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POLICY LEADERSHIP:
A Theory-Based Model

Abstract

Policy leadership infiltrates the lives of citizens everywhere. Though this type of leadership is implicit and ubiquitous, a theoretically-based model specifically intended for policy leaders is not readily available in academic literature. This article serves to address this gap by proposing a conceptual model of the policy leadership framework. The model expounds upon previous literature and identifies 16 areas vital to the policy process. Implications of the model relate to equipping leadership educators in the classroom and in the community with enhanced policy leadership research and curriculum.

Introduction

"Leadership is the most important factor influencing federal agency performance and government effectiveness. For government leaders to keep us safe, provide vital services and move the country forward, they need to develop their leadership and management skills" (Partnership for Public Service, n.d.). Policy leadership involves issues of public concern and, therefore, touches every facet of life including education (How Does the Government Impact Our Daily Lives?, n.d.), telecommunication (Biggs & Polomska, 2013), and health care (Edwards, 2016). Citizens who do not consider themselves active participants still find their lives affected by the ubiquitous influence of the policymaking and policy enacting process. Those, however, who take a voluntary and active stance in grassroots efforts, participate in activities that serve as foundational catalysts for the trajectory of local, state, and national policy. This article focuses on policy leaders, namely

those who may not have positional authority, but have taken it upon themselves to be proactive in the policy arena. The information presented here fills a gap in the literature by proposing a theory-based conceptual model that highlights the courses of action policy leaders take to create change on behalf of the issues and populations they represent.

In an interview, Newell (Fox & Newell, 2015), who works on governmental ethics and values-based leadership, argued that, "The problems the nation faces offer an exciting opportunity to have a significant impact on building a better society." While societal challenges make it an ideal time to get involved in public service and policy work (Fox & Newell, 2015), the leadership skills and strategies fueling this work make a difference (Hermann & Hagan, 1998). In 2015, a mere 13 percent of surveyed citizens trusted the government "to do what is right always or most of the time" (Fox & Newell, 2015). Data based on what government workers perceive about the policy process also complemented

this aura of distrust, underscoring the importance of the trust-building process and its valuable role in policy leadership (Fox & Newell, 2015). Government workers desire leaders who assist with mission-oriented tasks, cast vision, provide direction, and boost morale (Slade, 2011). Similar to those with positional leadership, policy leaders "build expectations, plan strategies, and urge actions on their governments that conform with their judgments about what is possible" (Hermann & Hagan, 1998, p. 126). Leaders build trust, influence coalitions, make decisions, and communicate with supporters and non-supporters (Hermann & Hagan, 1998); these same skills are needed for grassroots policy leaders focused on garnering policy interests.

Hermann & Hagan (1998) highlight that leaders have an effect on domestic and international politics and their actions are influenced by their "experiences, goals, beliefs about the world, and sensitivity to the political context" (Hermann & Hagan, 1998, p. 126). Additionally, it is known that in the policy arena, leaders help explain, frame, and make meaning of issues (Hermann & Hagan, 1998) that they, and the populations they represent, have deemed worthy of attention. However, a more thorough review of policy leaders who do these actions without positional authority is warranted. Edwards (2016), an author on presidential leadership, alludes to effective presidents being effective facilitators of the issues already surfacing in their environment, rather than creating policy for issues that may or may not be of importance of those being served by the government. Thus, elected officials not only need policy makers, but to be productive and effective, they need the support and voice of policy leaders.

Answering the call to assist the next generation of policy leaders (Fox & Newell, 2015), building better theories for policy leadership helps policy leaders with the transition to being policy makers if they choose to pursue official forms of office. Many positional leaders who work at some level of the policy making process are not adequately prepared for their roles (Fox & Newell, 2015). Newell (Fox & Newell, 2015) posits that those entering the process or being promoted to elevated positions may have technical expertise, but few other skills that prepare them to be effective. More enhanced policy leadership theories could not only help policy leaders and policymakers have more concrete methods to develop into holistic leaders, but enhanced theories could also help local, state, and national policy organizations develop more structured leadership development initiatives and pipelines (Fox & Newell, 2015) that prepare leaders at every stage of the policy process. Better policy leadership theories will give theoretical and empirically-based guidance to the formal training, informal training, coaching, mentoring, and performance evaluation of policy leaders (Fox & Newell, 2015).

