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The Leonard Davis Institute
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Konrad
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The Role of the Leader in International Relations: Challenging Person-Centered Analyses of Political Behavior

Daniel Druckman



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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Introduction

Consider the following questions:

a. How much did the rapport between Reagan and Gorbachev contribute to Gorbachev's decisions to make unilateral military concessions contributing to the eventual demise of the Soviet Union in 1991?

b. To what extent did Reagan's leadership style, referred to by some as "entrepreneurial leadership," contribute to the 1987 bilateral agreement between the United States and Soviet Union on reducing intermediate-range nuclear weapons?

c. Were the Camp David Accords achieved in large part because of the particular mix of the leaders' (Sadat, Begin, Carter) personalities?

d. To what extent did Clinton's persistence and empathy contribute to the signing of the Wye Plantation agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority?

e. How important was the rapport between Rabin and Hussein in attaining negotiated agreements between Jordan and Israel?

Each of these questions pertains to the role of leaders' personalities in international negotiation and foreign policy decisionmaking. In this paper, I address the issue of the extent to which leader characteristics influence international political processes. By characteristics, I refer to those aspects of a leader's personality thought to influence behavior or decisions largely independent of the situations in which he or she acts: of particular interest is the question of whether leaders can be separated from the political contexts in which they operate. By international political processes, I refer primarily to negotiation between nation-states but include also intranational policy decisionmaking: of particular interest is the question of whether leadership is synonymous with the leaders or with a process in which individual leaders play a role.

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This paper challenges the view that individual leaders play a significant role in international politics and negotiation. The challenge is offered in three parts. First, I ask whether leader characteristics are to be emphasized in theory or practice; a number of empirical questions must then be answered. Second, at the heart of the paper, I propose that a demonstration of the importance of these variables depends on falsifying a set of twenty hypotheses. The sources for each of these hypotheses are described in some detail. Third, I present further challenges by elucidating conditions that are likely to moderate the impacts of leader characteristics. The paper concludes with a summary of the three major challenges to analysts who prefer person-centered interpretations of political behavior. Before launching into the challenges, however, some background will be helpful.

Background

Theorizing in social science has emphasized processes, events, cultures, situations, structures, and institutions. The role of the person has been largely minimized in many of these frameworks. In contrast, psychology—which has been historically ambivalent about its relationship with the social sciences—typically places the person at the center of theory and analysis. For many psychologists, the analytical quest has been directed at discovering how personalities develop and are manifest in behavior, including decisionmaking. A smaller number of psychologists have focused on theoretical or applied issues that have brought them into contact or collaboration with other areas of social science, for example, industrial and labor relations, educational or military sociology, peace studies, and international relations. Such contact has highlighted a tension between person- and situation/structure-centered approaches to analysis: for example, the debates between the leadership or decisionmaking analyses done by political psychologists and the systemic-macro level analyses (such as correlates of war or enduring rivalries) done by many international

relations theorists. This paper's contribution to the debate consists of raising some challenges to person-centered approaches in the analysis of political leadership and international conflict resolution.

Empirical Questions

A number of questions need to be addressed to ascertain relationships between leaders' characteristics, their behavior in office, and their influence on political decisions, negotiations, and other conflict resolution processes. These questions are intended to set the stage for research (see also Hermann, 1977).

1. On (self)-selection: What sort of people become political leaders? Are different characteristics associated with different types of leadership positions?
2. On longevity: Are certain characteristics related to sustaining political leadership over time?
3. On kinds of characteristics: Which characteristics in particular influence which aspects of political behavior: those over which the leader has no control such as birth order, those developed early in life and thought to be generally sustained through time such as need for power or affiliation, or those that are contemporaneous or related to particular situations such as attitudes or preferred interpersonal styles?
4. On relation to behavior: Are certain characteristics related to foreign policy orientations and behavior (for a lack of relationships, see Hudson, 1990)?
5. On relation to national behavior: To what extent do a leader's characteristics influence a nation's foreign policy decisions or conflict/negotiation outcomes?
6. On relation of leader's behavior to national behavior: To what extent

does a leader's political behavior influence foreign policy and conflict outcomes?

