



Leadership and Organizational Theory: the heart of the matter

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Abstract

This article discusses concepts of leadership and organizational theory by identifying essential leadership theories and their impact on organizational dynamics. The manuscript presents an in-depth view of leadership theory and application, its impact on the leader and follower relationships, and how leadership style influences organizational culture. Leadership definitions, traits, skills and styles and theories are presented. The article characterizes leadership and its organizational impact on today's evolving global business world from a strategic perspective. In summary, this article is a model for effective organizational dynamics using strategic leadership and followership relationships.

*"Leadership is much more of an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, than a set of things to do. The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately in its practice."*¹ Well over 50 leadership theorists have contributed to a myriad of leadership and organizational theories. Scholars such as Bennis, DePree, Greenleaf and Wren have researched and written volumes about the phenomenon of leadership and organization theories.^{2 3 4 5} Bennis and DePree share similar views on leadership theory; they think leaders should be servant leaders who coach, influence and empower team members toward goal achievement. Bennis teaches that leadership is a result of knowing yourself and effectively communicating a clear vision while establishing trust amongst peers, colleagues and followers while ultimately owning your actions as an effective leader. DePree believes that leadership is an art and teaches stewardship over this art in regard to relationships evolving around effectiveness, principles, values and a legacy toward humankind. Similarly, Greenleaf believes leaders must possess clear vision and a willingness to serve as others will be drawn to this servant hood. A selfless and sacrificial nature attracts people. Lastly, Wren teaches that we need more broadly educated managers [leaders] with a focus on performance improvement, his key to effective leadership. These scholars support many leadership theories and styles including charismatic, transactional, laissez-faire, servant and transformational. Most of all, they reflect the human dynamics of effective leadership, which is the heart of the matter.

Essential Leadership Styles and their Impact on Organizational Dynamics

Multiple leadership styles have been researched, studied and applied yet no one style is recognized as the 'all in all' of leadership. Many leaders employ a variety of styles to adapt to situations, hence situational leadership. Other leaders work toward applying specific leadership styles based on who they

are and how they lead. A review of some essential leadership styles and their impact on organizational dynamics follows.

The Blake & Mouton leadership grid illustrates five major styles including authority-compliance, country club management, impoverished management, middle-of-the-road management and team management.⁶ Each style places a greater or less significance on task or people, which is readily determined based on the title. Thus, the key is to develop a leadership style that gets to the heart of the matter of the follower while mentoring and shaping them to become effective leaders. This passion sustains how and why the leader is who they are. While the first four leadership styles (authority-compliance, country club management, impoverished management and middle-of-the-road) may appear less appealing, they are effective depending upon the situation in which they are applied. An effective leader can use any of these approaches to match the environment and culture in which they are leading. Ultimately, the team management approach is a proven and highly effective method that considers human, technical and conceptual aspects of the skills approach; it is situational and can be highly motivating. However, leaders using the team management approach must be genuine or risk becoming ineffective. Is the leader applying the team management approach to benefit the team, to please management or to gain a personal reward? This rhetorical question is significant in determining why a leader may or may not choose to behave they way they do. Moreover, a follower may or may not choose to follow this type of leader. Leadership style is the essence of a leader's heart and soul and determines how the leader's hands and head are used.⁷

Leadership Theory and Application

Leadership theory and its application are essential to effective organizational dynamics. From an evolutionary perspective, leadership theory and application revolve around two major ingredients: leadership and followership. Together, they encompass strategies for solving social coordination in effective problem solving,

conflict resolution and cohesion among groups who work together.

Perhaps, if we view leadership and the application thereof as a matter of 'survival,' then we may adequately comprehend the importance of understanding this phenomenon and its application. This is true because when things are going well, leadership seems to be a trivial matter but when conflict arises, the importance of leadership becomes apparent. Because we define leadership so broadly in terms of its influence on goals and group outcomes, understanding theory and application is fundamental to a leader's effectiveness. Since leadership literature is so enormous it lacks an integrative theoretical framework that synthesizes all the data.⁸ This is true because some of the mid-level management theories are not well connected; some of the trends ignore the role of the follower when viewing trends and much of the focus is on leadership issues and not leadership functions and behaviors.⁹

Impact of Leader-Follower Relationships

The concept of leader-follower alignment is more than searching and selecting the right people, but it is hiring and placing them in the right position and gaining the commitment of all involved; especially the followers. It is the process of the four key points that provide a platform for followers to embrace as outlined by Bennis.¹⁰ Leader-follower alignment develops sustainable leader-follower relationships, which positively impact the growth and development of the organization. The key points include:

1. Clarify purpose by aligning individual purpose into a common purpose.
1. Define roles by understanding how they and others contribute to achieving the overall purpose.
2. Create alignment by sharing words and actions through creating shared values and congruent behaviors.
3. Build sustained relationships based on trust.

