Personal Philosophy of Leadership: Part 3

Final

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Abstract

Leadership is first and foremost a humanistic skill. It is a skill because it consists of a graded series of cognitive processes, actions, and behaviors directed toward a goal, and all of these can be learned, developed, and improved with practice. It is humanistic because it inspires others to work toward a common goal and functions best using processes which demonstrate commitment to improving the long-term welfare of those working in the group, of the wider circle of immediate stakeholders, and of humanity in general. The cognitive processes begin with knowledge, with the skill of gathering information, understanding the facts of a situation, and reasoning with them in a deep and rational way. They also encompass the skills of creative thinking, rearranging the facts into novel and useful frameworks, of judgment, reasoning under conditions of complexity and uncertainty when the facts are incomplete, and of intuition, drawing on the trans-rational components of human intellection. The actions begin with vision, synthesizing the knowledge and information into a picture of the desired future state and planning what must be achieved by the leader, the group, or the organization in order to reach that goal. The vision must then be communicated in such a way that other people will come to share it and work towards seeing it realized, hopefully with commitment and dedication. This requires specialized verbal and nonverbal communication skills which allow the leader to reach people through word and emotion, inspire them, and influence what they do. Leadership behaviors are complex sequences of actions which also enable progress towards the goal. Behaviors include analyzing variables related to the environment and situation and adjusting leadership style to best utilize the qualities of the followers and the situation. They include using social and emotional intelligence to guide complex interpersonal interactions in working groups and direct emotional responses into productive rather than disruptive channels. Behaviors also

include a delicate balancing process which encourages participation and contribution from group

members, so the group feels more creative, valued, relevant, and committed to the final decision,

while still deriving full benefit from the deeper knowledge and wider experience of the leader in

the decision making process. Finally, leadership behaviors include self-awareness, self-analysis,

and self-improvement. The leader must be aware of and apply his core values, ethics, and beliefs,

must analyze and measure his capability in using leadership skills, and must commit to using

education, training, practice, and lessons from his own experience to improve his performance.

We live in an ever more complex world. The essence of leadership is the ability to discern and

understand the technical complexity, social complexity, cultural complexity, and ethical

complexity of a situation and integrate that knowledge into a plausible model which can guide

the way forward and inspire others to join the journey.

Introduction

One of the important characteristics that has made *Homo sapiens* the most successful species in the history of planet earth is our ability to work together to achieve goals that are beyond the capacity of any one individual. Since the hunter gatherer groups of fifty thousand years ago, people have been combining efforts and sharing in the outcome, so the team is a natural unit that humans use to leverage their combined abilities into greater accomplishments (Robbins and Finley, 2000). However, the simple fact of assembling a group of people does not create a team because:

- Members may not understand or agree on the goals of the team

- Members may not understand their roles or what they are required to do

- Members may have personality conflicts and quarrel over disagreements

- Members may not trust each other

- Members receive no feedback on whether their actions are effective and useful

- Members may not keep track of the direction and progress of the whole group

Unless these issues are addressed, the group is as likely to degenerate into a chaotic mob or simply fall apart as to accomplish anything. The "glue" which fills these gaps and molds a group into a team or a crowd into a community is designated *leadership*, and it is one of the most important functions of the human character. Without leadership, the innate human tendency to synergistically amplify effectiveness by combining the abilities of multiple individuals would fail for lack of organization, and our outcomes would be limited to what one person can accomplish alone.

So exactly what is leadership? After more than 60 years of study into the theory and practice of leadership, there still is no consensus definition. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart

once famously wrote in regard to pornography, "I shall not today further attempt to define the

kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description, and perhaps I

could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it" (Stewart, 1964). In a

similar fashion, leadership means different things to different people. Certainly leadership is

intimately linked to interactions and processes that occur within groups. As summarized in

Northouse (2010), some researchers have argued that leadership arises out of *traits* and

personality characteristics possessed by certain unique and talented individuals. Others have

conceptualized leadership as a set of *behaviors* leaders use to induce changes in a group. Another

approach views leadership in terms of a *power relationship* existing between leaders and group

members, where the manipulation of leadership power brings about change. One recent group of

scholars has focused on *transformational leadership*, the use of motivation, inspiration, and

morale to redesign the perceptions and values of the group and produce change. A final group

has argued for a *skills* perspective where knowledge and capabilities enable the actions and

behaviors that constitute leadership.