7. On assessment/diagnosis: How much confidence can we have in inferring leaders' characteristics from various sources, e.g., secondary sources such as biographies or speeches; interviews with the leaders or with informants who know them; observed behavior as it occurs in a sampling of relevant political situations? Each of several sources is useful for particular purposes and, thus, may justify a complementary data collection strategy. For example:
 - a. Self-reports are intended to obtain information about how a person or leader views him or herself or how he/she feels about an issue, for example, self-esteem, attitudes and beliefs, reporting on past behavior.
 - b. Biographical information is useful when the leader is unavailable for questioning, particularly with respect to objective information such as birth order, place of birth, schools attended, positions held, and so forth.
 - c. Speeches, transcripts, and other archival documents may reveal aspects of leaders not accessible with other techniques such as the complexity of their thought, ideological orientations, deeper motives (such as the need for power, affiliation, or achievement), as well as the give-and-take of interaction processes for gauging influence. A problem here is to distinguish between ghostwritten speeches and the leader's own remarks.
 - d. Simulations are useful for observing behavior as it occurs in controlled environments where it is possible to attribute the expressed attitudes (through self-reports) or observed behavior to well-defined aspects of those environments. It is especially useful for analyzing role behavior if the roles are similar to those taken by political leaders.
 - e. Informants can be useful as secondhand data when the leaders are unavailable. These may be experts who have studied the leaders, or people on their staffs who know them well.

f. Participant-observation is quite useful for obtaining firsthand accounts of leader behaviors or actions. By sampling representative situations over time, the observer can distinguish consistent responding (across situations) from situation-specific behavior. This may be the best data for ascertaining whether a leader exhibits response consistency across situations, is consistent only within particular situations, or is inconsistent both across and within situations. It also provides information about leader states or attitudes at the moment of response.

g. Events or appearances can reveal the leader's preferred venues, formats, and social networks. These are the contexts within which he or she acts, and they may be chosen (or orchestrated) for managing political impressions.

8. On comparing impacts: How can particular leaders' impacts on decisions and outcomes be compared for two or more leaders in the same (or different) countries, in the same (or different) time period?
9. On isolating leader characteristics: How can the person in a leadership position be separated from the situations, contexts, and roles in which he or she acts? Can leader characteristics be isolated and then compared to other influences—such as situations, groups, or events—on particular political outcomes?
10. On group influences: How are leaders' characteristics (or their manifestation in behavior) influenced by the groups in which they act? How (and to what extent) do individual leaders, as group members, influence group decisions?
11. On situational influences: What aspects of a situation are likely to moderate or enhance the expression of individual characteristics or preferences? (This question is explored below.)
12. On the dependent variables: Which particular aspects of the policy or negotiation process are more or less likely to be influenced by individuals (vs. other types of influences)?

Topics and Hypotheses

The hypotheses to follow are drawn from the research literature on situations, including studies that compare the relative impacts of situations and persons. I summarize the key points leading to the hypotheses, which are stated in falsifiable form. As such, these are testable hypotheses.

“Inside-out” vs. “Outside-in” Perspectives

These perspectives differ in terms of the assumed locus of causation. They also differ in terms of the way research is designed. The contrast is illustrated by the difference between the approaches to analyses of conflict taken by Hermann and myself. Hermann (1995) analyzes policy decisions from the standpoint of leader characteristics (locus of causation). Her typology consists of distinctions between strategists, advocates, and cue takers. She then shows how each of these types makes decisions, deals with constituents, and otherwise maneuvers through negotiation or mediation to deal with or resolve conflicts. The cue taker is seen as being more sensitive to the situation than the strategist, making his or her behavior more dependent on the situation or more flexible in the sense of adjusting to situational changes. Using content analysis techniques, she places a variety of leaders (in her sample) into one or another of these categories. She then interprets their decisions (usually gathered from the same or similar documents) in terms of the hypothesized behavior associated with the category assigned to them.

In contrast, I take as my point of departure the situation itself (locus of causation). I depict or manipulate such characteristics of the situation as role obligations and accountability, visibility or media coverage, available alternatives (power), time pressure, and issue importance. I then show in experiments how these variables influence negotiating flexibility (as position movement), perceptions of the situation, and tactics (hanging tough or vacillating). When negotiators are accountable to constituents, have attractive alternatives, or negotiate in private, they are usually more

flexible. Instead of analyzing flexibility in terms of individual styles or acquired propensities, I analyze it in terms of those aspects of the situation that influence behavior for most negotiators. This research leads to the development of profiles of situational (rather than individual) characteristics. They take the form of trajectories toward or away from a negotiated agreement, as described in my 1995 article.

