Leadership Primer

A Meta-Analysis Of Current Thinking On Leadership

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forward -

This primer presents the thinking of nearly fifty authors (see appendix) who have written about leadership. In addition, it represents the ideas of hundreds of writers and thinkers who preceded these authors and from which their publications were derived. What I have done in the writing of this primer is collate the results of these authors' works, look for common patterns in what they have written, and present a "consensus" view of what they have written about leadership.

In some cases, I have quoted authors directly. In no way am I diminishing those authors who have not been quoted and am not implying that any authors have a "better" approach to leadership than others.

In the writing of this primer, a broad cross-section of authors was selected. However, one or more of your favorite writers about leadership may have been omitted. For this, I apologize and encourage you to send me any information you feel would contribute to this work so it can be included in the next printing.

I would like to thank the HD&L Division for providing me the opportunity to work on this project with a special thanks to A.J. Deeds for his vision and guidance. Finally, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Marie for her willingness to help edit and format this booklet.

Thank you,
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Introduction

What is this primer about? Leadership. Not personal leadership or "big" leadership (like we associate with Martin Luther King or John F. Kennedy), but Organizational Leadership. But what is leadership? The directing of operations or activities or performance? The guiding of people on a way? Is organizational leadership the same as management? Or is it apart and separate?

These are interesting if not perplexing questions. And a clear single definition of leadership, although discussed and pondered for centuries, somehow remains beyond our grasp. What we do know is that leaders are identified by the fact that they have followers. This is true for both "big" leaders and organizational leaders, but not necessarily for personal leaders.

Our interest in this primer, however, is not to define leadership. We are more interested in how leaders lead. How they obtain and keep followers. The roles a leader has to assume in order to be a good leader.

Why roles and not a single role? Because true leadership is an integration of several roles. No role by itself suffices to make a good leader. These roles include creating vision, building the organization, motivating and mentoring people, communicating with people, and transforming people and organizations through all of this above.

The following represents the results of the meta-analysis performed on the published works listed in the appendix. Basically it shows the percentage of authors who discussed a particular leadership role. Each subsequent chapter of this primer discusses the results in more detail.
THE LEADER AS VISIONARY

Creating vision, like leadership itself, has been discussed at great length but never really defined very well. Does it involve some intuitive sense that causes great leaders to stand apart? Or is it, as some have suggested, just an acute ability to judge human nature and ascertain what people want to hear? Either way, an overwhelming number of the authors reviewed agreed that vision was an important aspect of any organizational leader.

This aspect of leadership is described by our authors in many ways.

To envision what an organization can be.
To establish direction for the organization.
To create organizational purpose.
To bring vision and value to the organization.
To create focus for the organization.
To establish expectations for performance.
To create a coherent viewpoint.
To formulate shared goals.
To invest people with common purpose.
To create a sense of destination.

In all cases, there seems to be an overarching theme that visionaries look to the future and see a place where the organization can be. Someplace beyond where it is today. And this ability to see that future is critical to the continued viability of the organization itself.

There are some authors who believe this aspect of leadership separates leaders from managers and some believe the vision is a capturing of the heart of the organization, the creating of shared meaning, the formulation of shared goals. In other words, a rallying point for action.

"...the most important leader of all is one who sees another picture not yet actualized. He sees the things which belong to his present picture but which are not yet there. Above all, he should make his co-workers see that it is not his purpose which is to be achieved, but a common purpose, born of the desires and activities of a group."

Mary Parker Follett, Dynamic Administration, 1941

There are some views, however, that see a leader as simply someone clever enough or perceptive enough to figure out where the crowd is going and simply get in front. This is an interesting viewpoint but clearly, from the books reviewed, leadership is much more than that. Leaders as Visionaries have the ability to see a future that is different from what the rest of us see. They create a vision that takes us beyond where we could go by ourselves. A place that we need them to take us.

And how do they get us there. By also being builders.
THE LEADER AS BUILDER

The leader as builder has the ability to turn vision into action. And this is important. Eric Harvey and Alexander Lucia express this concept in their book, *Walk the Talk*, when they state, "Vision without action is meaningless". This aspect of leadership involves shaping of the organization so it can successfully implement the future that has been envisioned.

It is also described in various other ways as:

- Designing systems for sustained performance.
- Creating an environment for action.
- Positioning people and teams for action.
- Aligning individual goals with organizational goals.
- Redefining the boundaries of the organization.
- Creating ways to mobilize people and resources.
- Providing tools for reaching the vision.
- Organizing things so work gets done.
- Harmonizing work functions.
- Removing barriers to action.