By seeking underlying concepts that can unify the differing viewpoints, Northouse (2010)

identifies the core components of leadership as: "(a) Leadership is a process, (b) leadership

involves influence, (c) leadership occurs in groups, and (d) leadership involves common goals"

(Location 242, Kindle edition). This leads to the definition "Leadership is a process whereby an

individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." While elegant and

compact, this definition seems somehow incomplete. Since the start of the course, I have been

trying to identify what is missing, and I finally found it in Yukl's (2010) slightly more extensive

definition of leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what

needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts

to accomplish shared objectives" (p.8). This definition places more explicit emphasis on the mutuality of processes between leaders and group members, on the sharing of knowledge, on agreement about vision, and on facilitating and developing collective efforts rather than enforcing a single viewpoint. Because it focuses more directly on the transactional nature of leadership, on the dignity and abilities of all group members, and (implicitly) on the potential of all group members to learn the necessary skills and become leaders themselves, this is my preferred definition of leadership to be used for the purposes of the paper.

Leadership Core Values

Core values form the foundation of leadership. Successful leadership requires authenticity. As defined by Gardner et al. (2005), "authenticity involves both *owning* one's personal experiences (values, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs) and *acting* in accordance with one's true self (expressing what you really think and believe and behaving accordingly)" (p. 344-345). Seeing congruence between a leader's deeply held values and his actions builds trust and confidence in the group and communicates those values to group members by demonstrating them in action. A key factor in the development of authenticity is self-awareness and personal insight in the leader. To be true to himself, a leader must define his concept of what is desirable and admirable in human actions, develop normative standards for evaluating people, events, situations, and actions, and apply those standards to guide behavior that fulfills the needs of individuals, the group, and the larger community. These values become an integral component of the self and must be resistant to social or situational pressures to violate or compromise them (Gardner et al., 2005).

Many sources present long lists of possible values, for example, the Assignments section of our course management system, and some also describe systems, such as paired comparison

ratings, to help decide which values are most important to a particular person (Kerns, 2004).

After considerable thought and working one of these instruments, I will list my leadership core

values as:

1. Integrity. Keep your promises, and demonstrate consistency in values, principles,
   actions, methods, and expectations. Make your intentions clear, honor personal
   and organizational values, and accept accountability for your decisions and
   actions. Nothing else will suffice to create the trust which forms the core of
   effective leadership and of effective functioning within groups.

2. Empathy. Understanding and vicariously experiencing the thoughts, feelings, and
   attitudes of other people is the key to emotional intelligence and to connecting
   with the intrinsic motivation of group members.

3. Fairness. Treat all group members equally and respectfully, with no hint of bias or
   injustice. Examine all information and points of view objectively and in depth.
   Nothing is more demotivating and destructive to group functioning than the
   perception that a process is unfair.

4. Intelligence. Both leadership and group performance require knowledge,
   gathering of facts and information, and reasoning in a logical way to correct
   conclusions. The capacity for learning, reasoning, and understanding is therefore
   valued in all group members, but especially in the leader.

5. Creativity. The ability to arrange information into novel patterns and develop
   concepts and objects which are original and worthwhile contributes both to group
   performance and to the ability to meet the challenges of leadership itself, enabling
   new and better solutions to the problems which arise.

6. Competency. A leader needs the knowledge, skills, and abilities to understand the group's work processes and to do the job properly as well as the determination and self-awareness to constantly assess and improve his leadership skills.

7. Wisdom. In addition to intelligence, the best leaders are able to draw on the trans-rational components of human mental process including judgment (the process of reasoning under uncertainty), insight, foresight, imagination, and tradition. This skill allows them to integrate contradictory signals, resolve paradoxes, and look beyond the rules of pure reason and logic so as to achieve vision.

Personal Leadership Beliefs

In analyzing his definition of leadership, Northouse (2010) states "Defining leadership as a *process* means that it is not a trait or characteristic that resides in the leader, but rather a transactional event that occurs between the leader and the followers. *Process* implies that a leader affects and is affected by followers. It emphasizes that leadership is not a linear one-way event, but rather an interactive event. When leadership is defined in this manner, it becomes available to everyone" (Location 242, Kindle edition). In a practical sense this "interactive event" is mediated by a graded series of cognitive processes, actions and behaviors which are directed toward a purpose and can be learned and developed over time. In fact, this is the definition of a *skill*. The skill works best when the purpose affirms the basic principle that all human beings have the right to seek meaning in and shape the direction of their own lives, and the goal therefore contributes to improving the welfare of the group, the immediate stakeholders, and the wider community. So I believe that good leadership is a *humanistic* skill.

