencing the organization. Third, some of the crucial leadership acts may be the selection of managers in their firm, or setting of goals and timelines (Bower, 1970; Waldman and Yammarino, 1999). Fourth, there may be "substitutes for leadership" (Kerr and Jermier, 1978; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1996) in the form of systems that may augment the role of managers. Finally, performance of symbolic acts may be more critical for strategic leaders than for supervisory leaders (Peters, 1978).

Incorporation of external elements. Strategic leadership involves influencing not merely those elements internal to an organization but external as well; this is not true of supervisory leadership as currently defined and studied. External elements include investors (including the capital markets), customers and competitors, elements primarily featured in strategy. Arguably, this necessary focus on external elements distinguishes strategic leadership from supervisory leadership as currently conceived, poses theoretical challenges in detailing the content of strategic leadership and relevant performance outcomes to track. For one, external stakeholders (Fanelli and Misangyi, 2006) may deem different performance metrics and hence different leadership behaviors to be more important than currently featured in supervisory leadership studies. For another, as Friedlander and Pickle (1968) demonstrated in their landmark piece, conflict rather than harmony among stakeholder expectations and related performance metrics may be the "natural state" of the organizations; this further complicates judgments regarding the effectiveness of strategic leaders.

Thus, on first blush, there is *a priori* reason to suspect that both the content and context of strategic leadership are different from that of supervisory leadership. No wonder, ideas such as dealing with uncertainty, ambiguity and even chaos are featured prominently in the descriptions of strategic leaders (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1998). These content and context differences should caution us against a research strategy of "knowledge growth by extension" (Weick, 1989, p. 518), when a relatively full explanation of a small region is carried over to explain an adjoining region.

Nonetheless, supervisory leadership literature may hold useful lessons for crafting an epistemological strategy for developing the construct of strategic leadership.

Lessons from supervisory leadership literature
The leadership and related management literature is ripe with learning from the debates and discussions during the early stages of theory development, learning that should enrich and speed up our current preoccupation with the concepts of strategic leaders and leadership. Two lessons stand out. First, House and Aditya (1997) imply that it has not been easy to identify leaders as distinct from supervisors. Although ever since Zaleznik (1977) mounted his penetrative analysis, scholars have tried to distinguish "leadership" from "management" as a concept, they later acknowledged, as Yukl (1994) did, that the two concepts, though distinct, might not involve separate people. Second, we have witnessed significant challenges to the correspondence claims of some management theories, some on theoretical and others on empirical grounds. For example, March and Simon (1958) demolished administrative theory from its privileged position demonstrating the vacuity of the theory. Or witness Mintzberg (1973) marshaling empirical evidence to demonstrate that then popular management functions may not correspond to the observable nature of managerial work. We should fully expect that these challenges in the identification and correspondence of leaders and leadership would carry over and thus persist in the case of "strategic" leaders; we should further expect that additional challenges in identification would arise because these "strategic" leaders constitute only a subset of all leaders.

The challenges of identification and correspondence are but a subset of the epistemological issues that need to be resolved in the development of theory of strategic leadership. As mentioned in the introduction, we use Rescher's conceptual idealism as the epistemological platform to enumerate the options for resolution of these issues. While a detailed account of the Rescherian position is beyond the scope of this paper, we will delineate key elements of the platform to anchor our proposal.

Epistemological issues in theory development
Rescher's epistemological platform
Rescher traces the claims of any school of thought to "knowledgehood" to the underlying cognitive enterprise on which the claims are founded. Rescher's position is best summarized in his own words:

> Acceptance-as-true is in general *not the starting point* [our italics] of inquiry but its terminus. To begin with, all that we generally have is a body of prima facie truths, that is, propositions that qualify as potential – perhaps even as promising – *candidates* for acceptance. The epistemic realities being as they are, these candidate truths will, in general, form a mutually inconsistent set, and so exclude one another so as to destroy the prospects of their being accorded in total recognition as truths pure and simple. The best that can be done in such circumstances is to endorse those truths that best cohere with the others so as to make the most of the data as a whole in the epistemic circumstances at issue. Systemic coherence thus affords the criterial validation of the qualifications of truth candidates for being classes as genuine truths. Systematicity becomes not just the organizer but the test of truth (Rescher, 1992, p. 155).

Rescherian epistemology thus highlights a web of beliefs, but Rescher distinguishes between "facts" and "phenomena," that may constitute the web. Prediction may involve new facts, thus it serves not only to verify available truth candidates, but also to discover new facts, as in the case of Leverrier and Adams, who by using Newton's laws of motion

deciphered the position of Neptune. Phenomena, however represent types of facts and hence are more general. What may be a new fact may not be a new phenomenon; the phenomenon must have subsumed the fact. Thus, the epistemic status of a belief depends on its location in the web: facts are lower than phenomenon in status.

We will highlight three major elements of Rescher's conceptual idealism to help us analyze the epistemological issues in strategic leadership:

- two intersecting cycles;
- process orientation; and
- rational inquiry (Narayanan and Zane, Forthcoming).

Two intersecting cycles. Two interconnected cycles constitute the core of the Rescherian platform, a theoretical cycle of conceptual imagination and coherence, and a pragmatic cycle of applicative effectiveness or empirical validation (see Figure 1). The critical systemic nature of the two cycles resides in the way they reinforce and restrain each other. The theoretical cycle emphasizes coherence with available and/or emerging theoretical schemes, postulations, and viewpoints. It thus focuses on the intellectual or analytical aspects of explanation and understanding. The pragmatic cycle addresses the empirical evidence available to judge the validity and acceptability of "truth claims" (that is, the assertions or arguments being postulated). It thus addresses the pragmatic issues inherent in prediction and control.

