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Causality, Change and Leadership

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7. Causality, change and leadership[1]

Gill Robinson Hickman and Richard A. Couto

This chapter includes the invaluable contributions of our late colleague and friend, Fredric M. Jablin, who provided his seminal insights during the conceptualization and outlining phase of this project.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

During the early stages of discussions at Mount Hope, we realized that scholars in the project were working from different assumptions about human nature and the conditions that give rise to leadership and change. Project leaders divided the group into three teams – Purple, Red and Gold – to discuss our assumptions and write a short paper summarizing each group's perspectives.

Our different viewpoints roughly corresponded to essentialist and constructionist beliefs. In general essentialists maintain that social and natural realities exist apart from our perceptions of reality and that individuals perceive the world rather than construct it (Rosenblum and Travis 2003, p. 33). Conversely, constructionists believe that humans construct or create reality and give it meaning through social, economic and political interactions. Specifically, reality cannot be separated from the way people perceive it (Rosenblum and Travis 2003, p. 33). According to the constructionist view, therefore, people can change reality by changing their perceptions of it. Gold Team members, including the two authors of this chapter, took a relatively constructionist position in contrast to the other teams. We contended that:

> Humans make sense of their world and seek meaning through processes of imagination and interpretation, which are situated within social constructions of reality and affirmed through language and inter-subjective encounters. These processes enable humans to conceptualize space, time, and conditions beyond their immediate context and to employ linguistic discourses such as narrative to express and communicate those alternative realities. As social beings, humans depend on others not only for survival but also in the construction of frames of social reality through which people understand their everyday experiences, collaborations, and conflicts. (Couto et al., 2002, p. 1)

We argued that understanding differences in the perspectives of scholars and practitioners is important to the study of leadership because these perspectives shape the way we view problems, ask questions, conduct research, construct theories and create solutions. If we posit, for example, that there are essential and innate human differences among people that we categorize in certain racial groups, then we formulate hypotheses, assign meaning and draw conclusions about these differences that have a significant impact on the way each group is valued and treated in society. If as humans we construct social differences in power, status or opportunity based on variations in factors such as physical distinctions in appearance or group characteristics, then we can change these constructions to reflect new or different arrangements. Accordingly, the Gold team asserted:

> From birth, each human is unique in terms of physical characteristics, dispositions, social histories and environments, and cultural contexts. Through socio-cultural categories and language, humans organize and assign value to some attributes (e.g., along lines of sex, skin pigmentation, or age) and construct systems of social relations in order to distinguish among individuals of the group and among groups. (Couto et al., 2002, pp. 1–2)

Differences in perspectives affect the views of scholars and students of leadership studies and practitioners who endeavor to lead. Most do not adopt a strict essentialist or constructionist view; rather, they synthesize the two perspectives in a way that makes sense to them. Even Karl Marx, whom most scholars would consider a constructionist given his championing of humans as change agents, made some concessions to the essentialist view, observing that 'men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx 1869).

We start from the constructionist perspective in this chapter, framing the discussion of change, causality and leadership around it. Based on this perspective, we define *change* as a collective effort by participants to intentionally modify, alter or transform human social systems. This is not to assert that conditions change merely because a group of people wants them to change. As we shall see, social reality is subject to historical conditions that can either foster or hinder change beyond any single person's or group's ability to effect change.

A Case Approach

Scholars in the General Theory of Leadership Project provided our annual update on the group's progress at the 2002 International Leadership Association Conference using a different format from past presentations. Project leaders James

McGregor Burns, Georgia Sorenson and Al Goethals asked us to engage the conference participants in our thinking and discussions by exploring the elements and conditions for leadership in the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott case.

Similarly, we have chosen to present our thinking in this chapter by using a case from the civil rights movement in Prince Edward County, Virginia. Through this case we hope to uncover general concepts about the relationship among causality, change, and leadership that are relevant to multiple contexts including organizational, community, political, and social movements among others.

Barbara Rose Johns's actions as a high school junior in 1951 contributed to the end of public school segregation in the USA. She led a school boycott in Prince Edward County, Virginia, which culminated in the federal court case of *Davis v. County School Board.* Upon appeal to the US Supreme Court, this case joined four other school desegregation cases as *Brown v. Board of Education.* A review of both her actions and the profound consequences of school desegregation offers the opportunity to look at the conduct and causality of change. To what extent did Barbara Rose Johns end school desegregation? The question seems absurd, but it conveys how people often attribute change to the actions of a single individual, such as crediting Rosa Parks's actions with sparking the Montgomery bus boycott that triggered the civil rights movement in a three-link chain of causality or, even simpler, crediting Martin Luther King Jr. with leading the civil rights movement.

If we change contexts, causality often becomes a two-link chain of cause and effect. Airport book racks, for example, display titles that explain how corporate leaders brought about profit, excellence or some other worthwhile outcome. And too often we perceive the actions of nations as the decisions of a single leader with good or bad consequences; for example, consider the book *Bush at War* which details the war in Afghanistan. Change is frequently portrayed as the effect of a leader – a person in a position of formal or informal authority – acting heroically.

We take a different approach to leadership and change in this chapter. We describe and analyze Johns's actions as a cause of school desegregation and related changes. But instead of focusing on change as it pertains to leaders, their actions and outcomes, we address change in the context of the interdependence and interaction of many actors, all of whom we may regard as leaders in light of the consequences of their actions. Their actions, if intended to bring or hinder change, we will call *leadership.*

By placing Johns's actions in a broader field of change related to school desegregation, we are better able to see the domain of her intended change – thus leadership – and its interactions and interrelatedness with other leaders and domains of leadership. Considering her actions within a broader field of race relations suggests myriad influences upon her and myriad influences of her actions upon others in a field of change. The chapter offers a synthesis on causality

from theories in the social sciences, the natural sciences and philosophy. Although grounded in social change, the case offers context-free generalizations of leadership, change and causality.

Barbara Rose Johns

As a junior at Robert R. Moton High School in Farmville, the county seat of Prince Edward County, Virginia, Barbara Rose Johns knew that the segregated, all-black school that she attended in 1951 was separate but certainly not equal. She saw the same markers of inequality familiar to African-American school children and their parents throughout the South at the time: textbooks handed down from the white students and, most of all, overcrowded facilities. In Johns's case, a school built in 1939 to serve 180 students instead housed 450 students. The school accommodated some of the overflow students in three buildings hastily erected in 1949. Built of 2 × 4s, plywood and tar paper, they were dubbed 'shacks' or 'chicken coops.'

At the constant prodding of the Moton PTA and its president, the Reverend L. Francis Griffin, pastor of the First Baptist Church, the all-white school board offered regular assurances but no action on a new high school for African-American children. Progress slowed and the assurances became so broad that in April 1951, the school board suggested that the Moton High School PTA not come back to the school board's meetings. Johns shared her concerns about the poor facilities and her frustration with the board's delaying tactics with her favorite teacher, Inez Davenport. Davenport replied, 'Why don't you do something about it?'

So Johns did. During a six-month period she enlisted student leaders a few at a time to take action themselves. Finally on April 23, 1951, following the PTA's failed efforts, the students put their plans in motion. They started by luring M. Boyd Jones, the African-American principal of the school, away from the premises with a false alarm about students making trouble at the bus station. He had received such complaints before and was anxious to put a stop to whatever was going on. As soon as he left, Johns and the other student leaders sent a forged note to every classroom calling for a school assembly at 11:00 a.m.

When the students and teachers arrived in the auditorium, the stage curtain opened on Johns and other student strike leaders. She asked the two dozen teachers to leave, and most of them did. She then laid out the already well-known grievances and said that it was time for the students to take matters into their own hands by striking. No one was to go to class. If they stuck together, she explained, the whites would have to respond. Nothing would happen to them, because the jail was not big enough to hold all of them. Principal Jones returned to school to find the student assembly in full swing. He pleaded with the students not to strike and explained that progress on the new school was being made. Johns asked him to go back to his office, and he did.

Flush with their initial success, the student strike committee asked Rev. Griffin to come to the school that afternoon and give them some advice. They asked him if the students should ask their parents' permission to strike. The African-American adult population in Prince Edward County was 'docile' in the view of Rev. Griffin, who had spent time trying to organize an NAACP chapter in the county. He suggested that the matter be put to a vote, which ultimately determined that the students should proceed without getting their parents' approval. At Griffin's urging, Johns and Carrie Stokes, student body president, wrote a letter to the NAACP attorneys in Richmond asking for their assistance.

