

Leadership Philosophy Paper

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Leadership can be ambiguous and difficult to define. The variety of approaches and beliefs about leadership present in our global society has led to the ambiguity of the definition of the term leadership, and what individuals prefer out of a leader. To reflect this variety in my practice and see the ambiguity of the definition as a strength I can look to the theories about leadership, such as the leadership identity model, authentic leadership, servant leadership, intersectionality, and culturally relevant leadership learning. This is not a complete list of theories that can be used or will be used in my practice but are the theories that resonated with me as well as the theories I think that will challenge me to be more open-minded and inclusive. I will explore those theories first and conclude with my philosophy of leadership.

Leadership Identity Model

The leadership identity model is a stage-based model developed by Komives, Longersbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen (2006). This model identifies six stages that represent the development of leadership: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis (p. 407-411). I would like to apply the leadership identity model to my experience as a working undergraduate student to demonstrate how a model can apply to student's experience in the workplace. Stage one: I became aware I had leadership potential during an internship when I assisted my manager in dealing with an employee conflict. Stage two: I explored and engaged in ways that I could be a supportive leader within my group as well as how I could follow the goals of our organization. Stage three: Because I was able to help my manager resolve our work group conflict, I was asked to be a team leader. Stage four: I moved into stage four, leadership differentiated by recognizing some

on my team were struggling and asking how I could help these employees improve. Stage five: I began the generativity stage by mentoring my co-workers and showing them some of my “best practices” that allowed me to meet deadlines consistently. For example, sharing templates for emails to avoid mistakes and sharing how I managed the days where my workload meant I would stay late. Stage six: I gained confidence in my U.S. internship and when was asked to set up the recruiting best practices in the London office I knew I could do so confidently and collaboratively. This model allows me to see how I gained experience with leadership, however in practice we know that development does not always follow a stage model. Therefore, we need other theories and models to support our understanding of the variety of ways leadership is experienced in our world. I also recognize that many of the themes present in this model support a Eurocentric idea of leadership and it will need to be used with other theories to inform my practice.

Authentic Leadership

What does it mean to be authentic? Again, this is a difficult term to define. The fact that terms used to describe leadership styles are also ambiguous increases the complexity of defining leadership. Many people associate authenticity with honesty and integrity; the idea that you are true to yourself and honest with others. Dugan (2018) notes, “Authentic leadership is also novel in its attempt to situate itself as an underlying and requisite part of all prosocial theories of leadership (e.g. servant, transformational, social change model)” (p. 258). I see authenticity as bringing your honest self to the situation and displaying empathy and care about those you are supporting by listening and acting when needed. I plan to be authentic with students and share my vulnerability through telling stories. One way I feel that I can relate to students is through the

story of my struggle to finish my undergraduate degree. I did not do it in four years like I had planned but in the end I found a path that gave me the money to pay for school, gained global work experience, and the realization that when I am committed to a goal I will find a way to accomplish it. This story shows I stayed true to my authentic self; the girl I saw as someone who refused to be one of the statistics that started college but did not finish.

I also believe that there is value in learning what authentic means to our students in context of either global, local, or campus settings. Encouraging students to share stories of what authenticity means to them can help me become a more authentic leader in practice. I can begin to incorporate some of their approaches to authentic leadership into my leadership toolbox. However, I also think as leadership educators we need to know when and what is appropriate to share with students. Sometimes students will not be ready to discuss a topic and we must be prepared to support them in the ways that they prefer. In his book *The Invitation to Love: Recognizing the gift despite pain, fear, and resistance*, Pierre (2015) shares, “I believe we have to assess the values, patterns, and behaviors of an individual and make an honest assessment of his or her capacity to handle the truth of the situation before we share” (p. 119). I think that this will be a challenge, but authentic leadership can help me support students if I focus on listening and asking questions about the challenges they face and the supports they need to become authentic leaders in their lives.

As educators we will have to keep in mind that authentic leadership theories can be problematic. Dugan (2018) states “Honesty, ethics, integrity and a concern for others are used to ground the conceptualization of morality but ultimately reflect a set of normative assumptions.