In examining the implications of regarding leadership purely as a skill, Randell (2008) identified four core components that are essential for performing that skill: "gathering

information, giving information, influencing behavior, and handling emotion" (p. 1). Wise leadership begins with the cognitive process of gathering information, understanding the facts of a situation, and reasoning from them in a deep and meaningful way to synthesize a vision of the preferred future state and what needs to be done to get there (McKenna, Rooney, and Boal, 2009). The synthesis requires logical deduction, but may also require creativity, judgment, and insight as discussed above. Wise leadership continues with the action of giving information, as the leader communicates his vision to the group using specialized verbal and nonverbal (tone, stance, eye contact, gestures) motivational skills to influence understanding and agreement on what needs to be done and how to do it (Randell, 2008). The group's acceptance of this vision and commitment to move forward constitute the real decision about who leads. In this sense, I believe that all leadership is emergent and appointed leaders will not become legitimate or succeed in the long term unless they obtain such trust and commitment.

Facilitating individual and collective progress toward the objective requires further information giving, influencing behavior, and handling emotion. Group members need direction on how and in what order needed actions should be carried out, with the directions communicated in a way that supports and maintains their commitment to work for the group. Influencing behavior and handling emotion require emotional intelligence competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and motivation (Goleman, 2000). The way in which leaders use information, make decisions, manage change initiatives, relate to group members, and handle crises profoundly affects the success of the group. Goleman (2000) identifies six "leadership styles," each of which arises from different emotional intelligence dimensions and each of which works best in particular situations: coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching. From his research Goleman concludes "The best leaders don't know

just one style of leadership--they are skilled at several, and have the flexibility to switch between styles as the circumstances dictate" (p.1) and "the skills of emotional intelligence can be learned at any age" (p.13). Again this supports the skills perspective on leadership although I grant that many of the skills are difficult and time consuming to learn.

In a wider sense it seems to me that many theories of leadership are derived from the skills theory by repackaging a particular set of skills as the core component representing all of leadership. Goleman himself writes that emotion and social intelligence can be learned and developed (Goleman, 2000; Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008). Many of the traits discussed in trait theory can be identified to some extent in each person and then developed and extended by practice. Authentic leadership can be developed by careful introspection and soliciting feedback to acquire deeper self-awareness, and even the charisma and inspirational power of transformational leadership is based on psychomotor skills of interpersonal interaction which can be acquired, at least to some degree, by learning, practice, and perceptive feedback from teachers or colleagues. So I believe that even though some people possess innate talents and abilities that facilitate rapid development of outstanding leadership skills, everyone possesses qualities that can enable development of competent or even distinctive leadership skills, if s/he is willing to put in the time and effort to learn the techniques. I also believe that leadership credibility derives from demonstrating a good knowledge base, good decision making, good communication, and genuine concern for all group members and such credibility is confirmed only when group members grant the leader trust, respect, and personal (as opposed to positional) power.

My final belief, which is also to some degree an assumption, is that good leadership requires a set of ethics, moral principles which demonstrate that the leader values humane and virtuous outcomes (McKenna, Rooney, and Boal, 2009). As Thomas Jefferson wrote in the

Declaration of Independence, certain fundamental truths are self-evident, and first among these is the principle that all human beings are entitled to life, liberty, equality under the law, and self-determination. Those who violate these principles and treat other people as means to their own selfish ends are not good leaders, no matter how successful their organizations. Those who are unable to uphold their core values and choose the right, even when the consequences are difficult, are not good leaders.

Examples of Leadership

A leader who embodies almost all the principles I would like to emulate is Duke University Men's Basketball Coach Mike Krzyzewski. With well over 900 victories, Coach K has by far the most wins in Division I history, including four NCAA championships and 13 ACC championships. He also has one FIBA World Championship and four Olympic gold medals (two as assistant and two as head coach). He first learned about leadership at West Point where he was point guard on the basketball team under coach Bob Knight. After five years' service in the Army, he worked under Knight as an assistant coach at Indiana for one year before taking over as head coach at Army for five years, then moving to Duke University. Throughout his career, Coach K has said "I don't look at myself as a basketball coach. I look at myself as a leader who happens to coach basketball." (The American Leaders Network, 2007) He has written five books on leadership, and he teaches leadership at the Duke University Fuqua School of Business.