The next afternoon the strike committee met with the superintendent of schools, T.J. McIlwaine, who was serving a fourth decade in that position. He represented the softer side of Jim Crow – accepting things as they were and doing his best to be fair and evenhanded in a system of injustice and oppression. At the meeting, the opposing sides hardened their stances. McIlwaine insisted on African-American subordination and made numerous promises – assuring the students that much had already been done and that more would be done in time. He also previewed a gauntlet of reprisals – warning the students that unless they went back to class, the teachers and the principal would lose their jobs. The students left dismayed by McIlwaine's elusive and evasive manner but encouraged by their performance in the confrontation. They had held their own in the face of white power.

On Wednesday, two days into the strike, NAACP attorneys Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson III came by to talk with the strike leaders and their supporters in response to the letter they had received from the students. Both Hill and Robinson were high-profile civil rights lawyers who regularly engaged in lawsuits. They had studied at Howard University, a training ground for advocacy lawyers, and had joined the network of African-American lawyers working to redress racial inequality across the country. On the state and national level, the premise of the NAACP's advocacy had been that as long as *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the law of the land, the government had to make equal what it insisted remain separate. They had already won several lawsuits for equal pay and facilities around the state of Virginia. Hill had even won a case for equal salaries for Prince Edward County teachers before World War II.

Hill and Robinson were not encouraging on this day, however. They and other NAACP members had grown tired of equalization suits which, although plentiful, only succeeded in changing the subordination of African-American teachers and students at the margins. They were interested in shifting their strategy to confront school desegregation directly and were paying close attention to a case from Clarendon County, South Carolina, that was moving toward the US Supreme Court. In fact, when Hill and Robinson stopped to speak to the Farmville student strike organizers, they were en route to Pulaski County, Virginia, to

determine if the plaintiffs in a case there were willing to transform their suit from equalization to desegregation. They counseled the students to go back to class.

The students, however, were adamant in their refusal to end the strike. Impressed by their determination and not wanting to dampen their spirits, Hill and Robinson offered to help if the students would agree to return to school and change their case from one of equalization to one of desegregation.

The next evening, April 26, one thousand students and parents attended a mass meeting in Farmville. The secretary of the state NAACP urged the parents to support their children. Without parental support, he said, the NAACP would not initiate what it knew would be a long, hard suit that would require considerable endurance. Initial assessments suggested that 65 percent of parents supported the students and the NAACP intervention; 25 percent opposed it; and 10 percent had no opinion. No opponents spoke that night.

On April 30, the school board sent out a letter signed by Principal Jones, urging parents to send their children back to school. The strange wording, which stated that Jones and the staff 'had been authorized by the division superintendent' to send the letter, suggested that Jones was acting under duress. Rev. Griffin, however appreciative of Jones's difficult position, nevertheless understood that the principal's prestige and authority could influence many parents to change or waver in their support of the strike and court action. Consequently, Rev. Griffin sent out his own letter calling for another mass meeting on Thursday, May 3, and underscoring the significance of what the students were trying to accomplish: 'REMEMBER. The eyes of the world are on us. The intelligent support we give our cause will serve as a stimulant for the cause of free people everywhere' (Smith 1965, p. 58). John Lancaster, Negro county farm agent, helped Griffin get out the mass mailing.

On May 3 Hill and Robinson petitioned the school board for the desegregation of the county's schools. The meeting that night took the form of a rally and served as a real turning point. J.B. Pervall, the former principal of Moton High School, spoke in favor of the standard of equality but not integration and gave many people in the packed church reason to pause and reassess what they were supporting. The NAACP officials attempted to regain the momentum, but it was Barbara Johns who succeeded in restoring the crowd's support. She reminded members of the audience of their experience and the students' action. In concluding, she effectively recounted the many small and large insults suffered by African-Americans in the history of race relations, challenging Pervall with unmistakable metaphors of white oppression and black accommodation to it. She admonished the huge gathering: 'Don't let Mr. Charlie, Mr. Tommy, or Mr. Pervall stop you from backing us. We are depending on you' (Smith 1965, p. 59). Rev. Griffin took the cue and asserted Pervall's right to speak but implied cowardice of anyone who would not match the students' courage and back them.

The students consented to return to school on Monday, May 7. Hill and Robinson promised that they would file suit in federal court unless the school board agreed to integrate by May 8.

The walkout becomes a federal case

On May 23, one month after the strike, Robinson followed through on the NAACP's promise in light of the board's inaction and filed suit in federal court in Richmond, Virginia, on behalf of 117 Moton students. In *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* he argued that Virginia's law requiring segregated schools be struck down as unconstitutional. The attorney general, looking at the facts, counseled that an equalization suit was indefensible for the state but that integration was too radical a remedy. The state immediately began improving the facilities in an effort to render the suit moot.

The prestigious Richmond law firm Hunton, Williams, Anderson, Gay & Moore represented the school board. Two senior partners, Archibald Gerard Robertson and Justin Moore, prepared a vigorous defense of segregation. During the five-day trial, which began on February 25, 1952, they argued a very familiar defense of poor facilities for African-American children: to each according to the taxes that they pay. The poverty of African-Americans meant a low tax base among them and thus a generous white subsidy of their schools.

Robinson and Hill presented a now-familiar cast of witnesses who discussed the psychological impact of segregation. Moore rebutted one witness for the plaintiffs specifically for his Jewish background and the others for their unfamiliarity with the mores of the South. Moore ridiculed educator and psychologist Kenneth B. Clark for his research methods and overreaching conclusions. During Moore's cross-examination of Clark, Moore and Hill clashed vehemently – and just short of physically – over Moore's contention that the NAACP and Hill himself stirred up and fomented critical situations. The passions of this exchange portended events to come.

The court found unanimously for the school board. The students and their parents were disappointed, given their honest, albeit idealistic, belief that they would win because their cause was just. Robinson and Hill were neither surprised nor disappointed; they were now prepared to appeal to higher courts. *Davis v. School Board* reached the Supreme Court in July and joined with other school desegregation cases for argument on December 8, 1952.

The drama of a local school strike reaching the US Supreme Court was not over, although many of the original actors in the school strike had exited the stage. Barbara Rose Johns left Farmville soon after the strike. Her family, concerned for her safety, sent her to Montgomery, Alabama, to live with her uncle Rev. Vernon Johns, minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. The education board fired Boyd Jones, and he and his new wife, Moton High School teacher Inez Davenport, also moved to Montgomery so he could attend graduate

school. Ironically, the couple became members of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

The arguments of December left the Court with the task of deciding the legality of school desegregation and possibly the constitutionality of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 decision that found separate-but-equal to be constitutional. A divided Court, with at least two dissenting votes, was ready to overturn *Plessy* but sought a stronger majority. Justice Felix Frankfurter bought some time for the Court by developing a set of remaining questions, and the Court asked that the case be re-argued on October 12, 1953. In the interval Chief Justice Fred Vinson died and Earl Warren, former governor of California, replaced him as the new chief justice. Warren worked to gain a consensus among his fellow justices, who had become deeply divided during Vinson's tenure regarding civil liberties in the McCarthy era. Firmly opposed to the constitutionality of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Warren relied on diplomacy and compromise in language to make it possible for the Court, including a hospitalized member, to render a unanimous decision on May 17, 1954. The Court ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional and that separate-but-equal could not be applied to schools.

Local authorities and their reactions

The Court's decision engendered a severe backlash in the South, particularly in Prince Edward County and other parts of Virginia. As long as the courts did not set a remedy for segregation, one of Warren's compromises, segregation remained the de facto practice in Prince Edward County and other parts of the South. In 1956 the courts finally ordered desegregation but still did not set a timetable for it. Prominent Virginia politicians and editors invoked the theory of interposition – the right of state government to position itself between the federal government and those otherwise bound by its laws. They called for 'massive resistance' in much the same way that Johns had, certain that they could avoid punishment for noncompliance with the new federal law by presenting a united front. Extremists promised to put an end to public schools rather than integrate them.

Reprisals and resistance hit Prince Edward County particularly hard. On the personal side John Lancaster lost his job as Negro county farm agent and Rev. Griffin, besieged by every creditor, was left penniless. His wife suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of the stress. On the policy side the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors had been providing funding for the public schools one month at a time as long as the schools remained segregated. But in 1959 the federal appeals court ordered Prince Edward County and the rest of Virginia to desegregate its schools in September. In response, the board of supervisors did not allocate any funds for public schools. Instead it provided tuition assistance to students desiring to attend all-white private schools that had been established in the county in the event of court-ordered integration. The county's

public schools remained closed until 1964, perhaps offering the most radical example of massive resistance on the local level in the nation.

