

Understanding Leadership Perspectives

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Theoretical and Practical Approaches

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Building on a solid foundation is essential to success in any endeavor. My intellectual foundations have been formed more by my father than any other influence. I am grateful for his example and for our various conversations, many of which took place way before my interest in leadership studies formally emerged. More importantly, though, he and my mother have given me a broader, eternal foundation of faith and character and my sister and brothers have been constant examples of all that is best in people. As I, with my dear wife, Shannon, form a foundation for our family, I am grateful for her love, insight, patience, and example. I too am grateful for our sons Carl, Benjamin, Nathan, and William and for the light and wisdom I gain as I interact with them. I see in Shannon and our four sons the leadership I crave to understand. To them all I dedicate this effort and give my thanks and love.

Matt Fairholm, Vermillion, SD

Writing is essentially a solitary activity. While any author relies for both insight and context on a phalanx of extant research and researchers, the task of creating a unique perspective on any topic and logically fleshing it out is most often still done alone - except in this case. I am grateful that this time I could collaborate with an insightful and perceptive colleague, my son, Matthew. I am indebted to him both for his scholarship and his - and his sister and brothers' - example. They have always set the pattern of leadership for me.

Gil Fairholm, Richmond, VA

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Introduction

It is a “fact” that people seem to know what leadership is and yet often disagree with each other when they talk about it. Most puzzling is that we all seem to think we are right. We all think we know what we are talking about, even when we disagree. And, collectively, we have disagreed on a definition of leadership for over the 100 years of its “modern” lifetime. There are about as many different understandings of what leadership is as there are writers on the topic.

Competing and Conflicting Values: The Cause of the Problem

We propose here that these multiple disagreements and misunderstandings sprout more from the individual’s personal system of values and the perspective (or mind-set) that those values engender than they do from a lack of rational leadership sophistication. That is, our personal perspective about leadership influences how we view work and measure the success of our and others’ leadership. The fact that, in our attempts to define more clearly that which we call leadership, such people as Genghis Khan and Gandhi, Hitler and Churchill, Caesar and Christ, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pol Pot are mentioned side by side without embarrassment or concern is a testament to the progress still needing to be made in understanding, accepting, and implementing leadership.

Our understanding of this basic and widespread organizational relationship has been recast several times over the past 100 years. Analysis of this stream of ideas gives rise to several core concepts around which researchers have developed elaborate structures to define and describe leadership. The task we all face is to rethink our definition of leadership in ways most people will accept as intrinsically true in the face of the countless opinions and biases – mind-sets – we have created from our experience as and with our leaders. This is the challenge of this book: one we think is resolved within these pages.

Rethinking a leadership definition is, perhaps, the most difficult problem faced by practitioners and researchers alike. The problem is that each person has developed a mind-set that defines his or her perspective of leadership truth and, hence, any ideas about leadership that differ from this mental perspective are generally rejected out of

hand. Indeed, we do not easily move out of one mind-set into another. What we believe to be true given our particular experience often seems to be the *only* truth. Often we need some outside force to trigger reevaluation and rethinking. That triggering force to intellectual growth may be a new idea, a new situation, a new value, a new boss, or some other significant emotional event – maybe, even, a new book.

The Research Foundation

This book is founded on two pillars: one, a model of five leadership mind-sets common in the last 100 years first presented in Gilbert W. Fairholm's (1998a, 1998b) book, *Perspectives on Leadership: From the Science of Management to its Spiritual Heart*; and two, Matthew R. Fairholm's (2002) dissertation, *Conceiving Leadership: Exploring Five Perspectives of Leadership by Investigating the Conceptions and Experiences of Selected Metropolitan Washington Area Municipal Managers*, which analyzed and validated the perspectives model (see the Appendix for more details). The data collected confirm there are five distinct perspectives of leadership evident in the 100-year history of leadership study and practice. The resulting model defines the five perspectives in terms of descriptions of leadership in action, leadership tools and behaviors, and the way leaders approach their relationship to followers. The five perspectives are related hierarchically so that they progressively encompass a unique perspective of the leadership phenomenon.

The Purposes of Leadership

The data also confirm the simple observation that leadership is not merely ensuring rules and procedures are efficiently carried out. Surely it includes productivity goals, but it is more than that. Fundamentally, it deals with people in relationships. This view opens tremendous possibilities for leaders and workers to experience personal growth and to be a positive influence in helping group members and those in the larger society live better lives, for the inescapable purpose of leadership is to change lives. By their actions, through the programs they manage, and in their personal behavior, leaders act to create a culture of individual trust, progress, and growth. Only in this activity is leadership enduring because it changes people at the level of self-definition, allows them to be different, better, more whole – complete – than they were before the leadership occurred. This is the essence, and the result, of leadership: helping others to develop and mature and, in the process, maturing ourselves.