The situational perspective suggests the following three hypotheses:

1. Leaders' decisions and behaviors are influenced primarily by the contexts and situations in which they act.
2. Conflict processes or dynamics can be understood without reference to the particular individuals involved.
3. The outcomes would not have been different if other persons were in the leadership positions.

Sampling Behavior and Situations

Another difference between the approaches is the unit of sampling. For Hermann, it is the people who behave in various situations. For me, it is the situations in which people behave or act. Both approaches develop typologies that can then be sorted into broader theoretical categories—as attributes of people or of situations. Furthermore, the relevance of the categories for the behaviors of interest must be ascertained. This can be done with experiments designed to assess relative effects of different independent variables, as in my research. And, the way in which the various aspects interact with each other (including person-situation interactions) must be discovered.

Another implication of these approaches concerns the generality of findings. A focus on the situation shifts the locus of generality from the person (or a population of persons) to the setting (or a cohort of settings). Thus, we are more interested in the representativeness of particular experimental or field situations than of the people who take part in the studies. The empirical issue is the extent to which any situation is similar to or matches a class of situations as specified by a taxonomy. If, as I claim, the

primary source of behavioral variation is situational variation, then generality or relevance depends on similarity of situations rather than on persons.

The discussion in this subsection suggests the following hypotheses:

4. Explanations of outcomes in terms of leader characteristics are based on small and unrepresentative samples of their behavior or decisions.

5. Explanations of outcomes in terms of characteristics of the situation are based on small and unrepresentative samples of situations in which leaders act.

6. To the extent, however, that two (or more) situations are similar (dissimilar), leaders' behavior and decisions will also be similar (dissimilar).

Response Consistency: Empirical Evidence

There is a long history of empirical research on the issue of response consistency/variability across situations. Early findings from studies in the 1920s and 1930s by Hartshorne, May, and Shuttleworth (1930) reported that the average intercorrelation of the twenty-three "tests" (designed to measure the same "trait") used to construct a "total character score" was .30. Even more dramatic were Newcomb's (1929) findings showing the average correlation among behaviors within a given trait to be .14. These findings foreshadowed the results obtained from hundreds of studies on numerous personality traits. This research led Mischel (along with many other investigators) to conclude "that the predictive utility of a trait-based approach to personality still remains undemonstrated and that situational specificity of behavior appears to be the rule rather than the exception" (see Bem and Allen, 1974: 507). In other words, for many (perhaps most) people, their behavior can be predicted from situational variables.

These results are also consistent with findings obtained in studies of conflict or negotiating behavior. For example, Druckman's (1967) finding of a relationship between dogmatic attitudes and negotiating flexibility was difficult to replicate—and then reinterpreted as a subject's definition of the

situation rather than as a personality characteristic. Both Terhune (1970) and Hermann and Kogan (1977) showed that personality influenced behavior only early in the interactions, later to be overtaken by the situation and the mix of participants in the groups. Similarly, Plous (1987) reported that the only significant correlations between personality and simulated arming behavior were for responses made early in the interactions: overall, only 6 of 96 correlations between personality or attitudes and behavior were significant, a finding that could occur by chance. Furthermore, Druckman's (1994) meta-analysis showed that manipulated orientations had a stronger impact on bargaining behavior than orientations or attitudes assessed before the interactions.

Bem and Allen (1974) offered an interesting argument for person-situation interactions. While agreeing that the situation is a powerful influence on behavior, they were reluctant to dismiss personality influences. They argued that by construing people as unique combinations of traits or orientations—in an idiographic tradition—it becomes possible to observe cross-situational regularities: for example, a particular person may be friendly only in some situations but consistently so, or she may be conscientious in school but not at home. They argued against the nomothetic approach used in most studies, namely, arranging people on a linear scale from high to low friendliness or conscientiousness. When shifting to an idiographic (or clinical) approach, we can distinguish between, for example, high-variability (sensitive to situations) and low-variability (relatively insensitive to situations) people. (Note the similarity here to Hermann's person-centered approach.)

More recently, Mischel and Shoda (1995) provided evidence for a different conceptualization of person-situation interactions. They showed that personality may be reflected in patterns of behavioral variation across situations. By this they mean that person A's behavior varies from one situation to the next in a different way from person B's behavior: people may behave consistently within rather than between situations. According to their model, situational features activate mediating units—particular

cognitions and affect—that elicit situation-specific behavior. It is a stable network of relations among mediating units that characterizes an individual's personality system. According to them: "The behaviors ultimately generated depend both on the situational features and on the organization of the network of cognitions and affects that become activated" (1995: 255).