For the five years the public schools were closed, the NAACP litigated for public funding of integrated schools. African-American residents established learning centers for their children. A few families were able to send their children to live with relatives outside the county where they could attend public schools.

New tensions arose in the African-American community. Attorneys for the NAACP sought a legal remedy rather than a local remedy that they feared might undermine their case. Intent on having the courts decide the controversy, the NAACP did not want the learning centers to approximate the quality of school instruction and steadfastly avoided a compromise with officials that would lead to the reopening of the public schools. African-Americans heeded the NAACP's advice and began to register to vote in an effort to vote local authorities out of office rather than submit to them.

By 1960 Prince Edward County had gained notoriety and came to represent what needed to be changed in the South. It attracted organizations other than the NAACP and more direct action protest: Black Muslims supported separate and better schools; the Sit-In Movement inspired direct action; and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee sent in organizers to plan boycotts as well as to tutor the children locked out of their schools. Griffin managed to bridge the gap between the increasingly 'old' efforts of NAACP litigation and the 'new' methods of movement organizing. He supported the latter in the county even as he became president of the NAACP statewide. Ironically, the 'new' movement tactics of direct action had an exemplar: a school boycott organized in 1951 by high school junior Barbara Rose Johns.

ANALYTICAL ELEMENTS

What elements contributed to change in this case? Are these elements present in organizational, community, political, and other social contexts? In this section we explore these questions by proposing several analytical elements that may be useful for understanding this case and others.

Causality

Accounts of leadership often reduce causality to a limited set of factors. This enables us to portray leadership as links in a chain of cause and effect, such as when we credit Clinton's fiscal policies with the prosperity of the 1990s or a CEO with the turnaround of a company, without considering the many other factors that played a part in these outcomes. In the case of Prince Edward

County, Barbara Johns's leadership undeniably influenced school desegregation. But an exclusive focus on her role reflects an oversimplification of the chain of events and seriously underestimates the nature of leadership. Leadership is infinitely more complex than the efforts of any one individual; rather, it is the impact of efforts to influence the actions of leaders and followers opposed to and supportive of the same or related changes. This perspective on leadership requires attention to a network of actors and the sea of other changes in which a leader's influence efforts take place. Four analytical frames help us to attend to this network of influence rather than to a specific leader: Kurt Lewin's field theory; Gunnar Myrdal's principle of cumulative effect; Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge's theory of punctuated equilibrium; and Margaret Wheatley's work on systems.

Kurt Lewin, field theory

Kurt Lewin's field theory espouses that effective change requires understanding 'the totality of coexisting facts which are conceived as mutually interdependent' (Lewin 1951, p. 240). Lewin, a psychologist with training in physics and mathematics, concerned himself with individual and group behavior, including change. He contributed 'action research' to the field of problem-centered scholarship. Problem solving, just like effective change, requires placing a problem within a system or field with as many relevant and interdependent elements as possible. Within this field each individual also becomes a dynamic field with interdependent parts, including 'life spaces' of family, work, church, and other groups. People take positive and negative influences from their experiences that shape their identity and help explain their behavior. Lewin advocated assembling all the relevant, mutually independent factors to explain social phenomena such as leadership and change. For example, Johns may or may not have been aware that before she met school superintendent McIlwaine he had tangled with her uncle Vernon Johns over black students' access to county school bus transportation and with Oliver Hill over black teachers' pay a dozen years before. Nonetheless, McIlwaine remained aware of those experiences, and they undoubtedly influenced his assessment of Barbara Johns's efforts to lead and his judgment about the nature of the student strike. Because of their influence on McIlwaine, these prior conflicts became part of the field of the controversy. Their hidden nature suggests the difficulties of gathering and assessing all the facts relevant to an event.

Gunnar Myrdal, the principle of cumulative effect

Gunnar Myrdal and his colleagues completed their epic study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, before the appearance of Lewin's field theory. They offered a theoretical framework for the condition of African-Americans very much like Lewin and extrapolated it to a method of

social research (Myrdal 1944, p. 1066). Myrdal's study begins with the notion of a system in stable equilibrium and rejects it as inadequate to provide a 'dynamic analysis of the process of change in social relations' (Myrdal 1944, p. 1065). The static equilibrium of a system is merely a starting point of the balance of opposing forces. In the simplest of systems, with only two opposing elements, a change in one brings about a change in the other, which in turn brings on more change. The changes may be subtle enough to appear stable but only because of the constant state of adjustment. Any system is far more complex with many interrelated elements; even the simplest system with two opposing elements becomes complex when we examine the composites of each element.

Myrdal proposed a principle of cumulation to explain change within a system of dynamic social causation. Change accumulates as one change brings on another change, and the elements of a system and their composites or subsystems represent a second form of cumulation. The principle states, assuming an initial static state of balanced forces:

> *[A]ny change in any one of [its] factors, independent of the way in which it is brought about, will, by the aggregate weight of the cumulative effects running back and forth between them all, start the whole system moving* in one direction or the other as the case may be, with a speed depending upon the original push and the functions of causal interrelation within the system. (Myrdal 1944, p. 1067, italics in the original)

Myrdal elaborated that the final effects of the cumulative process may be out of proportion to the magnitude of the original push. More to the point of our case, although the initial push may be withdrawn – the school strike ended – 'the process of change will continue without a new balance in sight' (Myrdal 1944, p. 1066). This happens largely because the system in which any change occurs is far more complicated than it appears. Every element of the system interrelates with every other element, and every element has its peculiarities and irregularities (Myrdal 1944, p. 1068).

Myrdal concluded in terms central to our concern about causality: 'This conception of a great number of interdependent factors, mutually cumulative in their effects, disposes of the idea that there is one predominant factor, a "basic factor"' (Myrdal 1944, p. 1069). This includes leadership.

Indeed, the notion of leadership may be a construct of our attempts to understand causality within a system of change. This radically alters the enduring debate: Does change create leaders or do leaders create change? The cumulative principle would suggest that the actions of leaders may influence others to take action that in turn influences others in a continuing chain – thus the answer to the question is neither and both. Change does not create leaders nor do leaders create change *and* change creates leaders and leaders create change. Observers

apply the construct of leadership to people's actions – actions that are intended to influence the actions of other people – within a system of change. The construct of leadership may be used retroactively to suggest causality. The accuracy of that assessment depends upon the boundaries of the system; the broader the boundaries, the less likely any set of actions has a primary causal relationship to systemic change. Leadership is more easily applied to actions in a system of static equilibrium and a circumscribed set of cumulative factors.

Both Myrdal and Lewin borrowed heavily from quantum mechanics in particular for concepts of field and the steady state of disequilibrium. Both men emulated physics in their hope that human behavior and systems of change, however complicated, could be expressed mathematically.

Stephen J. Gould and Niles Eldredge, punctuated equilibrium

Concepts of equilibrium and change also feature prominently in the work of scientists Stephen Gould and Niles Eldredge (1972). Their theory of punctuated equilibrium explains major changes in nature after long periods of stasis that cause divergence or branching of a new animal or plant species (Gould 1991). Real change occurs if this divergence establishes a trend wherein the new species succeeds more frequently than the previous one.

Like field and systems theories, social scientists extrapolated the concept of punctuated equilibrium to explain changes in social systems that occur after long periods of incremental change punctuated by brief periods of major change (Schlager 1999). This phenomenon helps to explain how Johns and the other student leaders could launch a successful trend of mass resistance to racial inequality after decades of incremental change facilitated by previous generations stretching back to the era of slavery. Brief periods of punctuated equilibrium, such as the creation of a community of free blacks in 1810 (Ely 2004), established a trend of sustained resistance to an unjust racial system in Prince Edward County and other black communities, even in the face of retribution from white power holders.

Margaret Wheatley, the new science and leadership

Margaret Wheatley's work (1992) permits us to bridge the concepts of punctuated equilibrium in paleobiology and the physics of quantum mechanics to leadership in a manner that builds upon the field theory of Lewin and the cumulative principle of Myrdal. Wheatley explains that physics had introduced field theory to explain gravity, electromagnetism and relativity. The common element of fields in each of these is that they are 'unseen structures, occupying space and becoming known to us through their effects.' The space of fields and, we may add, their time, is not empty but 'a cornucopia of invisible but powerful effective structure' (Wheatley 1992, p. 49). Both Lewin and Myrdal also suggested that to understand human behavior and social change we need to

recognize that time and space are not empty and begin to fill in their invisible but effective structure.

