

Part 1

Presentation and Discussion Resources

Think of the articles in this section as a recommended reading list. They are intended to educate rather than to train. Read them yourself to gain knowledge and insight into the subject of leadership. Use them as handouts in workshops. Slip them quietly to individual supervisors or managers who come to you for advice or aid.

We chose these selections not only as the best discussions of leadership that the Pfeiffer *Annuals* have to offer but also with an eye toward covering several bases and serving a variety of needs. Three of them caution in different ways against too heavy a reliance on theory or on trait-based models of what makes an effective leader. The theme—you can't lead from a textbook—recalls novelist John Barth's observation that "a good teacher will teach well regardless of the [educational] theory he suffers from." But far from taking a deterministic view of leadership skills as something you're either born with or not, these articles offer real insight and excellent practical advice.

On the other hand, two of the selections are included precisely to provide a grounding in classic theories that have shaped the study of leadership and management as distinct and teachable practices. Anyone who proposes to teach the subjects should be familiar with names such as Frederick Taylor and Elton Mayo, if only to avoid potential embarrassment. As for Douglas McGregor's Theory X-Theory Y model, it is arguably the most fundamental

statement ever made of the philosophical gap that separates managers who will be obeyed from leaders who will be followed.

The opening article, “Leadership Is in the Eye of the Follower,” makes a similarly fundamental point by concluding that the traits and behaviors displayed by successful leaders can be summarized in a single word: credibility.

The last one, “Visionary’s Disease and the CEO,” dissects a phenomenon that became all too familiar during the dot-com boom and that the entire world economy has lived to regret. Visionary’s disease is not limited to high-tech companies, and the article serves as a cautionary tale for any leader who confuses his own passing enthusiasms with “stretch goals” for his followers.

Here are capsule summaries of the presentations.

- **Leadership Is in the Eye of the Follower: And what followers demand from a leader boils down to one thing: credibility.**
- **Leadership as Persuasion and Adaptation: Leaders are defined not so much by any set of traits they possess as by how they adapt to circumstances.**
- **Leadership from the Gestalt Perspective: To become an effective leader, start with who you are and what you actually believe, not with someone else’s theory of who you ought to be.**
- **An Overview of Ten Management and Organizational Theorists: From the time of Moses, thinkers have grappled with the question of how to organize and lead people. Here is a survey of the answers that have shaped our modern understanding.**
- **McGregor’s Theory X-Theory Y Model: An unsentimental explanation of Douglas McGregor’s concept of the two basic philosophies that every manager—and every would-be leader—must choose between.**
- **Impact at Ground Zero: Where Theory Meets Practice: Most resounding leadership failures result not from faulty theories but from poor execution.**
- **A Model for the Executive Management of Transformational Change: How HRD professionals can guide executives through a major change in the organization’s strategy, methods, or structure.**
- **Visionary’s Disease and the CEO: Prophetic advice from the height of the dot-com boom for leaders who get carried away with “the vision thing.”**

1

Leadership Is in the Eye of the Follower

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

What you have heard about leadership is only half the story. Leadership is not just about leaders; it is also about followers. Leadership is a reciprocal process. It occurs between people. It is not done by one person to another.

Successful leadership depends far more on the follower's *perception* of the leader than on the leader's abilities. Followers, not the leader, determine when someone possesses the qualities of leadership. In other words, leadership is in the eye of the follower.

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

During a five-year period we investigated the perceptions that followers have of leaders. We asked more than 10,000 managers nationwide from a wide range of private and public organizations to tell us what they look for or admire in their leaders. The results from these surveys have been striking in their regularity. It seems there are several essential tests a leader must pass before we are willing to grant him or her the title of "leader."

According to our research, the majority of us admire leaders who are honest, competent, forward-looking, inspiring, and, ultimately, *credible*.

Honesty

In every survey we conducted, honesty was selected more often than any other leadership characteristic. After all, if we are to willingly follow someone, whether into battle or into the boardroom, we first want to assure ourselves that the person is worthy of our trust. We will ask, “Is that person truthful? Ethical? Principled? Of high integrity? Does he or she have character?” These are not simple questions to answer. It is not easy to measure such subjective characteristics. In our discussions with respondents we found that it was the *leader’s behavior* that provided the evidence. In other words, regardless of what leaders say about their integrity, followers wait to be shown.

Leaders are considered honest by followers if they do what they say they are going to do. Agreements not followed through, false promises, cover-ups, and inconsistencies between word and deed are all indicators that an ostensible leader is not honest. On the other hand, if a leader behaves in ways consistent with his or her stated values and beliefs, then we can entrust to that person our careers, our security, and ultimately even our lives.

This element of trustworthiness is supported in another study we conducted of leadership practices. In that study we found that of all behaviors describing leadership, the most important single item was the leader’s display of trust in others. Irwin Federman, venture capitalist and former president and CEO (chief executive officer) of chip-maker Monolithic Memories, says it best: “Trust is a risk game. The leader must ante up first.” If leaders want to be seen as trustworthy, they must first give evidence of their own trust in others.

Sam Walton, founder and chairman of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., provides an excellent example of trustworthiness and “anteing up first” in leadership: In 1983 Walton—rated by *Forbes* to be the richest man in the United States—made a wager. Concerned that the company might have a disappointing year, he bet Wal-Mart employees that if they achieved a greater profit than in previous years he would don a hula skirt and hula down Wall Street. They did. And he did. He kept his word and did what he said he would do. He showed he had integrity, even if it meant public embarrassment. But imagine what would have happened had Sam not kept his word. You can believe that his employees would not have anted up for the next bet!

Competence

The leadership attribute chosen next most frequently is competence. To enlist in another’s cause, we must believe that person knows what he or she is doing. We must see the person as capable and effective. If we doubt the leader’s abili-

ties, we are unlikely to enlist in the crusade. Leadership competence does not necessarily refer to the leader's technical abilities. Rather the competence followers look for varies with the leader's position and the condition of the company. For example, the higher the rank of the leader, the more people demand to see demonstrations of abilities in strategic planning and policy making. If a company desperately needs to clarify its corporate strategy, a CEO with savvy in competitive marketing may be seen as a fine leader. But at the line functional level, where subordinates expect guidance in technical areas, these same managerial abilities will not be enough.

We have come to refer to the kind of competence needed by leaders as *value-added competence*. Functional competence may be necessary, but it is insufficient. The leader must bring some *added value* to the position. Tom Melohn, president of North American Tool and Die (NATD) in San Leandro, California, is a good case in point. Tom, along with a partner, bought NATD several years ago. A former consumer-products executive, Tom knows nothing about how to run a drill press or a stamping machine. He claims he cannot even screw the license plates on his car. Yet, in the nine years since he bought the company, NATD has excelled in every possible measure in its industry, whereas under the original founder—an experienced toolmaker—NATD achieved only average or below-average results.

If Tom brings no industry, company, or technical expertise to NATD, what has enabled him to lead the firm to its astounding results? Our answer: Tom added to the firm what it most needed at the time—the abilities to motivate and sell. Tom entrusted the skilled employees with the work they knew well; and for his part, he applied the selling skills he had learned from a quarter-century in marketing consumer products. He also rewarded and recognized the NATD “gang” for their accomplishments, increasing their financial and emotional sense of ownership in the firm.

Being Forward-Looking

Over half of our respondents selected “forward-looking” as their third most sought after leadership trait. We expect our leaders to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the company. Some use the word “vision”; others, the word “dream.” Still others refer to this sense of direction as a “calling” or “personal agenda.” Whatever the word, the message is clear: True leaders must know where they are going.

Two other surveys that we conducted with top executives reinforced the importance of clarity of purpose and direction. In one study, 284 senior executives rated “developing a strategic planning and forecasting capability”

as the most critical concern. These same senior managers, when asked to select the most important characteristics in a CEO, cited “a leadership style of honesty and integrity” first, followed by “a long-term vision and direction for the company.”

