Leading: Perspectives for Leaders and Leadership Coaches

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Abstract

"Leadership" is among the most widely discussed topics in business and organizational literature, but little consensus exists regarding what leadership is, let alone what is required to lead successfully. This is partly due to the lack of a thorough-going conceptualization of leadership and the domains within which it is exercised. This paper offers just such a conceptualization of "leading", "leader" and "leadership", rooted in the powerful conceptual framework known as Descriptive Psychology. Based on this conceptualization, the need and requirements for the role of Leadership Coach is discussed.

Keywords: leading, leadership, organizations, coaching

The Keys to Leading

Contemplating the current literature on leadership, a well-known story from the Sufi teachings comes to mind:

> A man was walking down a dark street when he saw Nasrudin standing under a streetlamp, staring at the ground. The man called out: "What are you doing?" Nasrudin replied: "Looking for my keys."
> The man joined in the search. After five minutes of fruitless effort, he asked Nasrudin: "Where did you last have your keys in your hands?" Nasrudin pointed to a dark alley. The man asked: "If you lost your keys in the alley, why are you looking for them here?"
> Nasrudin replied: "The light's better here."

Efforts to understand effective leadership are too often act like Nasrudin: they look where things can be most easily seen and therefore (forgive the pun) don't find the keys.

A clear illustration is Robert Quinn's Harvard Business Review article, "Moments of Greatness: Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership" Quinn, 2005).

His article offers some good reminders and operating principles for leaders. Quinn suggests that leaders "venture beyond familiar territory to pursue ambitious new outcomes" rather than continuing to "stick with what I know." He suggests that leaders "behave according to my values" instead of "complying with other's wishes in an effort to keep the peace." He tells leaders that if they "place my interests above those of the group" they will be less successful than if they "put the collective good first." Finally, he admonishes leaders to "learn from my environment and recognize when there's a need for change" instead of "blocking out external stimuli in order to stay on task and avoid risk." This is all sound advice, and if heard at the right time, useful.

But Quinn takes these points much, much further. Specifically, Quinn suggests that his four favored bits of advice together actually comprise a specific state – the "fundamental state of leadership" – which, if you can just enter it, will make you capable of "moments of greatness" as a leader. He makes a spot-on point at the beginning of his article, that "Nearly all corporate training programs and books on leadership are grounded in the assumption that we should study the behaviors of those who have been successful and teach people to emulate them" and then goes on to assert that it's not these specific *traits* of the leader that make them effective, but rather a specific *state* of the leader – the "fundamental state." In doing so, Quinn falls into the major trap facing authors who would be helpful to leaders: he looks in the wrong place for the keys to leading. It's not that Quinn has identified the wrong "fundamental" state; it's that *no* state, fundamental, or not, is the key to leading.

When consulting to executives who want to improve their success at leading, my single most important message is this: Essentially, fundamentally, *leading is NOT about* **you**.

Leading is not fundamentally about *you* – your vision, your voice, your skills, behaviors, experience, strengths, weaknesses or states. These are all important factors to consider; they all have an impact on how you lead and the effectiveness of your leading; but focusing on *you* will not show you what you need to see in order to lead effectively. You won't find the keys to leadership in that light.

So if leading is not about *you*, do we assume that leading must be about *them* – the followers? Is it about their efforts, their commitment, their needs and wants and motivations? Again, these are important factors, but again, they are not where you will find the keys to leading, because essentially, fundamentally, *leading is NOT about* **them**, *either*.

Leading is about **us**.

Leading is about a community of interests, a group of people who share a view of the world and who act individually and together to create specific value in that world, who are engaged in a mutual endeavor that creates value over and above what each can create independently, and who are committed to making their contribution to that endeavor. To lead is to pay attention fundamentally to that community of interests, to the mutual endeavor and each person's contribution to it. To lead is to make the contributions of everyone involved, and therefore the

value creation, possible. That is the leader's contribution to the mutual endeavor.

