

Research Paper: Understanding Leadership

Edrico K. Wallace

Ls 600 Introduction to Leadership

Professor Dr. Chere' Brown

December 3, 2017

Understanding Leadership

This research paper will provide an overview of the concept of leadership. I will begin by defining what a leader is and why they are important. The primary goal, types, and characteristics of leadership are then outlined, as I have researched from several credible sources. Next, natural versus spiritual leadership is compared. Key Skills for leaders are provided next. Finally, myths of leadership are explored.

What is a Leader?

In its simplest sense, “leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others” (Sanders, 1980, p. 31). For the purpose of this paper, however, I would expand that definition to be one who influences people towards God and his truth in all areas of their life. Borrowing language from E. Stanley Jones (1972), “a less precise, but easier to remember definition would be the influence of people towards the King (Jesus) and the Kingdom.” These definitions are not intended to just be spiritual. To move closer to God and his truth is the progressive path for all areas of life. Leadership is a trait which means “each individual” brings to the table certain qualities that influence the way he or she leads (Northouse, 2018, p. 2).

The Importance of Leadership

There are many differences in opinion about what leadership is and how it functions, but everyone agrees that it is crucial. Some opinions about the importance of leadership include: The key to successful organization transformation is "leadership, leadership, and still more leadership" (Kotter, 1996, p. 31).

- "Churches rise or fall on available leadership" (Comiskey, 2000, p. 21).

- "The most critical factor in a new ministry isn't the idea, but the leadership. Each ministry rises or falls on the leadership" (Warren, 1995, p. 384).
- "The church has always prospered when it has been blessed with strong, spiritual leaders", but the "the lack of such men is a symptom of the malaise that has gripped it" (Sanders, 1980, p. 19).
- John Maxwell (1998) says that nothing impacts organizational growth like developing leadership, not "increasing resources, reducing costs, increasing profit margins, analyzing systems, implementing quality management procedures, or doing anything else" (pp. 212, 213).

The Primary Goal of a Leader

The primary goal of a leader is to produce more leaders. As leaders emerge they must remember that it is not solely about their own growth. According to Fairholm (1997), "The substance of the leader's job is to produce more leaders, not more followers" (p. 211). The ultimate measure of leadership success is whether "the organization and the followers grow" (Fairholm, 1997, p. 56).

While this should not be the motivation, there is a practical reason for the development of leaders. According to John Maxwell (1995), the "greatest leadership principle that I have learned in over twenty-five years of leadership is that those closest to the leader will determine the success level of that leader" (p. 3). There are many facets of developing leaders, but possibly the most important and toughest challenge is to create an organizational "climate for potential leaders" (p. 17).

Types of Leaders

There have been numerous studies and categorizations of leaders, to the point of creating a “bewildering variety” (Yukl, 1998, p. 57). A simplified consolidation of types from Yukl (1998) include:

- Task-oriented leaders are “primarily concerned with accomplishing the task and utilizing personnel and resources efficiently” as opposed to the needs of people (p. 61).
- Laissez-faire leaders have “passive indifference about the task and subordinates” (p. 326). They let the group decide with little interference.
- Charismatic leaders lead from “traits such as self-confidence, strong convictions, poise, speaking ability, and a dramatic flair” (p. 319). But there are potential problems with this kind of leadership: it can be used either positively or negatively, it is hard to transfer to the next generation of leaders, and it only works when there is a corresponding need amongst followers.
- Transformational leaders seek to “transform followers by serving as coach, teacher, and mentor (p. 326) in order to “empower and elevate followers” (p. 327). Jesus Christ and Paul would be considered transformational leaders.

There may be situations when different types of leadership are called for. A leader needs to apply situational leadership (Yukl, 1998, p. 270-273) to determine the right style for the circumstances. A leader facing a crisis (natural disaster, legal, financial, emotional), for example, may need to use a more directive, task-oriented style. Nevertheless, transformational leadership is the style I recommend for the purposes of this research.

Characteristics of a Leader

Similar to types of leaders, there have been many studies on the key characteristics of a leader. Kouzes and Posner (1995), for example, asked over 20,000 people what they most admired in their leaders. The top four characteristics were: honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent (p. 21). Other characteristics such as intelligence, courage, imagination, decisiveness, were not even close to these top four.

There are numerous instances in the Bible where key leadership characteristics are listed. The requirements for an overseer, for example, are to “be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect . . . He must not be a recent convert . . . He must also have a good reputation with outsiders” (1 Timothy 3:2-7, NIV). The criteria for choosing Stephen to simply wait on tables was to be “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3, NIV).

Four leadership characteristics of particular importance are highlighted below. A fifth characteristic, being filled with the Holy Spirit, is examined in the next section.

