Leadership: A Protean Institution of the Mind and of Civilization

Pierce Bassett

Brigham Young University

As the inherent nature of leadership is continuously redefined in contemporary society, there is accentuating emphasis placed on its utilization and comprehension. The primary objective of this analysis is to examine this emphasis on leaders in the 20th and 21st centuries. This paper explores the study of specific styles, differences, and examples of leaders within several communities and throughout history. Further studies into the development of leadership processes based on consideration from this analysis have the potential for the synthesis of ultramodern techniques in the advancement of ethics, diversity, and communication in all facets of leadership positions.

Leadership has been a universal constant in terms of power, tyranny, and progress in the edification of some of the world's most dominant and vast human societies. Though there is no single, universally recognized definition or standard of leadership across time, it is still one of the paramount aspects of any organization, and as such often represents the difference between success and failure (Qadri, 2016, p. 1). Within the juggernaut of historical and modern research on contemporary models of leadership, there exists comprehensive traits that have consistently manifested themselves in nearly all leaders from this century and the last. Effective traits of leaders can include initiative, leadership motivation and the importance of knowledge (Kirkpatrick & Edwin, 1991, p. 48). As a student who started his education at Utah Valley University, and as a member of this modern sense of community, my perspective on leadership is one of fluidity, primarily dependent upon the adjustability of the leader's character as well as his or her ethical disposition. These traits illustrate the necessity for diversity amongst a broad spectrum

of those in influential leadership positions as well as my perspective as to why leaders need the flexibility to communicate efficiently within appropriate contexts.

Fluidity of Ethics in Leaders

The ethical perspective of an effective leader needs to be fluid. I define fluidity as the ethical awareness of other perspectives and of the influences of context as well as the willingness of a leader to alter his or her course of action consequently. In ancient and contemporary societies, there are inherently evil and good leadership motifs and techniques. Leadership is illustrated in polar extremes throughout history—in politically and socially absolutist figures like Adolf Hitler and in benevolent and ethically fluid leaders such as Abraham Lincoln. Both are model examples of leaders, yet the stark ethical differences between them are staggering. Hitler's leadership style was one determined by racial bigotry, and his actions against the victims of that hate while in a position of authoritative leadership have forever stained the history of the world. Hitler's principle view of racial supremacy was unethical, and his rudimentary and specific moral schema did not allow for the influences of outside perspective and context. On the other hand, Abraham Lincoln, considered one of the greatest presidents in American history, "rose to political visibility by moral argument" (Miller, 2002, p. 401). When Lincoln became president, he inherited the executive office with virtually no executive economic climate of a then divided United States. Abraham Lincoln displayed fluid leadership styles and ethical values towards extremely controversial issues such as emancipation and race, which allowed for the establishment of an ameliorated and unified post-Civil War America (Ross, 2009, p. 382). While these men were both undoubtedly impressive leaders, Hitler's implementation of a grotesque ethical agenda, obscured by narcissistic rage and delusion (Redlich, 1999), repudiates any personal classification standard of a true leader. Conversely, Abraham Lincoln's example helped set a standard of leadership for how I recognize leadership.

Ethics are required of a leader to build trust with their constituency. A leader who is aware and understands their constituents establishes this trust. Presently, politicians represent some of the most recognizable public figures and are continually thrust into a system of meticulous

scrutiny aiming to analyze their systems of leadership, and thus, their code of moral ethics. Public servants and politicians elected to positions of leadership on a community level agree to a relationship of trust with those whom they represent. However, bureaucratic politics is now often associated with unscrupulous policies and personal standards (Velasquez, Manuel, Moberg, & Cavanagh, 1983, p. 68). This encroachment of ethical values bastardizes the agreement of trust with the community of which they are serving and, to me, is a fatal vice for any sort of successful leadership formulation. A contemporary paradigm of this bastardization is former President Richard Nixon. Nixon demonstrated a high system of unethicality and disregard for the law by essentially attempting to manipulate the results of the presidential election in 1972. The direct result of this strictly unethical behavior was Nixon's impeachment in 1974.

These analyses substantiate that an exemplary standard of ethical disposition should be continuously adaptable within appropriate contexts, which is a mandatory aspect, from my perspective, of all prominent leadership positions. Adaptability is vital within leaders and involves both awareness and trust.

Diversity in Leaders

Because leadership has now become an intrinsic aspect of many organizations, it is essential for collective diversity amongst all forms of leaders. Diversity is a premise on modern western cultural values and thus should be represented by our leaders (Mcdaniels, Cathy, & Kelly, 2009). "The joining of the two bodies of theory and research—one pertaining to leadership and the other to diversity—enriches both domains of knowledge and provides guidelines for optimizing leadership in contemporary organizations and nations" (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 216). In this analysis, diversity includes different aspects of culture, gender, and race. With the incorporation of diversity within leadership, the world has transformed toward a predominately advantageous system of integration. Fluid, modern, conceptualization of social amalgamation allows for the discovery and implementation of unique methodologies within leadership (Chen & Velsor, 1996, p. 286). These leadership techniques include improved interpersonal conflict resolution across previously insurmount-

able ethnic and cultural barriers, which have stimulated international business relations. This miracle of cross-cultural synergism, synthesized from the assimilation of leadership and culture (Schein, 2004), has promoted an unprecedented growth and flexibility of diversity within leadership positions.

