

**Updating the Leadership and Team Ideas
We Present To Students**

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Engineering students often say that they don't want to be a leader, but they do want to increase their leadership skills (*Goodman & Wolf, 2012*). Employers and funding agencies say technical competencies will get new engineers in the door, but team development and leadership will help them thrive when they work collaboratively within the organization's walls. Even our accrediting agencies say that the programs must prepare graduates to apply knowledge integrating these human behavioral areas with the problems or projects we specify, design or implement. Students must know *how* to choose and use individuals, groups or teams of people to complete the work of designing, verifying, implementing, applying and maintaining systems or products. As educators, we have said that we are building our students' capacity in these areas, but our teamwork and leadership vocabulary is generally underdeveloped and our teaching strategies are also behind what leadership and team researchers currently know. We understand that ideas about communication, conflict and goals are important to collaborations, but teach these concepts as we did in many years ago.

As a leadership and team researcher who teaches in a college of engineering and technology, I understand the desire to provide more efficient forms for these human processes that can essentially be bolted onto any course. I also understand that many of the currently used forms are not up to date. Integrating the concepts engineering educators need with the content expertise team researchers have can be a cost effective strategy for increasing the learning of our students.

Managing vs. Leading

Reviewing specific leadership and leading teams literature -and not simply the general management literature- helps us fine-tune both educator expectations and

student outcomes. Recently I received an internationally respected business school's advertisement for a seminar entitled "Master the Challenges of Leadership". The accompanying explanation tells us "becoming an effective manager is a difficult journey" and they are right. Being an effective manager is a tough and noble pursuit, but it is *not* sufficient to be called leadership. Before the turn of this century we used to argue about the difference between managing and leading. We have since put away arguments about the differences and whether it was okay to intermingle the two constructs. Whereas managing can be about the status quo, maintaining efficiency, or getting goals achieved, leadership must always be about making a change.

Leadership is not simply a hierarchical or position based construct. It is a social influence process that can occur anywhere in an organization. Yet the desire to have a project manager or someone whose role is to inform others about the group or team's progress often helps confound the difference between the leader and another member. If the goal is to inform, track or correct behaviors then the person who does the tracking is *managing* regardless of the title they are given within the organization.

Teaching the definition of Leadership

When we teach leadership subjects in our courses we will need to begin a discussion about leadership assumptions. Leadership is a term taken from common language. The techniques and processes of leadership are also in the common lexicon. This helps explain why there are so many definitions of leadership, and why those differences represent more than scholarly nitpicking. We may forget that students have been hearing and using the terminology of

leadership a great deal of their lives. Parents, teachers, culture and other organizations have already shaped their knowledge of the construct. We cannot expect students to meaningfully extend, reshape, or change their ideas about leadership if we do not require them to reflect on their current state. In short, students need to get their assumptions about leadership out on the table to explore before they reframe their ideas about leadership.

As professors wrestle with issues of balance between presenting well-researched theoretical approaches to leadership and more popular practices/philosophies of leadership, the authentic needs of the students must also remain central. Often the student and professor can rarely get beyond the natural traits or simple behaviors checklists that were taught in the 1940's until the early 1980s when they were rejected by almost all leadership researchers. While it is true that there are some behaviors and traits we would like most of our leaders to have and that emerge when practitioners and others are asked to list traits and behaviors that effective leaders possess. Years ago we knew that possession of those traits or use of those behaviors do not allow us to predict successful leadership of their project, department, team or organization. After we left these two approaches behind, there has been a significant push for potential leaders to become transformational in addition to their transactional behaviors (Bass, 1997).

Transformational leadership is theorized to comprise the following five factors. These include *idealized influence-attributed* which refers to the socialized charisma of the leader, whether the leader is perceived as being confident and powerful, and whether the leader is viewed as focusing on higher-order ideals and ethics. The second is *idealized influence-behavior* which refers to the charismatic actions of the leader that are centered on values, beliefs, and a sense of mission. *Inspirational motivation* refers to the ways leaders energize their followers by viewing the future with optimism, stressing ambitious goals, projecting an idealized vision, and communicating to followers that the vision is achievable. Fourth is *intellectual stimulation* which refers to leader actions that appeal to followers' sense of logic and analysis by challenging followers to think creatively and find solutions to difficult problems. Finally, *individualized consideration* refers to leader behavior that contributes to follower satisfaction by advising, supporting, and paying attention to the individual needs of followers, and thus allowing them to develop and self-actualize (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003).

Howell, and Higgins (1990) characterized transformational leadership behavior as a cause to build champions in organizations. In their prescribed model they posited that emergence of a change champion is based upon personality characteristics, transformational leadership behavior, and a variety of influence

tactics. While these characteristics seem to give us a concrete set of skills to teach, we need only ask students to make a list of the most influential leaders they know and put their perceived personality characteristics next to them. When students share their lists, they realize that there is really no systematic set that all or even most leaders have that non-leaders do not have. Traits, character and contingency theories have been placed in the history section of leadership texts. Newer issues such as the role of distance as an important leader-follower contextual element (e.g., Bligh & Riggio, 2012) or identity based team development models help us keep social and technological advances in our teaching.