By “forward-looking” we do not mean the magical power of a prescient visionary. The reality is far more down to earth: It is the ability to set or select a desirable destination toward which the organization should head. The vision of a leader is the compass that sets the course of the company. Followers ask that a leader have a well-defined orientation to the future. A leader’s “vision” is, in this way, similar to an architect’s model of a new building or an engineer’s prototype of a new product.

Think of it another way. Suppose you wanted to take a trip to a place where you had never been before—say Nairobi, Kenya. What would you do over the next few days if you knew you were going there in six months? Probably get a map, read a book about the city, look at pictures, talk to someone who had been there. You would find out what sights to see, what the weather is like, what to wear, and where to eat, shop, and stay. Followers ask nothing more from a leader than a similar kind of orientation: “What will the company look like, feel like, be like when it arrives at its goal in six months or six years? Describe it to us. Tell us in rich detail so we can select the proper route and know when we have arrived.”

Inspiration

We expect our leaders to be enthusiastic, energetic, and positive about the future—a bit like cheerleaders. It is not enough for a leader to have a dream about the future. He or she must be able to communicate the vision in ways that encourage us to sign on for the duration. As Apple Computer manager Dave Paterson puts it, “The leader is the evangelist for the dream.”

Some people react with discomfort to the idea that being inspiring is an essential leadership quality. One chief executive officer of a large corporation even told us, “I don’t trust people who are inspiring”—no doubt in response to past crusaders who led their followers to death or destruction. Other executives are skeptical of their ability to inspire others. Both are making a mistake. It is absolutely essential that leaders inspire our confidence in the validity of the goal. Enthusiasm and excitement signal the leader’s personal conviction to pursuing that dream. If a leader displays no passion for a cause, why should others?

Credibility

Three of these four attributes—honesty, competence, and being inspiring—comprise what communications experts refer to as “credibility.” We found, quite unexpectedly, in our investigation of admired leadership qualities that more than anything else people want leaders who are *credible*. Credibility is the foundation on which inspiring leadership visions are built. When we believe a leader is credible, then we somehow feel more secure around him or her. This sense of security enables us to let go of our reservations and release enormous personal energy on behalf of the common vision. Credibility and an attractive image of the future are the very essence of leadership.

However, credibility is extremely fragile. It takes years to earn it, an instant to lose it. Credibility grows minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, through persistent, consistent, and patient demonstration that one is worthy of followers’ trust and respect. It is lost with one false step, one thoughtless remark, one inconsistent act, one broken agreement, one lie, one cover-up.

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Leaders establish and maintain their credibility by their actions, and in our research we uncovered five fundamental practices that enabled leaders to earn followers’ confidence and to get extraordinary things done. When at their best, leaders (1) challenge the process, (2) inspire a shared vision, (3) enable others to act, (4) model the way, and (5) encourage the heart.¹

Challenging the Process

Leaders are pioneers—people who seek out new opportunities and are willing to change the status quo. They innovate, experiment, and explore ways to improve the organization. They treat mistakes as learning experiences. Leaders also stay prepared to meet whatever challenges may confront them.

Inspiring a Shared Vision

Leaders look toward and beyond the horizon. They envision the future with a positive and hopeful outlook. Leaders are expressive and attract followers through their genuineness and skillful communications. They show others how mutual interests can be met through commitment to a common purpose.

1. The *Leadership Practices Inventory* measures these five practices.

Enabling Others to Act

Leaders infuse people with spirit-developing relationships based on mutual trust. They stress collaborative goals. They actively involve others in planning, giving them discretion to make their own decisions. Leaders ensure that people feel strong and capable.

Modeling the Way

Leaders are clear about their business values and beliefs. They keep people and projects on course by behaving consistently with these values and modeling how they expect others to act. Leaders also plan and break projects down into achievable steps, creating opportunities for small wins. They make it easier for others to achieve goals by focusing on key priorities.

Encouraging the Heart

Leaders encourage people to persist in their efforts by linking recognition with accomplishments, visibly recognizing contributions to the common vision. They let others know that their efforts are appreciated and express pride in the team's accomplishments. Leaders also find ways to celebrate achievements. They nurture a team spirit that enables people to sustain continued efforts.

UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP

Leadership is a relationship, a unique and special trust between the leader and followers. The development of this trusting relationship requires our full and caring attention as leaders. Below are five prerequisites to building and maintaining this bond of trust.

1. *Know your followers.* Building any relationship begins with getting to know those we desire to lead. Get to know their hopes, their fears, their values, their biases, their dreams, their nightmares, their aspirations, and their disappointments. Find out what is important to your followers. Come to know what they seek. Only in this way can you show them how their interests can be served by aligning with yours.
2. *Stand up for your beliefs.* People who take a stand are appreciated in U.S. culture. We resolutely refuse to follow people who lack confidence in their

own values and decisions. Confusion among your followers over your stand creates stress; not knowing what you believe leads to conflict, indecision, and political rivalry. There is, however, a danger in always standing on principle; it can make one rigid and insensitive. The key to escaping rigidity is to remain open to others. Listen; understand; empathize. We respect leaders who can listen to and understand our points of view, yet believe in their own hearts that other viewpoints are superior. If your beliefs are strongly held, ethical, and based on sound thinking, followers will find ways to align themselves with you.

3. *Speak with passion.* Managers constantly talk about motivating their people, of lighting a fire under them. If the leader is a wet match, there will be no spark to ignite passion in others. Enthusiasm, energy, and commitment begin with the leader. To gain the commitment of others you must communicate your excitement about the dream. Paint word pictures. Tell stories. Relate anecdotes. Weave metaphors. Enable others to see, hear, taste, smell, and feel what you experience. When the dream lives inside others, it lives forever.
4. *Lead by example.* Leaders are role models. We look to them for clues on how we should behave. We always believe their actions over their words. We will never forget the story told to us by a young manager, John Schultz, about his days as a high-school football player:

When I played high-school football, I had three coaches. The first two were exactly alike. Each said, "Men, while you are in training I don't want you to smoke, drink, stay up late, or fool around with girls. Got that?" Then we would watch our coaches during the season. They would smoke, drink, stay up late, and fool around with women. So what do you suppose we did? Boys will be boys, after all.

My third coach was the best I ever had. At the beginning of the season we had the same locker-room sermon as with the other coaches. Except this coach just said, "I have only one rule. You can do anything I do. If I smoke, drink, stay up late, or fool around with women, then I would expect you to do the same. But if I don't, you'd better not!"

If leaders ask followers to observe certain standards, then the leaders need to live by the same rules. That is exactly what we were told many times by exemplary leaders. You can only lead by example. Leadership is not a spectator sport. Leaders do not sit in the stands and watch. Hero myths aside, neither are leaders in the game substituting for the players. Leaders coach. They show others how to behave.

5. *Conquer yourself.* Jim Whittaker, the first American to reach the summit of Mt. Everest, learned that he could not conquer a mountain, because mountains cannot be conquered. He had to conquer himself—his hopes, his fears. It might brighten our heroic image of leaders to believe that they conquer organizations, communities, states, nations, the world. It might make good cinema to picture the leader riding into town on a white horse and single-handedly destroying the villains. But this superhero portrait of great leaders only perpetuates a falsehood. The real struggle of leadership is internal. The everyday struggles of leaders include internal questions such as: Do you understand what is going on in the company and the world in which it operates? Are you prepared to handle the problems the company is facing? Did you make the right decision? Did you do the right thing? Where do you think the company should be headed? Are you the right one to lead others there?

This inner struggle places enormous stress on the leader. Followers do not want to see that their leaders lack self-confidence. Certainly they like to know their leaders are human, that they can laugh and cry and have a good time; but followers will not place their confidence in someone who appears weak, uncertain, or lacking in resolve. Followers need to sense that the leader's internal struggle has been fought and won. Conquering yourself begins with determining your value system. Strongly held beliefs compel you to take a stand.