A classic TV commercial shows people caught in some nasty complex reality of business: a paper jam in the copier, gnarly shipping challenges, etc. Someone reminds them that they have an "Easy" button; they push the button and everything works out. The absurdity of the solution is part of the commercial's charm – sure, we recognize our desire for an "Easy" button, but we know they are none in real life. Communities of interest, mutual endeavors, committed participation and contribution to creating value – this is complex stuff, and no amount of wishing for simple answers will change that.

To support leaders in leading successfully, we have a choice to make. We can either respond to their genuine desire for easily understood solutions – "How do I need to be and what do I need to do in order to be an effective leader?" – and thereby join them in looking under the streetlamp. Or else we can help them see the true complexity of their actual situation, in ways that lead to specific, tailored ways of leading.

I propose we commit to keeping the full complexity in the picture. It's not as easy to see as under the streetlamp – but, after all, that *is* where the keys are.

Leading and Leadership

First we need to introduce some distinctions around these terms, "leader", "leadership" and "leading."

"Leader" is a tricky little word. It's wise to pay careful attention to just where and how you are using it, or else you may find yourself trying to be and do the *literally* impossible. For example, "leader" has come to be modern business shorthand for 'someone who holds a position of visible authority and responsibility in the organization.' But in an older and more basic sense, one is a leader only if one actually *leads* (and *succeeds* in leading – success is built into that assessment.)

Digging a little deeper, we notice that the term "leader" has a number of connotations in common English usage, some of which mislead us badly when we apply them to organizational leading. We often take facts from one realm of leadership, applying them as metaphor to the realm of leading organizations – and then we forget that they were just metaphors and treat them as literal facts. This is seldom a productive approach. Some examples:

- When you are traveling as a group from one place to the next, the leader is the one in front and everybody appropriately follows the leader – literally. We take these literal facts and apply them metaphorically to organization leading, telling people to "get in front" on some issue which will establish "direction" for people to "follow." Seriously now – where exactly is the "front" of an issue? And how exactly does one "follow"? In which actual "direction"? These directional leadership metaphors can be useful, but they can also be very misleading.

- In an athletic contest, the leader is the one who is currently winning. The great thing about sports is, you have actual measures that can tell you at any time how well any competitor is doing, and therefore who is

winning. For most important organizational endeavors, there are few if any measures of success that tell you how well you are currently doing compared to anyone else, certainly not before the endeavor is finished. But we exhort organization leaders to "win" and to establish a "winning attitude" on the "team" – all metaphors, all of which can lead right into swamps if taken literally.

- In governance and politics, the leader is the person who holds ultimate authority – the king, president, duke, general, party secretary, etc. What the leader says, goes. Actual leaders in organizations – say, the leader of a multi-functional team in a matrix organization – might *dream* about having such power but in reality they don't, and would probably do a very poor job of leading if they did. Commander, top-dog, chief, general – all are great traditional images of a governing leader, but a notoriously poor fit for leading in modern organizations.

- One last misfit image: in science, literature, music, the arts, "leader" has traditionally been used to refer to someone whose work and standing in their professional community is highly esteemed. If you do great work, you become a leading scientist, scholar or whatever. But notice this kind of greatness refers to *your work*, not to you personally and certainly not to any actual leading you may have done.

"Leader" *is* a tricky little word, isn't it?

I propose we look into the more basic term: "leading." It has fewer misleading connotations; further, it helps us keep the focus on "us" and the mutual endeavor, rather than falling into the trap of focusing on the individual leader – characteristics, behaviors, skills, states, etc. With this is mind, "leader" is someone who successfully leads; "leadership" is simply what a leader does in the course of leading.

What do we *mean* when we say someone "leads?" (The following articulation is rooted in the conceptual framework of Descriptive Psychology, specifically the Intentional Action and Community/Organization paradigms; see Putman, 1980; Putman, 1990; Ossorio, 2006). Our calling something "leading" is based fundamentally on our recognizing an *outcome*. It is the outcome – the successful accomplishment – that we recognize as leading, not, for example, some particular kind or style of activity. To belabor this fundamental point just a bit: no matter how "leaderly" the behavior may seem, we do not call it *leading* unless it *succeeds*; if it succeeds, we call it leading even if the behavior seems quite ordinary. We only call it leading when the individual's leading succeeds.