- Godly Character: Bill Thrall, Bruce McNichol, and Ken McElrath (1999) distinguish between leaders who strive after capacity and those who strive after character. They use the visual image of ladders to show the difference. The capacity ladder aims for achieving individual potential. Most people drop out in despair. The character ladder, however, aims for attaining God-designed potential and your destiny. These people leave a lasting legacy. The steps up the character ladder (p. 140) are: 1) Trust God and others with me, 2) Choose vulnerability, 3)

- Align with the truth, 4) Pay the price, and 5) Discover my destiny. A common trait throughout the character ladder is humility and trust (p. 70). By humbly trusting God and others with our future, God provides grace to go higher (1 Peter 5:6).
- Visionary. A “transformational leader is characterized as one who inspires followers with his or her vision” (Head, 1997, p. 18). A vision is something you can see with your mind. It is a preferred state of how things could be in the future. According to Hackman and Johnson (1996), “communicating a vision to followers may very well be the most important act of the transformational leader” (p. 82). The Bible states that “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18, NKJV).
 - Servant heart: A kingdom leader seeks first the glory of God (Matt 6:33) and good of others (Luke 10:27). According to Hackman and Johnson (1996), servant leaders put “the needs of followers before their own needs” (p. 339). Jesus took service and sacrifice to the point of giving his life for followers (John 10:15). He said “whoever wants to become great among you must become your servant” (Matthew 20:26, NIV). Even though Jesus was the king, he “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew, 20:28, NIV). If we truly lived this as leaders, it would revolutionize our view of hardships, offenses, and our treatment of others.
 - Life-long learners: “The quality of fostering organizational learning by example may be one of the most important functions of leadership” (Bennis and Nanus, 1997, p. 191). When Bennis and Nanus (1997) asked leaders about the most important leadership qualities, leaders “talked about learning . . . leaders are

perpetual learners” (Bennis and Nanus, 1997, p. 176). In this day and age, "most complex skills emerge over decades, which is why we increasingly talk about life-long learning" (Kotter, 1996, p. 165).

When the above characteristics are lived out, a leader becomes a model for others to follow. This requires that the leader have courage to change themselves first.

"Effective change begins when leaders effectively begin to change themselves" (O'Toole, 1998, p. x). They model a “personal change model” (Fairholm, 1998, p. 208). Both Jesus and Paul exhorted others to follow their example (John 13:15, Philip. 3:17).

Conversely, Bennis and Nanus (1997) state that leaders can “infect their employees” with their own weaknesses and ills. Similarly, Jesus states that a “student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matthew 10:24, NIV). In other words, a leader with weak character or management of self can become a lid for the whole organization (Maxwell, 1998, p. 53). In this case, leaders need to recognize that they themselves may be the problem (Belasco and Stayer, 1993, p. 40). As the authors noted about their employees, “they behaved the way they did because I behaved the way I did” (p. 40).

Natural versus Spiritual Leadership

J. Oswald Sanders (1980) adds a fifth characteristic of leadership when he distinguishes between natural and spiritual leadership in his classic book, *Spiritual Leadership*. Sanders (1980) says the “indispensable requirement” (p. 112) of spiritual leadership is to be filled by the Holy Spirit. He claims “spiritual leadership can be exercised only by Spirit-filled men. Other qualifications for spiritual leadership are desirable. To be Spirit-filled is indispensable” (Sanders, 1980, p. 112). He states that a spiritual leader “is able to influence others spiritually only because the Spirit is able to

work in and through him to a greater degree than in those whom he leads" (p. 33). When the Holy Spirit sees "elected to positions of leadership men who lack spiritual fitness to cooperate with Him, he quietly withdraws and leaves them to implement their own policy according to their own standards, but without His aid" (Sanders, 1980, p. 114).

Key Skills for Leaders

- Understanding how people learn: People have a consistent way of learning called the learning cycle (Conner and Corbett, 1999, VOC Lesson 5, p. 11). It begins from a foundation of life experience. This is what people currently know and where a leader should begin interaction. With the provision of new information, people proceed to reflection. Based on this reflection, people make *decisions*. Finally, for change to occur, *action* must result from the decision. This action then leads to more life experience and the cycle continues. A wise leader understands this and tries to stimulate reflection, decisions, and action to help people grow.
- Facilitation: The definition of facilitation is "to make easy" (Websters II Dictionary, 1999). Instead of providing the answer, a facilitator helps people find their own answers. This is typically done with skillful questions. Jesus was a master facilitator as he often responded to questions with a question of his own (Matthew 21:23-27). Being a facilitator does not mean the leader has no answers or vision. To the contrary, like Jesus, the best facilitators have a vision of the right way to go.