THE EYE OF THE FOLLOWER

These characteristics, these practices, these relationships are tough measures for the leader. It may not seem right to be judged so harshly, but followers perceive leadership in their own terms, and those terms are not always fair. After all, the leader is not a leader unless there are followers; and there are no true followers unless the leader is a leader in the eye of the follower.

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2

Leadership as Persuasion and Adaptation

Julia T. Wood

Group leadership has been of interest to scholars and practitioners in the social sciences since people first began studying their own behaviors. A great deal of attention has been directed toward questions such as “What are the characteristics of task leaders?,” “What are the variables that affect the emergence and maintenance of leadership in problem-solving groups?,” and “What is the best method of training leaders?” As a result of the many different orientations, however, there is a lack of consistency in research findings about leadership. No one really seems to know what “good leadership” is (Lumsden, 1974). Nevertheless, it is essential to understand the nature of leadership and the ways in which we can improve it.

PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

There are several approaches that have been prominent in research concerned with the determinants of leadership. The “trait approach,” the “situational approach,” the “follower approach,” and the “contingency model” have been proposed as explanations of the factors that determine leadership in small groups.

The Trait Approach

The first concentrated attempt to define the factors that result in leadership was the “trait approach.” Enormous amounts of time and effort were devoted to constructing lists of the physical and psychological attributes believed to differentiate leaders from nonleaders. Unfortunately, there was minimal agreement among researchers as to what those distinguishing traits were. The lists of “definitive qualities of leaders” were almost as numerous as the researchers who constructed them. Of several hundred traits studied, only a very few were consistently correlated with leadership (Shaw, 1971). Gouldner (1950) reviewed the empirical investigations related to leadership traits and concluded that “there is no reliable evidence concerning the existence of universal leadership traits” (p. 34). The trait approach is unsatisfactory because it implies that leaders are born, not made.

The Situational Approach

A second perspective on leadership, the “situational approach,” holds that it is the social circumstances that command the degree to which any person’s leadership potential is exercised. According to this approach, the crucial determinant of leadership is the social environment in which leadership is needed. The major claim of the situational approach is that different leadership skills are required in different situations. The deficiency of this approach, however, is that it implies that leaders are born of situations, not of their own abilities.

The Follower Approach

Although the situational approach is currently endorsed by many researchers, a third orientation to leadership has received some acceptance. The “follower approach” maintains that the most effective leaders are those most able to satisfy the needs or desires of a group of followers (Sanford, 1950; Tannenbaum, Weschler, & Massarik, 1974). The follower approach is inadequate because it implies that the emergence and maintenance of leadership is dependent on followers, not on a leader’s own skills.

The Contingency Model

By combining ideas from the situational approach and the study of leadership styles, a fourth approach to leadership was developed (Fiedler, 1964). This model maintains that effective leadership depends not only on a leader’s per-

sonal style but also on the characteristics of a situation. The contingency model is an exciting step in our understanding of leadership, because it refutes the simplistic and one dimensional explanations of the earlier approaches. Nevertheless, this model, too, is unsatisfying because it ignores the leader's personal ability to control himself or herself and the situation.

Assumptions of Four Approaches

In order to understand more fully these four approaches to small-group leadership, it is helpful to identify the assumptions on which they are based.

1. The trait approach maintains that a person either does or does not possess the particular traits that are considered to be the determinants of leadership.
2. The situational approach assumes that certain situations call for certain types of leadership and that the leaders will be those who best fit the requirements of a situation. The situational characteristics are viewed as the determinants of leadership.
3. The follower approach holds that the needs of group members determine who will lead. Leadership, then, is a coincidence between the needs of a membership and the abilities that a person happens to possess. The members' needs are assumed to be the key determinants of leadership.
4. The contingency model maintains that personal styles and situational characteristics combine to determine leadership. A "proper match" between styles and situations determines who will lead a group.

These assumptions show that each of the four major approaches to leadership shares a basic orientation: each approach maintains, at least implicitly, that there is a static quality to leadership, a quality that can be isolated and described apart from leaders who operate in particular group situations. A leader's active involvement in the small-group process has been overlooked, ruling out the possibility that a leader can, like any other human being, adapt his or her behavior in order to enhance his or her effectiveness.

A static conception of leadership, therefore, is inaccurate. Small groups are characterized by contingencies—by a lack of certainty regarding events that may occur. Once we acknowledge this dynamic nature of small groups, it becomes clear that a useful theory of leadership must be similarly dynamic. By considering a rhetorical perspective on the process of leading, we can focus

on the dynamic nature of leadership and the possibilities for human control over contingent situations.

A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP

As a philosophy of human action, beginning with the writings of ancient thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero, rhetoric is based on the belief that humans can control their effectiveness through the discovery and management of behaviors that take place in relation to other people. Humans are seen as purposeful agents who can consciously control their own actions and, therefore, the ways in which others respond to them.

A rhetorical perspective on small-group leadership rejects claims that there are static determinants of leadership. Leading is a process, a persuasive process in which a leader achieves effectiveness by the careful selection and management of his or her actions within a particular group situation. The leader has the potential to control himself or herself, the situation, and the membership through the use of symbolic behavior. A rhetorical perspective on leadership, then, is characterized by two features: (1) the persuasive nature of the leading process and (2) the recognition that humans can control their environments by adapting to social circumstances.

The Persuasive Process

Leading is an active process that involves making choices regarding behaviors. Presumably, a leader has goals for himself or herself, for the individuals in the group, and for the group as a whole. By selecting and implementing behavioral strategies that are designed to lead to these goals, a leader exerts influence and, therefore, engages in persuasion. The leader of a small group inevitably effects persuasions by the ways in which he or she chooses to present himself or herself, by the methods he or she employs in directing the group's tasks, and by the manner in which he or she relates to the group members. A leader's choices influence the members' evaluation of him or her and they, in turn, influence the group's success in reaching collective goals.

The persuasive nature of the leading process has not always been recognized. Some people, for example, persist in claiming that democratic behaviors are not really influences because they imply a "sharing of control." Yet, in choosing to act democratically and not to dominate actively, a leader is exercising influence: he or she engenders in the group members a certain perception of the

leader as a leader and of themselves as members of the leader's group. Even the most democratic behaviors are persuasions that reflect a leader's choice of effective behaviors to guide the group. A leader cannot avoid influencing the group. Therefore, identifying and studying the choices of persuasion that must be made by a leader become important: What types of influence does the leader wish to exert? Whom does he or she need to persuade? How do his or her particular choices affect members' perceptions of him or her and of themselves? How are various persuasive effects achieved by a leader? Leaders should be trained to be *aware* of these choices and to estimate the probable effects of various choices on collective goals.

Control Through Adaptation

A rhetorical perspective on leading also emphasizes the possibility that humans can control their environments through sensitive *adaptation*. People are capable of adjusting themselves in order to be more effective in relation to others. In this orientation, it is assumed that a leader can persuade the group members to need what he or she has to offer, to value the skills that he or she possesses, to perceive their situation as one in which his or her guidance is desirable or necessary, to commit themselves to collective goals, and to work together in a satisfactory manner.

Perhaps an example or two will help to clarify the view that leaders can adjust themselves, their memberships, and their situations in order to lead more effectively. When Gerald Ford first became President, he chose to present himself as a simple, honest man. After the criminal and demoralizing events of Watergate, Ford's apparent honesty and openness were welcomed by a nation weary of deceit and secrecy. However, when Ford's "down-home" presentation became the target of criticism and even ridicule, he began to shift his image. He made more definitive statements and took stronger positions on issues of national policy, altering his self-presentation in ways that he presumably believed to be acceptable or desirable to the voting public.

A newly promoted company president, in taking over a firm that had degenerated into chaos, was at first appreciated and praised for his firmness and positive decision making. When the company was on the road to recovery, however, his tightly controlled, authoritative approach was no longer popular with employees. He had to adjust his leadership so that it was more relaxed and person centered.