"Succeeds" – at what? Here we get to our core understanding of leading and leadership. What exactly are we committing ourselves to when we say, "That was effective leading"? As it turns out, we are committing ourselves to quite a lot. We are saying that:

1. We have observed an action by the leader – or at least have knowledge of the outcome of the action – and the leader's action was successful.
2. We have observed a subsequent action by someone else – or at least have

knowledge of the outcome of that action – and this other person's action was also successful. (Let's call this second person the participant. For reasons that will soon become apparent, I am deliberately avoiding the common command-and-control practice of labeling this person the "follower".)

3. The success of the participant's action was significantly dependent on the leader's action – without the leader's action, the participant's action might not have occurred or might not have been successful.

4. The leader knew that the participant's action depended on the leader's action and, in fact, knowing this provided one of the leader's primary reasons for acting.

5. Both the leader and participant are engaged in a mutual endeavor and their actions reflect that. In other words, they are participating in a social practice – an intentional pattern of interaction – as members of a particular community.

Note that these statements may appear to be inferences or theoretical statements, but they're actually nothing so grand. They are simply writing down – articulating – a part of what we commit ourselves to in using the common, everyday term "leading". As a mental exercise, try assuming the contrary. For example, "We call it leading, but we know nothing about what the leader did nor about the effects of what the leader did" or "We call it leading, but nobody did anything in response", etc. It seems apparent that we would be inclined to respond: "That's not really what we mean when we call something leading."

To put the matter succinctly:

• Leading is *taking active responsibility for making it possible for others to make their contribution to the mutual endeavor.*

• A leader is someone who leads successfully.

• And "leadership" is simply what a leader does in the course of leading.

(This view of leading was originally articulated in "Herding Tigers: Leading the 'On-Behalf-Of' Organization.") (Putman, 2012.)

We should also note some things we are *not* committing ourselves to in calling something "leading":

• We are *not* saying that the leader occupies some special place in the organizational community that makes what they did leadership. What makes an action leadership is its intent and its outcome, not the place from which it was performed. Many roles explicitly or implicitly require the person in that role to lead – CEO, Principal, Manager, Superintendent, Coach, etc. all come immediately to mind. But Jan being in one of these roles does not automatically make whatever Jan does an act of leadership, nor does the fact that Kim occupies no "official" role mean that Kim cannot lead. Again, to belabor the point a bit, it's the intent and outcome that makes it leadership, not the role.

- We are *not* saying that any particular type or style of action was performed. Familiar mass-media images of leadership often involve passionate exhortation or crisp commands, followed by an immediate scramble to follow. These clearly are examples of leadership, but leadership in actual organizations is rarely so dramatic (and media seldom show crisp commands that are roundly ignored, which is not infrequently the case in real life.) Decades of research have shown what common sense tells us: leadership is not a matter of any particular style.

- We are *not* saying that leading requires that others *follow*. The misguided coupling of leadership with followership has been a principal stumbling block in efforts to more deeply understand leadership. The emphasis on following – following the leader's direction, following orders, etc. – stems from the long history of military leadership. In some circumstances – specifically, those circumstances that combat soldiers find themselves in – followership is necessary for success and even survival. The "commander" image of the leader comes from the battlefield – the *literal* battlefield, not the metaphorical battlefield of modern commerce or organizational life. The plain fact is, the classic military model is an increasingly poor fit as a model for our current and future organizations. To the extent that we emphasize followership, to that extent we also minimize the independent knowledge, insight, decision-making and judgment of the individual participants in the mutual endeavor – and no organization today can afford to do that. Our view of leadership is centered on effective *participation*, not followership, and the distinction is a great deal more than "mere semantics."