Based on the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2013 – 2018 priority area one, leadership education should "explore curriculum development frameworks to enhance the leadership education transfer of learning" (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 5). This article offers a theory-based conceptual model of policy leadership based on a synthesized review of existing leadership literature about the topic. This model should provide an appropriate curriculum framework to enhance the transfer of learning in leadership education settings. Additionally, priority area six of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda prioritizes the "development of vibrant and resilient communities" (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 22). This article maps literature-based policy leadership strategies that aid active citizens in serving as a catalyst for positive change on a local, state, national, and possibly international scale. Highlighting the sociological imprint a public policy leader makes on a community underscores the importance of leadership curriculum that enhances the policymaking process and the community contexts that are subsequently affected.

Policy Leadership

Public policy has been defined as "an intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern" (Cochran, Meyer, Carr, & Cayer, 2009, p. 2). Typically, the policy process has been conceptualized to include five primary steps. First, a problem has been identified and the agenda setting process has been initiated. Second, policy formulation has occurred, specifically, courses of action are proposed. Third, policy adoption has included selecting an option. Fourth, policy implementation has addressed the way in which policies will be fulfilled. Finally, policy evaluation has focused on whether the policy has been achieving the stated goals (Anderson, 2011).

The process to make public policy has been exceedingly complex; it has involved, "public opinion, media attitudes, expert ideas, active citizens, business and labor leaders, elected representatives, presidents and governors, judges, and bureaucrats" (Cochran et al., 2009, p. 6). Although each of these factors have been found to have a contributory effect on the policymaking process, the primary focus of policy leadership, within this research, has been around active citizens. This research specifically focuses on individuals that have become involved in the policymaking process through their own initiative. The pluralist model of policymaking has identified the influence that groups and individuals have within the process (Cochran et al., 2009). This article expounds upon that influence, explains steps in the process, and proposes to extend existing leader characteristics into policy leadership.

Policy agenda.   As defined, public policy has been an action undertaken to resolve an issue of public concern. Consequently, policy has been directly related to the identification of issues (Cochran et al., 2009). The definition of the policy agenda process has been, "those problems, among many, that receive the serious attention of public officials or getting the government to consider action on the problem" (Anderson, 2009, p. 4). Individuals that have chosen to become involved in the policymaking process may do so independently or in coordination with other individuals through interest groups (Anderson, 2009).

A primary mechanism that policy leaders have been able to contribute to the policymaking process has been through representation of a group. Specifically, when leaders have participated in groups (House & Mitchell, 1974) and have faithfully represented the group (Page, 1985; Van Fleet & Yukl, 1986; Velasquez, 1992), the group has benefitted. Based on an ethos of serving (Craig & Gustafson, 1998), leaders have been able to provide leadership (Lord & Maher, 1991) as well as become a symbol for the group itself (Birnbaum, 1988; Mintzberg, 1973). Encouraging decision participation (Yukl & Nemeroff, 1979) and providing consideration for all members of the group have been found to further enhance a leader's representational standing (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008).

Based on their ability to represent their group, leaders have been shown to next focus on the group's purpose and goal. Identifying an issue of concern through awareness (Greenleaf, 1970), understanding (Winter, 1978), and foresight (Lord & Maher, 1993), leaders have been able to provide clarity to the group (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Based on this clarity, groups have been shown to be better able to make decisions (e.g. Hitt, Middlemist, & Mathis, 1983) in defining their goals (Bass, 1981; House, 1977; Kirk & Shutte, 2004; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990; Roby, 1961) and purpose (George, 2003). Throughout the process, effective leaders have been shown to provide value-based insights (Liden et al., 2008), as well as an ability to maintain focus (Gross, 1961) within the group in pursuit of the goal (Schein, 1995).