These are only two examples of figures whose leadership behaviors are best understood from a rhetorical perspective. We must recognize that leaders, members, and group situations are all flexible and that a rhetorical sensitivity

to the methods of persuasion can enhance most people's abilities to lead well. Leaders' capacities for adapting themselves and their situations through the deliberate management of their behaviors toward others should be emphasized. Such adaptation is desirable as long as it neither jeopardizes one's personal integrity nor results in unethical behavior toward others.

VALUE OF A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A rhetorical perspective on leadership offers a realistic and useful means for understanding how leaders emerge, how they maintain their power, and how they build effective, cohesive groups.

A second value of a rhetorical perspective is its potential as a strategy for training leaders. Unlike previous methods of training, a rhetorical approach does not provide any "recipes" for success. Instead, it offers potential leaders a useful way of thinking about themselves in relation to a group and its task. By viewing themselves from a rhetorical perspective, leaders could analyze their own behaviors and the situations in which they are to lead. Potential leaders would be able to assess the interplay among the forces of themselves, their goals, their group members, and their group situations. Given a rhetorical orientation to their work, leaders would be able to plan actions that would probably be effective in their particular circumstances.

Every group situation is different; the rules must vary according to the situations and the people involved. A rhetorical perspective on leadership, viewed as a process of persuasion and adaptation, offers a useful method of analysis for leaders of problem-solving groups.

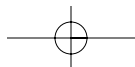
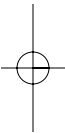
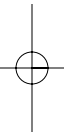
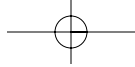
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Originally published in The 1976 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators.



3

Leadership from the Gestalt Perspective

H.B. Karp

Abstract: The current trend in organization development is toward large-system interventions. Although nothing is wrong with this trend, it is important that individual growth and effectiveness not be ignored.

This article explores the following definition of leadership: *Leadership is the art of getting people to perform a task willingly.* However, two key factors affect leader effectiveness: competence and comfort. A leader can achieve maximum effectiveness first by being aware of what and how he or she thinks and second by considering options for any specific situation. Leadership then becomes the ability to adapt one's authentic style to the circumstances of a particular situation.

In recent years, the trend in organization development (OD) has been focused on large-system interventions. Strategies such as self-directed work teams, right-sizing, and organizational reengineering are just a few examples of this trend. Although this direction is not wrong, individual growth and effectiveness may be downplayed, if not completely lost, in the attempt to evolve larger and more comprehensive interventions. Whether within the context of a major system-wide change strategy or cast in an individual's daily work routine, a consistent and pragmatic means of developing leadership is needed—one that will respond to what is occurring right here, right now.

The one theory base that has consistently responded to this demand is Gestalt. Gestalt originated with Fritz Perls in the field of psychotherapy in the mid-1930s. Described as “therapy for normals,” the Gestalt theory base has more recently been used to define an effective and healthy organization, just as it has been used to describe a healthy and functioning individual.

In recent years, Gestalt has provided a unique perspective to organizations while maintaining the prime OD objective of increasing individual and group effectiveness through intervention in group processes.

TERMINOLOGY

Prior to presenting the Gestalt leadership model, it will be helpful to clarify several terms and to show how they relate to leadership and, in some cases, to each other.

Leadership

Leadership is the art of getting people to perform a task, willingly. This definition is clearly different from “management,” which can be defined as “the science of the allocation of resources.” This definition of leadership has three operative terms: *art*, *task*, and *willingly*.

Art indicates that leadership is a combination of both talent and skills. Leadership talent is distributed normally throughout the population. Not everyone has the talent to be an effective leader, just as not everyone has the talent to be a concert pianist. The opposite side of the coin also implies that very few people either have no talent or have all the talent.

One way to actualize the talent that exists within an individual is by way of skill development, through training, education, and experience.

Art also implies that each leader performs individually. Just as no two singers sing alike, no two authors write alike, and no two sculptors sculpt alike, no two leaders lead alike. It is impossible to teach people to be good leaders. They can only be taught what leadership is about and then assisted in adapting that knowledge to their own individual styles. In the end, people will be effective leaders only to the extent that their potential for individual creativity and uniqueness of expression will allow.

The second term, *task*, means that leadership does not occur in a vacuum. Two structural elements must exist before a leadership function can occur. First, at least two individuals must be involved: a leader and at least one

follower. Second, leadership must have an objective. The task may be work oriented, such as manufacturing a product, solving a problem, or designing a new widget; or it may be socially oriented, such as planning a party. Regardless, leadership is a process that affects how the task finally will be accomplished.

Willingly, the third element, means that leadership precludes the use of threat or coercion as a means of getting the job done. The use of threats, monetary rewards, or promises of future promotion to control another's performance requires neither skill nor talent and is not leadership. *Willingly* implies that another person will perform the task without resenting having to do it or resenting you for having assigned it.

It is safe to say that no one is capable of being a maximally effective leader 100 percent of the time and that sometimes it is a lot easier to be a good leader than it is at other times. In this light, the definition for leadership can be converted into the following pragmatic statement: To whatever extent an individual can get others to perform a task willingly in a given situation, to that extent the person can be judged an effective leader.

Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness depends on two basic and essential criteria: *competence* and *comfort*.¹

Competence, which is the more observable and measurable of the two criteria, refers to the leader's ability to get the work done willingly by others; it can be measured through attitude surveys, critical incident analysis, and, of course, the quality of the work itself.

Comfort refers to a leader's comfort with himself or herself and with his or her individual leadership style. The importance of this criterion is that it clearly implies that *there is no one best way to lead*. For example, any accomplished art student can copy a master effectively. It is not until the student takes that skill and creates *something unique* that he or she is considered to be an artist. As it is with painters, so it is with leaders or anyone else who practices an art for a living.

Therefore, if a leader is judged to be competent by observable measures and is comfortable with his or her leadership style, that person has every right to resist the demands of others to alter *how* he or she leads. Like artists, only they themselves know best how to uniquely express their art.

1. Note that the term comfort refers to comfort with self and style and does not refer to what might be called situational discomfort, i.e., the discomfort that arises from dealing with situational ambiguity, tough choices, or painful situations.

If, on the other hand, the person is comfortable but not terribly competent or competent but not very comfortable, it may be wise to consider making a career change to something that will easily provide both comfort and competence. It is here that that person stands to make the greatest contribution and simultaneously gain the most satisfaction and growth from the work.

Boundary

One additional Gestalt term, *boundary*, needs to be surfaced because it also has major impact on the leadership model. The essence of Gestalt theory holds that each human being is separate and distinct from all others. A person's individuality, or *I-Boundary*, is made of many sub-boundaries such as attitudes, values, tastes, assumptions, abilities, and so forth. All of these combine to make each person absolutely unique. In a practical sense, each sub-boundary carries the explicit message, "For me, this far and no farther." Thus, boundaries, as the word implies, define and give each individual his or her identifiable personality characteristics, just as its geographic borders give a nation its identifiable configuration.

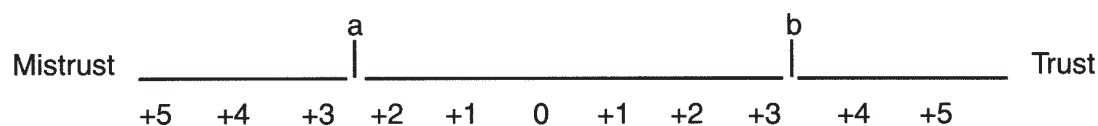


Figure 1. The Mistrust-Trust Polarity

Human characteristics can be seen as operating in polarities, such as good-bad, strong-weak, introvert-extrovert, or tough-tender. Each sub-boundary then can be seen as an area that is defined by a range within that polarity. For example, in Figure 1, the polarity ranges from "Mistrust" to "Trust." The range that is indicated between the points labeled "a" and "b" is my sub-boundary on this dimension and defines the extent to which I have the capacity to authentically mistrust and trust others. Note that this makes no statement about how other people are, only my capacity on this dimension. The positions at each extreme represent the maximum potential for human experience for this characteristic, i.e., being as mistrusting and trusting as it is humanly possible to be. The configuration in Figure 1 shows that at point a, I am mistrusting enough to always lock my car, no matter where I am parked; at the other extreme, point b, I am trustful enough to take most people at their word the first time I meet them. My range of effectiveness and self-confidence, in terms of mistrusting and trusting others, lies between points a and b. If I try to operate

outside these parameters, chances are that I will be tentative, lacking in confidence, and marginally effective at best. All sub-boundaries operate in this way. A person's sub-boundary can also be thought of as one's "Zone of Present Effectiveness" or "Zone of Comfort."

