

Cultivating Leadership in Educational and Workplace Institutions

Sonya Warner Hidalgo, M.A.T., MLS (ASCP)

Assistant Clinical Professor

McNeese State University

Box 91820, Lake Charles, LA 70609

United States of America

Abstract

Learning is widely considered to equate to the acquisition of knowledge to create or cause a change. Within learning, however, there are many dimensions and nuances. In today's global economy, embracement of learning/teaching methodologies and leadership skills is at a top premium, and aspiring leaders should research and develop unique philosophies of practice. By exploring leadership styles and methods of learning and teaching, one can flourish in many workplace settings, including positions of power.

Keywords: education, leadership, philosophy, Mezirow, transformational

Creating a Leadership and Educational Philosophy

1 Concepts of Leadership

The concept of leadership is complex and multi-faceted. The type of leadership in a setting can influence the team members' attitudes, intrapersonal relationships, and work product. In an academic setting, one functions as a leader with colleagues and students, but with a different dynamic pertaining to each. Leadership can be defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2016, p. 6). In a classroom, the professor leads the students toward the common goal of learning and understanding a defined set of material and (hopefully) evolving their modes of comprehension toward using higher-level critical thinking skills. In a work situation, one leads his or her colleagues by modeling desired behaviors, demonstrating achievable outcomes, and utilizing effective communication. To create a leadership philosophy, the intended audience must be of top consideration, along with a working knowledge of the different styles of leadership. Based on the list by Northouse (2016), leadership styles to be considered are: transformational, authentic, servant, adaptive, and psychodynamic.

1.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory focuses on issues to be addressed that can affect the institution in a positive future direction (Bass, 1990). For this leadership style to be effective, one must have a deep commitment to the future success of the organization and possess strong skills for the motivation of others (Khan, Aslam, & Riaz, 2012). The transformational leader must be able to "conceive values or purpose in such a way that ends and means are linked analytically and creatively" (Burns, 1978, p. 162). Transformational leaders empower others toward leadership positions, and tend to have happier employees (Martin, 2016).

1.2 Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership depends partially upon the follower or team members identifying the leadership qualities of the leader (Northouse, 2016). Authentic leadership is described by Bill George (2003) as one using intrinsic values as a leadership guide, rather than choosing a leadership style and adopting that persona. Burns (1978) further described it as leadership that depends upon the defined followers and the leader agreeing on goals and motivation. The concept of authentic leadership has been compared to a salesman selling a good to a customer—one must possess powers of persuasion that allow the customer to believe the pitch (Bass, 1997).

1.3 Servant Leadership

Educators who put the school and students' needs first may be utilizing servant leadership, at least partially. Servant leadership is based on leading through service, and these leaders often utilize listening, acceptance, empathy, foresight, awareness, and conceptualization (Greenleaf, 1977). An example provided by Northouse includes a school secretary that always puts the students' needs first, and serves them as well as possible every day. The secretary position is not one traditionally considered as a leader, yet she functions to provide the best outcomes for others and leads them to success (Northouse, 2016). Greenleaf (1977) further posits that not only should one strive to be a servant leader, but also when one is a team member that they should choose to follow other leaders who are servant-leaders. He admits that this is a difficult path, but insists that the outcome is worth the work (Greenleaf, 1977).

1.4 Adaptive Leadership

Similar to servant, adaptive leadership is also based on the follower, but it also includes the source of motivation for accomplishing the work (Northouse, 2016). Christopher Cabrera, founder of an upstart company, explains that an adaptive leader needs to "be open to addressing opportunities to improve and reinvent yourself every step of the way" (Scott, 2016, p. 21). An adaptive leader should be open to change, based on the needs of the organization and employees/faculty while considering external factors such as fiscal status and societal needs (Khan, 2017). An interesting adaptive leadership skill is termed "Get on the Balcony", and directs one to rise above the workplace chaos and discord to gain perspective before making decisions (Northouse, 2016, p. 263).

1.5 Psychodynamic Leadership

The psychodynamic leadership style is perhaps the most difficult to finitely define, but is rooted in childhood experiences, personality traits, and individualism (PsychoDynamic Leader, n.d.). This approach is considered more abstract in nature than the other leadership styles, and it can take direction from either the directives of the leader or of the followers (Northouse, 2016). A study conducted to incorporate this leadership style in nursing managers noted that the training for the leaders initially caused them noted anxiety; it also helped then to define their roles, authority, and boundaries (Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010). Workplace situations that can sometimes benefit from this fluid type of leadership include employees struggling with mental issues, life instabilities, and other difficult barriers (Northouse, 2016).

2 Diversity Influences

Other factors that affect leadership, regardless of style, include ethics and cultural diversity. Ethics is based on our society's definition of a morally decent human being, and provides guidance in decision-making (Northouse, 2016). A leader bears the responsibility to think about the consequences of actions, and a failure of this foresight can result in a negative outcome for the team (Greenleaf, 1977). The ethical considerations of decision-making are subjective in nature, as the "real change that leaders intend" often bears a cost that is not part of the ultimate goal (Burns, 1978, p. 414). Constructing an ethical framework can help guide organizations and leaders in their practices and decision-making. Building such a document requires input from all affected parties, not just the leadership team. One example of such a guide is demonstrated in Table 1 (Ehlen & Sprenger, 1998).

