Leadership Prescription Paradigms

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Abstract

The three most common paradigms used to develop leadership prescriptions are the empirical, biographical, and ideological. The empirical paradigm is subdivided into quantitative and qualitative versions. Similarly, there are two forms of the biographical paradigm: historical and autobiographical. The ideological paradigm involves an appeal to religious, spiritual, or ethical principles sometimes contained in a revered text. Understanding leadership prescription paradigms is useful to instructors and trainers because it makes explicit the underlying assumptions and limitations on practical applications.

Introduction

In developing, training or instructing potential leaders, it is first necessary to establish a set of criteria for what represents leadership and particularly good or effective leadership. Several sets of such criteria have been proposed in the past. An assessment of those criteria suggests that three dominant paradigms have emerged: empirical, biographical, and ideological. This statement is based on a review not only of scholarly attempts at developing prescriptions but also those found in the popular literature and in proprietary materials.

Paradigm, as used here, implies a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and methods that constitute a way of viewing reality for members of the community who share them. It can also be considered a philosophical and theoretical framework within which theories, laws, and generalizations are developed and methods used to verify or disprove them. Persons operating within a paradigm accept the assumptions, concepts, values, and methods and, in fact, may be unaware of them as they engage in their work. Unless made explicit, the nature of a paradigm is rarely understood or acknowledged.

The Empirical Paradigm

The empirical paradigm is the oldest in terms of modern leadership studies. There are two versions of this paradigm, the quantitative and the qualitative. The latter relies on the analysis of interview statements or case studies. The earliest version of the empirical paradigm consisted of the efforts of some scholars to list the traits of leaders. This "trait approach" is of limited use in developing leadership prescriptions because at least some of the traits may be inborn or developed very early in life and not subject to training or additional development (Northouse, 20004, 24). After the trait approach came studies of behaviors exemplified by the Ohio State University (Fleishman, 1951, 1953, 1957; Halpin & Winer, 1957; Hemphill, 1959) and University of Michigan studies (Likert, 1961; Likert, 1967). In those efforts, academicians made an effort to record, assess, and systematize the behaviors of persons in leadership positions. The findings were reduced to two key factors: an orientation toward goal or task and an orientation toward persons or process. Stogdill (1963) developed a short form of the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) that was used extensively in research and training. Eventually the results of those studies were developed into the Managerial Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1964) and then the Leadership Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1991) in which two dimensions of leadership formed the grid. The ideal leader was one who combined an orientation toward goal or task and toward process or persons.

An important empirical effort was that of Bass (1985) in developing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) which measure leader behaviors in seven areas: charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire behavior. These behaviors represent the elements of the Full Range of Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). There have been subsequent revisions to the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1992).

On the qualitative side and more recently, Kouzes and Posner (2002, 2005) used an interview and questionnaire methodology with a large sample of persons who had successfully engaged in some kind of leadership effort. As a result, Kouzes and Posner (2002) developed a model consisting of five practices and ten commitments, two for each practice. The sample used to create this model ranged across a variety of organizational types, included both women and men, and the subjects were in various levels in their organizations. The team of Kouzes and Posner also developed a Leadership Practices Inventory (2005).

Stanford-Blair and Dickmann (2005) interviewed thirty-six exemplary leaders with diversity in gender, culture, and experience. The subjects came from government, non-profit organizations, K-12 education, public health, foreign service, justice system, the hospitality industry, higher education, business, and fine and applied arts. Nations represented in the sample were Australia, Belgium, Ghana, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, New Zealand, Thailand, Singapore, and the United States. There were twenty-two men and fourteen women in the sample. Each participant was asked how did you come to, how do you conduct, and how do you sustain your leadership? The resulting model, the leadership coherence model, presents four points: coherence of value and purpose, coherence of congruent character and behavior, coherence of sustained capacity, and coherence of conduct. In brief, the descriptive paradigm, whether quantitative or qualitative, prescriptions can be generalized to: "Do as other or previous leaders have done and you will be successful."