Note carefully that a leader's actions take place in the context of a specific social unit – an organization, team, community, institution, family, etc. Some of the members of that social unit are engaged in a mutual endeavor, that, is, a complex course of action in which the efforts of each individual are coordinated or aligned to accomplish a joint outcome. *There must be a mutual endeavor for any sort of leadership to take place.* That "mutual endeavor," as it turns out, is where the actual keys to leading are found. Let's look there next.

Leading to Create Value

The purpose of an organization – *any* organization – is to create value. (Putman, 1990)

People form themselves into an organization for many reasons, but the central and fundamental reason is this: an organization can create value in a way and to a degree that individuals on their own cannot. In order to create that value, organization members engage in mutual endeavors.

Leading concerns itself fundamentally with making it possible for an organization to create value. This is the "flip-side" of our previously established view of leading as "taking active responsibility for making it possible for others to make their contribution to the mutual endeavor." They are two ways of saying exactly the

same thing.

"Value" is another tricky word. The value created by an organization is seen differently – sometimes *drastically* differently – from different perspectives. For example, from the numeric perspective of the CFO and financial analysts, "value" is seen as various forms of financial return. From the professional/ technical perspective of technicians and service providers, value takes the form of high-quality services or products that satisfy customers. From the perspective of people who make up the organization, value comes from the satisfaction they get from their work (personal, social, *and* financial.) And from outside the organization, value may seem radically different. For example, Hitler's leadership resulted in the destruction of millions of Jews and other "undesirables". The Nazis counted this as creating value; few people today would agree. Value is a universal, shared concept but what *counts* as value is specific to the organization creating it.

People will participate with or in an organization only if they see that their participation creates value *as they see it*. "Creating above-average returns for stock-holders", for example, is *not* the kind of value that motivates customers, nor does it motivate many organization members (unless their roles and rewards are tied directly to it.)

This multi-perspective value reality creates fundamental and difficult challenges to those who lead in modern organizations. Leading requires the leader to make sure that:

- the efforts of the organization result in the creation of value;
- the value created is seen *as such* from all relevant perspectives and by all involved parties;
- all necessary participants are able to make their contribution to the mutual endeavor of creating value.

Leading, then, *fundamentally* requires the leader to see things accurately from multiple perspectives. Either the leader is capable herself of seeing things accurately from all relevant perspectives (this is rare) or, more commonly, the leader gets a team of people to create a *common view of value* that is seen as value from all perspectives. Here's an example of how that can work:

Some years ago I facilitated a trouble-shooting meeting in a school district. Teachers, principals and School Board members were terminally deadlocked over an extremely thorny curriculum issue, with three absolutely incompatible views on what to do. Each group had presented its viewpoint and rationale, and opened themselves to questioning from the others (keeping *that* from turning into bloody warfare had been challenging). To conclude this round of information sharing, I asked each group to answer one question: "At bedrock, what do you believe makes your solution the right solution?"

All three groups responded without hesitation: "It best serves our customers."

All three groups were right.

All three had *different* "customers" in mind.

For a moment I wondered if we had stepped into the Twilight Zone. Then the thought flashed through my mind: "Welcome to the wonderful world of the complex modern organization!"

For the teachers, the ultimate customers were the students; the ultimate customer for the principals were the state and district administrators who set policy and guidelines; and the School Board members took as their ultimate customers the parents and other local taxpayers who ultimately paid everyone's salaries. With such diverse "customers", it is not surprising that the best curriculum looked very different to the three groups. As one observer remarked, they might as well have been living in three different worlds.