Wheatley also explains the relevance of field theory in the life sciences in a manner analogous to Myrdal's principle of cumulation. Morphogenic fields develop through the accumulated behaviors of a species' members. Successive members find it easier to acquire a skill, such as bicycle riding, in a setting where many others have accumulated it. Contrary to Newtonian concepts of causation, it is the energy of the receiver that takes up the form of a morphogenic field (Wheatley 1992, p. 51). In leadership terms the efficacy of leaders comes from shaping a field in which others, by their own actions, may participate in the energy and forms of the field. Barbara Johns certainly did this for students, their parents and many others. But she was also within the fields that others – including Rev. Griffin, Superintendent McIlwaine, Principal Jones and teacher Inez Davenport, and the other teachers at Moton High School – had shaped.

Wheatley elaborates on the consequence of this conception of field for leadership. The idea that leaders have vision, set goals and then marshal their own energy and that of others to achieve these goals is a Newtonian view of change focused on a prime mover and a mechanistic concept of change. Although partially true – some elements of old science still hold in the new science – this focus overlooks the complex fields of cumulative interactions across time and space in which all of this takes place. We might conceive of change as a destination sought through the leader as engine – a linear and railroad track analog. This would ignore the fact that even railroads function within fields – including elements from appropriations to weather – that influence when and where trains arrive or if they run at all. Better, Wheatley argues, to think about organizational culture and the deliberate and intentional formation of fields that reinforce the values and goals of an organization and fill its spaces and history with coherent messages (Wheatley 1992, pp. 52–7). Of course, this view is limited to those fields within an organization – such as the Moton High School PTA – and does not take into account the field in which these organizations interact with other actors with opposing values and goals – such as the Prince Edward County School Board.

Dynamic Systems of Interdependent Parts, Change and Causality

Wheatley's work invites us to view the field of leadership as a dynamic system in which change is a constant. Myrdal describes it as rolling equilibrium and alerts social scientists that they have to study '*processes of systems actually rolling* in the one direction or the other, systems which are constantly subjected to all sorts of pushes from outside through all the variables, and which are moving because of the cumulative effect of all these pushes and the interaction between the variables' (Myrdal 1944, p. 1067). Peter Vaill describes this system

as 'permanent white water' (1996, p. 2) and 'chaotic change' (1989) but attributes these conditions to recent changes rather than newly discovered enduring attributes of systems as Wheatley does.

Regardless of these important differences, many leadership scholars acknowledge that in the context of a dynamic, interdependent system, leaders play a far different role than the one often ascribed to them. For example, Adam Yarmolinsky takes issue with James MacGregor Burns about leaders initiating change. Yarmolinsky (2007) points out that leaders join a system in the midst of change and simply do their best to mediate and direct change in a shifting environment. Ronald Heifetz similarly, if implicitly, acknowledges that leaders, especially those without authority, modulate the distress within dynamic systems (Heifetz 1994, p. 207).

Likewise many leadership scholars acknowledge the complexity of such systems of fields and recognize that these fields undergo constant change. Vaill writes of organizations as universes with galaxies of knowledge and information (Vaill 1989, p. xii). Heifetz (Heifetz and Linsky 2002) and Vaill also place importance on the personal attributes of the leader, thus opening up a whole other dimension that can affect and further complicate the fields of organization and change, much as Lewin predicted.

The organizational and personal complexities of this constant change were fully evident in the Prince Edward County case. For example, the series of events that played such a pivotal role in the Supreme Court's unanimous decision on this case were at least as complicated as the events comprising the racial history of Prince Edward County. To offer only one example, the death of Chief Justice Vinson made possible a strong majority opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Earl Warren, who assumed the role of chief justice, was determined to have a unanimous decision. His determination was no doubt influenced by the guilt he felt for the role he had played in the internment of West Coast Japanese Americans when he was governor of California during the Second World War. *Brown v. Board of Education* gave him the opportunity to repent his own transgressions and to end those of the nation (Kluger 1975, pp. 661–2).

Warren began his penance before *Brown*. In 1946 a federal district court declared the segregation of Mexican-American school children in California unconstitutional in *Mendez v. Westminster*. The case anticipated the issues of *Brown*, although the grounds of segregation were national origin rather than race. After the federal circuit court upheld the lower court, Governor Warren lobbied the legislature in 1947 to pass bills that ended legal segregation for all groups in California. Even a scholar as conscientious as Richard Kluger overlooked how influential this experience would prove to be for Warren. The California case, like the *Brown* case, was a complex field that developed its own twists and ironies. Gonzalo Mendez, the lead plaintiff in the case, was able to pursue his grievance because of the income he derived farming land that he had

leased from the Munemitsus after the Japanese-American family had been 'relocated' to an internment camp. Warren's most egregious public policy indirectly provided him the opportunity to pursue one of his most progressive official acts (Teachers Domain n.d. 2001).

Wheatley offers another element of fields that Lewin and Myrdal did not foresee, namely, the manifestation of the entire system in each of its parts. Fractals best express this property of systems of dynamic change. Zoom in on any part of a chaotic system and one finds recurring patterns. Every part of a field of change may manifest the transformative change of the entire field, but a focus on a minute part of the field may obscure the perception of the pattern that comes from examining subsets in relation to large sets. The pattern of the entire system may be found in each of its elements, but without some sense of the whole, the pattern may go unrecognized. Needless to say, without a sense of that pattern the nature of each part of the system may be misunderstood. When considering each part of the system of change in the Prince Edward County case, for example, elements of other systems of change are readily apparent. The school strike had precursors in other forms of resistance within the slave and freed black community of the county and in the repressive measures of the white community. The fullest meaning of those preceding resistance acts and the school strike emerges from the pattern they share with each other. An exclusive focus on one or the other or on any other factor apart from its relationship to the system of change limits its meaning and our perception of the recurring pattern among them.

The principle of uncertainty, which Wheatley mentions and which makes up part of the new science, provides particularly rich insight into causality. Physicist Werner Heisenberg helped to usher in the new science of quantum mechanics. Heisenberg resolved many of the controversies of quantum mechanics by explaining that one cannot know the position and momentum of a subatomic particle at the same time. The more one knows about its position, the less one knows about its momentum and vice versa. The properties of the observed depend upon the instruments used to observe them. The leadership of Barbara Johns depends then upon what other factors we take into account in the system of change in racial segregation. When considering the Moton High School strike factor, her leadership plays a pre-eminent role. At the level of federal decisions for school desegregation, her leadership fades into a fractal subsystem of a larger system. Moreover, a fair evaluation of Johns's leadership depends upon examining this system of change from her perspective. Her leadership would be less prominent if we examined the system through the efforts and actions of Rev. Griffin, Oliver Hill or Superintendent McIlwaine. In terms of the uncertainty principle, the more we focus on the leadership of Johns, the less discernible other leadership becomes.

This has profound implications for causality. If our certainty about one actor comes at the cost of uncertainty regarding other parts of a dynamic system, how

can we be sure that the actions of one influenced the intended change? Although the case is quite clear that Johns's leadership spurred the student strike, we might also consider the other factors that influenced people's action and argue that Johns's exhortations would not have had any effect had it not been for the interaction with other elements of the system – the lack of success and frustration of the Moton High School PTA; the World War II service of Rev. Griffin, Principal Jones and Johns's father; the support of the initial small band of student strike leaders; etc. This uncertainty seems to demand that we examine every inexhaustible subset to the greatest microscopic level of scrutiny and then relate them. In truth, we could never examine every relevant fact and interrelated event in sufficient detail to explain with certainty what caused what. According to Heisenberg, 'In the sharp formulation of the law of causality – "if we know the present exactly, we can calculate the future" – it is not the conclusion that is wrong but the premise' (American Institute of Physics and David Cassidy 2005). The academic implications of these matters are that we can understand the leadership of this case only by the patterns that we look for and, once we find them, we may be surprised to learn that constituent elements of the case may vary from what we would expect. In this case, for example, it is possible that some white residents of the county wanted integration more than some African-American residents. The practical implications are that such micro-variations do not affect our understanding of the leadership of Johns and others. However, our understanding will be insufficient without incorporating enough elements of the system into our analysis to make clear the patterns of behaviors and the probability of their interrelatedness. This is precisely the caution that authors such as Wheatley and Vaill offer: a focus on leaders and their actions distorts our understanding of leadership in systems of change.