What the leader as builder does is create structure by aligning and integrating systems, resources, and people around the vision. But this structure, according to our authors, is more of a community than a box. It needs to be built so it is dynamic, and flexible, and connected both internally and externally.

Another aspect of the leader as builder discussed by our authors is that they create pathways for success. Leaders build roads so we can get to our vision. And more importantly, these leaders travel the roads with us.

"...The positioning decision aims at building a new community of common interests, shared circumstances, and mutual trust. In many cases, this community will exist entirely inside the organization. More and more, however, leaders are extending the sense of community outward to involve selected customers and suppliers. In some cases, the community stretches even further to encompass a network of alliances, mergers, and joint ventures..."


Why is it important to travel with the organization? Because even if we can see the emerald city, it doesn't mean we can get there. The leader needs to be out front removing obstacles and paving the way.

What the leader as builder does not do is shape people like lumps of clay or coerce people to do what they do not want to do. In fact, getting people to want to travel the path once it is formed is another important role leaders play.

Once the stage is set for action, the leader then becomes a motivator.
THE LEADER AS MOTIVATOR

This aspect of leadership involves getting people to implement the vision. Once the destination is clearly marked, and the path laid out, the leader now has the role of getting people to start the journey.

This aspect of leadership, the leader as motivator, is described by our authors as:

Providing an impetus for action.
Mobilizing people.
Building involvement.
Inspiring action.
Creating a positive consequence for action.
Influencing people.
Providing incentives for collaboration.
Investing people with purpose.
Shaping behavior.
Building loyalty.

There has been much written about motivation and we all recognize that a compelling vision is a sure way to motivate. And as Abraham Maslow has taught us, there is a direct correlation between psychological health, motivation, and achievement. But what other actions do Leaders as Motivators take to get people to follow the vision. Some of the actions are organizational. Rewards and recognition programs, sharing information (letting people be part of the action), and allowing for shared decision making are all good examples.

"... wouldn't workers be even more cooperative when mistakes are met, not with reproving looks, but with encouragement and the explicit recognition that only five of the 10 ideas that you yourself came up with are right? .... In the end, persuasiveness comes when command giver and doer see each other as human and only right half the time. Even if one party is tempted to say "I told you so," the other will not take it amiss. In fact both will begin to cooperate before long. This I believe, is true persuasiveness."

Taiichi Ohno, Workplace Management, 1988

But a more important aspect of motivation is one that connects with people one on one. Examples include managing by walking about, open door policies, and the like. But even more important than these kind of specific actions, is what the leader does everyday. Are they perceived as honest and straight forward? Do they do what they say and admit when they are wrong. Most of our authors agree that a leader must above all else be credible if he/she wants to motivate people to action. They also write that good leaders care for people as individuals and give them the tools and respect they deserve.

This is the next aspect of leadership - the ability to be a mentor.
THE LEADER AS MENTOR

What is a mentor - he or she is a counselor, a confidant, a teacher, a friend. The leader as mentor is described by our authors as:

Helping people grow and prosper.  
Supporting people.  
Training people to be self-sufficient.  
Teaching accountability.  
Fostering learning.  
Helping others act coherently.  
Building teamwork.  
Nurturing individualism in organizations.  
Driving organizational learning,  
Empowering people.

This aspect of leadership is concerned with people's capabilities. Not only to achieve the vision with purpose but much more. The leader as mentor helps people develop both professionally and personally. And an important tool for helping people grow is empowerment. In the book, Leadership and the One Minute Manager, empowerment is expressed as a delegating of responsibility so people have an opportunity to learn. The authors Ken Blanchard, Patricia Zigarmi, and Drea Zigarmi, state, "everyone is a potential high performer, some people just need a little help along the way." This help can be provided in many ways. Through coaching and counseling, and through both on-the-job and classroom training.

Another important aspect of the leader as mentor that our authors describe is that the leader has to set an example for the organization. In short, to be a living embodiment of the organization's vision.

This aspect of leadership is an open door policy to heart. The leader needs to walk the talk and listen to what people have to say.

"Management by wandering around is an empty, silly tactic by itself. Most managers get in the way when they wander around without objectives, and can undermine their subordinates when they mindlessly meddle. However, being visible in the organization at all levels clearly demonstrates the behaviors that fulfill the company's vision, and reinforcing the behavior of employees that support that vision, are mandatory in today's environment. Just a couple of hours a week dedicated to this examplar role will make a tremendous impact over the course of a year."

