



Understanding Organizational Leadership¹

M.A. Brennan, M.K. Moon, and Dale Pracht²

This article is part of a series of discussions on the connection between citizen leadership capacities and successful community development. This series will include specialized papers on leadership styles, critical events shaping the emergence of community leaders, the importance of context and local culture as factors shaping leadership capacities, and other topics important to the development of community and effective local leadership.

Introduction

As local communities increasingly take on greater responsibility for local planning, providing services, and meeting the needs of local residents, effective leadership is seen as essential. Similarly, leadership continues to be seen as a highly valued commodity as our communities deal with limited resources, funding, and other local capacity. This need for effective leadership is felt in both local organizations and in the broader community.

Local communities may be large or small, but regardless of their size, they are a complex environments made up of internal and external organizations. The organizations may be cultural, economic, or political. Wolf (1964) observed that

"the organization cannot be isolated from the broader society of which it is a part." Therefore, a primary requisite of good leadership is understanding the organization of our communities and knowing how to function within and through these often complex systems.

While significant attention is given to the importance of leadership, it remains a vaguely defined and inconsistently used concept. It is further complicated by our exposure to people with varying degrees of personality, life experiences, training, and other conditions that may shape our understanding of leadership. All of these often make leadership difficult to separate from other social processes and influences.

Leadership can be seen in a variety of ways such as the focus of group processes, the formation of group structure, a condition of personality, and as particular behaviors. Leadership can also be broadly seen as a representing power, such as inducing compliance, exercising influence or persuasion, and as an instrument to achieve personal or community goals. In short, leadership can be seen as the ability to mobilize people towards a shared vision, while

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 2. M.A. Brennan, assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences; M.K. Moon, graduate student, Interdisciplinary Ecology; and Dale Pracht, assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences; Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; University of Florida; Gainesville, FL 32611.

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encouraging direct individual contributions to the process. It should be noted, however, the type of leadership behavior used would depend on the type, size, and form of organization.

Understanding this process allows local citizens to build local capacity, more efficiently manage local resources, and to better develop locally based plans for social and economic development. By understanding this process, local leadership potentials can be cultivated, identified, and managed to best meet local needs and build on the uniqueness of our communities.

Organizational Leadership Styles

Exploring and understanding the leadership condition has long been a goal of communities and their organizations. Often this initial approach has focused on the traits and characteristics of existing leaders (*trait leadership*). This viewpoint was seen in academic, public policy, and other research that focused on the qualities and characteristics possessed by great community, social, political, and military leaders. From this viewpoint, potential leaders could be identified by their characteristics. Following this viewpoint, it is believed that certain individuals are born with specific traits that differentiate them from others, making them great leaders. Identifying leaders from this viewpoint, however, often poses some problems. This is mainly because researchers have been unable to identify a universal list of leadership traits. Because of this, many researchers began to view leadership more as an association between people in social situations than traits they were born with or developed.

Over time, leadership began to be viewed more as result of social influences and relationships, with attention focused on the types and styles of leadership (*style leadership*). Two types of leadership behaviors are seen as most influential in this leader-follower relationship: the initiation of structures and consideration of capacities of subordinates. In practice, these factors translate into what subordinates thought their leader should do successfully—provide structures and encouragement for constituents. Research in this area has also identified additional leadership behaviors: employee orientation and

production orientation. Employee orientation is similar to consideration (relationship-oriented leadership), while production orientation more closely parallels initiating structure (task-oriented leadership).

Most researchers agree that there is no single best leadership style. In response, *situational leadership* was conceptualized. From this viewpoint, the leadership style that is best suited with different individuals or groups is a result of the level of follower readiness and the leadership situation. The model links a leader's task and relationship behavior with follower readiness. Task behavior is seen as the amount of direction a follower may require. This would be reflected in one-way communication from the leader providing direction on how to accomplish the task, whereas relationship behavior (socio-emotional support) would be viewed as facilitating behavior with two-way communication. As an individual (follower) matures in task behavior, relationship behavior would increase. In other words, direction would fall off and facilitation would increase (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969). With the development of the situational perspective, researchers began to recognize the leader-follower interaction process as an essential facet in understanding leadership. In short, this shift toward situational leadership placed the emphasis on the exchange between leaders and their constituents. In this sense, situational leadership could be considered a process used by leaders at the micro level.

The local community level conceptualization of leadership can be better understood by considering two types of leaders within it: transactional and transformational leaders. Gardner (1990) simply distinguishes the two by explaining that *transactional leadership* accepts the current structure as it is and transformational leadership renews. Transactional leadership is defined through tangible compensation for a job done by an individual.

Increasingly attention is being given to *transformational leadership*, which is based on the idea that leadership is cultivated, and that individuals can transcend their self-interests to act on behalf of their community. For leadership to operate successfully under this framework, leaders must

recognize an existing need, assets, or motives of potential followers. This leads to the mutual development of capacities for both. Transformational leadership stresses that leadership is a relationship among those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow and leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to a higher levels of motivation and morality (Burns 1979).

Transformational leaders are change agents, visionaries, and calculated risk-takers. They can easily articulate a set of core values that guide their own behavior, possess exceptional cognitive skills, believe in careful deliberation before taking action, and believe in people and show sensitivity to their needs. They are flexible and learn from experience. Transformational leaders inspire others to go beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group, therefore maximizing potential of individuals as well as the group.

in today's organizations and institutions are needed to take on the responsibility for revitalizing, refocusing, and advancing organizations. This is accomplished through recognizing a need for revitalization, creating a new vision, and institutionalizing change, along with acknowledging the unique assets and directions that are possible to build upon. Such repositioning and change is essential as organizations strive to meet changing market conditions and needs. In this setting, transformational leadership facilitates this process, by fostering effective communication, leader flexibility, and developing constituent commitment.

References and Useful Reading

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| Transformational Leadership | Transactional Leadership |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on man's need for meaning • Is preoccupied with purposes and values, morals, and ethics • Oriented toward meeting long-term goals without compromising human values or principles • Is proactive, catalytic, and patient • Focuses more on missions and strategies for achieving them • Leads out in new directions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on man's need to get a job done and to make a living • Is preoccupied with power and position, politics, and perks • Is short-term and hard-data oriented • Confuses causes and symptoms and concerns itself more with treatment than prevention • Focuses on tactical issues • Follows and fulfills expectations by working effectively within current systems |

From Stephen R. Covey's *Principle-Centered Leadership*, p. 286

Conclusion

Our understanding of leadership and leadership theory continues to grow and diversify as research continues. The world is constantly changing, thus organizations will need to adapt and overcome to remain competitive or be effective. An organization that is unable to navigate the changes will no doubt become obsolete.

Within organizational leadership settings, situational leadership is an effective process utilized to ensure jobs are completed or goals are met. Transactional and transformational leadership are both necessary. However, transcending beyond the responsibility of just ensuring the job is accomplished and meeting the bottom line, transformational leaders

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Useful Web Sites

Association of Leadership Educators

<http://www.leadershipeducators.org/>

The Journal of Leadership Education

<http://www.fhsu.edu/jole/>

National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs

<http://www.nclp.umd.edu/>

Pew Partnership for Civic Change –
LeadershipPlenty

<http://www.pew-partnership.org/lpinstitute.html>