An individual's I-Boundary can be represented by the pattern intersecting the various sub-boundaries, as shown in Figure 2²

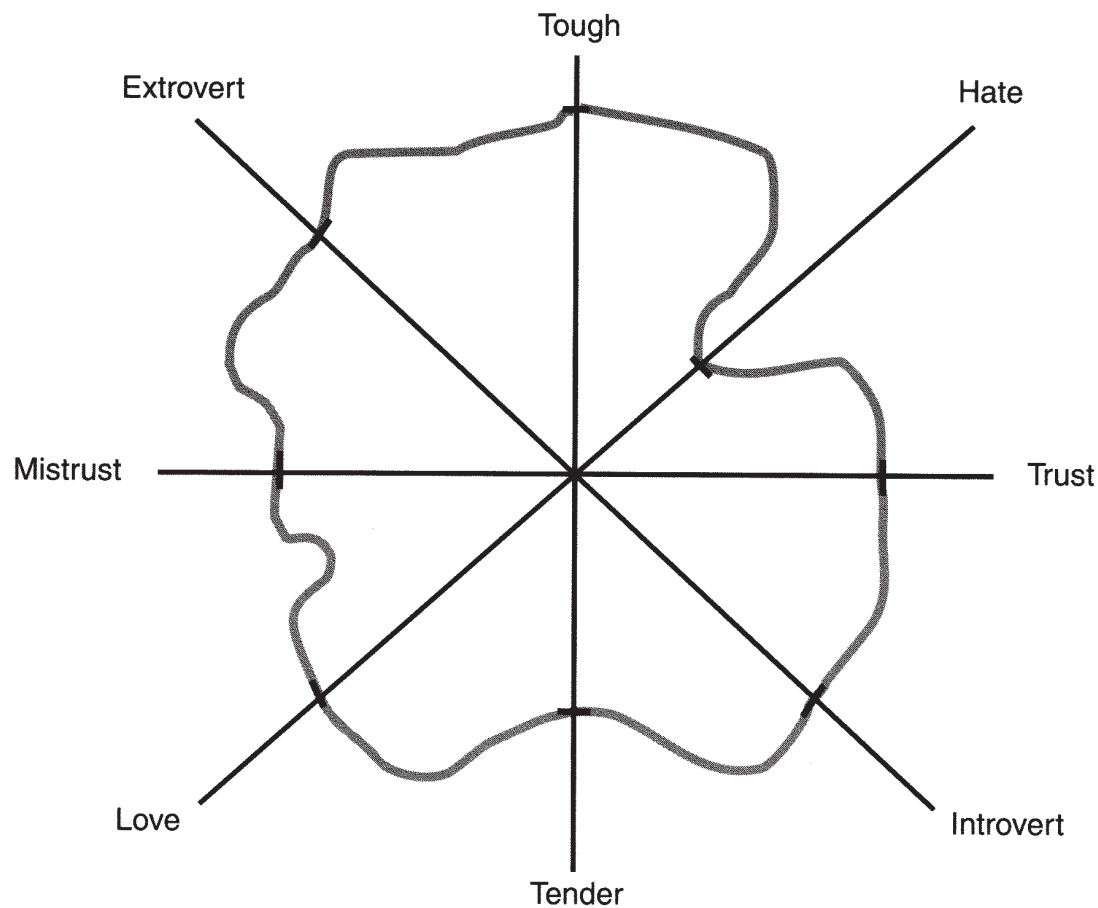


Figure 2. I-Boundary

Each person's I-Boundary is intact. It is essential that each individual recognize, accept, and value his or her personal I-Boundary. The simplest step toward increasing your effectiveness and comfort with self, in leadership or any other area, is to have your *perceived* boundary, (where you think it is or should be) correspond to your *actual* boundary (where it actually is).

2. For a more detailed discussion of boundaries and how they work see Polster and Polster (1973), p. 107 or Karp (1995), pp. 9–23.

THE GESTALT LEADERSHIP MODEL

Leadership effectiveness is most influenced by two highly individualistic variables: the need for *congruence* and the need for *integration*.

The Need for Congruence

Congruence, or authenticity, can be viewed as having one's *perceived* boundary correspond to one's *actual* boundary. Regardless of who the person is, a leader will be judged by what he or she *does*. As suggested earlier, leadership effectiveness can only be determined by the appropriateness of the specific actions taken to get others willingly to comply to work.

Because it is highly unlikely that any leader will be able to get willing compliance in every situation, increasing leadership effectiveness becomes a matter of increasing one's "success rate" in choosing the effective and appropriate actions when responding to each new and different situation. It is not so much a matter of *what* the leader elects to do as much as it is a matter of *how* the selection is made.

In Figure 3, the top broken line is designated as "Actions." It represents the nearly infinite range of specific behaviors available to every leader to attempt to get willing compliance to work (planning, supporting, reprimanding, encouraging, training, coaching, and so on).

No specific action, in and of itself, is either good or bad. It is only functional or nonfunctional in getting compliance from another person in a given situation. Again, these actions and their results are the only things that can be observed and judged by anyone else.

Directly below the "Actions" line, however, are three lower levels, all of which are internal to the individual. These levels are not observable or subject to the judgment of others; understanding these levels is clearly the best means by which leaders can increase their own effectiveness.

Boundary

The lowest level, "Boundary," is not only the most general of the three levels, it also is the most basic and important determinant of effective leadership behavior. In this case "Boundary" is synonymous with one's assumptions about people. It refers to how the individual leader experiences self as well as others. Because a leader works exclusively with people, as opposed to cabinet makers who work with wood or masons who work with stone, it is both essential and pri-

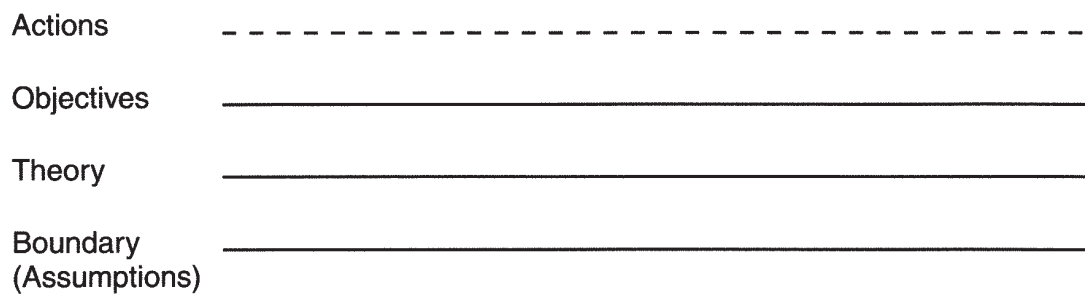


Figure 2. Four Levels of Leadership

many that leaders be clear about the assumptions they make about people. The single most important question that a leader must answer is “What are people like?”

I would like to point out that the only person I can ever know, to any extent, is myself. My interactions with everyone else, to greater or lesser degree, are based only on my assumptions of how they are. Because I do not share a common nervous system with anyone else, I can never really know how people are merely through observation. Therefore, the more I know about me—who I am and how I see things—the more I am able accurately to check out my assumptions with and about others.