Coach K's first principle of leadership success is taking time to form a meaningful, trust-based personal relationship with each of his players. He talks about Duke Basketball as a family. His players from all eras uniformly praise him, and when he broke the record for most collegiate victories, more than 30 of his former players were in the stands. When an interviewer asked him "What's the single most important characteristic for coach to have," he replied "I think you have

to be trustworthy. You have to take the time to develop a relationship that's so strong with each individual player, and hopefully with the team, that they will trust you. They let you in [pointing to his heart], and if they let you in, you can teach." (Conley, 2011)

The second principle is an absolutely unassailable set of core values. Coach K believes in the concept of student athletes and wants to impart more than just basketball skills to the young men that he leads. In the 32 years he has been at Duke, there has never been a hint of scandal, and only two of his players who stayed the full four years have failed to graduate. Every player has an academic advisor, and anyone not making academic progress is not allowed to play. He would not allow his players to post their 1990 NCAA final four banner in their stadium until the last two members of that team graduated. He has turned down no less than five offers to coach in the NBA at enormous salaries. NBA All-Star Grant Hill put it very well when he said "The most important thing of all about Coach K is that he taught me the principles and values that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. Those principles and values transcend basketball. They can be a guide for success in whatever you do in life." (Yaeger, 2011)

Coach K is an adaptable leader who can adjust his strategy to different teams and situations. He has dealt with changes in the game of basketball such as the advent of the three-point shot and with the differing talents and personalities of his teams from year to year, always focusing on utilizing and developing their strengths while improving and compensating for their weaknesses (Eikenberry, 2011). In his work with the US World Championship and Olympic basketball programs, he has been challenged by teams filled with star NBA players used to high salaries and leading their own teams. Yet he has managed to motivate these individuals to play unselfishly and with maximum effort solely for the honor of team and country. He is not afraid to think outside the box and solicit suggestions from his teams. He once told an interviewer

"usually when you're ruled, you never agree with all the rules, you just abide by them. But if you have standards and if everyone contributes to the way you're going to do things, you end up owning how you do things." (McGregor, 2011)

Coach K believes in developing future leaders, and nine of his former players and assistant coaches have gone on to become head coaches at other universities while three of his former players currently work under him as assistant coaches at Duke. He also believes in giving back to the community and has been active in multiple charities including the Emily Krzyzewski Family Life Center (named for his mother) which assists low income students with programming designed to help them improve academic achievement, gain entrance to college, and break the cycle of poverty (The American Leaders Organization, 2007). He is also active in supporting the Duke Children's Hospital and the V Foundation for Cancer Research.

Another person who has demonstrated many practices of exemplary leadership is William H. (Bill) Gates, founder and long-time CEO of Microsoft Corporation. He began with a powerful vision and the courage to pursue it. His idea of a computer on every desktop, used by ordinary people rather than accessed through specialized technology professionals, was one of the founding paradigms of the information revolution. Although Steve Jobs at Apple had similar ideas, Gates was the one who inspired enough shared vision to bring it into reality. He dropped out of Harvard and took the risk of forming a company to pursue his dream full time, thereby challenging conventional process and showing what can be accomplished with intelligence, drive, and hard work, even without formal training (Crandall, 2005).

He modeled the way and led by example. He was fully conversant with the details of the software and its development, and participated directly in many key decisions about software architecture and coding during the early and middle phases of his career at Microsoft. He has

been criticized at times for his ferocious work ethic and sometimes hypercritical treatment of

subordinates. However, this was "authentic" leadership, and reflected his commitment to

innovate, expand the envelope, and make extraordinary new products available on a mass scale.

And like his contemporary Jobs, he felt those products had to be "right" according to his vision.

During the years of Gates' leadership, Microsoft invested roughly 15% of revenue in research

and development, preparing the way for that vision to grow into the future. He ultimately became

better able to work with and inspire others who shared his vision, empowering his employees and

giving them more freedom to develop new ideas. He learned about leadership from the

experiences of his career (Crandall, 2005; Life of Excellence, 2008; Yihan, n.d.).