Mindfulness

Underlying this investigation into the theories and observations of Lewin, Myrdal, Gould and Eldredge and Wheatley is the common emphasis on mindfulness – a central tenet of Buddhism. In order to understand and practice leadership, it is necessary to engage in critical reflection on the acts of leaders, the context in which those acts take place and their likely consequences. The tenets of this critical reflection include conceptualizing acts within a field of interactive and interrelated parts rather than in a straight line from acts to results. In this manner both leaders and those who study leadership are more likely to anticipate unintended and unwanted consequences. Our perception of these consequences increases with our knowledge of the boundaries of the system of change or field in which someone attempts to lead.

In the *I-Ching* Chinese scholars posit a universe composed of a single unifying element with two complementary and opposing parts – a *yin* and a *yang*.

The complexity of the universe is contained in its basic element and in all the derivative elements that flow from the original *Tao*. These elements combine in systems of equilibrium based on complementarity and in a dynamic flow of energy, *Feng Shui*, founded on their oppositional characteristics (Couto and Fu 2004). The premises of this realm – fields of energy, change and stability, complementarity and opposition – provided Neils Bohr and other pioneering physicists a metaphysical context for discovering quantum mechanics and expanding scientific thought beyond theories of Newton and even Einstein. Physicist Werner Heisenberg and his colleague Erwin Schroedinger found their inspiration in the metaphysics of Hinduism. These systems of thought provide a very different metaphor for causality than the mechanics of a machine, to which Scottish philosopher David Hume subscribed. Instead causality is rooted in dynamic, interactive systems of interrelated parts that resemble and differ from each other (Capra 1982, pp. 79–89).

Lest it appear that we have strayed too far from causality, change and leadership, let us not forget the numerous references, albeit cursory and oblique, to Lao-Tsu, Taoism and Confucius in leadership scholarship. Peter Vaill deals somewhat more substantially with Taoism, after first confessing to the elusiveness of its elliptical thinking. Vaill dwells on the concept of *wu-wei*, or nonaction, and its place in leadership. *Wu-wei* was evident in the Johns case when the teachers and principal left the assembly hall at the students' request during the organization of the strike. Vaill also hints at the significance of examining this and other epistemological and ontological systems for the understanding of change. He envisions the possibility of organizations benefiting from the Eastern realization that the meaning of organizational capabilities, including leadership and change, 'can emerge only through the most careful and continuous contemplation' (Vaill 1989, p. 190).

Social Tensions

In our conversations about the links of causality and mindfulness to actions that result in change, Fred Jablin suggested that the impetus for change might emerge from social tensions. This idea resonated as a meaningful way to understand the dynamic and socially constructed nature of change in human systems.

Social tensions arise among groups from conflicts about identity, resources, power and ethics. These tensions are embedded in interactions within and between groups as they form and continually reform the structures and systems that comprise society. Table 7.1 identifies several social factors and ensuing tensions that underlie change. In the Johns case, conflict arising from these tensions created pervasive conditions for change in Prince Edward County.

Table 7.1 Social tensions

Factors	Social Tensions
Identity and Meaning	Assigning identity – Asserting identity Rendering insignificant – Establishing value
Resource Availability and Distribution	Restricted resources – Accessible resources Individual resources – Collective resources
Power	Disenfranchised power – Authorized power
Ethics	Inequitable actions/conditions – Equitable actions/conditions

Identity and meaning

Individuals and groups create meaning in society by naming, defining and assigning value to themselves and others in their environment. Social tensions concerning meaning commonly develop as strains between assigned identity (naming) and asserted identity (self-claimed) and upon rendering identities insignificant (worthless). When one group assigns a name and lower social worth to another group, the resulting tensions can evolve or erupt into social change. Rosenblum and Travis (2003) assert, 'Because naming may involve a redefinition of self, an assertion of power, and a rejection of others' ability to impose an identity, social change movements often lay claim to a new name, and opponents may express opposition by continuing to use the old name' (p. 6).

In 1951 whites identified African-American citizens of Prince Edward County as 'coloreds' in the most polite terms and as dehumanizing epithets in the worst terms. There was no doubt that African Americans were deemed inferior and unequal, while white citizens were valued highly and deemed superior. These name and value distinctions shaped disparities in other aspects of society including the rights of blacks to resources, power and ethical treatment.

Resource availability and distribution

Tensions concerning resources emerge from the availability and distribution of goods, services, wealth, property and other benefits or needs that groups in society value or require. Accessibility and restriction of resources are more often determined by social mores (the haves and have-nots) than natural abundance or limitations. Tensions for change emerge from struggles over who has the right to possess resources – the individual, the collective or some combination of both.

US citizens established the right to universal public education as a valued collective resource long before Barbara Rose Johns entered Moton High School. In 1951 resources for educating black children in Prince Edward County were sorely lacking, even under the separate-but-equal standards of *Plessy v. Ferguson.* Moton High School's PTA, principal and community members continuously appealed to the all-white school board to upgrade buildings and supplies only to be placated or summarily ignored. Even when funds for buildings and supplies were available, white school board members had no intention of supporting equal public education and facilities for African-American children.

Power

Participants in the change process create, leverage or challenge power constructs to bring about major change. In our session at Mount Hope, members of the Gold Team agreed that 'power is not fundamentally a thing that individuals possess in some greater or lesser quantity but is more than anything an aspect of social relationships' (Couto, Faier, Hicks and Hickman 2002, p. 3). The capacity to impact social relations is affected by a group's attainment of or restriction from various forms of social power and the group's ability to use power to influence others. Tensions develop among groups that have attained various forms of power (authorized or legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, informational or referent [French and Raven 1959]) and groups that are restricted, disenfranchised or negatively impacted by the exercise of these forms of power.

The exercise of legitimate power contributes to stability and organization in social interactions; however, misuse or exploitation of power bases results in inequality and loss of rights or freedoms for selected groups. In 1896 with the landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, white Southerners succeeded in reversing and suppressing any gains African Americans had made in terms of civil rights and human dignity. The US Supreme Court used its power in this case to establish a legal basis for separate-but-equal conditions for blacks and whites in the South. The result of this decision gave tacit permission to white power holders to create separate but decidedly unequal conditions for black citizens.

Ethics

Joanne Ciulla (2004, p. 4) maintains that ethics is 'the heart of leadership'; likewise, inequity, inequality and excessive self-interest are at the heart of social tensions and conflict. Ethics in social interactions compel members of society to take into account the impact of their actions on others and consider what 'ought to be' done in situations with other human beings. Al Gini explains that 'ethics, then, tries to find a way to protect one person's individual rights and needs against and alongside the rights and needs of others' (Gini 2004, p. 29). Social tensions emerge when groups experience or perceive inequitable treatment at the hands of power holders and dominant groups.

Inequities in the treatment of black and white citizens in the Jim Crow South were intentional and inhumane. In 1939 the Prince Edward County School Board built its first public high school for African-American students with no cafeteria, auditorium, locker rooms, infirmary or gymnasium – features that were standard in white schools in the county. Moton High School was built to hold 180 students, but in 1947 it served more that 360 students.

The county school board responded by building temporary facilities made of wood and covered with tar paper behind the school. These 'shacks,' as they were called by local citizens, leaked when it rained and were poorly heated. Barbara Johns and other Moton High School students were well aware of the superior quality of facilities and equipment at the white high school. These inequities coupled with long-term neglect and disregard by school board officials increased frustration and tensions among students.

From an ethical perspective, change in its most humane and enlightened form intentionally uplifts the human condition of some without harming the welfare of others, while change in its most detrimental form fosters the aims of egocentric or amoral individuals and groups at the expense or demise of others. Leadership studies research examines both elevating and harmful forms of change. Scholars James McGregor Burns (1978, 2003) and Bernard Bass (1985; & Avolio 1994) examine the uplifting effect of transforming and transformational leadership, just as scholars Jean Lipman-Blumen (2005), Barbara Kellerman (2004) and others research the causes and consequences of toxic or bad leadership.

Illustrations of both harmful and elevating forms of change permeate the story of Barbara Rose Johns and school desegregation in Prince Edward County. Leadership by Southern whites created and sustained social arrangements that legitimated their own amoral needs and wants by denying the civil rights and well-being of black citizens. In contrast, strike organizers at Moton High School used their moral agency to advocate for improved educational conditions for black students without harming the rights of white citizens.