One of the functions that groups have been found to serve in the policymaking process has been to identify issues and articulate alternatives, thus initiating

policymaker consideration (Anderson, 2011). Effective leaders have been found to use their expertise (Wilson, O'Hare, & Shipper, 1990) and network (e.g. Bell, Hill, & Wright, 1961; Senge, 1995) to initiate consideration successfully. Furthermore, by taking action (Winter, 1978), providing innovative insights (e.g. Kouzes & Posner, 2002) and disseminating information (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998), leaders have been shown to provide a motivational catalyst for consideration (e.g. Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000; Yukl, 1998) and future action (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Policy formulation. According to the literature, there have been two primary aspects to policy formulation, the effective and the political (Anderson, 2011). First, effective policy alternatives need to be identified. Second, a choice among alternatives must be made, the process of choosing is more closely associated with the political aspects of policy making (Anderson, 2011).

From a policy perspective, effective formulation has been considered more of a technical and analytical process (Anderson, 2011). In regards to technical processes, effective leaders have been found to contribute in multiple ways. For example, the ability to plan (e.g. Yukl, 1998) and organize (e.g. Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 1982) information and options has been related to leader effectiveness. Additionally, leaders that have been able to provide order and clarity (Wilson et al., 1990) and a structured approach to obtaining information needed for decision making (Bass & Farrow, 1977; Roby, 1961) have been considered valuable. In addition to supporting the analytical processing of options, effective leaders have been shown to contribute by helping to establish and negotiate standards (e.g. Fine, 1977; Metcalfe, 1984) as well as exchange information (Luthans & Lockwood, 1984) about policy related items (MacKenzie, 1969).

Based on the generation of viable policy options through the effective formulation process, subsequent options are further considered for acceptable formulation. Acceptable formulation options are considered within the political context and evaluated based on the probability of successful adoption (Anderson, 2011). From a political, or relational, perspective, effective leaders have been shown to be boundary spanning specialists (Hitt et al., 1983; Van Wart, 2003).

The ability to provide a unifying vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005) and act in a collaborative manner (Larson & LaFasto, 1989) has been associated with effective leadership under relational conditions. Furthermore, when leaders have been resourceful (Israel et al., 1998; Terry, 1993) and adaptable (Heifetz, 1994; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), they have been viewed as agents of change (Schein, 1995) helping to overcome potential barriers. Monitoring the context (Yukl & Nemeroff, 1979) and providing conceptual insights (Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2008) have also been associated with effective leadership from a relational perspective.

Policy adoption. After policy options have been formulated and vetted from a technical and politically feasible perspective, the policy process has moved into the policy adoption stage (Anderson, 2011). The intended outcome for policy adoption has included the, "development of support for a specific proposal so that a policy can be legitimized or authorized" (p. 4). Effective leaders have been found to provide support throughout the adoption process. For example, leaders have been found to gather, disseminate (Mintzberg, 1973), and summarize relevant information (Metcalfe, 1984). Additionally, leaders have been shown to demonstrate a tolerance for uncertainty (Stogdill, Goode, & Day, 1965) throughout the process while maintaining effort directed at adoption (Terry, 1993). A leader's reputation (Bell et al., 1961) and perception as a steward for the group (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008) have also been

associated with the ability to coordinate the efforts (Tornow & Pinto, 1976) and provide a stabilizing influence (Jacobs, 1983) throughout the adoption process.

In addition to providing support to the adoption process through direct action, effective leaders have been shown to facilitate the process by maintaining focus on the issue that the policy has been ultimately developed to address. Specifically, when leaders have been able to navigate the political arena (Beckhard, 1995; Bolman & Deal, 1991) and establish relationships (George, 2003; Pigg, 1999), they have been in a desirable position to contribute to the adoption process. For example, effective leaders have been shown to use relationships to inspire action (e.g. Wong & Davey, 2007; Yukl, Wall, & Lepsinger, 1990). Furthermore, leaders that have been able to monitor and manage environmental conditions (Mumford et al., 2000) as well as manage conflicts (Craig & Gustafson, 1998) have been shown to be more effective at meeting their intended goal.