Furthermore, the elicited behaviors may change the situations themselves by altering the interpersonal or group environment reacted to in subsequent transactions. Although this is an intriguing model, it has little to say about the effect of learning or development on the way situations are perceived or on the configuration of relations among the mediating (cognitive and affective) units. Nor does it address the difference between role and personality: could a similar model be used to characterize consistent situation-linked role behavior? And, if so, how can unique individual behavior patterns be distinguished from unique role patterns?

The discussion in this subsection suggests the following hypotheses:

7. Leaders' behavior changes with changes in the situation.

8. The consistency of leaders' behavior within a situation is due more to role definitions than to personality characteristics.

Attribution Biases

Research on attribution theory has demonstrated that people tend to overestimate the degree to which behavior is caused by traits of the individual and underestimate the degree to which it is caused by external factors (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). We are, therefore, willing to generalize about a person's behavior, extrapolating it to other, unobserved settings in which situational forces may be quite different. We are more apt to attribute another's behavior to his or her dispositions while explaining our own behavior in terms of the situation. Moreover, we are often unaware of the extent to which our own presence (the situation) influenced the other's behavior, reducing the extent to which that behavior can be generalized to other settings. And, moreover, as Bem and Allen (1974) note, our English

vocabulary is richer in traitlike terms than in terms that label situations, making the former more accessible as descriptors or explanatory concepts.

Blake's (1959) idea of a psychodynamic fallacy reduces the importance of personality factors in group settings. He maintained that group (including negotiation) behavior should not be explained in terms of the personalities of members of the group. Like many social psychologists, he argued for separate levels of analysis, claiming that groups should be analyzed in terms of properties that are not the sum (or other combinations) of their members. He did not suggest, however, that groups had personalities or "minds"; instead, they consist of roles that coordinate their actions in response to environmental conditions.

The discussion in this subsection suggests the following hypothesis:

9. Explanations of individual behavior and group outcomes in terms of leader (or member) characteristics are attributions based on the observer's perceptions or impressions, rather than based on evidence.

On Intergroup Conflict

According to LeVine and Campbell (1972), there is widespread agreement among different theorists about the following situational aspects of conflict and ethnocentric imagery.

a. Competition over scarce resources is a source of conflict and hostility between groups—a condition independent of psychological factors. The greater the conflict of interests, the stronger the ethnocentrism.

b. Groups return hostile behavior with hostile behavior and corresponding attitudes. Conflicts between groups spiral because of the tendency to reciprocate the other's behavior (a reaction to the immediate situation and to the other's most recent behavior).

c. Group differences are reflected in stereotypes but they are exaggerated especially when the relationship between the groups is negative. To the extent that the images reflect actual differences, they are influenced by the situation; to the extent that they are exaggerated, they are influenced by projections based on ingroup needs and motives.

d. More complex societies are more warlike and ethnocentric than less complex societies. Societies with higher levels of political or administrative complexity have a longer history of intergroup warfare (the source of conflict lies in social structures).

Following are examples, drawn from LeVine and Campbell's (1972) treatment of intergroup relations, of questions that compare psychodynamic with situational explanations. (The stark contrasts are intended to clarify the issues.)

► Do stereotyped images of outgroups reflect actual information about them (based on opportunities for contact), or are they projections of ingroup needs (unrealistic constructions)?

► Is ingroup solidarity produced by external threat (situational), or does the frustration of ingroup solidarity generate hostility that is displaced onto outgroups (psychodynamic)?

► Do ethnocentric attitudes develop from internal group/societal practices or norms such as severe restrictions placed on behavior (a frustration-aggression theory assumption), or from rewards for being aggressive (a social learning theory assumption)? Or are the attitudes reactions to a threatening and hostile environment that includes competition with neighboring groups (a realistic group conflict theory assumption)?

► Is ethnocentrism a dispositional lens through which other groups are perceived or is it an attitude elicited by circumstances that increase tension?