Many theorists, most notably Douglas McGregor (1960), make this point quite strongly. However, the difference between the Gestalt view and other views is that the Gestalt view is much more concerned with *how* the assumptions are made and clarified than it is with *what* the assumptions actually are.

To state the premise simply:

The more clear and the more confident leaders are about their assumptions concerning people, regardless of what those assumptions are, the higher the probability that they will be effective leaders.

Theory

Once leaders are clear and comfortable with the assumptions they hold, the next level to be addressed is “Theory.” “Boundary” asks the single question, “What are people like?” In contrast, “Theory” asks the single question, “What is leadership about?” Just as there is an infinite range of assumptions about people, so there is an infinitive range of leadership theories. I would suggest that there are just about as many leadership theories as there are individual leaders and theorists. The real question being asked is, “What is leadership theory about for me?”

Whether an individual ascribes to an established theory, chooses to modify an established theory, or devises an original theory, the important points to remember are as follows:

- The theory must be clear and explicit; and
- The theory must be consonant with the leader's own assumptions about people.

To be explicit, suppose I were to ask a large random sample of people the following question: "Who was the more effective leader—General Douglas MacArthur or Martin Luther King?" My guess would be that most people would judge them as comparable within the contexts of their specific situations. It requires only a passing knowledge of the history of these two men to realize that probably the only thing they had in common was that each held a very clear, defined, and different view of what people were like, themselves included. Not only was each man clear about his assumptions, but each operated out of a style of leadership that was highly consonant with how he saw things. Had MacArthur tried to lead like King or King like MacArthur, neither would have been effective.

Objectives

The third, and last, of the internal levels deals with objectives. This level also addresses a single question: "What do I want?" Objectives can be viewed in two ways. The first and most subjective view relates to personal objectives. Whether these objectives are general and long range ("I want to be successful" or "I want to be highly regarded by my superiors") or short range and specific ("I want a corner office" or "I want the promotion that's coming up"), the more clear and the more concise the individual is about what is wanted, the higher the probability that he or she will succeed.

Secondly, objectives must also be viewed from the organizational perspective. Here the organization's demands become a guideline for the individual's objectives. The more people are clear and comfortable with wanting whatever they want, the higher the probability that they will be able to integrate their personal objectives with the organizational objectives so that pursuing either one will have a positive impact on getting the other. For example, if I am clear about wanting the promotion and clear about what the organizational demand for productivity is, pursuing either one will work toward getting the other. The most important aspects of "Objectives" are the following:

- The individual leader is clear about and “owns” each objective; and
- The “Objectives” are consonant with the leader’s “Boundary.”

On the surface it would seem that the leader must spend an appreciable amount of time and energy struggling with each of the three lower levels. Paradoxically, this is not the case at all. Actually, the situation simply calls for increasing one’s awareness. Clarity on any level is a matter of having one’s *perceived* position, i.e., where one thinks one is or should be, accurately reflect one’s *actual* position, i.e., where one is.

Actions

The last level literally is where all of the action is. It is here that a leader’s effectiveness ultimately is determined. Although no one ever is accountable to anyone else for what happens on any of the three lower levels, a leader is totally accountable for the choices made at the fourth level.

The assumption here is that at any given moment, any one of myriad possible actions are available to attempt to get willing compliance to work from others. The broader the range or the greater the number of authentic choices that fit for the leader at any given moment, the higher the probability that the leader will be able to respond appropriately.

In this case, increasing leadership effectiveness is only a matter of answering the following question: “Given an almost infinite number of choices, how do I select an action that will work best for me in getting willing compliance in this situation, versus selecting one that just barely makes it or doesn’t make it at all?”

Most people attempt to answer this question by going outside of themselves (asking a colleague, reading a book, or attending a seminar). There is nothing wrong with this approach; however, I suggest that there is a better place to go, at least at first: Go inside. Herein lies the Gestalt perspective to leadership.

Having worked with this model for a number of years, I see that the clearer the individual is about his or her assumptions concerning self and others, the higher the probability that it will be easy to develop a theory of leadership and a set of objectives that are consistent with and clearly reflect those assumptions. Most important, it is from this position that the leader will be able, with confidence, to select the leadership actions that will enable him or her to deal easily and effectively with most situations.

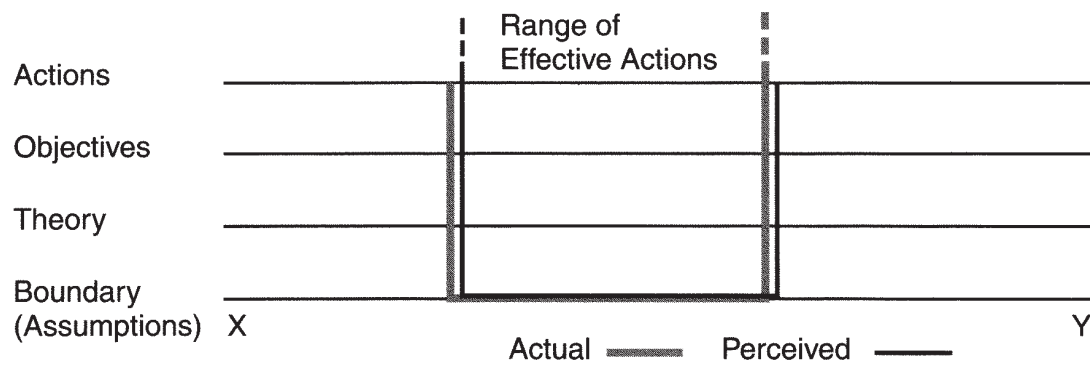


Figure 4a. Manager “A”—Congruence

Using Theory X / Theory Y as a convenient set of assumptions to illustrate the premise in Figure 4a, “A” is clear about how she sees herself, others, and the work setting.³

From this point of clarity and comfort, she is more able to develop ways in which to work more confidently and comfortably and she is more able to surface and state clear long- and short-term objectives that are important for her. She is clearer about what is important to her, freer to give her commitments openly and unhesitatingly, more willing to state disagreement with things that are dissonant for her, and much more available for effective collaboration when that is what is called for in the situation (Karp, 1976).

Leader “B,” on the other hand, is unclear about his assumptions. For him there is little or no awareness of what people are like, including himself. His tendency is to confuse a changing situation with the notion that the characteristics of people are changing on a moment-by-moment basis. Therefore, no theory ever fits well, no objectives are ever tested, and, more to the point, very few actions are ever wholly trusted by him. Simply stated, nothing ever fits for “B.” His purgatory is one of constantly plaguing himself with questions such as, “What will my boss think?” “What should I do next?” “What would my predecessor do in this situation?” and “Is it fair for me to ask for this?”

3. The focus of this piece is not yet another reworking of Theory X/Theory Y. “X” and “Y” are being used solely because they represent one very familiar and clear example of a relevant sub-boundary. Equally relevant, but less workable, would be the sub-boundary of mistrust/trust of others. In this case, the “growing edge” of the cynic would be to learn to trust others more appropriately; the “growing edge” for the naive individual would be to learn to mistrust others to the point that that response would be appropriate. Growth can occur in either direction, as opposed to the more conventional view that growth only occurs toward the right or “trust” (Theory Y) end of the continuum. Gestalt theory does not imply that one “should” move toward either pole, that is, that the capacity for trusting is any more valuable than the capacity for mistrusting. The thrust of Gestalt theory is on the individual’s being clear about where he or she is on this dimension right now and then being able to move in the direction that is most responsive to getting what is wanted.

Because “B” has no clear sense of what he wants, how he sees things, what is or is not important for him, and little ability to support himself, he has no choice but to rely heavily on other people’s views, judgments, and suggestions. This does not provide a healthy prescription for increasing leadership effectiveness.