Who has the power to define these terms” (p. 284)? This means that we have to be cautious of the ways that our approach to authenticity supports the dominant narrative on leadership. It can create a false dichotomy of entirely authentic or entirely inauthentic and tends to be leader-centric (Dugan, 2018, p. 259).

Servant Leadership

I felt a connection between authentic leadership and servant leadership. Kiersch & Peters (2017) believe:

Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, acting in accordance with values, balanced and unbiased decision-making and building trust-based relationships...Servant leadership adds a focus on follower's growth and empowerment, a sense of community stewardship, and further emphasis on ethics, humility and moral behavior. (p.149)

The idea of connecting these theories to create a self-authored philosophy of leadership is empowering. It also is represented in my life in my husband, Phillip, and his work. I interviewed him for a reaction paper and found that I can see that servant leadership is appealing to me as a leadership style. The fact that in practice it allows for Phillip to hold a positional place of leadership, but not be defined by that position resonates with me. He is able to be a servant to others and demonstrate that they are a team when it comes to solving problems and working to improve behaviors. He also feels that when other leadership styles are required, he is still being a servant leader by upholding the goals of his organization (community). By tying the need for corrective action to the betterment of the whole he is promoting growth for the organization AND the person. To be ready to be a servant leader, I will need to improve my patience for others to enact change. I can relate to the statement, “If only someone would do____, they would fix this problem. Why can't they just do ____?” To avoid this, I will need to consider

what things could be roadblocks to their growth that I am unaware of. Is it something I am doing? Is it something withing our group/system/organization? Exploring these questions will allow me to focus on how I can support someone instead of how I can solve their problem.

Servant leadership can focus the leader on the community and be a positive leadership style, however in practice educators need to be cautious of the ways that servant leadership romanticizes leadership, can be disproportionately focused on the process of leadership rather understanding the complexity of the goal, perpetuates the heroic leader myth and savior complex, reinforces dominant norms and limits students agency (Dugan, 2018, p. 215-218).. In order to dismantle the dominant norms from my servant leadership style I will need to challenge the dominant norm by using critical theories, such as intersectionality.

Intersectionality

Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) define intersectionality as, “the study of intersections between minority and disenfranchised groups specifically studying the interactions of multiple systems of oppression.”(p. 22) In her study on Black female leadership, Meriwether (2018) provides a clear example of how intersectionality is intertwined in Black women’s daily lives and how that molds their relationship with leadership. Meriwether (2018) found:

Five major themes surfaced from the interviews: (a) leadership for Black women can be difficult, (b) leadership learning began at home and in their community, (c) being Black and female is beautiful but hard to navigate at times, (d) giving back to the community and helping others progress is why you lead, and (e) seeing other Black women leading was impactful for them and their belief that they could be leaders. (Meriwether, 2018, p. 98-99)

These themes speak to the need for leadership educators to listen to, empathize with, and understand how and what motivates Black women to take on leadership roles. When studying Black women in leadership roles this term, I was able to see how intersectionality plays such a large role in the life of Black women, but came to understand through the variations in their stories that their individual experiences while appearing similar on the outside upon closer inspection reveal that individuals can internalize thoughts, feelings, and experiences quite differently (Meriwether, 2018, p. 100). It will be important in my practice to understand that while some experiences appear to be the same, some students will not feel the same way about those experiences. This reminds me of the fact that the saliency of identity will vary from individual to individual given context, the individual's belief systems, and the potential for multiply marginalized identities.

Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning

Leadership theory in the United States has been heavily influenced by Western Culture which has resulted in non-Western ways of leadership being misunderstood and is often seen as having less value from a Western perspective. This has resulted in many minoritized groups being left out of the conversation on leadership and seen as incapable of performing certain leadership duties. We know this is true as, for example in the United States, while there are increasing numbers of women in top leadership roles thanks to a change in presidency this year, no woman has become president. We have a history of women running, but they have not won. I think this is because there is still a pervasive myth that women cannot perform in top leadership roles. If we look at top leadership roles in higher education more women are obtaining advanced degrees in education, but they are not represented in top leadership roles in higher education institutions (Whitford, 2020). Culturally relevant leadership learning will allow me to look at the context of

leadership from the point of view of someone in a different culture and recognize how leadership styles are different or similar. In practice I can look to deepen my understanding of approaches that are not Eurocentric in order to better understand how a culture relates to leadership and how that translate into supporting those students in their leadership journey on campus.