The process for building effective leadership and sustained followership is designed to create leader-follower alignment and relationships that align with a leader's behavior and mirrors that of the follower and vice versa. This is critical because effective leaders must lead by example. In addition, leadership effort and patience are required to sustain committed followers and requires a continuous evolving process of deepening and strengthening the commitment of followers to behave in alignment with the leadership culture.

How Leadership Influences Organizational Culture

"Lead, follow...or get out of the way!" This familiar adage suggests that relationships are significant to the success of leaders and followers alike. It further distinguishes the relationship of the leader/follower and describes how leadership influences organizational culture.

Relationships should evolve around a purpose and a partnership. In this instance, the leader is seen as the mentor who leads and guides individual followers thus enhancing the purpose of the relationship and creating a reciprocally beneficial partnership where all parties work toward a common goal or mission. These courageous leader-follower relations have a positive influence on organizational culture and breed the development of leaders who serve in a servanthood role.

Sound culturally based leadership is strategic to serving as a leader [mentor] who guides, directs or advises others on how to become who they wish to become, often coaching the individual to develop strengths, knowledge and talents they strive toward. As a result, the follower feels valued as an integral part of the team; the follower's purpose is clearly defined and supported by a leader who embraces them in a manner that invokes ownership and accountability.

According to Bell, leadership or "mentoring is being real, it is being a catalyst, and being sometimes a kind of prophet. It is therefore far more art than science. It is about personal

power, not expert or role power. The most powerful and most difficult part of mentoring is being who you are."¹¹ Transparent, authentic leadership is what fosters the effective leader-follower relationship that creates a highly productive work culture. It moves people toward passion.

Leadership Defined: Select Scholarly Perspectives

While Northouse defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" and Merriam Webster defines followership as "the capacity or willingness to follow a leader" both words, concepts and principles mean so much more.^{12 13} Voluminous research proves that there is no one definition of either leadership or followership and both may have more popular press written than any other words.

It is important to understand what leadership is and the essential principles and values of a heart focused [servant] leader as they ultimately determine whom we follow and how we lead. According to Winston, leadership starts with values.¹⁴ Chemers describes a widely and majority acceptable definition of leadership by most researchers and theorists as the "process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task."¹⁵ In *Leadership in Organizations*, Yukl suggests that most definitions of leadership "reflect the assumption that it involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization."¹⁶

Northouse believes there are many ways to conceptualize leadership and presents key components essential to the leadership phenomenon including: (a) process, (b) influence, (c) teams and (d) goals and objectives.¹⁷ In his seminal book *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns wrote that leadership is "one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" ... and that this leadership phenomenon is an elusive concept.¹⁸ While these scholarly researchers

articulate well on the definitions of leadership, Northouse, Yukl and Chemmers all define leadership as 'influence.' Burns suggests the elusive nature of leadership is too complex to grasp without thorough research, exploration and study.¹⁹ Yet, both Northouse and Burns agree and further illustrate leadership as a 'phenomenon.' While a finite definition therefore may be elusive, leadership certainly includes influence, motivation and service. Further, a leader's traits, skills and styles have a long-term impact on an organization's dynamics and sustainability.

Leadership Traits, Skills and Styles: Select Leadership Theories

Various approaches to leadership theory include the most commonly used traits, skills and styles approach as outlined by Northouse.²⁰ A leader's skill determines how effective a leader is because followers are more likely to follow someone who appears to know what he or she is doing. Therefore, the skills approach is based on a leader-centered perspective; it moves away from believing that leadership is innate towards a learned behavior approach asserting that skills can be learned, applied and measured.

"Many people believe that leadership is a way to improve how they present themselves to others. Corporations want people who have leadership ability because they believe these people provide special assets to the organization."²¹ Fundamentally, one's leadership knowledge, skill and ability, is based on personal motives. Some people are motivated to lead because they believe in an inherent ability to do so while others lead for personal gain including position, power and money. In either case, individual leaders have personal motives. Northouse refers to leading within an organization on the basis of title or position as an *assigned leader* while one who leads due to group response is referred to as an *emergent leader*.²² It is believed that assigned leaders do so because they have a job to do while the emergent leader does so because they desire to do the job well.