► Most generally, is intergroup conflict better explained in terms of such situational factors as proximity, similarity, intergroup contact experiences, and the characteristics of outgroups such as size, strength, wealth, and demographic diversity, or is it better explained by such internal group factors as socialization and childrearing practices, economic development (relative deprivation), cultural and religious traditions, and educational opportunities (for cognitive complexity)? In other words, reactions (outside-in) or projections (inside-out)?

Emphasizing the importance of situations, the following hypotheses are suggested:

10. Intergroup conflict is due largely to such external factors as proximity, similarity, intergroup contact experiences, and such perceived characteristics of outgroups as their size, strength, wealth, and demographic diversity.

11. Intergroup conflict is influenced less by such internal factors as ingroup socialization and childrearing practices, economic development, cultural and religious traditions, and educational opportunities.

Diagnosing Leader Characteristics

It may be argued that the reason for poor predictive validity of many personality measures is inadequate measurement and/or conceptualization of those characteristics. Perhaps, but psychologists have been developing inventories of numerous "traits" and conducting validity studies for almost a century—and continue to provide little evidence for cross-situational traitlike behavior. However, it is also the case that many of these measures seem to be seriously flawed. My favorite example is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: respondents must answer each question as either-or (do you or don't you like going to parties?), and the inferences made the answers to such presumed traits as extroversion-introversion, analytical-intuitive seem at best silly and at worst dangerous. Why not simply ask someone to self-report whether he or she is usually (or generally) outgoing or shy (with behavioral definitions attached) and then ask other observers to answer the same questions about the respondent? Why not ask: in which situations are you usually shy, in which outgoing? Why work so strenuously at developing numerous questions to get at the matter so indirectly?

The discussion in this subsection suggests the following hypothesis:

12. Leader characteristics cannot be validly diagnosed apart from the contexts in which the leaders act.

Furthermore, it is difficult to separate a personality characteristic, such as authoritarianism, from ideological orientations, worldviews, or role-prescribed behavior. For example, commitment to a cause (ideology) or constituency pressures (role-situation) to maintain a particular stand could be interpreted as a "rigid personality."

The Principle of Contemporaneity

The key idea in Lewin's field theory is the "principle of contemporaneity." By this he meant that "any behavior or any other change in the psychological field depends only upon the psychological field at that time" (1951: 45). His primary interest was to diagnose behavior in the present, not from the standpoint of past experiences or future expectations. For Lewin, the situation was defined by the actor, not by the investigator, i.e., how it is interpreted rather than objective properties. He was a pioneer in creating laboratory situations to test hypotheses, a notable example being the comparison between authoritarian and democratic leader environments. He does not exclude the past, however. For him, a situation is usually not a moment in time but a time period that allows for development. The settings that interested him most were group situations, and his students initiated the research tradition of group dynamics.

Lewin's principle suggests the following hypothesis:

13. The strongest influence on leaders' behavior and decisions is the immediate situation that confronts them in the settings in which they act.

External Events vs. Internal Group Processes (Contextual Analysis)

The settings studied by behavioral ecologists may be regarded as context. More typically, however, the term refers to organizations. According to Sundstrom et al. (1990), organizational context includes organizational cultures, the physical and technological environment, and the integration and differentiation aspects of group-organization (and organization to other organizations) boundaries. A study by Gladstein (1984) illuminates the importance of context: the results showed that organization members attributed sales performance to internal team processes when actual performance was largely a function of market growth (a contextual variable). Similarly, outcomes of international negotiations have been shown to be influenced more by factors or events operating outside the negotiations, often in the larger international system, than by internal negotiating processes (Hopmann and Smith, 1978; Druckman, 1983). Although these

variables are part of the larger situation facing actors, they are more distant than the aspects of the immediate situations studied in the laboratory. They are rarely included in experimental studies.

The discussion in this subsection suggests the following hypothesis:

14. Organizations and their component agencies (including negotiating teams operating at the boundaries between organizations) are influenced more by external events than by internal group-interaction processes.

Roles in Organizations

Pursued mostly in sociology, analyses of social processes in terms of roles contrast with the psychological investigation of personality. Roles are defined in organizational or institutional contexts. Their impact on perceptions was demonstrated in my study of ethnocentrism: perceptions of own vs. other groups varied with (randomly determined) role assignments; the foreign minister was least ethnocentric whereas the aspiring (out of power) head of state was most ethnocentric (Druckman, 1968). Research on boundary roles—those who negotiate with other organizations—has led to an interesting literature on two-level games, elucidating the dilemmas of representing (and negotiating with) constituencies while negotiating with adversaries (Walton and McKersie, 1965; Druckman, 1978; Putnam, 1988). Of continuing interest is the relevance of role analysis to studying such unstructured situations as the intense conflicts that reflect or lead to breakdowns in social orders. Since many international conflicts occur because of the breakdown of social orders, the following hypothesis is relevant:

15. Role expectations and demands have less influence on leaders' behavior and decisions outside of structured organizational contexts. They are likely to be more responsive to the immediate situation, especially during crises.