The Leadership Perspectives Model

The 1998 Fairholm Perspectives model proposed an interrelated hierarchy of mind-sets about what leadership is; these mindsets have characterized the 100-plus year

life span of modern leadership study. Since then literally hundreds of books, articles, and essays have been published that take a “perspectives” viewpoint describing various elements and aspects of leadership. Unlike *Perspectives on Leadership*, most contemporary studies mostly focused on only a few elements of the whole picture. The Leadership Perspectives Model (LPM) described herein emerged in part as a result of studying the attitudes and values of practicing organizational leaders, in part from analysis of available past and contemporary literature, in part from observation of leaders in action, and in part from the authors’ personal experiences both as leaders and as followers of leaders – some good, some not.

The LPM defines a kind of leadership based in the values of the leader transposed to the group. Depending on the values-set of the individual leader, he or she may see leadership as (1) a synonym for management, (2) an element of excellence management, (3) a reflection of that leader’s values-set, (4) an establishing of a values-laden culture he or she creates to facilitate group action, or (5) an outgrowth of the leader’s core spiritual values. It is unclear which of these mind-sets is the correct one to delineate leadership. What is clear is that our core values define us, determine the goals we seek and the methods we will use to attain them, and dictate our measures of success.

Everybody has values and these values trigger our behavior. Necessarily, then, leadership takes place in a situation pregnant with values. The leader must act and influence at the level of values, because values are more powerful than plans, policy, procedure, or system. They define the person of the leader – and each follower – and constitute the measures of personal success and acceptability of others’ actions. Absent shared values, the organization becomes just a crowd of people. The power of our values in shaping our individual and collective lives is obvious. Unfortunately, this truth did not find its way into past leadership models.

Given the importance of leadership in today’s world, we cannot ignore this powerful way to think about and understand the leadership process. Rethinking leadership in values terms promises to help us appreciate more fully the leader–follower relationship and the values-laden culture in which it takes place. But, to make it work for us requires that we reconsider our present perspective about what leadership is and open our minds to new ways of thinking about, practicing, and measuring leadership action.

The Process of Leadership

The leader is a servant first and then a boss, if even a boss at all. Many of the problems we have as leaders result because we tend to reverse this phenomenon. That is, we concentrate overmuch on bossing our followers – making them do what *we* want – instead of serving them by helping them be the best they can be in their jobs and otherwise. True leadership and service cannot be separated (Greenleaf 1977). This is the message of leadership through the ages. The great leaders are and always have been of service to their followers first and then leaders into a new, better, more productive life. Unfortunately, past theory ignores this truth.

The LPM ultimately defines leadership as a task of service, of facilitating a values transfer – (1) through the leader’s example, (2) through forming cultures within which followers can come to trust their leaders enough to follow them, and (3) by reflecting their authentic core self, their soul or spirit – in their relationships within the group and with all stakeholders. This task is not for the faint-hearted. It requires a bold meekness that all serious research ought to require, for through meekness comes a more sure understanding of what is being explored.

However, to present our research as nothing more than interesting information seems a disservice to our readers. Our intention is not disinterested intellectual curiosity, but rather it is to help our readers to rethink the comprehensiveness of the leadership mind-set they hold and to identify or create a map (or even the road itself) to the improvement of self, society, and our surroundings through a more thoughtful, enlightened, and practical understanding of leadership.

This book investigates how leaders conceive of and, importantly, apply leadership. It reassesses the kernels of truth gleaned from past study of leader action and proposes a more precise conception of leadership. The authors present a fully developed LPM which identifies unique leadership elements that concretely define and delimit the practice of the kind of leadership implied in each of the five individual perspectives. These elements flesh out an operational definition and define techniques of practice. They are categorized in terms of (1) Leadership in Action Descriptions, (2) Tools and Behavior, and (3) Approaches to Followers. These categories are applied to each of the five leadership perspectives to show how leadership changes with the mental perspective adopted by the individual. We conclude that the LPM incorporates operationally useful definitional elements that are valid in differentiating the five leadership perspectives, that the leadership perspectives are themselves valid and accurately reflect unique conceptions of leadership, and that the five leadership perspectives relate to each other in hierarchical ways.