Conditions for Change: Climate, Timing and Threshold Points

Though social tensions underlie change, tensions alone do not initiate change. The elements in Table 7.2, climate, timing and threshold points, are essential factors in prompting change. Climate encompasses the totality of environmental cues, feelings and experiences of groups in social contexts. Conditions for change emerge over time as social climates affecting the well-being of specific groups become more threatening or uncertain.

Threatening conditions were present in the situation surrounding events in Prince Edward County. Moton High School's PTA, principal and community members advocated for improved resources and facilities for their children on

Table 7.2 Conditions for change

Factors	Conditions		
	From		To:
Climate	Passive	→	Threatening
Timing	Premature	→	Opportune
Threshold Points	Lacking	→	Prevalent

a continuous basis. In the existing separate and unequal environment it was evident that postponements and rejections of their requests were not isolated incidents. As a result, each obstacle contributed to the black community's cumulative experience of discrimination and mistreatment.

Timing is also a central factor in change. Cumulative acts, that when taken together are larger than any singular or specific moment in history, create opportune openings where concerted action is capable of sparking change – a punctuation in social equilibrium. The previous actions of many African Americans to defy segregation – including the actions of Johns's uncle, Rev. Vernon Johns, that resulted in better school bus services for African-American children in the county in 1939 – paved the way for Moton High School students to stage a sustainable strike. The actions of Vernon Johns formed part of a complex web of change leading to desegregation.

The concept of thresholds provides further insight into conditions that trigger change. Mark Granovetter (1978) describes threshold as 'that point where the perceived benefits to an individual of doing the thing in question ... exceed the perceived costs' (p. 1422). By extending the idea of threshold to groups, we conclude that significant social change is set in motion when a group collectively reaches a threshold point.

It is conceivable that thresholds are also points where courage transcends fear. Legalized racism and accepted acts of violence toward African Americans reinforced fear and uncertainty in people who dared to assert their objections to an unethical structure. At the same time these acts served to build cumulative experience, conviction and collective courage.

There were several major threshold points in the Moton High School case. One threshold point occurred when Barbara Johns recruited a small group of trusted friends to meet secretly and plan a student strike in the foreseeable event that efforts by the school principal and PTA would not result in a decision to build a new high school. When the school board failed to announce plans for a new school, Johns's strike group put their plan into action.

The group arranged for the school principal to be away from campus, then notified each classroom that there would be a brief assembly in the auditorium.

Johns and her compatriots then called on the 450 students gathered at the assembly to unite in collective purpose and stage an orderly strike on the school grounds. On April 23, 1951, Johns and the entire student body marched out of Moton High School determined to change the abysmal conditions in their school.

Another crucial threshold point occurred on the fourth day of the strike. NAACP lawyer Spottswood Robinson asked students to bring their parents to a meeting where he would determine whether they supported their children's willingness to proceed with a lawsuit to end segregation in public schools. Rev. Francis Griffin held the mass meeting at his church and urged black solidarity in the fight to end segregation. Barbara Johns spoke passionately on behalf of the students. The desegregation plan received a rousing endorsement from the majority of those present, though there were some dissenters. At the close of the meeting, Rev. Griffin summarized the sentiments of the group: 'Anyone who would not back these children after they stepped out on a limb is not a man' (Kluger 1975, p.478).

Leadership as Intended Change

This detailed account permits us to address questions of change and causality. In what way did Barbara Rose Johns provide leadership to end school desegregation? Did her actions pass the litmus test that James MacGregor Burns set for leadership – 'the achievement of purpose in the form of real and intended social change' (Burns 1978, p.251)? Clearly, there is a succession of related events from the school strike to *Brown v. Board of Education*. There is also, clearly, a succession of related events, albeit less direct, from the school strike to the campaign of massive resistance. Figure 7.1 outlines some of the sequential relationships of events and actors from the school strike to *Brown v. Board of Education*. It includes subsequent events such as massive resistance on both the state and county level and occurrences on both the national and local level in the civil rights movement.

If Johns was a leader in school desegregation because her actions tied into the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, was she also a leader in the campaign of massive resistance for the same reason? Did her leadership cause the closing of the schools in Prince Edward County as well as their eventual reopening and integration? Clearly she intended improved school facilities and not school closings. Was she then only responsible for the changes she intended? If so this might suggest a very low ethical standard, namely, that leaders are responsible only for their intended outcomes and not for the consequences of their actions. As a leader did she bear any responsibility for the poverty that Rev. Griffin was reduced to or for Lancaster's loss of his job as Negro county farm agent?

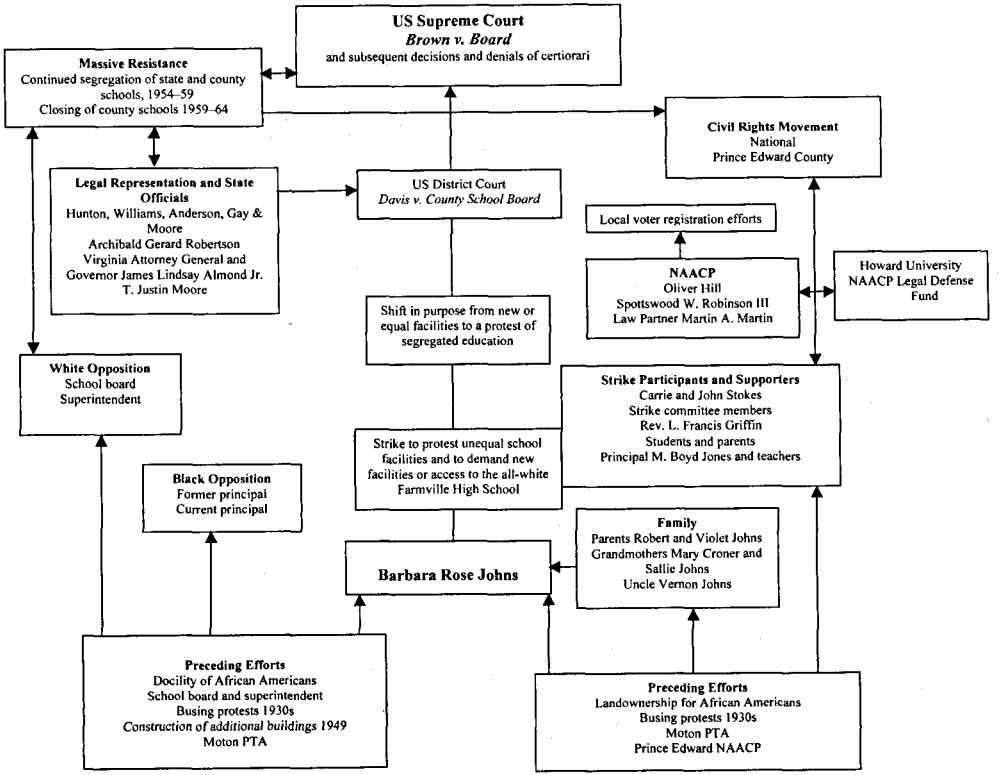

Figure 7.1 The leadership of Barbara Rose Johns

Perhaps we can absolve Johns of these negative outcomes to the extent that we cannot hold her responsible for the expected and unexpected actions that others took in reaction to her leadership. Max Weber, however, made acceptance of the intended and unintended outcomes of our efforts to influence public events a mark of the calling to political leadership. Johns was in a system of change and, according to Weber, it would be irresponsible for her not to acknowledge the interdependence of contending factors in these fields. Johns and the school board had their own separate but interdependent systems of power. Each bears responsibility in the dual sense of causality and moral accountability for their system's actions, actions which they intended to influence. But, again citing Weber, responsibility in the sense of moral accountability also requires that we use judgment to anticipate negative reactions and outcomes and attempt to avoid them. An ethic of responsibility requires that we pursue values with proportionality (Weber 1946, pp. 115–16). Weber helps us understand that Johns and the school board operated in separate but interrelated dynamic fields. Johns can only be held responsible for the negative outcomes of massive resistance and school desegregation in Prince Edward County if those outcomes can be traced to her intentions or to an excess in her actions. Clearly, they cannot.

Just as clearly we have identified a sobering caveat of leadership. Burns's litmus test of the achievement of real and intended social change comes with Weber's measured melancholic observation: 'The final [and intermediate] result of political action often, no, even regularly, stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning' (Weber 1946, p. 117).