Policy implementation. Once a policy has been adopted, policy implementation has occurred through, "application of the policy by the government's administrative machinery" (Anderson, 2011, p. 4). In general, policies are implemented through three primary steps. First, the means to implement the process are identified (Anderson, 2011). To assist with locating the resources necessary to implement a change, such as a policy, leaders have been found to establish trust (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005) and then utilize problem solving abilities (e.g. Morse & Wagner, 1978; Mumford et al., 2000; Yukl, 1998). Although leaders may not be in a position to mandate outcomes, they have been shown to be able to contribute directive input (House & Mitchell, 1974).

The second step within the policy implementation process is identified as the ability to translate goals to rules (Anderson, 2011). Within the political system, policy has been insufficient to address issues; only when policy has been enabled through rules, or actions, are issues impacted. To facilitate the transitional process from goal to rule, leaders have been found to use communication abilities (Jacobs, 1983). Operating from a position external to the system itself has provided leaders an opportunity to inform the implementation process (Suttel & Spector, 1955).

The final step in the process is the coordination of resources. Specifically, after rules are established, resources to support and enforce the policy are required (Anderson, 2011). Similar to preceding steps, policy leaders may not have the ability to directly impact implementation decisions; however, by coordinating the efforts of the group (Page, 1985), leaders have been shown to be influential.

Policy evaluation. Subsequent to a policy becoming implemented, policy evaluation has represented, "efforts by the government to determine whether the policy was effective and why or why not" (Anderson, 2011, p. 4). Based on policy leaders' proximity to the issue that the policy was intended to address, they have been shown to have a role in supporting evaluations (Anderson, 2011). For example, within the context of the group, leaders have acted as stewards supporting evaluation efforts (Greenleaf, 1970; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Additionally, leaders have previously found it necessary to defend the institutional, or policy, integrity by supporting evaluation efforts (Selznick, 1957).

Leaders have also been found to assist in the evaluation process by participating in evaluation efforts (Anderson, 2011). Based on their proximity to the issue, leaders have been committed to success and performance (House et al., 2004; Whitehead, 2009). Specifically, leaders have been involved in defining evaluation criteria (Bass, 1981) and collecting information about performance (e.g. Komaki, Zlotnick, & Jensen, 1986). Effective leaders have been found to provide critical input (Metcalfe, 1984; Van

Fleet & Yukl, 1986) and feedback (Bass, 1981; Jacobs, 1983; Wilson et al., 1990) throughout the evaluation process.

Policy Leadership Conceptual Model

Based on the review of the existing literature, a conceptual model of the policy leadership framework has been proposed (Figure 1). The model synthesizes and expands the previous recommendations within the literature (e.g. Anderson, 2011).

The first step in the policy process has been identified as setting the policy agenda (Anderson, 2011). Leaders have been found to act as representatives of groups of which they are associated (Page, 1985; Van Fleet & Yukl, 1986). Additionally, effective leaders have been shown to establish a purpose and goal for the process (e.g. Bass, 1981; House, 1977; Kirk & Shutte, 2004; Podsakoff et al., 1990). Finally, leaders have assisted in initiating consideration through contact (e.g. Senge, 1995) and motivation (e.g. Mumford et al., 2000; Yukl, 1998).

After a policy agenda is set, the policy undergoes a formulation process. To be effective during this specific process, leaders assist with technical aspects such as planning (e.g. Yukl, 1998). After feasible policy options have been identified, acceptable formulation has occurred. During acceptable formulation, leaders

have shown to express support by providing a vision (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005) and spanning boundaries (e.g. Hitt et al., 1983; Van Wart, 2003).

Once a policy has been appropriately formulated, there is a policy adoption process. Based on the numerous entities involved in the process (Cochran et al., 2009), leaders have shown to contribute by providing support (e.g. Mintzberg, 1973). Leaders have also contributed by maintaining their focus throughout the process (e.g. Wong & Davey, 2007; Yukl et al., 1990).