Chapter 1

Intellectual Threads of Modern Leadership Studies

Defining leadership is a relatively recent academic activity, though the phenomenon of leadership has been ever present in human relations. Stogdill (1974) reviewed more than 3,000 studies directly related to leadership since this concept was introduced in the 1800s. Many propose definitions unique from any other writer's. Obviously, these studies have not closed the book on leadership research. In fact many analysts lament the lack of progress made in understanding and defining leadership. Bennis and Nanus (1985) conclude that so many have worked so hard to do so little. And Rost (1991) concludes that these attempts to define leadership have been anything but yielding of concrete answers. He uses words such as "confusing," "varied," "disorganized," "idiosyncratic," "muddled," and "unrewarding." Yet research continues, definitions proliferate, and leadership remains an enigma.

Rather than reflecting cynically on past efforts, Yukl (1988) says we need to draw new conceptualizations of leadership that give us a better, more thorough grasp of this elusive social phenomenon. Trying to integrate past leadership theories into an overarching supermodel of leadership, as Yukl tried, may prove impossible. Rather, we need to rethink the body of information amassed about leadership and try to find the substance of truth contained in some of this work and discard the myths and opinions making up the bulk of other studies. The task is not synthesis, but reduction of the data about leader action to its essential core – its values construct.

We Know It When We See It

As players in the interpersonal world of group activity, people have their own conceptions of leadership; that is, "we know it when we see it." While many researchers recognize this, few study leadership with that notion in mind. Past researchers have failed to account for this personal, even intimate, proclivity to define leadership. They ignore the personal values, individualized frames of reference, world views, and personal cultural constructs that ask each of us to answer for ourselves the question, "What is leadership?" We all need to rethink our own

values mindset and begin work on understanding different leadership mindsets within which people operate and which they use to measure the success or failure of leadership.

Building on the growing body of research, the authors have reconceptualized past research findings to help the reader understand the threads of leadership theory. We have developed and present here the Leadership Perspective Model (LPM), which points to more comprehensive understanding of leadership in terms of ever-more encompassing and transcendent individual mental perceptions about leadership.

The Four Historical Threads of Leadership Thought

What makes a leader? What is leadership? What do leaders do? After more than a hundred years of modern study, these remain cogent questions. Many writers have offered either general or specific answers, but the discussion continues unabated. We need to understand past theory and rethink its application, if any exists, to present practice. Four threads of leadership thought help us understand the evolution of leadership's study: (1) Trait Theory (2) Behavior Theory, (3) Situational Theory, and (4) the newly conceptualized Values Theory.

Seen in terms of values, the first three threads lean toward a reductive methodology for understanding leadership by aggregating data about leaders, their behavior, and situations in which they find themselves. Sanchez (1988) suggests that examining leadership theory using these three threads provides a useful framework for analyzing the evolution of leadership thought. He cites Lewin's (1951) model of behavior as a reasonable foundation for examining these three elements of leadership (Colvin 1996). Lewin's model suggests that behavior depends upon the individuals involved and the circumstances of each individual's environment or situation, or $B = F(P, S)$: behavior is a function of person and situation. Colvin (1996) similarly describes the historical threads of leadership to include the leader as a person, the leader's behavior, and the leadership demands of the situation.

The first three approaches consider leadership in terms of what the leader is, what the leader does, and in which situation a leader is effective. Although all three of the historical threads mentioned above are still commonly used as a framework for understanding leadership, a new way of approaching leadership theory goes beyond these assumptions. In fact, many, if not all, of the leadership theories growing from the first three threads focus on skills, structure, and system concepts that are firmly within the realm of management, not leadership. At their worst, the past management-oriented frameworks divert our thinking from real leadership principles. At best they are only precursors and ingredients of values leadership – they contain parts of the guiding values and behaviors central to true leadership, but not its essential whole. Nevertheless, they are parts of our understanding and need to be considered in the development of a comprehensive theory of leadership such as the LPM.

Seen in terms of this emerging theoretical thread, the trait, behavior, and situational models constitute elements of a values-focus on leadership and not full-blown theories of leadership in their own right. The fourth thread, values leadership, moves us more in the proper direction, focusing on the distinctive nature of leadership. It moves the discussion toward a more holistic approach to interpret leadership. It changes the discussion from the leader to the phenomenon of leadership. This thread examines the relationships between leader and follower and the activity of sharing, or coming to share, common values, purposes, ideals, goals, and meaning in group and personal pursuits. This thread also points to the inevitable emergence of the perspectives approach upon which the LPM is based.

