

Leadership Reflection Assignment- Paper #2

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Leadership is a complex topic and one that is not easily explained, either by lay people or by professionals in the field of leadership. Morrill (2007) explained the pop culture draw to leadership stating, “Whether as citizens, professionals, or volunteers, people want to understand the meaning of effective leadership and how to practice it” (p. 3). The texts for this semester have come from a variety of sources- popular self-help books, Northouse’s (2019) textbook, videos from various sources, white papers, and peer reviewed journal articles. The diversity of the class texts is indicative of the range of lenses through which leadership is explored. When I began this class, I had very little knowledge of leadership in an educational sense, but even then I was able to identify basic characteristics of my own leadership philosophy. My philosophy on leadership, specifically in the realm of higher education, has only been strengthened through this course. In identifying my leadership philosophy, I approach the topic in the manner Morrill (2007) did in his chapter’s outline of leadership- through the discussion of my own beliefs or motifs about leadership. My philosophy of leadership has shifted this semester and become more theoretically grounded, but as I consider the key tenets, I put forth the following beliefs about leadership: 1) leadership is contextual, 2) leadership is relational, and 3) the purpose of leadership is to advance the good of society.

My view of leadership as a contextual concept that changes is not surprising given my educational background in History and English Literature. It is impossible to separate leadership from the context. Hallinger (2016) explicitly listed the contexts out of what leadership exists, which include political, economic, and socio-cultural. In the same way that Litz (2011) argued that worldwide differences should be considered when implementing approaches, Hallinger recognized the micro level of each school system arguing that “leadership practice results from the interaction between the individual... and the broader context” (p. 14). When leading

individuals in the global sense, for example, one should consider the Anglo-centric ideas they are bringing to the developing country settings. In a world where communities have had their educational systems destroyed because of Colonialism, I believe it is important to approach a leadership opportunity with an appreciation of the context, rather than an insistence on “fixing” the community (Litz, 2011). Additionally, regarding the globalism of leadership, leaders need to have “a better understanding of local customs and cultural norms” (p. 57). Higher education leaders need to embrace the increasingly global nature of higher education and as such, the interconnectedness and contextual elements of the leadership experience.

Northouse’s (2019) chapter on the situational approach to leadership reiterates the idea of contexts, explaining that different situations merit different kinds of leadership. Like many other organization, higher education institutions have their own unique settings and the truly effective leader learns what these settings and followers need and then adjusts their style to meet those needs (Northouse, 2019). I have worked in various capacities at different types of institutions and, as a result of the respective situations, I have led in different manners. For example, while at Texas Tech in Student Disability Services, I entered a well-established tutoring center and led in a laissez-faire sort of way, understanding that the setting in which I entered was flourishing as is. I utilized a high supportive-low directive style as I used supportive behaviors to encourage the tutors to continue the work they were doing. However, during my tenure at Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College (ABAC) my style was more coaching in nature since I was creating a tutoring center and needed to both support and direct the employees that were novice to the field of tutoring (Northouse, 2019).

Belief two in my personal philosophy states that leadership is relational and cannot be separated from the individuals or the team. To maintain the healthy relationships within the team,

an awareness of one's emotions and of others' emotions is key (Goleman, 2000). Leader-member exchange theory also focuses on the interactions between leaders and followers, arguing that each has a unique relationship (Northouse, 2019). In discussing the relational model of leadership, one should include the five core components of the model, which include inclusive, being empowering, ethical, purposeful, and process-oriented (Dugan, 2017). Additionally, the theory argues that relationships are "the central location through which leadership emerges" (p. 242). Relational leadership happens not through the written rules of a group, but through unspoken communication and understandings in the team.

Connected to the relational theory of leadership is the need for emotional intelligence in leadership. Although it was once considered a trait, emotional intelligence is becoming recognized as something that is learnable and essential for affective leadership (Dugan, 2017). Furthermore, emotionally intelligent leadership is designed for the work we do with college students and is outlined with 19 capacities. As I consider my work with students, I think the list is very relevant; capacities like authenticity, coaching others, and facilitating change seem to be almost pre-requisites for working in higher education. The amount of emotional intelligence required of a leader is dependent on the follower with whom they are working. There are three components of emotionally intelligent leadership, as Allen and Shankman (2016) outlined and the level to which higher education can develop these components can impact the entire team. For example, being aware of the abilities and emotions of my Supplemental Instruction Leaders is directly related to the effectiveness of my work with those student staff members. Allen and Shankman (2016) discussed this component as an intentional effort to work with others for the team's goals. Working as a leader requires mindfulness about the dynamics of your team and their needs.

Trisoglio (2012) also addressed issues of mindfulness in leadership, explaining that it is something “needed in today’s increasingly turbulent business environment” (p. 50). When I consider emotional intelligence as one of the core elements of effective leadership, I cannot help but connect this to the idea of mindful leadership, in which we expand “the focus from stress reduction and emotional intelligence” (p. 55). As I consider my work in previous institution, the element of mindfulness immediately comes to the forefront as I witness staff that frequently suffer from burnout due to a lack of mindfulness. For leadership, this mindfulness to avoid burnout includes being emotionally intelligent about what your team is feeling. My previous supervisor worked hard to be a mindful leader, often insisting on staff retreats and reflections, especially when the office work became more stressful at times during the semester. Mindful leaders go beyond the idea of emotional intelligence and embrace the four areas of awareness that Trisoglio (2012) presented- body, feelings, thoughts, and phenomena.