Both of these cycles are present in any epistemology although the substance and emphases may vary from one epistemological platform to another. For example, in an emerging theoretical domain opening up new conceptual issues and searching for relevant data sets, theoretical coherence may be weak and extensive sensitivity to descriptive data or "facts" may be evident. In established domains, theoretical coherence, that is, adherence to established and accepted conceptual axioms or precepts may be dominant, with a tendency to downplay or even screen out
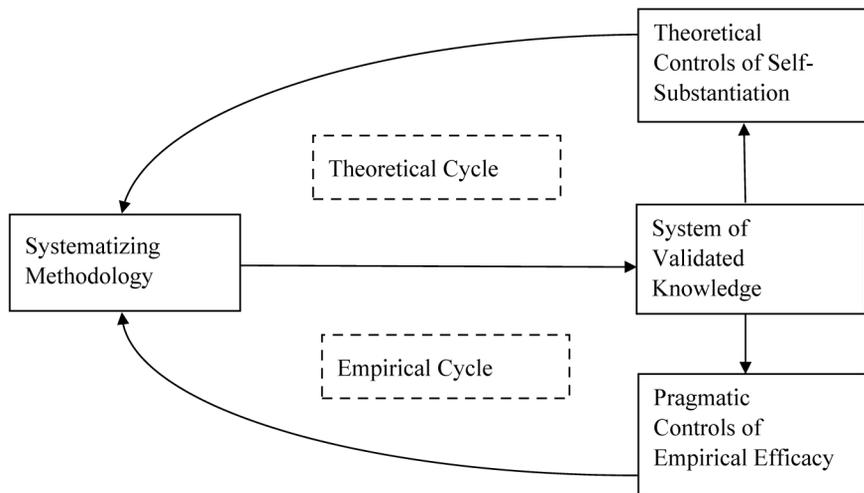
Figure 1.
Two intersecting cycles of theory development

Source: Rescher (1992)

contradictory data. One intent of applying the Rescherian epistemological platform is thus to surface and explore these hidden and therefore unexamined theoretical and empirical tendencies.

Process orientation. The two cycles and especially their interaction rest on a process orientation: a conceptual understanding is explicated, tested against data, refined and tested again. In doing so, both the theoretical understanding and empirical validation are simultaneously depicted, assessed and refined. Neither is independent of the other. For Rescher, the process orientation pursues, but may not realize, the ideal of coherence: harmony must emerge between explanation and understanding on one hand, and prediction and control on the other.

Special relevance to our objectives inherent in Rescher's declaration that while harmony between explanation and prediction may be ideal, it can never be stagnant, and hence deemed to be complete. Conceptual innovation in the form of the development of new concepts or the redefinition of existing ones and the emergence of new data or the reinterpretation of existing data both emanate from and drive the continual push to reshape the knowledge regime. Moreover, conceptual innovation extends the focus and scope of inquiry beyond the realm of what is (description) and current know-how (control) to the realm of "what would happen if," without which strategy theorizing and research could not handle the certainty that the future will be (significantly) different than the present or the past.

Rational inquiry. Since Rescher emphasizes the process of knowledge generation in the form of enhancing conceptual understanding and application efficacy as the key to the intersecting cycles, rational inquiry becomes the essential engine of his epistemological platform. Without it, the process of knowledge generation operates on its own whims. Rescher's rational inquiry does not insist on the truth of facts in the beginning: rather the starting conditions of inquiry such as the theory, assumptions, and descriptive data associated with any strategy frame, may be far from any conception of the truth. Indeed, truth-as-accepted, because of the prevalence of change in the world, is susceptible to be proven otherwise. Thus, strategy frames must be subjected to assessment against emerging and projected change; thus, they are amended and adapted as change unfolds.

Rational inquiry must manifest the hallmarks of "rational" discourse: it must articulate arguments involved in clearly delineated connections among elements in the reasoning – often reflecting causal linkages, assumptions underpinning viewpoints, and most critically, persistent and pointed challenges to key elements in the reasoning process resulting not just from conceptual grounds but from learning due to monitoring and reflecting on the results of action. Rescher emphasizes that personal and intense interpersonal exchange, driven by different viewpoints, results in cognitive change that, in turn, carries conceptual change in its wake. The cognitive enterprise implied here, however, requires direct access to the structure of arguments that constitute the interpersonal exchange. Rational inquiry is the heart of Rescher's epistemological platform.

Thus, both postulation and idealization play pivotal roles in his epistemological platform, but both are problematic. Rescher follows Kant in that cognitive reflexivity dogs every postulation of a "fact." Similarly, he acknowledges the gap between the real and ideal, a gap that gets closed only in ideal circumstances. In Rescher's own words:

> Our truth criteriology thus comes to be endowed with a duality of objectives, and the relevant teleology of inquiry is both cognitive and practical. Truth acceptance is, on the one hand, a determining factor for belief in purely intellectual and theoretical regards, and on the other, a

guiding standard for the practical conduct of life. The two are inseparably interrelated (Rescher, 1992 p 224).

This platform of two interconnected cycles, animated by a process of (cognitively) rational inquiry, enables us to detail key epistemological challenges in the early stage of theory development, an issue to which we now turn.

Epistemological challenges

In the early stages of theory development pertaining to a specific phenomenon, the central challenge is to find a (cognitively) rational method to admit statements, however inconsistent they are among themselves, to the set of "truth" statements that activate the process of theory construction. Rescher's platform can be put to use for specifying the two critical though inter related epistemological challenges surrounding the choice of the initial truth statements in the beginning of the theory development project: the choice of concepts, and the type of relations among the concepts, both of which serve as selection criteria for statements for further consideration. In Table II, we have summarized the key challenges in determining the initial truth statements.