As his work at Microsoft made him very wealthy, he took the opportunity to use his

resources in support of his core values and give back to a wider humanity. He founded the Bill

and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is currently endowed at $33.5 billion and has so far

awarded $26.7 billion in grants supporting public health and infectious disease research,

education initiatives, and agricultural/food production initiatives that benefit people all around

the world with special attention to improving conditions in poor countries. His work to improve

health, nutrition, and educational opportunity globally demonstrates his commitment to empower

millions of people to reach their full potential and lead more productive and satisfying lives. He

also remains active in other foundations supporting the use of technology to improve education

and skills development, and he maintains a connection to his core interest in software and

programming by serving in an advisory role as a "software architect" at Microsoft (Crandall,

2005; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).

Special Challenges in Becoming a Physician Leader

In the early part of the twenty first century, the medical profession faces one of the greatest challenges in its history, the need to dramatically improve healthcare quality and safety while controlling the unsustainably rapid rise in healthcare costs (Richardson, 2001). While strong physician leadership has never been more important, developing physician leaders remains extremely difficult, because physicians are, by their nature and training, poor leaders and poor followers. Most physicians spend eight to ten years in medical school and postgraduate training mastering a huge body of knowledge and a wide array of skills and procedures. In daily clinical practice, when they need something to happen, they most often have do it or write a detailed tactical plan (orders) for it themselves. Patients present with complex issues and expect the physician to rapidly supply correct, accurate and up to date information, even in life and death emergency situations. Physician performance is monitored ever more closely in terms of both quality and quantity of care (Jacobson, 2010).

As a result of their experiences, doctors feel uneasy about power, but are unwilling to cede power or control to others, because they are so accustomed to being held solely responsible for outcomes. They are used to telling people (patients and small clinical teams) what to do rather than inspiring and empowering them. They are highly analytical and have great problem solving skills, but are often less creative and imaginative. The circumstances of science and disease management often drive them to behave tactically and reactively, and they have less experience at seeing the broader picture or acting strategically. They are wary of expressing their own emotions and poor at manipulating symbols and vision to create organizational excitement (Smith, 2001). They are fiercely independent, often quite opinionated, and express distrust of

their colleagues who have accepted leadership positions (Jacobson, 2010). No wonder physicians find leadership problematic at best.

Conclusions

One of my goals in undertaking a Master's Degree program in medical informatics was to develop the skills to lead my physician colleagues in utilizing the power of advances in health information technology (HIT) and evidence-based medicine to solve the problem of improving healthcare quality while lowering costs. One position which offers the opportunity to do this is Chief Medical Informatics Officer (CMIO) in a healthcare organization. It remains for me to distill core values and beliefs into a functional set of leadership tenets which are fundamentally sound and can meet the special challenges of physician leadership. A CMIO:

- Must share a vision of how HIT can improve healthcare quality and affordability **AND** also improve physician efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction.

- Must always remember that although physicians are the frontline caregivers, their ability to help patients would be severely diminished without the resources provided by healthcare organizations.

- Must understand the laws, regulations, and constraints that govern how healthcare organizations must operate.

- Must participate in establishing information systems that organizations can implement and that physicians can understand and utilize.

- Must maintain in-depth, up to date knowledge of clinical medicine and health information systems

- Must collaborate with leaders from organizations' Information Technology and Administration Departments and encourage their participation in information systems that improve physician effectiveness and quality of care.

- Must collect and thoroughly analyze all relevant information before making a decision.

- Must recruit a team of strong people, empower them to use their own intelligence and creativity to contribute to fulfilling the vision, and advance their leadership skills by mentoring them and by modeling examples of leadership best practices.

- Must use social and emotional intelligence and relationship management to build workplace community, educate physician colleagues that some vital outcomes depend on group rather than individual performance, and overcome the intrinsic barriers that physicians feel between themselves and their leadership.

- Must establish clinical informatics as a career growth path and demonstrate the value of a CMIO in bridging the gap between clinical practitioners, information technology professionals, and healthcare operations personnel in a manner that increases organizational effectiveness and success.

The challenges faced by the healthcare sector in 2012 are both enormous and complex. In an era of ever increasing complexity and information overload, a successful leader will be the person who can discern most clearly and understand most deeply the technical, social, cultural and ethical complexities of the situation and integrate that knowledge into a model that guides his way forward.

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