Recently a more humility-driven vision of leadership is helping business schools and others shift their focus away from economics, finance and dreams of individual fortune. As Ken Starkey said in an article in Economist “What is required is a narrative of common interest to combat the mantra of selfishness; one that appeals to the sense that leadership is for all not for the few.” (Starkey, 2012).

Starkey goes on to say that the main challenge is to keep the MBA the foremost qualification in management, but to revise it. Many schools are trying to do this with an explosion of courses in, for example, responsibility, sustainability and

social entrepreneurship. The more inventive are using philosophy and the arts to critique dominant business mindsets. Jim March's pioneering use of literature to teach leadership at Stanford is an example of the changing of the MBA mindset. Theresa Amabile's work toward reframing innovation and creativity in business or Debrah Ancona's use of team members who become boundary spanners to change the way we discuss team roles and work with others not in the organization.

How do we make sense of these differing definitions of leadership and is there anything we can all agree on? There is a basis that Katz and Kahn (1978) gave us to work with that has stood the test of the years. They essentially said that 'leadership is the incremental influence over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization.' They helped researchers agree that leadership had to be about a change- it cannot be what would already be done or toward the original goals that were already set. In their view we can argue about how much change is needed and even how to measure it, but we do agree that the incremental change has to be noticeable to members. If this is leadership, shouldn't we fill our teams with leaders? Isn't shared leadership the gold standard for leadership in teams?

What is a Team-Really?

While there are many different types of collaborative groups including task forces, departments and planning groups, they are different than the work-based teams we hope our students need to learn about. The answer to the question ‘What is a team?’ can depend on the frame of reference (Bolman, 2002). For example in the *structural frame* the answer is ‘a team is interdependent workers on a common task’. The key challenges in this frame are to clarify goals and strategies, and design a workable structure of roles and relationships. The *human resource frame* defines teams as ‘diverse individuals trying to build satisfying relationships to one another and to the group.’ This is not the dominant way of defining the work teams our students will engage in, however it does remind us that individual contribution is key in all teams and diversity, while a challenge, does have a place in multidisciplinary teams. In *the political frame* a team is ‘individuals playing together to win in a competitive environment.’ The challenges of managing conflict and understanding the roles of power, resource dependence and competitive intelligence are important to team members and perhaps to those who put the team together in the first place. Finally, the *symbolic frame* where teams are ‘pilgrims on a shared journey’ may be driving top management. This is the frame where the culture and a compelling vision are the key challenges. Often ending his presentation with a list of characteristics for

effective groups that combine all of these perspectives (Bolman, 2002) his transition from teams to group development taps a different psychological base.

The size of a team is almost always assumed or addressed. A team must be three or more people who need each other to complete a creative or innovative task, but there is controversy about the upper limit. A question of size should center around who is needed to get the creative task completed while still maintaining the five characteristics of effective teams listed below. If the task is routine or needs to be replicated, a group or department may be a more appropriate type of collective to use. Teams require some time and talent to design (ala Hackman and Wageman, 2001) and develop the teams (Cox , Murray & Spurlock, 2006).

A real work team has some each of the following five characteristics. First, a team has at least *one shared goal*- but members are not required or expected to share all goals- in fact they rarely do. *Interdependence* regarding that shared goal (or shared goals) is the essential characteristic in a team. If members do not need each other, there is no need for a team. Third, members need to know that they have the *authority to organize and do their own work* and not be micromanaged by someone who is inside or outside of the team itself. A work team is *bounded and relatively stable over time*: members know who is on and off of the team. And finally, the team understands that it works in a *social system context*. The

last is most often forgotten by teams who put too much emphasis on their own processes and not enough on how their team's processes and actions effect other parts of the organization or the environment and vice versa.

In 2012 we no longer teach that teams are a collection of members developing their characteristics in rhyming stages of group development (e.g., Tuckman, 1966) since it is wrong that we use group development models that do not operate the same way in work teams. Tuckman provides a good example here. He developed and tested prescriptive model with homogenous small groups in a limited controlled setting. It has been replicated several times and used extensively, but when it was tested to see if it was a descriptive model of how work teams actually developed, it fell short. The punctuated equilibrium model of Connie Gersick (1988, 1991) showed that successful project teams actually had a set of cognitive shifts based on time and projected completion date that drove the activity of the team members. They would thus do the activities in Tuckman 'stages' of forming, norming, storming and performing all at once and those teams who could successfully get through the stages and reach a higher platform become the teams with the highest innovative project success. The social identity literature also gave the Tuckman model low marks for the lack of cognitive changes in team member understanding of what it means to be on a team. That team development and for that matter, virtual team development may be well to

follow a different pattern (Mansour-Cole, 2005) that begins with a Naming function capturing team perceptions *before* the team actually begins it's work together.