Because the United States and other Western nations follow similar leadership styles this has meant that global leadership styles have been influenced by Eurocentric ideals, sometimes in positive ways and sometimes in negative ways. Anthony Jr. (2018) states, “A fundamental component of globalization, Quijano (2000) defined Eurocentrism as “the social classification of the world’s population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality” (p.42). “Furthermore, Sayyid posited Eurocentric logic is sustained by Western culture being accepted as the center (i.e., the universal example), and is dismantled when the West is not acknowledged as a universal truth” (Anthony Jr., 2018, p. 42). Culturally relevant leadership learning has three main components: windows and doors (intrapersonal experiences); and the foundation (interpersonal experiences) (Anthony Jr., 2018, p. 42-43). By examining a students relationship with the windows, doors, and foundation we can dismantle the power structures that are supporting Eurocentric ways of knowing and begin to become socially just leadership educators who “...support the navigation of marginalized students through systemically oppressive, Eurocentric environments” (Anthony Jr., 2018, p. 54). As a leadership educator, an important part of my practice will be to actively work to dismantle Eurocentric power structures by using theories such as culturally relevant leadership learning to amplify minoritized voices. For example, if I become accepted into a graduate program that is designing international online learning spaces, I can use culturally relevant learning to challenge

the Eurocentric ideals present in campus programming and curriculum. “Ironically, universities have always been framed as a site for egalitarianism. The landscape of oppression and inequality continues to impact different educational, socio-economic and political discourses which reinforce the assertion of normative hierarchies at the expense of people of color” (Arday, 2019, p. 141-142). Culturally relevant leadership learning will allow me to better support the university, faculty, staff, and students in creating an egalitarian learning environment.

My Thoughts on Leadership

When we started the term, I defined leadership as: Leadership is demonstrating expected behaviors in an effort to respectfully guide others in your area of expertise. It can be in a corporate setting, school, and at home. In my opinion, leaders are not attempting to control someone but attempting to guide and help someone else be the best version of themselves. Leaders provide support and constructive feedback when appropriate. I would now add that leadership is not just about the positional leader but the relationship between leaders and followers; leadership involves the group working together to reach a common goal and; leadership looks different in global, local, and campus settings and as educators we need to commit to learning about leadership from a global, local, and campus setting. I am using the terms local and campus to make a distinction between how leaders work with the community off campus and how leaders are working on campus as I believe sometimes this will look different. My philosophy on leadership would be that there is no one version of leadership that will fit all. Certain contexts will require specific styles of leadership, whether they are more authoritarian or democratic. There are a variety of leadership styles. The ambiguity of the definition and

practices of leadership can be a strength when considering how to dismantle the power structures that influence an individual's relationship with leadership.

I am feeling more optimistic about the future of leadership in the United States, as our President-Elect, Joe Biden, has appointed one of the most diverse cabinets in history. My hope is that the diverse representation that our students see in these leadership roles will allow them to see themselves in leadership roles, whether it is a formal leadership role in an organization, or leading their friends and family to become involved in a movement that is important to them. Leadership has felt like a scary word to me at times. I have discounted my leadership skills in the past and understand how students could feel intimidated or hesitant to consider themselves leaders. In my family, I try to demonstrate leading with civility and collaboration. I can see the positive affect it has on how my children resolve conflict with each other and their peers. My hope is that as an educator I can help make the idea of leadership less intimidating and help students realize that leadership is something they have been doing in their daily lives, there are different ways to lead, that following is as important as important as leading, and that they see themselves represented in leadership positions that are important to them. Leadership education is a lifelong process and committing to the continued pursuit of leadership knowledge is vital to my practice.

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