While "living in three different worlds" may be a bit extreme, we can straightforwardly take it that we are dealing with three distinct *views* of the world, and therefore of the value the organization exists to create. This situation is depicted in Figure 1.
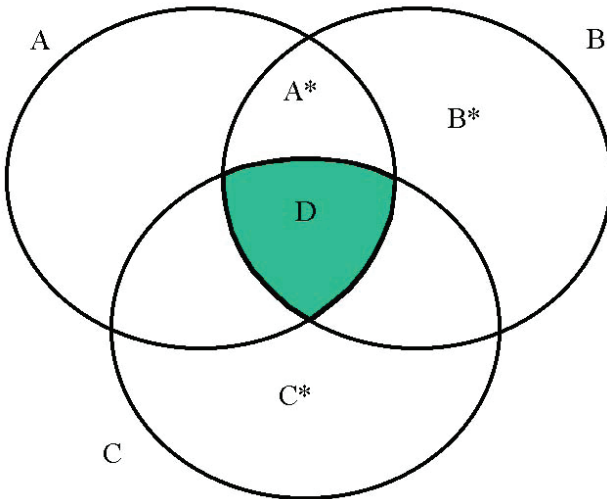
Each circle represents the set of good answers to the question, "What should our curriculum be?" from the viewpoint of (A) teachers, (B) principals and (C) School Board members. The best answer from each group's viewpoint is represented as A*, B* and C*, respectively.

Note the obvious:

- The best answers are not the same from group to group.
- The best answer from the School Board's point of view, C*, is not even among the good answers for the other two groups.
- No "best answer" is a good answer for all three groups.
- Any answer that does not fall into the "good answer" category for one group will not receive commitment and participation from that group.

Notice also that there is a small area, D, which falls within the "good answer" category for all three groups. Based on our above understanding of leadership, one

who would lead in this situation will direct the group's attention to D and help them choose a path from among the D answers – because all three groups can commit to and participate in D. And note that not just any answer will do – it must be one that looks good to all three.

This strategy – looking at the issue from all viewpoints and searching only for answers that look good from all viewpoints – can give all the participants what they require. With hard work and good will, it enabled the curriculum trouble-shooting session to come to an unexpectedly productive conclusion.

We should be careful here to avoid confusing this strategy with two seemingly similar but actually very different strategies: compromise and "least common denominator." Compromise – if it works at all – requires each group to give up something they believe is important in order to get something else they believe is more important. Notoriously, compromise often results in "solutions" which nobody sees as a good answer, but which each group sees as the best they can get. For example, if you wanted pizza and salad for lunch while I wanted egg-drop soup and General Tso's chicken, our compromise lunch might be either an artery-clogging combination of pizza and General Tso's chicken, or perhaps a mind-boggling General Tso's chicken pizza. "Least common denominator" takes all the elements in common in each group's position and proposes a "solution" that includes them all. Based on our lunch preferences above, our "least common denominator" lunch would be something like a few ounces of oil with a generous pinch of salt and a glass of water.

Both compromise and least common denominator solutions fail to recognize the true complexity of people's views of the world. They take A*, B* and C* as given and try to give each group something, not recognizing that the task is to find a solution that *every* group sees as a good solution (so everyone can commit to it), and that getting only *part* of our *best* solution is probably not a *good* solution. If you and I just keep talking about lunch, we may discover that we would both be pleased with taco salads.

Getting the view of value right – from all relevant perspectives – is the one of the true keys to organizational leading. Leaders frequently do not do this. They "take charge", requiring (or allowing) one view of value to preempt the conversation ("Our job is to make plan – period.") and then wonder why they have trouble getting top-quality participation from people who do not share this view of value.

Leaders do this because they think it's the right thing to do. They either haven't seen the necessity of creating a multi-perspective shared view of value, or they don't know how to do it because they have never seen it done. In either case, it's the job of Leadership Coaches to help leaders develop their capability and capacity in using this, and all the other, keys to leading *that are relevant to their actual situations.*

Leadership Coaching

Arnold Palmer did not use a swing coach; Tiger Woods did – in fact, he's now on his third. Palmer never used a personal trainer; Rory McIlroy does.

The difference is not in the men; the difference is in the times. The game today requires performance at an unprecedented level. No world-class athlete attempts to

win without a coach or trainer, usually both.

The times have also changed for organizational leaders – perhaps even more drastically.

Leadership today is a great deal more complex than it was 40 years ago because the organization of today is a great deal more complex and diverse than it was 40 years ago.