An underlying assumption of the empirical paradigm is that data on behaviors, skills, styles, and practices can be acquired and systematized either by quantitative means, usually questionnaires but sometimes observation, or qualitatively through questionnaires or interviews. The focus is on the leader as an individual operating within a particular context. However, the results are often generalized to a wider range of situations.

An important feature of the empirical paradigm is that the empirical findings can be converted into an instrument to assess the states of students or trainees, and the results of such an evaluation can be compared to the ideal as developed from the data. Thus, individuals can be provided with specific information on behaviors, skills, or principles that they need to learn or acquire.

There are flaws in the descriptive paradigm. The most obvious is that the data are taken from observation or report on individuals who are in positions of authority. Thus, leadership is defined, de facto, as being in such a position. In addition, the Ohio State University and University of Michigan studies obtained data from all the persons in such positions in certain organizations without regard to whether or not they were considered to be effective or successful in their leadership activities. The data were also obtained almost entirely from males within organizational settings and not in communities, voluntary associations, or professional groups. The Kouzes and Posner (2202, 2005) work overcomes some of these objections by selecting people who successfully executed leadership attempts and across a wider ranger of settings and contexts than in previous studies. With the exception of the Stanford-Blair and Dickmann (2005) study, all of the prescriptive models in this paradigm are based on persons operating in

formal organizations. There are no models for persons in voluntary organizations such as associations, in communities, or in professions. There is also, in most cases, no attempt to distinguish between leadership and management.

A valuable aspect to the instructor or trainer using one of the outcomes from the descriptive paradigm is that individuals can have their behaviors, skills, styles, practices, and values assessed in some fashion and compared to the ideal as prescribed by a particular model. Further, it is believed that individuals can thereafter modify their behavior, skills, styles, practices, and values in the direction of the ideal.

The Biographical Paradigm

The biographical paradigm occurs most often in the popular literature and is extremely influential in terms of dissemination to persons who are in positions of leadership or wish to attain such positions, particularly in the corporate and governmental worlds. In this approach to developing criteria for leadership development the focus is on the behaviors, activities, and beliefs of a single individual. There are two versions of this paradigm, historical biography and autobiography. In the latter category are such relatively recent works as *Leadership* (Giuliani, 2002), *Wooden on Leadership* (Wooden, 2005), and *Leading with the Heart* (Krzeyzewski, 2003), the latter two being well known and successful basketball coaches. Their books deal, in fact, more directly with being a head basketball coach but publisher marketing efforts attempt to broaden the prescriptions to leadership in general and particularly in the corporate realm. Of the biographical sort, the most popular has been *Lincoln on Leadership* (Phillips, 1992), but there are others such as *John Kennedy on Leadership* (Barnes, 2005), *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way* (Gerber, 2003), and *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* (Roberts, 1987). Biographical prescriptions can be reduced to "Do as I have done and you will be successful" or "Do as this exemplar has done and you will be successful."

As with the empirical prescriptions, the directives in the biographical paradigm, autobiographical or biographical, come from persons already in positions of authority and, at least well known, if not always seen as successful. Furthermore, the basis for the prescription is based on experience in one particular kind of leadership context. Readers are expected to adopt the ways of the author or biographical figure through exhortation and the prescriptions are believed to be generalizable to a large variety of situations. Many of the biographical prescriptions include a sizable dose of admonitions about management rather than leadership. Prescriptions arising through the biographical paradigm are not

particularly adaptable to training and development programs but are intended for individual consumption. They can be used as readings, and discussions can be developed around them.

The Ideological Paradigm

In the ideological paradigm, leadership prescriptions are developed neither from observations of leaders nor from individual exemplars but rather from the base of a dogma. The term dogma is not used here pejoratively but in the sense of a set of principles, religious, spiritual, or ethical, from which prescriptions can be developed. Two types of ideological prescriptions occur. There are recommendations based on religious or spiritual texts such as the Christian Bible and the Tao Te Ching. However, another set of prescriptions arise out of ethical presuppositions such as principle-centered leadership (Covey, 1992) and authentic leadership (George, 2003).