Policies are implemented after they are adopted. There are three primary steps associated with policy implementation. First, leaders have shown to support the identification of means by using their problem solving abilities (e.g. Morse & Wagner, 1978; Mumford et al., 2000; Yukl, 1998). Second, leaders have helped to translate goals to rules based on their communication abilities (Jacobs, 1983). Finally, when a policy has been implemented, resources associated with the policy must be coordinated (Page, 1985).

Policies are evaluated in the final step of the policy process. Effective leaders have supported and contributed to evaluation processes as a means to act as a steward for the group (e.g. Greenleaf, 1970). Additionally, leaders have participated in evaluation activities (e.g. Bass, 1981).
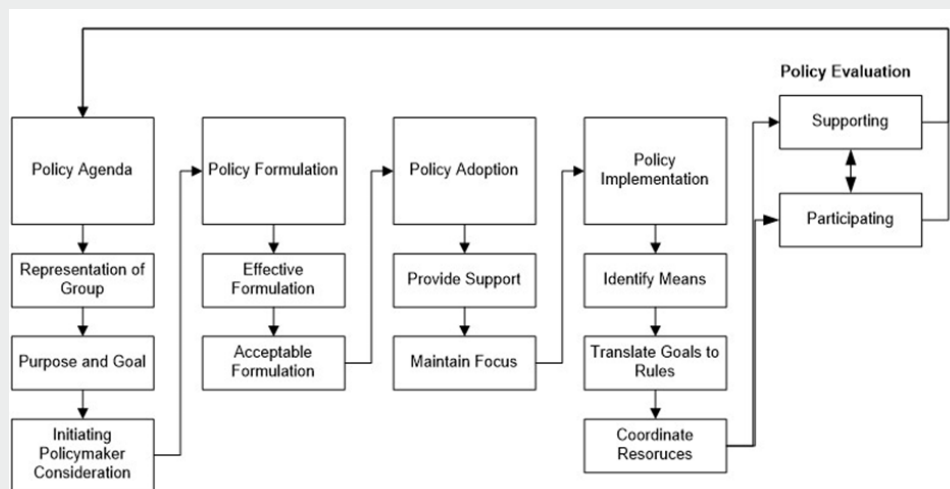

Figure 1. Conceptual model of policy leadership framework

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to synthesize existing literature and present a theory-based conceptual framework of policy leadership. Policy leadership reflects public interests and influences every aspect of life. Citizens who take initiative to participate in policy processes do so in ways that warrant the development of structured models and more enhanced policy leadership theories. The impact and implications of policy leadership are far-reaching, further highlighting the need for continued research in this area. The understanding of interpersonal leadership (Lamm, Carter, & Lamm, 2016) is needed to fully grasp how individuals join together and are affected by the process of community leadership (Lamm, Carter, Lamm, & Lindsey, 2017), which is influenced by policy leadership. Due to policy leadership encompassing various levels of leadership, namely community, organizational, and interpersonal leadership, it behooves scholars and practitioners alike to explore the influential power of policy leadership and how the skills attributed to it are connected, and dependent upon, other leadership models.

As a next step, leadership educators are encouraged to utilize the proposed model to help facilitate conversations about policy leadership topics. Additionally, community-based curriculum focused on policy leadership, advocacy, community empowerment, and public service can use the model as a road map to garner interest about creating policy change on the local level. Incorporating this article's information in both academic and community settings propels the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (Andenoro et al., 2013) forward.

This model helps explain the actions taken by policy leaders and can serve as an integrative foundation to enhance literature that has explored the actions of larger entities, such as states, in the domain of world politics (refer to Hermann & Hagan, 1998).

It is recommended that future research focus on context-specific policy leadership. Hermann and Hagan (1998) studied the influence of leadership for international policy; what they share about foreign policy leaders holds true for domestic policy leaders as well: "Today, scholars who study the dynamics of foreign policy decision making recognize the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice. In particular, skeletal theoretical frameworks must be fleshed out with nuanced detail" (p. 130). Context is vital in policy leadership; local, state, and national policy environments all have context-specific factors that need to be taken into consideration as well as those public concerns that are of an international scope. The model proposed in this article will be a helpful reference as more conditions and layers related to policy leadership contexts are explored.

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