In Figure 4b, leader “B” actually is somewhere nearer the “X” side of the continuum; however, because of his lack of awareness of this or the social unacceptability of being seen as an “X” type, a surface conversion to human-relations training has occurred, and he perceives himself as being much more toward the “Y” side. This usually takes the form of such thoughts as, “I should be more open (or participative or collaborative or caring).” His assumptions generally are derived from theorists, bosses, and consultants who tell him how he should see other people. From this position, both his theory and objectives are cast in terms of others’ views and values.

The result is that his *actions*, although usually adequate, are rarely creative and rarely fully responsive to the situation; frequently, these actions are low risk. The actions he allows himself, that is, those arising from the perceived boundary, are not compatible with who he really is and how he sees things. Those actions that would fit for him and be responsive to the present challenging conditions he rejects for fear of being seen as an autocrat, or Theory X type leader.

As opposed to leader “A,” who brings all she has to the work situation, leader “B” brings only the shadow of others. As long as this condition exists, he will never be able to fully maximize his potential for personal growth and creativity, nor will the organization be able to realize the full extent of his ability to contribute effectively. Even more damaging, although more subtle, is that by being incongruent, he models incongruity as his leadership style to

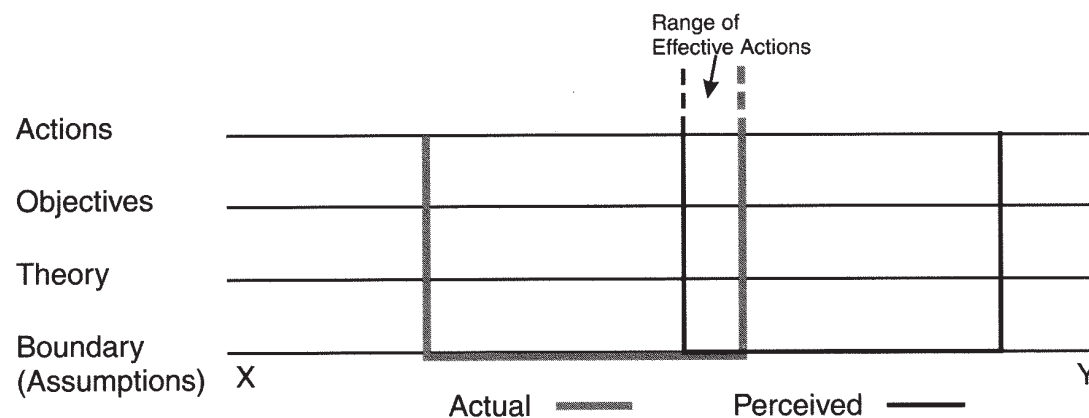


Figure 4b. Manager “B”—Incongruence

those he is attempting to influence. This sets a bad example and tends to increase the probability that the next “generation” of leaders will be even more likely to look to others for guidance and direction first, before attempting to rely on their own knowledge, internal strength, and sense of what is appropriate. His only area for real, effective action is the small area in “Actions” where his actual and his perceived capacities overlap.

The key to increased leadership effectiveness is first to get as much overlap as possible between where you are and where you think you are. The greater the amount of overlap on the “Boundary” level, the more congruence and choices that fit on all other levels, particularly on the “Actions” line.

The Need for Integration

Gestalt theory maintains that every human being is born with the capacity to experience his or her full range of human characteristics. Furthermore, competence and effectiveness are held to be the natural state. What has occurred in most cases is that, because of societal norms, parenting, education, or religious guidance, we have learned to disvalue certain parts of ourselves. With much help from others, we even have attempted to amputate many of these parts. This can have a strong negative impact on leadership behaviors later on in life. For example, suppose that as a young child I was taught never to speak ill of others. Although the value may be a fine one, believing it completely as a child could result in my being a supervisor who is unwilling or unable to give my direct reports clear, corrective feedback on the job.

Integration is the process through which we begin to regain and re-own these lost parts. Integration also serves the function of effectively expanding one’s I-Boundary. Casting this into the organizational setting, the premise is as follows:

The more effective leader will be the one who can generate the most alternatives in any given situation.

Each and every leadership situation that one encounters is, to some degree, unique. A leader’s effectiveness will be increased to the extent that he or she can (1) be fully aware of the uniqueness of this particular situation and (2) be able to respond to the situation authentically. This implies that a leader must have more than a single way of approaching and dealing with contingencies.

For example, suppose that I describe and experience myself as being “easygoing” and “thoughtful.” Furthermore, suppose that I have been fairly effective overall in consistently coming from this position. People like me this way and reinforce my behavior. However, what happens when there is a crisis or I am attacked in some way? Because over time I have eliminated the tougher, more aggressive parts of myself in order to please others, where do I find the toughness needed to respond to the present situation? In the absence of toughness, I find myself with one of two possible alternatives. I could attempt to restructure the situation so that I could somehow respond to the situation from my comfort zone (attempt to reason with a bully) or I could choose simply not to respond. However, the more authentic ways I have to be—easygoing, tough, thoughtful, aggressive, supportive, angry, humorous, or logical—the more responsive I can be to any ongoing situation.

Note that this does not preclude the reality and the rightness of choosing to spend the greatest majority of my time in my most comfortable stance. It does mean that I can readily leave this stance when the situation calls for it and be just as comfortable for as long as it takes to accomplish what needs to be accomplished from a different position. If leaders would give up their self-demand to be consistent and replace it with a self-demand to be optimally effective, they would be better leaders.

One way of defining alternatives is “ways of being.” A second, and equally important, definition refers to the ability to create choices of action before committing to a specific course of action. Managers frequently limit the generation of workable alternatives because of fear of negative reactions from others or a fear of being seen as unfair. When first viewing the situation, responding to these concerns is definitely counterproductive. However, when it is time to make the conscious choice of what to do, then it is appropriate to consider these restrictions.

For example, I can choose not to implement a certain alternative because it would be unfair to another person. However, unless I am free enough to generate that alternative and am willing to consider it, I have consciously denied myself the option of choosing for or against it. In addition, this particular alternative, although unfair to a single individual, might be the best way to avert an overall crisis.

This view of alternatives underscores the premise that there is no one best way to be. It also suggests that, in most cases, there are several potentially effective ways to attack most problems and pursue most objectives. Each effective leader brings a totally unique being (himself or herself) to each organizational decision point, and the most valuable contribution made is his or her unique perspective.

In attaining organizational objectives, the more diverse the originating pool of opinion, the higher the probability that an optimally effective choice will emerge. Anything that discourages a broader range of alternatives limits the potential for a successful outcome. Once again, using Theory X/Theory Y as a convenient reference point, integration can be viewed in terms of how the four levels of leadership contribute to individual leadership effectiveness.

Much recent literature alleges that organizations that operate from a Theory Y set of assumptions and values are more effective than those that operate from a Theory X set. Certainly self-directed work teams and total quality management programs rest solidly in the Theory Y assumptions about people. Although this allegation may be true in many cases, it is not always true. Many organizations are maximally effective operating from a clear set of Theory X assumptions, such as Marine Corps boot camps, certain religious organizations, and almost all penal institutions. The issue is not so much one of *what* the underlying assumptions are, but rather one of *how* clearly those assumptions are stated and owned by the leadership and membership of the respective organizations.

Given, as a necessary precondition, congruence between a leader's actual and perceived boundaries, the more encompassing the boundary, the broader the effective range of "Actions" available.

In Figure 5, leader "A" is operating authentically from the position on the X/Y sub-boundary in Time Period 1 (TP1). She is clear about the assumptions she holds, i.e., that people tend to be lazy, will avoid responsibility, and mostly are not to be trusted. However, she is using that awareness as a means of selecting the appropriate leadership approaches, objectives, and actions that fit best for her.