We know the current overemphasis on understanding personality provides student team members with more scapegoat opportunities, blaming conflict and work downturns on incompatible styles. Since these are personality based (and measured by Myers-Briggs Type Indicators or similar surveys) there is almost no chance that team members who are tasked to a project will also change the deep personality characteristics of any other team member. These personality indicators do give a lot of personal insight to an individual member, but they should not be shared or used to diagnose problems since that diagnosis will also say that there is no hope to make it different unless the members get off the project.

A quick look at the team leadership characteristics from research in student and project teams leads to the question: aren't these the attributes we should expect from ANY team member at any given time? So what is different about team leadership? Leadership in teams certainly shouldn't be more management, since this decreases the efficacy of the team. It may mean that the team has a manager who is the hierarchical or otherwise designated liaison for those outside of the

team. Leadership- or the ability to make change- is internal to the team and present in most if not all of the team members. If they were not ready to lead, they should not have been needed on the team. Wait- aren't there a lot of tasks that require workers and not leaders? Yes- but they also require groups and not teams! There is nothing wrong with task forces or departments who take on projects with managers who help clarify objectives, communicate the vision and tell members what they should be doing and when.. But it *is* wrong that we call them teams when we have low or no expectations for member learning, member use of their own authority and member leadership.

Team and Member Effectiveness

In the first and last place, when we talk of teams we need to look at the indicators of team effectiveness. Most team researchers use a version of Hackman's three characteristics (1986, 2002) where each of these three are met or exceeded and at least one of the three is very high. First, the product or project quality meets or exceeds the expectations of the primary stakeholders (clients), the boss and your team members. Of course quality is important outcome but the difference here is that it needs to be seen as quality internally and externally. There are many times when a project thrills the client, but the members know they could have easily done so much more. The second effectiveness criterion is that team members have the capability to continue working together if they had to. Note that

members do not need to enjoy working together or have any affect for each other. Cohesion is not a goal, although it does make it easier for some to enjoy coming to work. The last effectiveness measure is simply that learning occurs. This can be individual member learning or organizational learning, but it must be something significant and new. It should be captured for the individuals or for the organization to use at a later date, but the team requirement is that it must happen and be noticeable to all. Again, while not all of these must be very high for a team, if any of the three characteristics is missing, you cannot call them an effective team. We know that not all items are entirely controllable by the team or their external leader, but team should work on making sure these characteristics are as high or positive as they can be.

The effective team member must be the one who is not afraid to stand up and make a change that will show up in the team's processes or outcomes. They must feel that they are ready to lead the team for that moment. They cannot simply be dedicated and willing but they are *able* to orchestrate a real noticeable measurable change in either the way the work is done, or the work or project outcome.

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

The importance of having students examine their assumptions about the constructs of leadership and teams cannot be overstated. Students cannot

formulate a philosophy of leadership if they cannot understand how leadership affects their work needs and desires. If leadership is a position that is eventually reached -something hierarchical- it will not happen on their first job and thus, is not seen as essential to their university program. While many of the leadership ideas for those teaching engineering students use older or misidentified leadership measures that either follow older ideas about leadership, they do not help us get the dedication to innovative ideas and solutions that we expect from our teams.

How then, do we develop real *change* leaders in the team environment? Much of today's collaborative leadership development is based on understanding individual strengths, comparing preferred cognitive styles or refining each leader's personal behavioral style. While these are good tools for a member's personal development and insight, 25+ years of leadership research shows they do not predict much about leader emergence or effectiveness in real world organizations. Leadership styles are unlikely to be the best predictors in collaborative organizations either. Real leadership requires a process-focus where characteristics of the leaders, followers, their relationships and the organizational context are all explicitly considered. Real teams require collective work and integration of multidisciplinary perspectives in order to obtain innovative outcomes. Because of the popularity of style programs, one of the biggest hurdles

will be switching from self-based leader development to a development process that is primarily (but not exclusively) others-based.

We should insist that teams use a version of the team effectiveness criteria (e.g., Hackman, 2002) to get us started on the right track. Ironically, a more sophisticated look at the topic of virtual collaboration leadership may help us change our teaching about team leadership. At the heart of leadership is the idea of change, and many researchers and authors contend that the real difference between managing and leading is in the outcomes we seek (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1978; Kotter, 1990; Rost, 1991; Schein, 1992). Leaders seek to make changes to the status quo, and effective leadership can be seen most clearly in the way decisions are made under conditions of uncertainty by all members of a team. This view of leadership is attractive in a collaborative team setting and while not all of the ideas are new or unique, they all honor the past experience and ideas of each individual student.

References