Questions remain about the role of intended change in Johns's leadership. Initially she did not intend to desegregate the schools but only to improve the facilities of Moton High School. She supported and championed the NAACP's shift to desegregation as a means to gain improved facilities. Do we test her leadership by the achievement of desegregation or the improvement of facilities? The state immediately took steps to improve facilities as a means to avoid desegregation, but by that time the NAACP's position had hardened to the point of preferring closed schools to improved ones. In this sense, the NAACP bears more responsibility than Johns for the lost educational opportunities from 1959 to 1964.

Just as the overall *Brown* decision had some unintended consequences (Sullivan 2004), Johns's actions brought about some changes she intended and some she did not. While her initial goal was one of equalization, the NAACP viewed equalization as a very limited form of change because racial subordination could and often did continue even after students of all races obtained equal facilities. When the county ultimately desegregated its public schools, Johns achieved her intended purpose – equal facilities for black and white students – albeit in an unforeseen, unintended way. In this sense did equalization and desegregation symbolize a deeper form of change: the recognition of the value and intelligence

of all the county's students and the end of all forms of racial discrimination within the school system? How do Johns's leadership and the NAACP's leadership rate against these intended outcomes? The difference the efforts of Johns and the NAACP made in improved educational opportunities, processes and outcomes provides the best measure of their effectiveness.

Although she played a part in the formative stages of the lawsuit, Johns did not play a part in subsequent events in the county after her parents, fearing for her safety, sent her to live with her uncle Vernon in Montgomery, Alabama, shortly after the student strike. Johns married on New Year's Eve 1953 and subsequently moved to Philadelphia, far removed from the consequences of the strike and its ensuing controversy. Did her leadership stop after she launched the strike or did it continue because of the consequences of her initial action? Regardless of intention then, did her role as leader end when she no longer influenced events in the present? Or did her leadership remain to influence later events, again regardless of her intentions? Can we distinguish her role as leader from her leadership – the former being the actions that she took to influence the actions of others, and the latter being the consequences of those actions? If we are to accept the time and space of a field as relevant to the actions of influence within it, then Johns's leadership remains a factor in the field of civil rights movement in Prince Edward County and beyond.

Leadership as the Cause of Change

Johns did not operate in a leadership vacuum; rather, she interacted with other leaders in this narrative of change. It is instructive to examine the influences on each of the other leaders involved in the Prince Edward County case: the Howard University Law School education of Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson; the conflict that Superintendent McIlwaine had with Vernon Johns over transportation for African-American children twelve years prior to meeting his niece; the impact that fighting a war of liberation in a segregated army in World War II had on Rev. Griffin, Principal Jones and Barbara Johns's father as well as the effect of the subsequent desegregation of the armed forces by President Truman in 1948. This examination suggests that a set of interdependent actors each with their own set of influences comprised a system of change in the Prince Edward County case, a system limited only by our ability to ferret out all of its conditions. In this type of immense and interactive system, Johns's actions might be considered analogous to a butterfly flapping its wings in the Amazon basin, thereby setting off a string of events that ultimately causes rain in Des Moines, Iowa. Or Johns's actions might have had much more of a direct impact, causing us to analyze the specific circumstances of the case, such as the conversations in the Johns's family store; Inez Davenport's reasons for encouraging Johns to take a lead in improving the school facility; and Principal Jones's determination to run

a democratic school and support student-led initiatives, a determination that extended to his momentous decision to leave the assembly hall at Johns's request at a time when he could have squelched the strike before it got started.

Events did not unfold in a straight line from Johns to the US Supreme Court. Johns dealt directly with students, students' parents, other residents in the county and the Richmond office of the NAACP. She aligned herself with the elected student leaders of Moton High School who should possibly also be considered leaders in the school desegregation effort. Johns received advice and assistance first from Inez Davenport and Rev. Griffin and later from the NAACP. Did the boundaries of her leadership diminish when the NAACP entered or did they broaden under the influence of all the people who interacted with her? If it was the latter, should we then examine the influences on those people who influenced Barbara Rose Johns – not only those mentioned in this account but also her family members and the community of property-owning African-American farmers served by her family store?

Some of these influences were small and personal – a spoken word. Some were momentous and public – the inability of the Moton PTA to make progress. Some influences were specific to that time and place, while others had historical roots, which although long forgotten, were compelling nonetheless. For example, historically large numbers of free blacks lived in Prince Edward County during a time of legalized slavery. In the years preceding the desegregation case, an economically independent group of African-American farmers and landowners had grown and flourished in Prince Edward County, of whom Vernon Johns was just one example, albeit the most dramatic. In time Johns's efforts in the Prince Edward County school desegregation case may fade from the collective memory just as memories of some of these earlier historical events had faded by 1951.

Burns's litmus test of leadership as the achievement of real and intended change sets a high standard. Clearly Johns achieved her purpose of conducting a school strike and, as a consequence, she influenced the actions of others. It is relatively easy, as we have seen, to detail the action that leaders take to influence others. It is much more difficult to judge the influence of those actions on other leaders. Whereas leading is replete with intentions, leadership concerns the assessment of the consequences of leaders' actions. And how do we deal with and assess the changes that ensued because of a leader's action? Joseph Rost's critique of Burns only compounds the problem. His definition of leadership as 'an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes' (Rost 1991, p. 103) obfuscates the possibility that some influence relationships may make real changes, although unintended, and may stimulate some to act for contrary purposes. In order to move beyond the dilemma of unintended changes and contrary purposes, we may have to distinguish between leading and leadership.

Leading is an attempt to influence others in the present moment. The story of the strike offers numerous examples of efforts to lead, including the students' letter to the NAACP lawyers, the massive resistance tactics employed by some of Virginia's politicians and newspaper editors and Earl Warren's determination to win a unanimous opinion in the US Supreme Court. We can define these attempts at leading as *leadership* only after assessing their full impact. Even then, what is and is not leadership depends upon what is and is not included in the system of change.

By limiting the influence relationship to leaders and followers and insisting on intention, Rost and many, many others confuse the nature of leadership. The actions of a person may influence a leader to take action even though it was not intended. Barbara Johns's paternal uncle and grandmother both instilled a great deal of confidence in her and served as role models of resistance to racial subordination in personal and public matters. Their actions would not be considered leadership in an ordinary interpretation of Rost's definition, but an extraordinary interpretation – which focuses on influence relationships primarily – would incorporate their actions into the leadership that brought about school desegregation. Although they did not directly affect the change effort in the way that Rev. Griffin and the NAACP lawyers did, Johns's uncle and grandmother nurtured Johns's self-esteem, making it possible for her to assert herself in the school desegregation case. The omission of significant influential relationships is but the first shortcoming in any theory of change that limits its focus to leaders and followers.

The second shortcoming of Rost's conception of leadership is that it tends to concentrate on the efforts of one set of leaders and followers. In truth and in practice, leaders – those who take action to influence others – set off reactions in other leaders for conflicting purposes. Obviously, Johns's plans for the school strike had severe critics who took action to prevent the strike and desegregation. There were African-American leaders opposed to the strike and efforts to integrate who vied with Johns for influence in the African-American community. Principal Jones, for example, wrote a letter to parents asking them to send their children back to school. In sum, a system of change does not have only one set of leaders and followers; rather, it has many interdependent and interactive sets of leaders and followers.

These two factors of change, namely, myriad influences and many sets of leaders and followers, came into play most dramatically on the morning of April 23 when Principal Jones left the assembly at the request of Johns and the other strike leaders. He could have refused to leave and ordered the students to return to their classrooms, protesting that their strike plans would only harm his own change efforts. Certainly his boss, the superintendent of schools, thought this is exactly what he should have done. And had he done so, it is very unlikely that events in Prince Edward County would have unfolded as they did. Here was a leader, a person in authority, who did not use his influence to coerce compliance.

Several factors might have influenced his action: he might have withdrawn his opposition because he tacitly supported the students' actions; he might have been making a concession to Inez Davenport, Johns's favorite teacher and Jones's fiancée, who had encouraged Johns to take some action to address the poor facilities; he might have wanted to show support for the orderly and democratic manner in which the students conducted themselves regardless of whether he agreed with their plans. He sought to instill initiative and organization in his students and may have been reluctant to squelch their efforts for this reason. Richard Kluger describes Jones as a man trapped between his convictions as a black leader and his obligations to his white employees (Kluger 1975, p. 469). His convictions won out at the moment he was asked to leave. The assembly was itself the result of his influential encouragement of student initiative and his own example of striving to acquire better resources for the school. Ironically, Jones was a leader in terms of the influence he had on an action he could not ultimately support. His leadership, his influence on the school strike, came from his decision not to use his authority, or to act by inaction.