Trait Models: Who the Leader Is

The first modern theoretical thread examines the leader's traits of character. Trait theory deals with the capacities, talents, and person of the leader. An early iteration of trait theory focused on people who occupied significant positions and impacted societies in important ways – the great people of their time. The so-called Great Man (Person) model proposed that individuals become leaders because they are born with superior qualities that differentiate them from others. The contemporary version of this model argues that common character traits, if identifiable in recognized leaders, would help others develop their leadership capacities.

The search for the set of qualities that these superior individuals possessed began first by identifying generalities. For example, the idea that strength of personality equated to leadership was a consistent theme (Bingham 1927; Bogardus 1934; Bowden 1926; Kilbourne 1935). From these general discussions of the influence of personality, other studies tried to identify the set of qualities or traits that defined leadership across the board. Stogdill's (1974) review of leadership trait studies identified the following as important in successful leaders: chronological age, height, weight, physique, energy, health, appearance, fluency of speech, intelligence, scholarship, knowledge, judgment and decision, insight, originality, dominance, initiative, persistence, ambition, responsibility, integrity and conviction, self-confidence, mood control or mood optimism, emotional control, social and economic status, social activity and mobility, biosocial activity, social skills, popularity and prestige, cooperation, patterns of leadership traits that differ with situation, and the potential for transferability and persistence of leadership. Other studies focused on physical characteristics, social background, intelligence and ability, personality, task-related characteristics, and social characteristics (Stogdill 1974). The focus on the last two categories presages the beginnings of behavioral theory. Interestingly, Schein's (1989) study of women and leadership concluded that the traits of leadership are virtually identical between men and women, though some scholars disagree (Rosener 1990).

Broadening the Great Person theory, Scott (1973) discusses a theory of significant people. Significant people are the administrative elite who control the mind and techniques of others because they do significant jobs and are superior to everyone else. Their justification is not to control, but rather to improve efficiency. Since people will benefit from the techniques, which are not based on notions of control, Scott considers them to be morally correct. The result of improved efficiency will enable the elite to handle crisis situations better than before. An equation representing this concept is as follows: $AE + MT = SP$ (administrative elite + mind techniques = significant people). Leaders, presumably, have more developed mind techniques.

Charismatic leadership also is rooted in trait theory, though it is a topic of considerable debate. Conger and Kanungo (1988) call charisma the elusive factor in organizational effectiveness. Nadler and Tushman (1990) say that charismatic leadership, which involves enabling, energizing, and envisioning, is critical during times of strategic organizational change. Valle (1999) suggests charisma, in conjunction with crisis and culture, helps define successful leadership in contemporary organizations. Sashkin (1982), however, views charisma as a replacement for leadership, not a trait that leaders necessarily possess. Rutan and Rice (1981) question even whether charismatic leadership is an asset or a liability to organizations. The potential for good and evil is too significant to ignore because charismatic leaders influence others by appearing more than human.

Although the traits of leaders appear to be implicit in most discussion of leaders and leadership, this leadership model needs to be rethought. Traits alone cannot define the leadership construct. They need to be linked with other leadership requirements such as behavior and situation and more importantly with values, passion, spirit, and meaning-making. For example, Bennis (1982) used trait theory in his study of how organizations translate intention into reality in a cohort of 90 CEOs of reputable companies to identify specific qualities of leadership. Sashkin (1989) concluded that to understand leadership, one must consider personal characteristics as well as behaviors and situations.

More recent research has refocused interest in a purer form of trait studies. Jaques and Clement's (1991) work suggests that certain people are innately better suited to leadership roles (reminiscent of older foci on the debates about significant people and great men). A more direct reexamination of trait theory and leadership comes from Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), who argue that though leadership study has moved beyond traits to behaviors and situational approaches, a shift back to a modified trait theory involving the personal qualities of leaders is occurring. They identified six traits leaders possess as distinct from nonleaders, but they argue that these traits are simply necessary, not sufficient, for success. Possessing these qualities gives individuals an advantage over others in the quest to be leaders; it does not predestine them to leadership. And, more recently, the work by Goleman (1995) on emotional intelligence harkens back to the trait theorists.

Trait theory is a constant in leadership studies. It is seemingly the most obvious avenue for researchers to embark upon, assuming, as it does, that leadership is simply an aggregation of the qualities of good leaders. While trait theory has its

uses, the quest for a single list of universal qualities still eludes researchers. Theories of who the leader is help us understand one important aspect of leadership—the character of the individual leader. They do not do much to predict future leaders or anticipate leader behavior. They are of even less help in leadership development training. New, more operationally specific theories were needed and theorists turned their attention to another thread, this one focusing on the leader's behavior.