The organization 40 years ago consisted overwhelmingly of
- men
- from a single culture
- who had substantial indoctrination in the competitive culture of games, sports and the military
- who had little indoctrination in the cooperative culture of informal groups and relationships
- whose job was well-defined and stable over time
- for whom technological change was a predictable, orderly process
- whose business was focused almost exclusively on one local geography
- whose personal lives were lived in an intact nuclear family
- who were largely motivated by the extrinsic factors of money, power and security, and intrinsically by achievement and problem solving
- whose leaders and leadership role models were exclusively male

The organization today consists of
- men and women in increasingly equal numbers
- from a number of cultures,
- some of whom have substantial indoctrination in the competitive culture of games, sports and the military, some of whom do not (and this does not neatly sort into men and women)
- some of whom have substantial indoctrination in the cooperative culture of informal groups and relationships, some of whom do not (ditto)
- who fill roles, not jobs, that are constantly evolving and rapidly changing
- for whom technological change has always been a rapid, accelerating paradigm-changing series of events
- whose business addresses multiple shifting geographies within a global marketplace
- whose personal lives are characterized by almost unbelievable diversity and choice, and constant multiple demands
- who are motivated extrinsically by specific combinations of money, power, status, independence and security, and intrinsically by achievement, problem solving, teamwork and, increasingly, service
- whose leaders and leadership role models are still largely male but increasingly female

A leader who aspires to be world-class today needs the support of a coach or trainer, probably both in a single package. The game for leaders has elevated drastically. The game for the leader's coach must elevate accordingly.

A wise old saying reminds us that: "Unless you know where you are going, any path will do." To that, I would add: "Unless you know where you are starting from, no path will get you where you are going." Put these two together, and we have the initial prescription for a Leadership Coach: find out where the leader is now, find out where the leader needs to be, and then help the leader get there.

In other words, start with an assessment. This is not exactly earth-shattering news; *all* good coaches already do that.

But the next question begins to really stir the pot: What exactly do we assess, and how? I suggest that the most common answer to that question, and the coaching practice that goes with it, are cases of looking under the lamppost instead of looking where the keys can be actually found.

Common practice is to assess the leader on some set of dimensions – traits, values, behaviors – either through testing, or some sort of 360 process, or both. Strengths and weaknesses are identified; this forms the basis for a developmental plan to develop the weaknesses, utilize the strengths, or both. (Current best practice, influenced heavily by thought leaders like Peter Drucker and Marcus Buckingham, is to focus on the strengths.)

This approach can give us a lot of information, sometimes with solid numbers attached, but it's fundamentally flawed when it comes to helping leaders succeed. Leading is *not* about you; leading is about us. What we need to assess is significantly more complex, and more specific, than the "leader-focused" assessment can ever be.

Developing and implementing an assessment that supports actual leading, and codifying the practice of Leadership Coaches using this approach, is the challenge we face. Much work and discovery remains to be done – but we're not starting from scratch here. In fact we already know, and know how to do, quite a lot once we start looking in the right place.

In coaching specific Leaders, we need data/observation in four large categories:

- **Organization Specific**: What value does this organization exist to create, and how is that value seen by the various groups involved with its creation? What actual requirements does this organization have for an individual in a Leadership role? What values (in the sense of *actual operating principles*, not just aspirations) must this individual embody through word and deed? What results and practices are core to this organization's culture? In short, what must *all* Leaders in this organization exemplify? These are all organization-specific questions – and I'm sure there are others as well – that need specific answers as context for coaching any leader.
- **Role Specific**: Different Leadership roles call for very different ways of leading. The CEO faces significantly different challenges than does the Leader of a multi-disciplinary design "swat" team. What are the specific leadership results and challenges of this specific role, and therefore what are the specific leadership skills and practices required? Input on these

questions is required at least from the leader, the leader's superior(s), relevant peers, customers or down-stream consumers, and subordinates through some form of interview – preferably in person and open-ended rather than rate-on-a-checklist. In my experience, this information typically yields the best and most specifically focused material for deciding how to lead effectively, and how to coach a leader.