The philosophy of leadership as relational and impacted by the individual must also take into account the implications of my gender in my leadership approach. Although some studies argue that leaders need to be flexible in their work and lean toward an androgynous identity as a leader, my philosophy disagrees with this notion and insists that gender can be a positive influence on my work as a leader (Pounder & Coleman, 2002). As I argue that relationships affect leadership, I acknowledge the existence of my relationship with myself as a female leader. Due to my experience as a woman in often male-dominated institutions, I appreciate the awareness of this inequality that comes to the forefront of my work. In reflecting on my own experience with female leaders, I find myself appreciating the leaders that owned this self-awareness of their own gender in leadership. For example, my first mentor in the field of advising served as a director on campus and fully embraced her femininity in leadership,

refusing to concede to an androgynous or traditionally male leadership style. Dr. Kimberly Smith is an African American female leader in higher education and recognizes the complexities her gender brings with it to leadership; and I respect her more for it. Rather than ignoring the, as Northouse (2019) terms it, “leadership labyrinth”, I hope to come to terms with the navigation that is required and use my experiences as a female leader to create positive change in my future places of work.

The last belief within my own philosophy centers on the purpose of leadership, not just in higher education but in society. Leadership is used for the good of the people and society. When considering what the role of leadership is, especially as it pertains to the increasingly technology-based societies out of which we work, I argue that the ultimate result of leadership should be positive change for the world. People like Mother Theresa and Ghandi contributed positively to the world through their work as leaders. Mother Theresa helped impoverished people and Ghandi fought for independence for his people. Comparing these two leaders to someone like Steve Jobs, a technology genius, I am forced to consider whether the latter truly made the world better through his leadership. Effective leaders work for positive change in their world.

One of the newer theoretical frameworks that reinforces my belief in leadership for good is the strategic social change leadership; this approach allows leaders to use their power to help those in less empowered positions (Dugan, 2017). Furthermore, by applying the various “technologies” of social change to higher education, leaders can push forward their team’s vision. For example, the technology of organizing in strategic social change leadership model is evident in today’s protests for equal college access for DACA students. This same movement uses the technology of public policy advocacy in protests for laws that reflect this desired equality. Traditionally, leadership has been viewed through the concept that true leaders are

powerful individuals that can motivate followers to the leader's goals. Strategic social change leadership goes against this traditional view. Today's global higher education environment mean these leaders must consider how their work contributes to the betterment of the world.

In arguing that effective leadership advances positive social causes for equality, I also categorize servant leadership in this part of my leadership philosophy. Northouse (2019) defines servant leadership stating that, like the previously mentioned leadership style, it “runs counter to common sense” (p. 227). Servant leaders work to help others, but the others they are helping happen to be their followers. There are ten characteristics of a servant leader, two of which speak to the helping nature of this type of leadership. These leaders have a focus on such characteristics as stewardship and empathy, two common traits of those leaders that are seen as part of the strategic social change category (Northouse, 2019).

The need for servant leaders in higher education is evident as burnout becomes a bigger issue in the field and recruiting new leaders is needed. At my own institution, I see an increase in the retirement of Baby Boomers, leaving vacancies in needed positions at the university. These vacancies mean younger professionals are filling the roles and that it is key they work with servant leaders who will help them develop in to their new roles. Servant leaders in higher education make new, younger employees' “career development a priority, including mentoring followers” (Northouse, 2019, p. 236). Outside of helping their followers develop professionally, servant leaders work to better their community in the same way that strategic social change leaders work for a positive vision. One of the best examples of a servant leader from my own experience is that of my former Assistant Vice President (AVP) at ABAC, who not only encouraged in my professional development, but also gave back to her home community of Moultrie. The AVP commuted an hour for her job so that she could remain an active member of

her hometown. When the town needed funds to redo their Christmas lights, she was a key part of the committee that sold pieces of the old lights to fund the purchase of new, updated lights. This AVP also considered ABAC a part of her community and gave back to the school often, fundraising with clubs and contributing to scholarships for the students without familial or financial support.

While I argue for the previously mentioned three tenets of effective leadership, I also understand that it is something one develops over time and my own leadership development is a process. When I began this course in August, my understanding of leadership was superficial and optimistic in many ways. I initially thought of leaders as those people doing extraordinary things, the Mother Theresa's and the Abraham Lincoln's of the world. However, my mentor and interviewee for this course insisted that leadership is "about leading where you are, whatever role you have" (Sullivan-Vance, Personal interview). In concluding this course, I see myself not as one type of leader, but as a combination of types within different contexts and for different reasons. Ideally, I would like to be a servant leader and a transformational leader in my higher education work, especially considering that I work mostly with students and these are the future leaders that need mentoring. But I also know that some days require me to be a transactional leader and even a manager at times. The strengths of my leadership style lie in the relationships I create with my employees and the work I do to mentor them, but I also need to think of myself beyond the leader of students. I suffer from imposter syndrome about leading my peers, but transformational leaders cannot doubt themselves, at least publicly, and need to inspire for greatness.

After the wide variety of readings from this semester, I view myself as a leader in a more tangible way, as opposed to the idealized leader I aspired to be at the beginning of the semester.

When I started in higher education, I struggled to view myself as any kind of leader; this difficulty could be due to several things, my gender and age being the two that immediately come to mind. Northouse (2019) opens his chapter on gender and leadership with a quotation from Margaret Atwood, which exemplifies my own discomfort with identifying as a leader. Atwood speaks of women in leadership saying, “We still think of a powerful man as a born leader and a powerful woman as an anomaly” (Northouse, 2019, p. 404). I witness disproportionate leadership in higher education, with most of my experience being that of males in the higher leadership positions. This course, specifically the assignments that have been outside of a “typical” assignment format, has provided me with a more broad definition of leadership; through this expanded idea I have come to understand that individuals can lead from where they are and with what the skills they have possess.

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