As shown in Table II, the twin problems of identification and correspondence we observed in the case of strategic leadership are an instantiation of the general epistemological task of choosing appropriate concepts for crafting truth statements. Similarly, the truth statements may take different forms, reflecting preferred, but taken for granted, modes of inquiry such as positivism, or focused on narrow pursuits about specific set of relations, both of which have not yet been the focus of serious discussion in strategic leadership literature. In both of these tasks – choice of concepts and type of

Challenge	Theoretical cycle	Empirical cycle
1. The choice of concepts	What concepts and labels should we chose to describe the phenomenon of strategic leadership?	What are the referents for the concepts? Do the concepts have ontological reality or are they known through their consequences? How does the theoretical content map onto empirically derivable indicators?
Specific to strategic leadership	Identification and correspondence	Identification and correspondence
2. Relations among variables in admissible truth statements	What variable (s) are we interested in explaining? What variables enter into our explanatory scheme? What does the literature currently say with regard to these variables?	Do we have empirical instances of relationships observable directly or through consequences? What are observable indicators to include in the model? Are they open ended or bound?
Underlying mode of inquiry	Are we interested in a deterministic model or otherwise?	Epistemological predisposition Unit of analysis Methodology
Specific to strategic leadership	Are we interested in performance of organizations or selection of leaders?	

Table II.
Key epistemological challenges surrounding the choice of the "initial" truth statements in the "beginning" of the theory

truth statements – Rescherian platform would have us focus simultaneously on both the theoretical and empirical cycles for coupling theoretical concepts to empirical referents, and insisting on a process of rational inquiry, but not on a prescribed set of steps or norms for accomplishment of this coupling.

The Rescherian platform would opt for diversity in the choice of truth statements in the initial set without insisting on consistency among the statements, reserving the search for coherence to the later stages of rational inquiry. Hence, we ask the question how we can proceed to understand strategic leadership rather than to advocate a particular stance or theory, outlining the options involved in the choice of initial truth statements: both the concepts underlying any theoretical scheme, and the perspectives or worldviews informing the theoretical schemes. Since the Rescherian platform insists on the need to juxtapose concepts and empirical facts, we adopt a two-pronged narrative strategy:

(1) to hold extant theoretical ideas against the glare of leadership phenomena as reported by strategic leaders (primarily the chief executive officers or CEO's) or their observers to illustrate the need to embed nuance and complexity in our concepts and theories; and

(2) to reach outside the leadership literature for perspectives that may enable us to capture the phenomenal variety encapsulated by strategic leadership.

Thus, in what follows, we argue that the epistemological challenges that we confront in the case of the concepts of strategic leaders and strategic leadership may be reframed as opportunities to capture the phenomenal variety embedded in these concepts, and to deploy a diversity of approaches to examine their correspondence.

The concepts underlying strategic leadership
The challenge of identification
Can we recognize strategic leaders? If so, what assumptions and heuristics do we employ for this identification? These and related questions lie at the heart of the problem of identification. House and Aditya's definition has offered one route to identification, a route that has inspired many of the definitions in Table I. In the face of its apparent comprehensibility, and rapid adoption by others, this route invites our critical examination, leading us to suggest that House and Aditya's (1997) route allows for a number of possibilities only a few of which have received attention. These possibilities hinge on:

· ambiguities in demarcation between strategic and supervisory leaders;

· the phenomenal variety embraced by this definition;

· methods of uncovering leaders; and

· unit of analysis.

Ambiguities in the demarcation between strategic and supervisory leadership. Although conceptual distinctions between supervisory and strategic leadership are prevalent in the literature, these demarcations (including the role of middle management) are riddled with ambiguity. We identify three ambiguities for illustration. First, how do the two types of leadership stack up? Are these concepts orthogonal, mutually exclusive, overlapping, or does one include the other? These conceptual delineations have phenomenal referents: at one extreme, orthogonal implies one can be a strategic leader

without necessarily being a supervisory leader, while at the other, strategic leadership includes supervisory behavior. Second, phenomenally, in an organization, when does one become eligible to be considered a strategic leader, e.g. at what point, as the individual climbs the ladder of progressively higher supervisory leadership responsibilities, does he or she become a strategic leader? The upper echelons literature (Hambrick, 2005; Hambrick and Mason, 1984) has made the choice of CEO and top management team as the strategic leaders, thereby taking a top down approach to answering this question; but that may be only one way of drawing the boundaries between strategic and supervisory leaders. The literature on career progression (e.g. Dalton and Thompson, 1986), or vertical differentiation of organizations (Daft, 1989) may offer other ways to resolve this question, each approach offering a different window to our understanding of the concept. Finally, the conceptual boundaries sometimes breakdown: As Staw (1991) taught us, in many start up firms, the supervisory and strategic leaders are one and the same, the entrepreneur.

These ambiguities suggest that the concept of strategic leadership can be described in different ways, incorporating diverse phenomena.

Phenomenal variety embraced by this definition. A simple, if not simplistic but valid way of interpreting House and Aditya (1997) is to restrict the label "strategic leaders", to those individuals at the apex of an organization, employing the legal charter to ascribe the locus of responsibility; they could be CEOs or top management teams (TMT), but in many cases members of the board of directors charged with corporate governance of the firm.

Nonetheless, the vast literature on organizations hints at the possibility of the emergence of leaders, leaders who have significant responsibility and exert major influence on the performance of an organization. These emergent leaders may include corporate entrepreneurs, mentors and sponsors (Dalton and Thompson, 1986), who may not necessarily be represented on the official organization charts as executives with formal responsibility. They play major strategic roles in organizations (e.g., building a new business as in the case of corporate entrepreneurs), but their significance is typically masked by their designation in formal organization charts. Should we, by definition, exclude them from our list of strategic leaders? In some cases, infrequent though that might be, the individuals, who function as strategic leaders, may not be readily visible to outsiders or even to many inside the organization.