Behavior Theory: What the Leader Does

The second thread in the fabric of leadership is behavioral in nature. Behavior theory has attracted attention since the mid-twentieth century. The rationale is that concentrating on studying observable behavior may be more operationally useful than looking at traits. Most behaviorists focused on the top of the organizational hierarchy to understand management-cum-leadership practice (Argyris 1957; Barnard 1938a, b; Follett 1926, 1998; Gouldner 1954; Gulick 1937; Homans 1950; Maslow 1943; Taylor 1915; Whyte 1956). The assumption was that those at the top were more often than not called leaders. Therefore, what they did in their leadership roles, the logic went, was leadership. The roots of the confusion that persists to this day between what is leadership and what is management are easy to see in the behavioral mindset.

The classic Ohio State and University of Michigan studies on leadership were the prime examples of and the watershed events for the development of behavior theory in leadership research. Hemphill (1950) and others discerned from factor analysis research two main elements of leadership behavior: consideration and initiation of structure. The contemporaneous Michigan studies verified these findings in describing relationship building and task-focused leadership orientations. Although the research questions and conclusions of each study were slightly different, the similarities are significant.

Coming out of these beginnings, Stogdill and Coons (1957) edited a series of research efforts describing and measuring leadership behavior. Jay (1968) popularized managerial tactics by using the advice and wisdom of Niccolo Machiavelli. Blake and Mouton (1964) developed a behaviorally based grid describing leadership behavior and positing an ideal leader type based on the two factors of the Ohio State studies. Gardner's (1987) review of the tasks of leadership moved the discussion from management to leadership, but retained the focus on leader behavior. And, in many ways, writers on total quality management (Deming 1986; Juran 1989) add the behavior approach to good managerial leadership.

Gardner's (1990) argument that most leadership behaviors are learned opened the door for many to write about organizational learning and leadership (Kouzes and Posner 1990; Senge 1990; Heifetz 1994; Hughes et al. 1993; Howard 2002). Much of what could be learned centered on the power relationships that are inevitable in the leadership dynamic, even though that dynamic was not yet clearly defined (Fairholm 1993). Much of the contemporary practices of leadership, and

especially leadership development training, emerged based on modern illustrations of behavior theory (Drucker 1990; Kotter 1996; Vaill 1996; Collins and Porras 1997).

Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) saw leader behavior as a continuum ranging from manager-centered to subordinate-centered behavior. Davis and Luthans (1984) concluded that behavior represented environmental cues, discriminative stimuli, and results of behaviors that form a behavioral contingency for action. Leaders lead as they determine the occasion or provide needed stimulus for the evocation of follower behavior. Likert (1961) defined four basic leader behavior patterns – from highly job-centered to highly people-centered – elaborating McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y assumptions.

Interaction-expectancy theories emphasize the expectancy factor in the leader-follower relationship (Homens 1956). Leaders, Homens says, act to initiate structure-facilitating interaction, and leadership is the act of initiating structure. Stogdill and Coons (1957) develop an expectancy-reinforcement theory that defines the leader's role as setting mutually confirmed expectations about follower performances and the interactions followers can provide to the group. Evans (1970) and others suggest that leaders could determine the follower's perception of the rewards available to them, and hence, the leadership task is to determine the follower's perception of the behaviors required to get needed rewards. And Yukl (1988) postulates that leaders are to train, increasing follower task skills. A leader's consideration of others and a decentralized decision-making process, he argues, increase subordinate motivation, and, in turn, follower skill enhancement and motivation increase overall effectiveness.

Perceptual and cognitive theories focus on analysis and rational-deductive approaches to leadership. In attribution theory, leadership activity is dependent on what we think leaders should be and do. We see leader behavior and infer causes of these behaviors to be various personal traits or external constraints. We assume that the causes are a function of an experience-based rational process internalized by the leader. Classical behavior research is a more scientific approach to leadership study because behaviors can be seen, observed, measured, and potentially mimicked much more easily than traits, especially if traits were found to be innate to the person (Stogdill and Coons 1957).

Behavior theories provide a way for people to copy what other leaders have done, but the behaviors, in the end, do not prove to be generalizable. Importantly, they began the intellectual exercise to view leadership as something apart from the leader: a set of actions, attitudes, and values that involve the individual leader in intimate, personal ways. Behavior theory is where much of the confusion between leadership and management theory originated. The rise of this research focus coincided with the efforts to understand the rigors of management and executive authority in the industrial age. As a result, most past leadership theories in this vein were, in reality, management theories. Behavior theory, like trait theory, is a useful thread in weaving the full fabric of leadership, but neither theory is enough – singly or collectively. Consequently, the next intellectual thread added the dimension of situation – where leadership happens.