As a result, leaders adopt traits essential to how they lead, motivate or influence followers.

Northouse refers to this as the 'trait approach,' one of the first systematic advances toward the study of leadership: it studied innate qualities of leader's characteristics [traits].²³ Research concentrated on the differences between leaders and followers by studying great leaders such as Abraham Lincoln, Mohandas Gandhi and Napoleon.²⁴ The trait approach is also referred to as the "great man" theory because it evolved from the skills, traits and behaviors of social, political and military leaders who were renowned or great.

Some leadership traits of the "great man" theory are intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability. The theory focuses on the leader and not on the follower. Therefore, some believe these traits make up the foundation of leaders who desire greatness. Many great leaders study and model great man traits displayed by Lincoln, Gandhi and many others and use them to help determine how they lead and who they become as individuals. These leadership traits can help to enhance one's leadership skills through study, personal development and application.

The three-skill approach applies technical, human and conceptual skills as an effective combination of leadership that can be applied to the supervisory, middle and top management organizational levels. Katz's model addresses the skills that he believed were necessary at various levels within the organization in order for the leader to be effective.²⁵ He suggests that there are varying levels of application of the three skills depending on the level of the leader or manager within the organization. For example, the top manager may need or use less technical skills, the supervisor needs or uses less conceptual and more technical and human skills while the middle manager may need to apply all three skills in order to be effective.

In addition to the skills, the leader needs knowledge, competence and social ability. These attributes are critical for the leader to motivate, problem solve and perform throughout the organization. Ultimately, the skills approach states that while a leader must have knowledge or technical skills, they must also

possess the ability to motivate and lead others while having a concept of where they are going and how they are going to get there. As a result, style is essential if the leader expects followers to embrace their vision. Thus, effective leaders need to consider a global and strategic perspective as they continue to grow and evolve as leaders.

Leadership from a Globally Strategic Perspective

A new breed of courageous followership views leadership from an inclusive and globally strategic perspective. In order to keep up with advances in technology, heightened cultural dynamics and global challenges, emerging and seasoned leaders should think and behave strategically. This strategic thought process ought to encompass a variety of leadership styles, behaviors and characteristics that embrace transformation and the evolution of change. It needs to continually transform.

This change management requires a humble and servant leader who is willing and able to lead as well as follow. Moreover, the globally strategic leader should be willing to adopt a planned approach to change within an organization and themselves. In order to minimize the risk of failure while implementing change, leadership requires a collective process that is inclusive and benefits all parties involved. This progressive thinking may require leaders to consider Lewin's model of freeze, change and refreeze as an ongoing application.²⁶ The model involves overcoming apathy and a changed "mindset" or a self-assessment that positions the leader's motives around selflessness and servanthood not around selfish gain or individual accomplishment. This is much like the example Jesus used as a leader.

Conclusion

Blanchard & Hodges have been successful in learning and writing about characteristics modeled after the leadership of Jesus.²⁷ In the book entitled, *Lead like Jesus*, co-authors, Blanchard & Hodges, share four key areas with strategies and tips on how modeling these characteristics and behaviors can help

contemporary leaders become incredibly effective, efficient and successful. They outline four areas of leadership:

- Heart – Ask what is your motivation as a leader? Is it to serve or to self serve? Am I a servant leader or a self-serving leader? When answered candidly, the answer will get to your core existence and your motivation/intention as a leader.
- Head – What are your personality traits and characteristics? What are your beliefs and views about leadership? Are you there to lead through servant hood or are you there for personal gain such as a title, position, money and notoriety?
- Hands – Do you set clear goals and measure performance, consistently following up with those you lead? Do you lead by example? Are you a climber or a connector? Are you there to help others achieve their goals and be successful in their own right?
- Habit – How do you refresh and renew yourself as a leader? Are you establishing positive patterns [habits] or are you distracted and focused on self sustaining matters?

While the science of leadership [management] requires the practice and application of theory, the art of leadership [passion] requires the practice and application of theory from the heart of the matter. Ultimately, leadership is about one's passion. Leader must get to the heart of leadership theory and application and focus on sound leader-follower relationships to influence the culture within an organization by defining leadership and related theory. Are you leading from the heart of the matter?

About the Author

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