Methods of uncovering the leaders. Diverse methods are employed to uncover just who the strategic leaders are: position-based, attribution-based, socio-metric, and investigator inference, to name a few. First, a position-based identification is easy because firms usually have a designated head, and for large public firms an organization chart. This method has face validity because a position in the top echelons is a common sense way of recognizing strategic leaders. It also has the advantage of being feasible in large sample approaches, but may mask informal organizational phenomena. Second, methods that invoke attribution, whereby strategic leaders are identified based on what a group of individuals inside or outside the organization opines may enable one to discover emergent leaders and hitherto largely invisible ones. While these methods may uncover previously unknown individuals, they suffer from difficulties in accessing opinion in a cost effective manner. Third, social network approaches may uncover central individuals in firms, individuals who may be vastly more influential than how they are represented on an organization chart; this approach also may be prohibitively intrusive and costly. Finally, anthropological approaches, which rely on investigator inference, may give very rich insights to the strategic

leaders but are not easy to scale up for large sample studies. Irrespective of their pros and cons from an operational point of view, these four and other approaches may identify somewhat differing strategic leaders, and thus may be congruent with some views of strategic leadership and not others. Collectively they offer a diverse array of options for capturing the phenomenal variety submerged under the strategic leadership concept.

Underlying much of the above discussion is the challenge of constructing concepts to deal with a complex phenomenon that lies at the nexus of individual and organizational levels of analysis. We extend this discussion to highlight the distinction between these two levels of analysis.

Unit of analysis. Is strategic leadership an individual or an organizational level concept? Leader behaviors, implicit in many of the definitions listed in Table I, constitute an individual level concept, but may well be interpreted as role behaviors, an organizational level construct. Beyond that simple correspondence, we could also ask: do organizations differ in terms of strategic leadership (See also Day, 2000)? At the organizational level of analysis, several characteristics not captured at the individual level of analysis may become important. For example, the CEO of Xerox, recently proudly proclaimed that she would be succeeded by another woman, showing how "deep the leadership bench" is in the company. Similarly, General Electric during the retirement of Jack Welsh had at least three viable internal candidates competing for the job of Chief Executive, suggesting that GE also had a deep bench at that time. Indeed structures and systems may play a role as "substitutes for leadership," (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) in strategically led corporations. Thus at this level, strategic leadership may take additional facets of organizational functioning beyond organizational roles.

In another sense, these definitions also pack a lot of content into the concept of strategic leadership; we take up this topic of the correspondence between this content and real world phenomenon in the next section.

The challenge of correspondence

Because the extant interest is rooted in the desire to elevate the focus of leadership theory from supervisory levels to upper echelons, the definitions listed in Table I embrace activities beyond the supervision of immediate subordinates. The challenge of correspondence thus rears its ugly head: How do we establish that these activities map onto real world phenomena? The sources for the content of strategic leadership appear to be academic, with most definitions basing their claims on received theory from strategic management (e.g. Ireland and Hitt, 2005). Although Burgelman and Grove (2007), a unique collaboration between an academic and a former CEO of Intel, offer a distinctive definition of strategic leadership, most definitions seem to be based on the idea that strategic leadership implies carrying out text book descriptions of strategic management. Although this approach faces the problem of disentangling management and leadership, a problem similar to the one we could have anticipated from our experience with supervisory leadership theory, and although it is open to criticism regarding the rationality bias inherent in most academic views on strategic planning and management, we will restrict our discussion of the correspondence challenge to three issues: unit of analysis, evidence available from the academic literature, and perhaps most importantly mapping on to other source material.

Unit of analysis. A significant number of the definitions in Table I suggest that strategic leadership involves a complex set of activities ranging from crafting a mission and strategy to implementation. This brings us back to the unit of analysis question: Who

should we study to examine how all these functions are carried out? In large corporations (e.g. diversified firms), it is unlikely that either the CEO or even the top management team can focus on all but a few of these activities. If so, then a case can be made for an alternate conception of strategic leadership, i.e. it is a function to be conceptualized at the organizational level, incorporating the coordinated action of many individuals.

Evidence from the academic literature. A second challenge is the exhaustiveness of activities identified in the definitions of Table I. The significant literature in strategic management has not yet been able to establish a clear link between strategic planning and economic performance (Pearce *et al.*, 1987): Comprehensive planning works in some industries (Fredrickson and Mitchell, 1984), but has tenuous links to profitability in other industries. Given these ambiguous findings, source material for the content of strategic leadership underlying the definitions in Table I may be inadequate, especially for those interested in linking strategic leadership and performance. Put another way, although the desire to anchor the content of strategic leadership in the received literature is understandable, this expedience should be tempered by the recognition that the existing literature itself may not be adequate for this purpose. The inadequacy may perhaps become most evident when we juxtapose these definitions against those derived from other sources, an issue to which we now turn.

Mapping on to materials from other sources. Perhaps most importantly, one way of ensuring the correspondence between the content of strategic leadership and the "real world" is to establish a route from theoretical definitions to the language of actors in the "real world."

How can we reconcile our definitions with those believed to be true by existing CEO's? Consider the view of leadership offered by Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft:

> I have come to believe that to be a great leader, you have to combine thought leadership, business leadership, and great people management. I think most people tend to focus on one of those three. I used to think it was all about thought leadership. Some people think it's all about your ability to manage people. But the truth is, great leaders have to have a mix of those things (Bryant, 2009a).