- Communication: Great leaders are masters of communication and “seem to be able to find just the right metaphor that clarifies the idea and minimizes distortion” (Bennis and Nanus, p. 100). They use stories, metaphors, rites, rituals (Goldhaber, 1993, p. 71) or any other tool to effectively communicate the vision and values to followers. Jesus and Paul were masters of communication. Jesus, for example, used six parables to describe the kingdom of God in Matthew 13.
- Contextualization: While people use the same learning processes, their cultural norms and understanding may be quite different. This is true even within a culture, for example, between older and younger generations. A good leader uses message and methods that make sense to the people he is talking with. The Apostle Paul did this when he built a communication bridge with the Greeks by referring to their unknown God (Acts 17:23).
- Peacemaking: Anytime people are in relationships, there is the potential for conflict. Dealing with conflict is one of the most fatiguing responsibilities for leaders. The organization Peacemakers International has developed helpful guidelines for biblical peacemaking. The first principle is to realize that conflicts are not always bad. They can also be an “opportunity to glorify God, to serve others, and to grow to be like Christ” (Sande, 1991, p. 20). The biblical steps to conflict resolution are summarized into 4 G’s: 1) Glorify God, 2) Get the log out of your own eye, 3) Go and confront your brother, and 4) Go and be reconciled.

Myths about Leadership

At some point we all have hard myths about leadership. Bennis and Nanus (1997) help dispel various myths about leadership. Some excerpts are shown below.

Myth #1: “Leadership is a rare skill. Nothing further can be from the truth. While great leaders may be as rare as great runners, great actors or great painters, everyone has leadership potential” (p. 206). The most successful cell churches increasingly see all group members as future leaders.

Myth #2: “Leaders are born, not made”. The truth is “that major capacities and competencies of leadership can be learned” (p. 207).

Myth #3: “Leaders are charismatic”. The reality is (in their study) that “leaders were all ‘too human’; they were short and tall, articulate and inarticulate, dressed for success and dressed for failure, and there was virtually nothing in terms of physical appearance, personality or style that set them apart from their followers” (p. 208).

Myth #4: “Leadership exists only at the top of an organization”. rather, “nowadays many large corporations are moving in the direction of creating more leadership roles” (p. 208).

Myth #5: “The Leader controls, directs, prods, manipulates”. To the contrary, “leadership is not so much the exercise of power itself as the empowerment of others” (p. 209).

Conclusion

For ages, people have debated if leaders are born or made. It was my aim to provide an overview of the concept of leadership and how leaders are developed and emerge. The Apostle Paul says “to aspire to leadership is an honorable ambition” (1 Timothy 3:1, New English Version). Conversely, Jeremiah cautions against seeking greatness for ourselves (Jeremiah 45:5). This apparent dichotomy supports that the call to leadership is a serious calling and the purpose of my research is to reveal the marriage between the two. Through my research I have strengthened my stance in that the purpose is not to become great personally, rather, to abandon ourselves unto God and the service of others. It is a call to see God’s kingdom and others increase (John 3:31). Superb leaders have very different ways of directing a team, a division, or a company. Some are subdued and analytical; others are charismatic and go with their gut. And different situations call for different types of leadership. Most mergers need a sensitive negotiator at the helm, whereas many turnarounds require a more forceful kind of authority. It is my plan to make clear the importance of effective leadership. This paper on leadership and facilitation highlights key concepts from many authors. To fully understand their points, however, it is necessary to read their writings. Similarly, the key to growth is life-long learning.

References

- Belasco, J.A. and Stayer, R.C. (1993). Flight of the Buffalo. New York, NY:Warner Books.
- Bennis, W.G. & Nanus, B. (1985). Leaders: The strategies for taking charge. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bible: New International Version. (1985) Grand Rapids, Michigan:Zondervan Bible Publishers. (unless otherwise noted).
- Comiskey, J. (2000). Leadership Explosion. Houston, TX:Touch Publications
- Jones, E.S. (1972). The Unshakeable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person. Nashville, TN:Abingdom Press.
- Kotter, J.P. (1996). Leading Change. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2017). The leadership challenge: how to make extraordinary things happen in organizations. Hoboken, NJ: Leadership Challenge, A Wiley Brand.
- Maxwell, John C. (1998 and 2007). The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Maxwell, J.C. (1995) Developing The Leaders Around You. Nashville, TN:Thomas Nelson
- Northouse, P.G. (2018). Introduction to leadership: concepts and practice (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Sanders, J. O. (1980). Spiritual leadership (2nd ed). Chicago:Moody Press.
- Websters II – New College Dictionary. (1999) New York, NY:Houghton Mifflin Company

Yukl, G. (1998). Leadership in Organizations (4th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice

Hall.