When we examine change through one particular leader, we can see how seemingly unrelated events become a network of influence because of their effect on that one person. When we analyze a change event from the perspective of different leaders, we must add and subtract elements of influence and think about how the consequences of the events affected different leaders differently. For example, if we choose to examine the whole system of change in Prince Edward County through T. Justin Moore, lead attorney for the school board, we would have to consider very different influences and consequences than we would if we were considering the same system of change from the perspective of Johns or Jones.

Leadership as Action for Change

Action to bring about change entails more than a single leader or initiator, as the Prince Edward County school desegregation case illustrates. Individuals can achieve a common purpose only when they join together in an act of generativity – forming a group to accomplish goals that an individual could not achieve alone (Forsyth 1999, p. 67). During our Mount Hope discussions, the concept of generativity was especially important in the Gold Team's conceptions of leadership. The scholars at Mount Hope grappled with the question: What processes or conditions characterize the emergence, maintenance and transformation of leadership and followership? The Gold Team responded, 'Leadership is a creative and generative act – literally bringing new realities into being through collaboration with others' (Couto et al., 2002, p. 2).

Members of the Moton High School student body assumed active roles as leaders or followers in an effort to attain their common goal. Robert Kelley

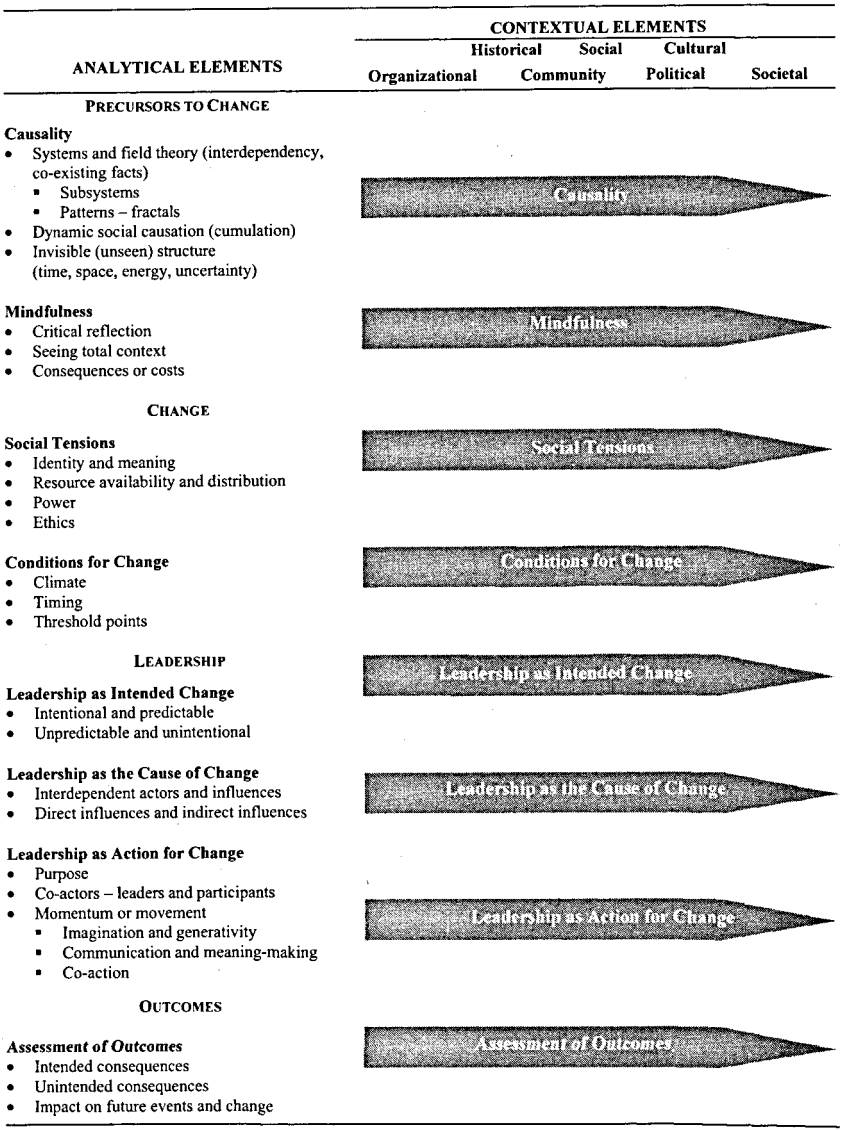

Figure 7.2 Analytical and contextual elements

factors that contribute to the leadership of change in human systems and use them ethically.

Barbara Rose Johns and the Moton High School students proceeded with intention, purpose and collective action to gain facilities and conditions equal to

their white counterparts. Yet they had no idea when they met with attorneys Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson that their actions would ultimately lead to the overthrow of legally segregated schools in the United States. The student strikers achieved more than separate-but-equal schools; they achieved legal desegregation of schools throughout the country. Major unintended consequences also accompanied this major change – the closure of Prince Edward County schools, job losses and the unanticipated relocation of many teachers, families and students, including Barbara Rose Johns.

How can leadership groups in any context anticipate and prepare for the intended and unintended consequences of their actions and thus be responsible in Weber's sense of intention and proportion? In truth, there is no absolute way to foresee and plan for the various outcomes that change may bring. However the Native American wisdom of the Iroquois advises us to consider the impact of the decisions we make today on the seventh generation of humans (Lyons 1992).

Peter Schwartz advocates a process of scenario development that helps decision-makers take a long view in a world of uncertainty (1996, p. 3). He contends that scenarios are not predictions but mechanisms to help people learn. Scenario building involves more than guessing. It requires a process that uses factual information and indicators of early trends to project alternative futures. The process entails eight sequential factors:

1. Identifying a central issue or question
2. Listing key factors in the micro-environment that may directly affect the central question
3. Identifying forces in the macro-environment that may affect the central issue
4. Assigning rank and weight to the micro- and macro-environmental factors based on their impact on the original issue or question
5. Identifying the forces that are most significant and most uncertain, clustering and plotting each force along an axis from uncertainty to certainty or the reverse and choosing the two most significant axes to form a grid with four distinct quadrants
6. Amplifying details of each quadrant to form four different plots (or scenarios)
7. Considering the implications of each scenario
8. Taking action based on early indicators of movement toward or away from a desirable scenario. (Schwartz 1996, pp. 241–7)

A final factor, 'acting with feedback' (Harman 1998, pp. 193–4), fosters ongoing learning and flexibility as leaders and participants move toward a desired common goal. Although scenario building is a method used most often in busi-

ness or organizational settings, it provides a useful means for developing informed action in other settings, including community, social and political environments.

We offer several concluding observations for further reflection based on our use of four analytical factors – field theory, cumulative effect, punctuated equilibrium and systems thinking – to examine the Prince Edward County school desegregation case. We hope these analytical factors and the observations they provide are useful across contexts.

- We can assess leadership only after some change has occurred. We can observe leaders acting to influence outcomes in the present.
- The nature of leadership in any change effort corresponds to the historical and social context in which we place it and the leader(s) through which we examine a network of change.
- The less we consider historical and cultural context, the fewer influential events and factors we take into account.
- The interaction of a leader's effort with the efforts of other leaders and participants shapes the outcome and hence the significance and nature of leadership.
- Every change effort takes place within a system of change that provides opposition and modification of other leadership.
- The more credit a particular leader is given for change, the less we recognize the impact of systems in which events take place and the contributions of co-actors to the outcome.

Our Mount Hope colleagues asked members of the Gold Team how we could ever know or conclude anything or sustain order and stability if we believe that reality, including leadership and change, is socially constructed. If we extrapolate lessons from the natural sciences to social systems, we conclude that the 'long view' provides perspective on human capability to imagine and change social systems. While social construction of human systems can result in restricted or inequitable systems of power, privilege and access, our hope for social relationships is in leadership that helps people imagine and effect humane futures for themselves and the seventh generation. In the words of the Gold Team, 'Imagination enables self-reflection and social criticism, as well as socialization, and thus makes possible a form of leadership that proposes alternative social arrangements and new forms of legitimate human needs and wants' (Couto et al., 2002, p. 2).

NOTE

1. The framework and concepts for this chapter emerged over various sessions with scholars in the General Theory of Leadership (GTOL) project. We also incorporated considerable portions of the Gold Team's concept paper, written by Richard Couto, Elizabeth Faier, Douglas Hicks and Gill Hickman during the GTOL project.

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