Contrast this with Eduardo Castro-Wright, vice chairman of Wal-Mart Stores:

> . . . there is no leader who can be called one if he or she doesn't have personal integrity, or they don't deliver results, or if they don't care about the people they lead or if they don't have passion for winning. At the end of the day business is about winning (Bryant, 2009b).

Next, consider the words of Drucker, an academic and consultant, as he offers his advice to the President, ostensibly a leader:

> *What needs to be done?* is the first thing a president should ask; concentrate, don't splinter yourself; don't ever bet on a sure thing; an effective president does not micro manage; a president has no friends in the administration; once you are elected, you stop campaigning (Drucker, 1995).

It is doubtful if these statements about leadership merit serious consideration for being included in a theoretical definition because as four decades ago, Weick (1969) forcefully reminded us, "the only way in which understanding can be advanced is if the symbols used by practitioners are removed and the phenomena recast into language that has psychological or sociological meaning" (p. 22). It is entirely possible that we can easily assimilate the above statements within the definitions listed in Table I; nonetheless, if, as Weick implies, the starting point is some empirically observed or observable phenomenon, then we need to find bridges to travel from the real world to theoretical territory, and

conversely from theory to the language of real world executives. Alternately, the empirical world may offer a richer, simpler or just simply a different view of strategic leadership than the ones which are gaining currency in the academic literature.

In Table III, we have enumerated a set of options for identifying strategic leaders and delineating strategic leadership, highlighting for each option its theoretical advantages and concomitant empirical challenges. As evidenced in Table III, the concepts of strategic leaders and leadership are complex and accommodate significant phenomenal variety. Some but not all of the variety is captured in the developing literature. Most significantly, organizational levels of variety are notably underrepresented in the literature. Further, the rules of correspondence between theoretical definitions and real world phenomenon are not yet fully crafted, so that the question of whether these concepts, as currently defined, capture the phenomena in a realistic and comprehensive manner remains to be settled. This brings us to the second issue, the diversity of perspectives necessary to study the phenomenon of strategic leadership.

Linkages among concepts: a diversity of perspectives

There have been two major, though not exclusive, perspectives observable in the burgeoning literature on strategic leadership. One is the deterministic orientation, with scholars focused on discovering the causal linkages among variables, strategic leadership serving as either a dependent or an independent variable. A second one is concerned with explanations of organizational performance, the reason why strategic leadership is deemed to be important or as Podolny *et al.* (2005, p. 4) put it:

Concept and options	Advantages	Challenges
Strategic leaders		
Individual level		
Leaders defined by position (e.g. CEO) Leaders defined by influence or performance of strategic leadership function	Easy to identify, correspondence between theory and empirical cycle Can accommodate strategic functions and emergence	Establishing how they map onto strategic leadership function Emergence of leaders ignored Need to establish empirical markers based on content of strategic leadership
Organizational level		
Organizational level descriptors such as redundancy of strategic leaders Strategic leaders as interdependent, collectively performing the leadership function	An organizational analogue to individual level description Can accommodate strategic functions and emergence Can accommodate substitutes for leadership	Need to establish empirical markers based on content of strategic leadership Need to establish empirical markers based on content of strategic leadership
Strategic leadership		
Strategic leadership is the same as strategic management Strategic leadership is distinct from strategic management	Academic descriptions of strategic management easily available Creates a distinct identity for the construct of strategic leadership	Mapping these onto "real world" Need to create a strategic leadership construct (s)

Table III.
Illustrative set of options
for identification and
correspondence

We would now like to draw attention to a fundamental assumption..: if leadership does not directly impact organizational performance, then leadership does not matter to organizational life.

We employ these two perspectives, arraying them against other alternatives to derive a matrix of possibilities for examining strategic leadership. Figure 2 sketches the four possibilities, some attracting far more activity than others. In what follows we discuss each of the four possibilities, arguing how such an expansion of our research perspectives can enhance our ability to capture the phenomenal variety pinpointed in the previous section.

Cell 1: causal linkage between strategic leadership and performance
Arguably, the dominant perspective in the study of leadership in general, and strategic leadership in particular, this cell is populated by works energized by a belief in the casual linkage between the concept and performance, leading scholars to adopt a deterministic orientation. Given its long history, there have been excellent reviews and critiques of this literature (Podolny *et al.*, 2005), especially the ambiguity of definition and its conceptual breadth, when instead, analytically decoupling constituent behaviors and attributes may contribute to explanations of performance; and the concept's limited power in explaining the variance in performance relative to other factors such as industry and organizational variables.

What constitutes performance? Podolny *et al.* (2005) lament the fact that the study of leadership went awry because of its preoccupation with economic performance; they would have us focus instead on the capacity of leadership to infuse purpose and meaning into the lives of individual, identifying some infrequently used tools to examine "meaning-making" in organizations (many of which we will enumerate in our discussion of Zald in Cell 4). Although there is much to agree with in their preferred approach, in essence they are advocating a different performance variable. This begs the question: What is (are) an appropriate performance variable(s)? (See also Kaiser *et al.*, 2008.)

	Interest in Explaining Performance	
	Primary Focus	**Peripheral Focus**
Yes	Cell 1 Organizational performance is causally determined by strategic leadership	Cell 2 Theme 1 – Attribution of strategic leadership Theme 2 – Selection of strategic leaders
No	Cell 3 Performance may be modeled as a random process	Cell 4 Historical accounts of great leaders

*(Row label at left: **Deterministic Orientation**)*

Figure 2.
Examples of perspectives in the choice of relations among concepts

If strategic leadership embraces both internal and external domains of activity, then it is reasonable to think that a model of organizations consisting of many stakeholders and their expectations may be closer to reality than one where there is one clearly identified constituency and hence a single performance metric for leaders to pursue. Any dependent variable chosen will have implications for many groups of stakeholders. According to Friedlander and Pickle (1968), whom we referred to earlier, it should be difficult simultaneously to satisfy several stakeholders. Sequential attention to goals, threshold goals, and even responding to probably the most powerful stakeholders may be strategies executives use to survive or manage a corporation. This suggests that at a minimum we should encourage different performance metrics to be pursued, expecting all the while complex linkages between strategic leadership and various performance metrics.