Alan Weiss, Our Emperors have No Clothes, 1995

Mentorship is truly about caring what people do, and how they do it, and how they feel. The leader as mentor has to be approachable, honest and genuine. And she/he has to be able to communicate effectively.

Which brings us to our next leadership role. The leader as communicator.
THE LEADER AS COMMUNICATOR

None of the previously discussed aspects of a leader would work very well if the leader were not a good communicator. Even so many authors chose this aspect separately because of its importance to leadership.

Communication is characterized by our authors as:

Persuasion.
Connecting values and action.
Active listening.
Expressing a viewpoint.
Articulating shared goals.
Improving shared mental models.
Building cooperation.
Honest dialogue.
Feedback in real time.
Listening to understand.

At the center of being a good communicator is the ability to listen. Oftentimes we create communication problems because we are listening to respond rather than listening to comprehend. So if you want to be a better listener, close your mouth and open your ears and mind. As Mark Twain was known to say, "That's why we have two ears and only one mouth. So we can talk half as much as we listen."

Another item that interferes with good communication is the meaning we attach to what is being said. What Peter Senge in his book, The Fifth Discipline, calls mental models. Senge says that we need to take the time to explore our mental models and seek to understand others as a way of better communicating.

He also discusses systems thinking as a, "framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things", and that "systems thinking is the cornerstone for how learning organizations think about their world." Certainly, in this context (as Senge suggests along with other authors), communication becomes even more critical to the leader who is concerned about motivating and mentoring people.

"A leader paves the way for change. She prepares the organization. Probably the most important preparation is lavish communication. We can neither read each other's minds nor afford the sin of isolation. Yet each of us needs to be able to identify with a mission. Each person needs to decide to follow: When you ask someone to do something, make sure you wait for an answer."

Max DePree, Leadership Jazz, 1992

But how do we communicate? Bob Boylan in his book, The Leading Role is Always a Speaking Part, tells us that communication needs to be easily understood, memorable, and realistically actionable. More importantly, as many authors point out, the messenger must be credible. If not, the message will most likely not be believed. Credibility, John Kotter tells us in his book, "A Force for Change", is based on the strength, relevance, and consistency of both the message and messenger. How do we give a message strength? By challenging people to be more than what they are; by the leader being a transformer.
THE LEADER AS TRANSFORMER

The last aspect of a leader is the ability to transform - to take risk and allow others to take risk also. This is integrally connected with a leader's ability to compel people to action and create an open environment where people can excel.

This aspect of leadership is described by our authors as:

A catalyst for change.
Constant improvement.
Risk-taking.
Eliminating fear of failure.
Emancipating action for change.
Willingness to experiment.
Entrepreneurial imagination.
Embracing error.
Responding to the future.
Leading people into uncertainty.

With this final aspect - the leader as transformer - we come full circle. It is the leader's ability to transform that gives the leader such a powerful vision to start with. Some of the most compelling visions are those that challenge us to think in radical new ways. In this way, the leader sets the example for true innovation and change. This ability is at the heart of what W. Edward Deming identified in point number eight of his management method as eliminating fear. The "unloosing of fear" which allows people to ask questions, identify real problems, and try something new.

The leader as transformer has to be a champion for change. As Tom Peters states in his book, Thriving on Chaos, "change must become the norm, not cause for alarm."

Leaders must learn to embrace change at all levels. And allow all employees to try new things, to make mistakes, without retribution. Why? Because change is a natural phenomena. Stability is the exception to the rule. And in today's business environment, only the companies that change, that evolve, will survive.

"Every act of organizing is an experiment. We begin with desire, with a sense of purpose and direction. But we enter the experience with vulnerability, unprotected by the illusionary cloak of prediction. We acknowledge that we don't know how this work will unfold. We discover what we are capable of as we go along. We engage with others for the experiment. We are willing to commit to a system whose effectiveness cannot be seen until it is in motion."

Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, A Simpler Way, 1996

How do leaders create an environment for change? Many of our authors have written that the desire for change is inherent in a well formulated vision. So at this point, we have come full circle. And this is as it should be. For a leader has many roles, and often they are played simultaneously. Can we really separate the transformer from the communicator from the motivator. Or are they all part of the same thing, what good leaders do in the process of leading.
Appendix

The following authors through their published works contributed to the writing of this primer. The HD&L Division would like to extend its sincere thanks to their ideas and efforts.

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Alan Weiss, PhD, *Our Emperors have No Clothes*, 1995, Career Press

Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you;
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, "We did this ourselves."

Lao-tzu