As well as promoting multinational business, diversity in leaders is essential in utilizing the differences of leadership methodologies present in men and women. In the past, men have often held the majority of leadership positions (Bryman, 2011). However, recent studies have shown that when contrasted in synonymous leadership positions with their male counterparts, women demonstrated a more dominant, gender-determinant leadership technique, known as transformational leadership (Bernard et al., 1996, p. 5). Implication of transformational leadership methodology by women in leadership positions is directly proportional to "validity generalized over longitudinal and multisource designs" (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755), which has the potential to produce forward-looking results for women in future leadership positions who excel in all aspects of their inherent leadership style (Eagly et al., 2003, p. 570).

Growing up in a predominately conservative and Caucasian demographic, I have encountered minimal exposure to diversity amongst leaders. Hence, when I began my university career in an environment of diversity within administration, faculty, and peers at Utah Valley University, I ascertained a distinct and humanizing impression of the value that the diversity and cultural fluidity within leadership holds, particularly within an academic setting.

Communication

Growing up, I was a member of the Boy Scouts of America. Within my scout group, we were often required to assume leadership roles. From the ages of twelve to eighteen years old, I cycled through a variety of leadership positions that, although often in an informal setting, instilled first-hand knowledge and experiences in me as to the importance of communicational qualities that are required of any leader. I learned communicational skills in the Boy Scouts by composing weekly emails of upcoming activities for the members and their parents, and through

corresponding with venue owners regarding potential outings. This early exposure to communication within leadership has played a defining role in shaping my perspective into what it is today.

Effective communication in leaders is the ability to successfully transmit a message, appreciate and understand situational tone, and to convey oneself in a way that will be clearly received by others (Barrett, 2006). Fluidity in communication is vital for any leaders to diversify their sphere of influence (Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010, p. 367). As a university student, and especially when working with my professors, I have come to recognize the necessity for successful communication. In addition to wielding an impressive reservoir of knowledge, professors responsible for the education of university-level students can only achieve genuine success with adaptable and masterful styles of communication. Through my personal experiences with different professors, I have witnessed a plethora of leadership styles. These represent a proportional relationship to the degree of effectiveness of the communicational styles used and the success of the class. One important observation worth noting is when professors exhibit accomplished and adaptive communication styles, both in a lecture setting as well as outside of the classroom, students achieve improved grades in a difficult subject matter. Although no type of professor or instructor offers a quintessential example of fluid communication within their leadership style, there still exists a definitive correlation between those who show the necessary development and utilization of their communication techniques and the improved results from their students (Reeves, 2008).

Implementations of Perspective Leadership

Leadership is a paramount aspect of any successful organization. From the perspective of a university student, leadership such as this is achieved primarily with the utilization of a fluid style of multi-faceted aspects such as diversity amongst those in leadership positions, the ethical values upheld by them, and the ability of leaders to be able to adjust communicational styles based on situational context. Due to the proven results found in the implementation of fluid leadership methodologies, leadership professionals may be able to generate new techniques and procedures that have the potential to revolutionize modern leadership roles.

References

Barrett, D. (2006). *Leadership communication.* Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., & Atwater, L. (1996). The transformational and transactional leadership of men and women. *Applied Psychology 45*(1), 5-34. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.1996.tb00847.x

Bryman, A. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of leadership.* London: SAGE.

Chen, C. C., & Velsor, E. V. (1996). New directions for research and practice in diversity leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly 7*(2), 285-302. doi:10.1016/s1048-9843(96)90045-4

De Vries, R. E., Bakker-Pieper, A. & Oostenveld, W. (2010). Leadership = communication? The relations of leaders' communication styles with leadership styles, knowledge sharing and leadership outcomes. *Journal of Business and Psychology 25*(3), 367-80. doi:10.1007/s10869-009-9140-2

Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: A meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological Bulletin 129*(4), 569-91. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.4.569

Eagly, A. H., & Lau Chin, J. (2010). Diversity and leadership in a changing world. *American Psychologist 65*(3), 216-24. doi:10.1037/a0018957

Judge, T. A., & Piccolo, R. F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology 89*(5), 755-68. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.755

Kirkpatrick, S. A., & Locke, E. A. (1991). Leadership: Do traits matter? *Academy of Management 5*(2), 48-60. Accessed November 29, 2016. doi:10.5465/ame.1991.4274679

Mccroskey, J. C., Booth-Butterfield, S., & Payne, S. K. (1989). The impact of communication apprehension on college student retention and success. *Communication Quarterly 37*(2), 100-07.

McDaniels, C., Kelly, W., & Kelly, J. (2009). Diversity handbook: Implementing a diversity initiative in state, provencial, and territorial psychological associations. *PsycEXTRA Dataset.* doi:10.1037/e560652012-001

Miller, W. L. (2002). *Lincoln's virtues: An ethical biography.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Qadri, M. A. (2016). The concept of applied leadership in the contemporary world. *Journal of Education and Practice 7*(4), 17-23.

Redlich, F. C. (1999). *Hitler: Diagnosis of a destructive prophet.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Reeves, D. B. (2008). *Reframing teacher leadership to improve your school.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Ross, D. (2009). Lincoln and the ethics of emancipation: Universalism, nationalism, exceptionalism. *Journal of American History 96*(2), 379-99. doi:10.1093/jahist/96.2.379

Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership.* 4th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Velasquez, M., Moberg, D. J., & Cavanagh, G. F. (1983). Organizational statesmanship and dirty politics: Ethical guidelines for the organizational Politician. *Organizational Dynamics 12*(2), 65-80. doi:10.1016/0090-2616(83)90034-7