Influences of Leaders' Behavior on the Definition of the Situation

Attempts to define the situation raise the issue of whose definition—the investigator's or the subject's? There have been several approaches to this

issue. The situations created by experimenters are evaluated in terms of impacts on both perceptions and behavior. Experimental subjects' perceptions have been assessed before, during, and after their participation in a task. Assessments made before are usually attempts to evaluate the effects of attitudes before experimental manipulations and are closer to the tradition of personality assessment. Those made during the task are often attempts to check the effects of the manipulated conditions, especially with respect to judging whether subjects understand the conditions. Assessments made after are often self-report postnegotiation questionnaires designed to gauge the way subjects viewed the tasks, opponents, and issues. These questions are often regarded as variables that intervene between the situation and behavior or outcomes (e.g., Druckman et al., 1988).

In less controlled field situations, investigators often attempt to elicit respondents' views of events or processes by survey questions or by extended narrative descriptions that become part of an ethnographic study of a culture. Another approach emphasizes the way actors manage impressions in different types of situations or actually create the situations in which they perform. (Note also in this regard the feedback from behavior to situations in the model developed by Mischel and Shoda, 1995.) In sociology, this approach has been referred to as symbolic interaction (see also Goffman, 1971).

This suggests a recursive model of effects summarized by the following hypothesis:

16. By their behavior, leaders alter the situation (or interpersonal environment) in which they act leading to changed situations through the course of continuous transactions.

Situated Learning

This is an extreme version of the situational perspective with practical implications. Theorists in this tradition emphasize the importance of learning in context (e.g., Greeno et al., 1993). By this they mean developing skills relevant to performance in specific vocational domains. The theoretical rationale for this suggestion is based on the assumption that

behavior is contingent on or closely linked to very specific situations and, thus, does not transfer to other situations. One practical implication about which these theorists have been vocal is that abstract subjects, such as mathematics, are largely irrelevant in the “real world” of work. The idea of understanding behavior within its context is widely shared and is the basis for contingent theories of conflict (Fisher, 1997) as well as the development of situation taxonomies. However, the assumption of lack of transfer or generality of behavior between similar situations, made by the situated-learning theorists, is not shared by investigators in the other approaches that emphasize situational effects.

The discussion in this subsection suggests the following hypothesis:

17. Leaders' behavior in specific situations does not transfer (or generalize) to other similar situations.

Game-Theory Modeling

These approaches put the emphasis on constructing representative situations. Focusing primarily on issues of external validity, these theorists attempt to design laboratory environments that represent a class of situations. In the game-theoretic tradition, the environments consist of choice dilemmas presented by various configurations of payoff matrices such as the popular prisoner's dilemma but also such games as chicken, deadlock, bully, battle of the sexes, or coordination. Snyder and Diesing (1977) illustrated how a number of these matrix configurations reflected real-world dilemmas in foreign policy and international relations (e.g., the Cuban missile crisis as a game of chicken).

In the simulation tradition, the constructed environments are usually more complex. They often include many of the aspects of corresponding real-world environments compressed in time. Regarded as operating models, these simulations are used both for research and teaching: simulation researchers often embed experiments within the simulations and compare results with corresponding field studies; teachers often use simulations to provide students with real-world training experiences. A simulation with

high fidelity—close correspondence to a real-world environment—is a criterion of construct validity (Guetzkow, 1968).

This approach suggests the following hypothesis:

18. Any situation can be construed to represent a type of situation described in terms of a limited number of structural properties.

Situational Levers

Applied to research on negotiation, this approach examines how a variety of aspects of the situation affect decisions, perceptions, and choice of tactics. The idea of “levers” suggests that the situation can be controlled or manipulated for impact. In this way, the approach derives from the behaviorist tradition in psychology. It is an attempt to evaluate frameworks of situations with experimental methodologies. The frameworks identify many aspects of the situation hypothesized to influence negotiating processes and outcomes. The experiments reveal the relative importance of these variables at each of several stages in the negotiation process. One result, obtained from a simulation of a multilateral environmental conference, was trajectories toward agreement or stalemate, namely, the key aspect of the situation that influenced decisions made at each of four stages in the negotiation (for details, see Druckman, 1993, 1995).