Consider a real world example as seen through the eyes of one leading scholar in finance. In analyzing the state of corporations and business schools today, in the aftermath of the financial meltdown of 2008, Jeffrey Garten (Bisoux, 2009) cites this example:

> Look at AT&T in the late '90 s, when Michael Armstrong was CEO. All of a sudden, AT&T's returns were much lower than WorldCom's. When Armstrong and his team looked at WorldCom, they just couldn't understand how it was making so much profit. AT&T cut no corners, it engaged in no shenanigans – and it got clobbered by the market. Armstrong's reputation was badly diminished, and he was forced out. Months later, it came to light that WorldCom had cooked the books.

> If the executives at Lehman brothers hadn't engaged in "the game," the company would have been forced to break itself up and sell itself off, just like AT&T. But in retrospect, that would have been the right thing to do. Hats should go off to Armstrong. In all of the investigations of tech collapse, nobody could say a word about AT&T's integrity (p. 18).

Even economic performance is not sometimes easy to gauge: Is it possible then to suggest, that in the 1990 s and now in retrospect, that Armstrong was an effective strategic leader? The complexity and analysis of performance indirectly induced by Garten's example suggests the need for identification and further elaboration of boundary conditions of the causal models linking strategic leadership and performance, be it economic or otherwise.

Cell 2: leadership as an outcome
Although deterministic in orientation, a second group of works focuses on strategic leadership as an outcome. We illustrate this with two examples, one based on attribution theory and the other focused on the process of selection.

One line of inquiry simply upended the relationships between performance and strategic leadership, offering a view of leadership as an attribution process (Calder, 1977; Pfeffer, 1977). Rather than viewing leadership as a determinant of performance, this view posits that the level of organizational performance determines the perception of leadership (e.g. Meindl *et al.*, 1985) stating that when individuals observe high performance organizations, they assume that effective leadership must be present. The search for the determinants of attribution need not be restricted to performance, as other factors such as high salience or resources may also be related to attributions of leadership.

A second line of inquiry is focused on the process of selection: How and why certain individuals get selected (or fired) as leaders? Although there is a sizeable amount of literature on selection – indeed human resource management courses routinely include

selection as a topic – most of this literature is confined to lower levels of the organization, and few shed light on strategic leaders. For example, how are these individuals identified as potential candidates for selection as strategic leaders? What processes lead to their ultimate selection?

Consider Gerstner's (2002) recollection of how he came to be selected as the Chief Executive Officer of IBM, starting from Burke's visit to his apartment, or how he led the ailing giant in the midst of intense media criticism to recovery and success. Can the current selection models, criticized heavily though they might be, explain how someone who led a consumer products company got selected to head a technology company in a very different industry facing very different strategic situation or for that matter, how after being selected, he enjoyed a successful tenure in the company? Gerstner candidly points out that when he took over, the board had judged that IBM faced a strategic, not a technology problem, and further that had that judgment been wrong, he would have had a short tenure at the company. This is a remarkable slice of information about both the process of selection and the turbulent context of strategic decision making that reminds one of the complexity in the selection process and exercise of leadership, complexity that perhaps is yet to be captured by our existing models.

Cell 3: fooled by randomness

As we move away from the deterministic perspective, but still remain interested in the linkage between strategic leadership and performance, we have a wealth of perspectives that have received inadequate consideration in scholarly treatments of strategic leadership, some more so than others. We may illustrate these by two examples, one nihilistic, the other probabilistic. Both view the linkages between strategic leadership and performance as problematic, although the protagonists may have different worldviews that lead them to different beliefs or practices.

In the nihilistic perspective, there is no linkage between strategic leadership and performance, whichever performance metric is tracked. Although this could be interpreted as a form of determinism, advocates of this perspective are interested in the systemic tendencies in performance rather than strategic leadership. They are fueled by the belief that organizational performance tends to be mean reverting: What goes up must come down. Viewed from this base of probabilistic skepticism, the causal modeling suffers from the fallacy of reasoning from consequents (Taleb, 2007), identifying performance first, and then working back to find the reasons in strategic leadership. The nihilists thus take determinists to task for violating the spirit of positivism. Consider the work of Collins', *Good to Great,* which provides an inspiring message about how a few major companies became great. Consider also the critique that Resnick and Smunt (2008) leveled against this work:

> Our analysis of Collins' *Good to Great* study methodology suggests that it suffered from three major problems: 1) data mining with respect to the selection of the starting month of the company transformation period, 2) the failure to test for the sustainability of greatness over subsequent time periods, and 3) the failure to use modern portfolio theory that accounts for the costs of risk and then whether the performance differences are statistically significant (p. 11).

Faith in the probabilistic perspective manifests itself in several ways. In practice, some believe that because of the inherent complexity of the phenomena, the successes of leaders are best viewed as unpredictable. An extrapolation of Makliel's (1973) random walk theory would suggest that successes of fund managers are a product of chance rather than any specific behavioral or personality traits. In scholarly circles, the

Mathew effect (Merton, 1968) ascribes initial endowments to later perhaps undue recognition or perceived success.

At a minimum, these approaches serve as an alternative explanation to the conclusions arrived at by determinists, forcing us to abandon the complacency of our beliefs, however "scientifically" we have arrived at them. By contrast, the humanistically inclined scholars challenge us to confront the phenomenal variety that has escaped our notice, a group of scholars to whom we now turn.