Some of the most popular leadership books arise through the ideological paradigm. There are leadership bestsellers from John Maxwell (Maxwell & Ziglar, 1998; Maxwell, 1999; Maxwell, 2002) based heavily if not openly on Christian theology and doctrine. Both principle-centered and authentic leadership have been popular although not as widely disseminated as the Maxwell books. The principles of humanistic psychology were the basis of the work of Maslow which has been revived and republished (Maslow, 1998).

Two prescriptions openly espouse particular ideologies. Sanders (1994) produced a prescription based on Christian principles and doctrine and intended appropriately for use by missionaries. Sanders book regularly cites passages from the Christian Bible as support for and illustration of leadership principle. On an entirely different basis, Heider (2005) has developed a set of prescriptions for group leaders using the Tao Te Ching and the principles of Taoism. Using the Tao Te Ching as a template, Heider converted the statements from the original into guidance for leaders of small groups. Fundamentally, the ideological paradigm instructs followers do the right thing and you will lead successfully.

One version of the ideological paradigm usually involves a written source, often an ancient and revered text that represents the ideal. Persons operating within this paradigm assume that general leadership principles can be enunciated from the dogma contained in the source. There is also an assumption that moral or spiritual sources are to revered and believed, not questioned. In addition, leadership behaviors or leaders must be judged as good or evil depending on their adherence to the dogma.

Doctrinal prescriptions such as those from Christianity or Taoism are limited to the particular contexts in which the proponent suggests their use. Directives such as those espoused in the works on authentic or principle-centered leadership are intended to be applicable over a wide range of situations.

Prescriptions developed from dogmas are very powerful for those persons who share the ideology. However, the recommendations make little or no sense to those who are do not accept or even actively reject the underlying text. Furthermore ideological principles may not be effective in some situations but are often put forth as universal in application.

As with biographical prescriptions, adherents are exhorted to behave in certain ways. There usually is no means provided for assessment of existing values, beliefs, or behaviors and for comparing them to the ideal. Instead, it is up to the leader to assess one's personal state relative to the prescriptive statements.

Summary

Leadership educators and trainers have a variety of prescriptive models available ranging from quantitative empirical assessments of leader behaviors to several biographies of famous leader of the past to dictates based on spiritual or ethical principles.

Empirical and biographical models can be criticized for being based on persons in positions of authority and, in some cases, mainly men and in organizational contexts. Ideological models are limited to those persons who accept the underlying dogma. As a general critique, all three of the paradigms focus on the leader as an individual and assume that an individual, whether currently in a leadership position or aspiring to one, is able to change to conform to the prescription.

Empirically based models of leadership are particularly useful in college and university classrooms. Several are described in Northouse (2004) and include sample questionnaires by means of which students can become aware of their own leadership behaviors or styles compared to those of the persons in the samples.

Where budgets permit, there are proprietary leadership models and assessments including The Leadership Challenge. Booklets and validated questionnaires supplement the material in the book (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2005) have also developed a student version of their questionnaire, the

Leadership Practices Inventory together with a facilitator's guide and other materials.

Students in courses on political leadership or management can benefit from reading the biographical and autobiographical works on leadership. The exceptions are the previously cited works by basketball coaches in which the main focus is on how to function as a head coach.

For persons in Christian institutions of higher learning, the Sanders book (1994) would be appropriate, and for persons seeking a nondirective way of leading small groups, *The Tao of Leadership* (Heider, 2005) is a good choice. On the other hand, the guidance offered in works on authentic and principle-centered leadership would have wide applicability.

The value in describing several paradigms is that the underlying assumptions and methods are made explicit and can be compared to one another. Any prescription about leadership or leader development must have some basis. The empirical paradigm is useful in generating ways to educate and train leaders in formal settings such as the classroom or a training program. The biographical paradigm provides advice that is helpful to some people in showing that certain values and practices are effective with subordinates and followers. The prescriptions arising in the ideological paradigm are limited to those who subscribe to the underlying dogma or set of principles but can be highly motivating to those believers.

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Biography

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