Experimental results support the following hypothesis:

19. Situations can be manipulated to influence the prospects for attaining negotiated agreements or resolving conflicts.

Person-Situation Interactions

During the 1960s and 1970s, the heated debates over the relative importance of the person and situation as influences on behavior or attitudes captured much attention in social and personality psychology. Much of this literature is reviewed by Bem and Allen (1974), Mischel (1969), and more recently by Mischel and Shoda (1995). As discussed in some detail above, the debate turns on the question of whether personality traits are relevant, or, whether behavior is situationally specific or intrapsychically consistent. My

discussion above provides some compelling reasons for situational variation. But does that mean that there are simply no unique aspects of individuals? Are they infinitely molded and malleable? Intuitively, it would seem that individuals can be distinguished in ways other than (or in addition to) the situations they are in at any point in time; of course, no two individuals (even siblings close in age) have had the same experiences. The issue is how to account for these differences. Bem and Allen (1974) make the interesting proposal to shift the research strategy from comparing different people on the same scales (nomothetic tradition) to regarding their behavior, however inconsistent, in their own unique terms (idiographic). This retains a place for individual expressions without comparing them to the expressions of others. It also avoids the either-or form of the question—person or situation?—by retaining a strong place for the influence of situations and persons. Mischel and Shoda's (1995) model depicts personality as patterns across situations with consistent behavior occurring within rather than between situations.

The final hypothesis has yet to be falsified:

20. Individual leaders—their behavior and decisions—cannot be separated from the contexts and situations in which they act.

When Do Personal Characteristics Not Matter?

Following are situations or circumstances where a leader's characteristics are likely to exert little if any influence on decisions or outcomes. They are the bases for a contingency theory of action. They also provide a basis for diagnosing the sources of conflict behavior or decisionmaking.

1. To the extent that political behavior is orchestrated, scripted, impression-managed, it is better understood from the perspective of role than personality theory.
2. To the extent that situations mask individual differences in behavior, that behavior is better understood from knowledge of the situations than the personalities: for example, when there is limited decision latitude,

when leaders are discouraged from defining or interpreting the situations, when their role in the policy process is limited, when groups make decisions, in well-defined situations, and when organizational norms are dominant.

3. To the extent that the unit of analysis is the collectivity, such as a negotiating delegation, leader characteristics have less influence over policies or decisions.
4. To the extent that leaders' terms in office are short, their tenure transient, they have less influence.
5. In collective cultures, where cooperative rather than individualistic motives prevail, leader characteristics (apart from cultural characteristics) have less influence.
6. To the extent that leaders are themselves sensitive to changing situations (as in the case of Hermann's "cue takers"), their behavior can be better understood from knowledge about those situations.
7. To the extent that the immediate situation is compelling in the sense of demanding a response, the leader's state at the time (rather than "traits") is likely to provide useful information along with characteristics of the situation itself.
8. To the extent that information about personal characteristics is gathered from a distance, second-hand, or confounded with scripted (context-relevant) behavior, that information is of little use.
9. To the extent that person variables are shown to correlate weakly with political behavior—as they would in many of the above situations (for evidence, see Hudson, 1990)—those variables provide little added value to explanations.

Three Challenges

In summary, there are three main challenges to analysts who prefer interpretations of political behavior in terms of leader personality:

1. The conceptual issue: Can personal characteristics be conceived of independently of the contexts in which political leaders act?
2. The measurement issue: Are these characteristics validity diagnosed—can “trait” variance be separated from methods variance?
3. The situation issue: When (under what conditions) are particular characteristics likely or unlikely to influence political behavior? And when is that behavior likely to influence policy decisions?

A final note: my focus on the situation as a unit of analysis is not meant to suggest that other units such as motives, culture, structures, or institutions are irrelevant. It is meant to suggest that, compared to the other perspectives, a focus on the situation underlines the possibilities for changes—as in the idea of situational levers—that go a long way toward more effective interventions by international negotiators, third parties, and other facilitators whose goal is to resolve conflicts.

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