Cell 4: lessons from humanities

A genre of works exist, works that are unfettered by the "rigor" of causal modeling, or colored by the lenses of performance. The spirit of these works is best captured by "the enlightenment model" in organizational studies articulated by Zald (1993). Unlike "the engineering model," a term Zald uses to capture many of the approaches we have grouped in the causal orientation (Cell 1 and 2), the enlightenment model was developed by humanistically oriented sociologists who were appalled by the rationalistic, technocratic and wrenching solutions offered to mitigate the negative effects of industrialization. In Zald's own words:

> An enlightenment model of organizational studies would quickly turn to its base in humanities. An explicit attention to this dimension of our endeavor would change the way we conducted our studies and organized our discourse. It would lead to a more complex view of the ends of an applied discipline. It would enable the scholar to be more detached from the goals of the owners. The enlightenment model highlights the scholar's role as a citizen of the society and a critic of organizational practice (Zald, 1993, p. 524).

Zald goes on identify four major approaches to actualize the enlightenment model:

(1) historical approaches such as Chandler's (1962);

(2) semiotics and the close reading of texts exemplified by Barley (1983), Fiol (1989) and corporate culture students (Martin, 1990);

(3) rhetorical analysis as a guide to substantive and meta-methodological analysis of the kind offered by McCloskey (1985) or John Van Maanen (1988); and finally

(4) competent narrative and policy choice as advocated by the story telling approach of Kaplan (1986).

Although many scholarly biographies and, more broadly, humanities-based treatises of leaders currently exist, not many of these inform our current preoccupation with strategic leadership. Yet the enlightenment model may offer four types of insights that may be valuable in our efforts to understand strategic leaders and leadership. First, this model may provide a counterbalance to our fascination with the scientific approach that in Kaplan's (1986) argument leaves out context, contingency, and conflicting values. Second, although "the objectivist-value free stance of positivism leads them to lack a nuanced base for the discussion of value choice," (Zald, 1993: p. 524), value issues have been recognized as central in decision making ever since Simon's (1947) theoretical *tour de force* and Guth and Tagiuri's (1965) applied piece, and perhaps in strategic leadership, we may need to be acutely concerned with these axiological predicates. Third, the enlightenment model may enable us to escape the unreflexivity for which Zald took humanities to task in his penetrating essay. From our vantage point, there is a fourth and important reason to incorporate lessons from the works of this genre: uncovering phenomenal variety that has escaped notice or eluded our efforts at theorizing.

In Table IV, we have enumerated a representative set of questions pertaining to both the concept of strategic leadership and the perspectives brought to study the phenomenon. The questions represent one set of epistemological tasks that need to be completed for adequate theory development. Fundamental to Rescher is the notion that theory development should strive for congruence between the choice of concepts and truth statements, rational inquiry among diverse perspectives during the early stages of theory development and engagement with the real world to ground concepts and theories. We turn to the major implications of this analysis for strategic leadership theory.

Implications

Our epistemological analysis underscored both the richness of the phenomena that fall within the ambit of emerging, and hence vaguely detailed, strategic leadership literature, and the necessity for greater variety in the choice of focus and perspectives. We propose that to invent a future for strategic leadership, the epistemological possibilities should be exploited assimilating both the phenomenal variety and diversity of perspectives. We will discuss three key implications of this proposal:

(1) requirements for theory development;

(2) need to build bridges between perspectives; and

(3) practitioner- engaged scholarship, before returning to some general comments on the need for epistemological analysis in strategic management.

Epistemological challenge	Representative questions
Choice of concepts	
Identifying strategic leaders	Who are strategic leaders, and what are the pathways to establish the congruence with real world phenomenon?
	Is strategic leadership an individual or organizational level concept?
Content of strategic leadership	How should we incorporate external elements into the content of strategic leadership?
	Should we equate strategic leadership and strategic management?
Diverse perspectives	
Deterministic	
Models of performance	Which performance variables are of interest? How can we identify relevant performance metrics in light of conflict among these constructs? What is the mechanism that links strategic leadership and any performance?
Models of leader selection	How are strategic leaders selected in the real world and how are they reflected in our models of selection?
	What are the linkages between selection and performance?
Non deterministic	
Performance	What are the appropriate ways of modeling performance?
Holistic approaches	How do we set the boundaries of the phenomena for discussing strategic leadership? What rules permit us to accept a historical or ethnographic account as admissible?
	How do we account for values in the discussion of strategic leadership?

Table IV.
Strategic leadership: illustrative set of questions for theory development

Requirements for theory development
In our discussion of identification and correspondence, we have highlighted the fact
that extended reach and focus on external elements distinguish strategic from
supervisory leadership and underscored the need to incorporate lessons from the
debates surrounding supervisory leadership in the early stages of its development.
This discussion suggests the need for theory development, particularly the
architecture of appropriate concepts corresponding to the real world phenomena of
strategic leadership. This has several implications.

First, and perhaps the most obvious, the differences between strategic and
supervisory leadership suggest that transporting concepts from the latter to examine
strategic leaders, and defining the strategic leadership problem exclusively as a
difference in context – what Weick referred to as a strategy of knowledge growth by
extension – is likely to prove unproductive.

Second, at this early stage of development, the architecture of concepts should get
significant attention in theory construction. No doubt, we have enumerated several
interesting insights from extant literature – cascades, or substitutes for leadership, to
name two – all of which reflect a focus on internal elements of an existing organization.
As a consequence, this architecture would require not merely existing but additional
insights incorporating external elements for which we may not yet have labels in our
vocabulary. Further, the current thrust toward defining strategic leadership in terms of
strategic management functions should be reconsidered in light of our experience with
developing the theory of supervisory leadership.