- **Person Specific**: All leader roles are filled by specific persons with their own specific characteristics: experience, preferences, talents, knowledge, skills, interests, energy, etc. Think of these characteristics as roughly equivalent to the ingredients in the kitchen and pantry: that's what you have available to create your meal from. Good leadership development will always include some amount of stretch – getting the leader to function effectively in areas initially outside of his/her comfort zone. But the ingredients for the stretch are almost all already "in the kitchen" – in other words, the person has that skill, knowledge, etc. but has not applied it effectively. Actually *changing* the person in some significant sense is rarely the preferred approach because it rarely works. Here is where common practice – 360's and tests – can be useful when used carefully and in context.

- **Leadership Specific**: At the end of the day, does this person *lead*, that is, get results that qualify as leadership? Does s/he do the core things that you must do in order to lead? And most important for our purposes: what are those results and "core things you must do?" Recall: Leaders do *whatever is needed* to make it possible for *us* to create the value we are committed to creating. Perhaps they need to resolve our differing views of what that value looks like. Perhaps they need to get us on the same page regarding what our customers need, or how we intend to compete in a crowded marketplace. Perhaps they need to build our belief that we can in fact achieve this goal, or overcome these obstacles. Perhaps they need to reassure us about the course we are following, or shake us up to see that the course we are following won't get us there, or … There are no simple answers because the answer fundamentally depends on who *we* actually are, and what our mutual endeavor actually is.

Put these together: In any actual case of coaching or developing a leader, a coach must take into consideration the facts about: the organization, the specific role, the person in that role and the facts about what it means to lead.

Let's look next at an expansion of these four types of facts, and the questions one might ask to assess them. This might be the basis for a somewhat different type of survey.

Examples of Leadership Specific Facts

Leading requires paying specific attention to the mutual endeavor itself, for example:

- Creating the mutual endeavor ("We will send a man to the moon by 1970")
- Deciding which mutual endeavor to pursue ("Seven card stud, no ante")
- Naming or articulating the mutual endeavor ("Looks like what we're doing is moving upmarket with this product.")
- Getting consent and commitment to the mutual endeavor ("Let's call the question: do we build this or not?")
- Authorizing the mutual endeavor ("Alright people, let's do this!")
- Establishing a strategy for the mutual endeavor ("We will put most of our effort into our 25 most valuable clients, while trimming the bottom 10% of the client list.")
- Establishing a timetable or pace for the mutual endeavor.
- Choosing – or ensuring choice is made – among possible allocations of resources (time, energy, money, people) to tasks in the mutual endeavor.

Leading requires paying attention to the relationship between the mutual endeavor and individual participants, for example:

- Does each individual know what the mutual endeavor is?
- Do they know what outcome we are aiming for, and what we will count as success?
- Do they know which parts of the mutual enterprise they can contribute to?
- Do they know what specific contribution is expected from them?
- Can they initiate their contribution and decide independently what and when to do, or must they wait for signals or hand-offs before they act? Who gives them what signals to trigger their contribution?
- Do they have the authority and/or permission to do what is needed to make their contribution? If not, who authorizes their action, and how does this take place?
- Do they know whose contribution is "downstream" from this participant – that is, dependent on this participant's action or communication? How do they communicate/negotiate/ decide regarding their requirements of each other?
- Can they see the results of their actions in a way that enables them to continue or accurately correct what they are doing?

Leading requires ensuring the right people are called upon to make the right contributions, for example:

- Who are the "key players", if any? Key players are participants whose contribution is crucial to the success of the mutual endeavor; if they do not succeed at making their contribution, the mutual endeavor will be significantly compromised or will fail altogether.
- What is needed from the key players? What do the key players need – resources, tools, information, permissions, etc. – in order to succeed? Do they have what they need? If not, how will what they need be provided?

- Who are the contributors? Contributors are participants whose contribution is not individually make-or-break, but which cumulate into success or failure. Do they have what they need to make their contribution successfully?