Effective leadership must account for different cultures and backgrounds among team members to be able to accomplish goals. An organization, and its leaders, must know the factors that "promote equality and decrease the disparity between all social classes" (Karkouti, 2016, p. 411). A core example from healthcare is the case of Lia Lee, a child of refugees from Laos that was temporarily located in California. After repeated visits to the emergency room, Lia was diagnosed by the physicians as having epilepsy. Her parents had already diagnosed her with "soul loss", referring to their belief that the "spirit catches you and you fall down" (Fadiman, 1997, p. 28). Due to their cultural differences, and the time lag in hospital leadership taking note of this communication breakdown, Lia's care was negatively affected. Within educational institutions, the differences in cultural terms and understandings must be acknowledged to shorten this time lag between problem creation and solution. Educational institutions should prioritize the mission of creating a positive learning environment for all students (Karkouti, 2016).

3 Workplace Leadership

Part of any leadership role is training your employees. If a system is not functioning as intended, no matter what one's leadership style is, the quality of the product being produced will suffer. Multiple theorists agree that the concept of learning involves change; the degree and cause of the change vary among theorists (Knowles, 1973).

Transformative learning (TL) elicits change within a specified frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). To utilize TL for adult learning, one must develop a clear understanding of not only how adults learn but also why they learn (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013). Adult learning theory tends to emphasize self-directed learning opportunities and maturity (Knowles, 1973). Contextually, TL is only one layer constituting the adult learning process; experiential learning should also be considered in adult evaluations (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013).

3.1 Educational Foundations

Knowles defined four principles of adult learning, including: (a) adults should be involved in the planning process, (b) experience provides a strong basis for learning, (c) topics of interest relevant to occupation or personal life are usually learned the best, and (d) adults learn best when trying to solve a problem (Knowles, 1973). Experiential learning experiences are a critical part of planning transforming learning experiences for adult students; therefore, Knowles principles are ingrained within the theory of TL (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013).

3.2 Transformational Leadership

Mezirow's theory of TL includes defined stages or phases based on his research; including:

- A disorienting dilemma;
- Self-examination;
- Critical assessment;
- Recognition of one's discontent;
- Exploration of options toward a new role;
- Planning a course of action;
- Knowledge acquisition;
- Practice of new roles;
- Confidence-building;
- Reintegration of new perspective into one's life (Mezirow, 1996).

Mezirow defined three types of active reflection post-learning: (a) content reflection; (b) process reflection; and (c) premise reflection. He posited that the only type of reflection that leads to transformative learning is premise reflection, which "involves examining long-held, socially constructed assumptions, beliefs, and values about the experience or problem" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 145). Mezirow's theory of TL is clearly an accurate comprehensive view of learning, as many other theorists utilize it as a source of their own work. A consulting editor of the journal *Adult Education Quarterly*, Stephen Brookfield stated that Mezirow's work "has inspired a wealth of empirical case studies that have given the field of adult learning an entirely new order of theoretical legitimacy" (Levine, 2014, para. 3).

Many studies have documented the authenticity of Mezirow's TL theory; a few will be examined here. One such story involves TL in a non-Western culture, involving a postdoctoral student from Malaysia. After a destructive tsunami destroyed much of his homeland, he and his classmates began a large donation drive for medical and other supplies. Through this experience, the student was transformed to a new perspective of people who have survived natural disasters and his responses to them (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013). For this to relate to Mezirow's theory of TL, there are parts of this student's transformation that relate to each step outlined, including the critical ones of self-assessment and critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997).

Other such documented examples include: one's transformation post-HIV diagnosis (Baumgartner, 2001), older adult attending college for the first time (Dalo, 1988), families forming the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and fighting against a dictatorial government (Brookfield, 2012), and empowering radical social movements (Inglis, 1997).

3.3 Critiques of Transformational Leadership

Throughout the years since Mezirow's publication of his theory of TL, there have been numerous critics of his work, some resulting in modifications and evolutions of his writings. Some elements that have remained consistent include the need for a disorienting dilemma and a course of action based on one's new perspective (Mezirow, 2000). It has also been noted that this transformation can lead to actions toward social justice, but it is not a requirement for inclusion as creation of a new perspective (Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2017).

TABLES:

Table 1 Ethical Framework for Leadership Philosophies

| Principle | Definition | Purpose |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Stewardship | Recognizing the limits of resources; promoting policies to ensure equitable distribution of assets | Stresses individual responsibility while continuing community focus |
| Respect | Protecting and supporting relationships between leaders and team members | Respecting individual's needs and priorities |
| Caring | Respecting members emotional and spiritual needs | Encourages communication and multidisciplinary teamwork |
| Honesty | Making sure that consumers, providers, and employees have all the information needed to understand their decision-making | All members affected by a policy should have access to its information |
| Confidentiality | Supporting an individual's rights to privacy | Guard all private information, of team members and customers |

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