Third, Rescherian epistemological platform would indicate that in the early stages
of theory development, the theoretical and empirical cycles should run parallel and be
synchronized (see Abbott, 2004; Van De Ven, 2007; also Narayanan and Zane,
forthcoming); hence, the primary logic during concept development is neither
congruence with existing theory nor ease of operationalization, but relevance, i.e. the
ability of the concepts to map some slice of real world phenomenon. Thus, concept
development requires engagement with the "real world" of strategic leaders, however
that is accomplished. However, this cannot be fueled by the logic of verification, which
is appropriate once theories reach sufficient maturity to be placed on a "normal
science" track.

Finally, we should keep the door open for contending and complementary views on
strategic leadership, and hence concepts representing alternate views. We have
illustrated how extant definitions of strategic leadership could be interpreted as at
either the individual or organizational levels of analysis. This is just one example, and
ingenious theorists could provide other imaginative ways of construing the concept.
Nurturing variety is an important task in theory development for, as Weick (1989)
argued, a greater number of diverse conjectures are likely to produce better theory than
a small number of homogeneous conjectures.

Need to build bridges between perspectives
We have noted that a diversity of perspectives is needed to accommodate the
phenomenal variety packed into the idea of strategic leadership. Much will however be
lost if the diverse perspectives function as cognitive islands without bridges for
intellectual content to flow from one to another. At its worst, this could spark
ideological battles, and indeed "strategic leadership" may become another cognitive
amphitheater in which to replay the battles between scholars operating at individual

and organizational levels of analysis, debates that were prevalent during the 1970s and 1980 s.

Diversity of perspectives offers the opportunity for synergy, that is, the opportunity for scholars within one perspective to learn from the insights of their counterparts from another perspective and incorporate those lessons to enrich their own theory development efforts. We may illustrate that with two examples.

(1) Scholars pursuing deterministic perspectives and interested in performance, may be able to link lessons from their deterministic counterparts for whom strategic leaders are a dependent variable to explore if selection and leadership are intertwined, if so how and under what conditions.

(2) Ethnographic and historical approaches to strategic leaders may serve as the source of material from the real world both to craft relevant concepts about strategic leadership, and to conceptualize theoretical linkages (with either performance or other dependent variables).

These are of course illustrative, definitely not exhaustive, but indeed they suggest the potential for theory building generated by cross-fertilization of ideas.

The challenge is to implement the bridge building activity, which is hindered by the traditional peer review process, a process, which is better fitted for the (later) theory verification stage within a positivistic epistemology (Narayanan and Zane, Forthcoming) that is increasingly dominant in the management disciplines. The predominant implication is that bridges are likely to be found in special issues of journals (devoted deliberately to nurture multiple perspectives), edited books and invited conferences. Indeed these alternative outlets will need to play a significant role if theory development that is attentive to epistemological tasks is to be taken seriously.

Practitioner-engaged scholarship
Rescher's insistence on the dual cycle of theory development also points to the need to engage the real world of "strategic leaders", during the theory development process. Theory development stage is akin to the problem formulation stage of Van De Ven (2007), and just like in formulation, establishing the phenomenon is the necessary first step (Merton, 1987). This involves engagement with practitioners in meaningful ways. To quote Van De Ven (2007, pp. 73-74):

> Too many social science studies suffer from elaborating theories that are often based on an insufficient diagnosis of the problem and its context. As a consequence, theory and research tend to be grounded in myths and superstitions. Those who generalize from concrete experiences or particulars with a problem can answer the questions, For example? From whose point of view? What is the point of view? Engaging people who experience and know the problem is necessary to answer these questions. Lacking answers to these questions often leads to unfounded generalizations.

Although engagement with strategic leaders, irrespective of the frame of reference brought to examine the phenomenon of strategic leadership, is necessary in theory development, we suspect that it is expedient to overlook this necessity for at least two major reasons. First, meaningful dialogue and interaction with senior leaders of firms of some size is not a common occurrence in most social science departments, including many business schools. These interactions will have to be designed, and often depends on privileged access, but creating this access is typically not in the toolkit of most

social scientists. Second, in many social science circles, philosophical skepticism masks a deep suspicion of the senior leaders' intentions and behavior, suspicion that discourages necessary interactions.

Yet, engagement with "strategic" leaders is an epistemological necessity for both theoretical and pragmatic reasons. If we are to learn anything new and significant, premature closing off of the discussion by the imposition of a specific disciplinary logic without sufficient engagement of the real world is likely to prove unproductive. Herb Simon is often quoted as saying "When an academic starts a sentence, 'As a [fill in the blank: psychologist, economist, sociologist or other]', I always know I am not going to learn anything" (Rousseau *et al.*, 2008, p. 507). Simon's admonition is worth remembering at this early stage of theoretical development of the strategic leadership concept.

Equally important, the strategic leadership concept offers us scholars another potential lever to improve the functioning of organizations. But our success depends on the ability of our theories to provide insights and guidelines to current or aspiring leaders. Practitioner engaged scholarship is thus necessary for purely pragmatic reasons: the prospect of better theory and hence its ultimate usability should propel us to ground our theories in real world phenomenon by engaging with those whose experience we are attempting to tap in our theories about strategic leadership.

Some concluding comments

We have argued that epistemological considerations are both useful and necessary in the analysis of mature theories (Narayanan and Fahey, 2005), and for strategic management field in general (Narayanan and Zane, Forthcoming). In this paper, we have attempted to demonstrate how epistemology can strengthen theory building in the case of strategic leadership, an emerging focus of attention of business scholars drawn from psychology, sociology and strategy. Given the signal importance of this phenomenon, we need good theories and therefore, epistemological challenges should occupy a central stage of discussions in this early stage.

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