Leading requires ensuring the individual efforts are aligned and coordinated:

- Are actual, meet-together-to-get-work-done teams required for this mutual endeavor? If so, who must be on them? What specific tasks is the team expected to accomplish? How will each team be led? (Note that each team should be thought of as engaging in its own mutual endeavor, which contributes to the larger – thus, all these leadership considerations apply to each team as well.)
- How must the contributions of each team or individual align to accomplish the mutual endeavor? How will this alignment be ensured? Will each team or individual monitor their own alignment and self-correct? If so, how do they get the performance feedback required for this? If not, who will monitor the alignment and how will they ensure correction occurs as needed?

Leading requires ensuring participants are capable of contributing at the level required:

- Do they have the knowledge and skills to make their contribution? If not, how will they be supported in succeeding – coaching, mentoring, training, teaming with more capable participants?
- Do any key players lack the knowledge or skill to succeed? If so, do you replace them, support them or develop their capacities?
- Do many contributors lack the knowledge or skill to succeed? If so, do you change the mutual enterprise in some way to reflect their actual abilities, or do you develop or support their performance in some way?

Leading requires focusing on the motivation of the participants:

- Do they see the mutual endeavor as inherently worthwhile, so their contribution is to something they value?
- Do they see their contribution as directly contributing to the worthwhile mutual endeavor?
- Does their participation give them a direct opportunity to satisfy some of their intrinsic motivations, e.g. for achievement, problem-solving, teamwork or service?
- Does their contribution enable them to meet some of their basic needs, e.g. for money, recognition, standing in their social unit, authority? Does it enable them to avoid an undesirable outcome, e.g. loss of "face", loss of eligibility, letting the team down, demotion, missing out on a reward?

Leading may require focusing on capacity in addition to current competence if the mutual endeavor is not a one-time or short term matter, but rather extends or is repeated over substantial time:

- Are there perspectives or skills needed for the mutual endeavor that are

generally underdeveloped or in short supply? If so, how will you develop or acquire these capacities?

- Does each individual have someone who takes an active interest in their success and development over time?
- Does each individual have a development path which will enable them to expand their capacity to contribute? Are resources available and adequate to follow this developmental path successfully?

The above list is meant to be expansive; it is not meant to be final or complete. Note that all the above is "generic" in the sense that it applies to leading any organization in any mutual endeavor. But it is not an arbitrary list of considerations: it is directly derived from our definition of leading and leadership. Accordingly, it may well serve as a launching pad from which to develop a very detailed and specific assessment of the leadership challenge and/or the leadership effectiveness of actual leaders one may be called upon to coach.

Aspects of Leadership Coaching

What exactly qualifies someone to be a Leadership Coach? Looking at what we have said about leading in the modern organization, one might expect that coaching leaders would not be simple, and that is very much the case. Specifically, a Leadership Coach must have masterful grasp of:

- The creation and implementation of organization strategy (including vision, mission, values, goals, etc.)
- Making aspirations real
- Goal setting and prioritizing
- Team creation and team leading
- Group and team dynamics
- Business relationships – individual and group, internal and external
- Financial and technical realities of business
- Communication, in particular authentic self-presentation, hearing, and dialogue
- Sustainable living (beyond "balance")
- Articulating principles and acting on them
- Intrinsic motivations and how to work with them
- Himself or herself in relation to working with others
- Leadership

Obviously, this is a formidable set of requirements and it probably is not complete. But consider: would you trust the development of your organization's most important leaders – or your own leadership – to someone who did *not* have mastery of one of these?

This may seem overwhelmingly complex – and it is, if you think you need to know all this at once in every case, feed it back to the person you are coaching, and try to work on all of it. But of course, that's not how coaching – or leading – works. The reason Leadership Coaches need to have all this complexity available is the same reason a physician needs expertise and available tests covering the full

range of the body: So that in any particular instance, one can zero in accurately and exactly on what this specific person needs. Leadership Coaches need to know what all the keys to leading are, so they can help actual leaders find and use the keys to their actual situation.

Acknowledgements

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