Assume that she is doing very well and decides that she wants to increase her leadership effectiveness. She attends some workshops in team building and total quality management, does some personal growth work to increase

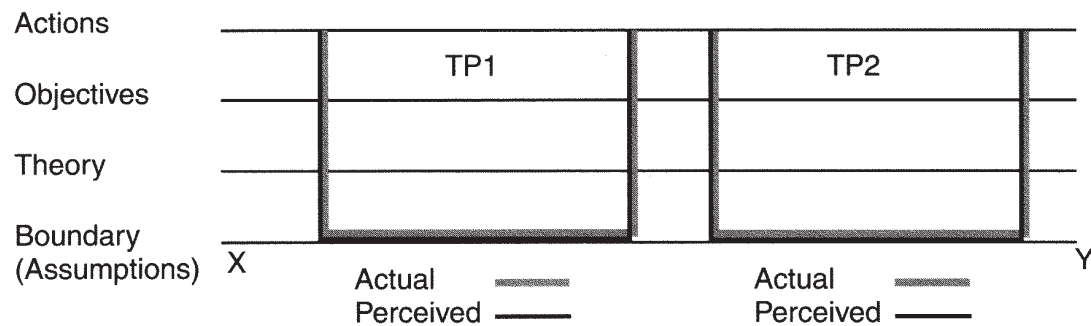


Figure 5. Change

her communication and listening skills, and develops a more genuine concern for her people. A year later, at Time Period 2 (TP2), she is holding a more authentic Theory Y set of assumptions at the indicated point in Figure 5. Is this growth? Most people would say that it is; however, I disagree. It is not growth . . . it is change!

At TP1, leader “A” only has the capacity to view people as potentially lazy, unmotivated, and averse to responsibility. At TP2 she only has the capacity to see them as potential opportunities for growth, motivated, and open to responsibility. At TP1, she might have made a good Marine stockade commander but not a very effective supervisor of a social work unit. In TP2, the situation would be reversed. The secret in increasing leadership effectiveness is to be able to do as much of both as you can!

As Figure 5 suggests, growth for “A” in TP1 would be toward the right, or the Theory Y, side of the scale. For whatever reason, she has limited her capacity for supportiveness and trust. Growth for her in TP2 would be toward the left, or Theory X, side of the scale in order to regain her capacity for toughness and mistrust.

Whether speaking of personal growth in the group setting or of leadership effectiveness in the organizational setting, the premise is as follows:

Growth is not changing existing positions but rather expanding them.

Growth, or effectiveness, is best depicted in Figures 6a, 6b, and 6c for leader “B.”

Time Period 1 in Figure 6a indicates the starting position, in which the perceived position and actual positions for “B” are congruent. This is the same point that “A” began in Figure 5.

“B” is precisely where he thinks he is. He is clear and unapologetic about where he is and how he sees things and maintains enough flexibility to be willing to learn.

He is now faced with a leadership challenge that requires a more supportive set of assumptions and approaches than he presently possesses. By working out of the extreme congruent position (getting some coaching in communications and listening skills, going to seminars on team building and participative management, and experimenting with some new collaborative techniques that stretch him), he succeeds in overcoming the challenge. Figure 6b, TP2, indicates where he is at the point of successfully responding to the challenge.

He has done such a good job that he is given a promotion to a new location. On his first day at the new location, he discovers to his consternation

that each of his new direct reports is either an ex-convict or would like to become one. His growth opportunity now is in the opposite direction. He needs to increase his capacity for mistrust, provide unilateral direction, be willing to discipline, and so forth. These skills are what the new position requires, and growth is now in the opposite direction, toward the X—the more controlling—side of the continuum. “B” loses no capacities in the process. Figure 6c then depicts his capacities after successfully responding to these conditions.

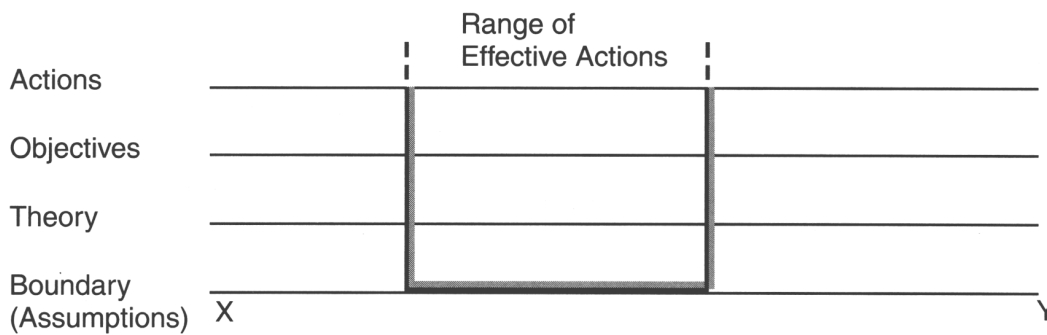


Figure 6a. Congruence — TP1

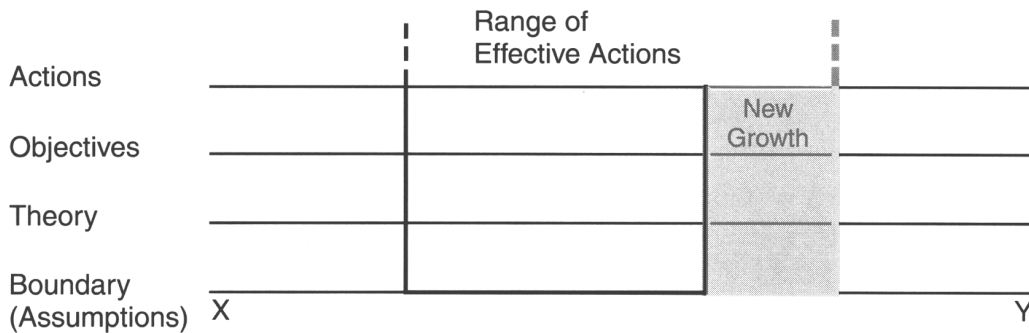


Figure 6b. Growth — TP2

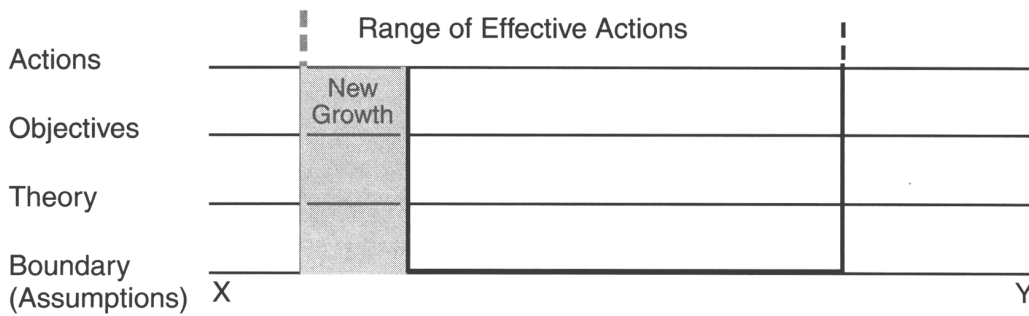


Figure 6c. Growth — TP3

Actual ———
 Perceived ———

This model suggests three axioms for increasing personal and leadership effectiveness:

1. When growth occurs on any continuum, in either direction, the far boundary stays fixed. The implication is that anything that ever worked for you in the past has a capacity to work for you again. It just needs to be tested and adapted to the present conditions.
2. Growth, or any increase in effectiveness, always occurs at the boundary. A leader's best position in the face of new challenge is at the very edge of his or her Zone of Comfort.
3. As one nears the edge of a sub-boundary and the probability for growth increases, the probability of discomfort, risk, and diminished self-confidence increases proportionally.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the setting in which it is employed, the Gestalt approach relies heavily on the use of paradox. Several such paradoxes may be very helpful in increasing leadership effectiveness.

Paradox I. The best way to build an effective team is to focus on the individual. The concept of synergy suggests that because the whole (team) is greater than and different from the sum of its component parts (individuals), the stronger each individual member is, the higher the potential for the maximum strength of the team. When the leader focuses on and legitimizes the value of individual differences and common goals, each group member is encouraged to develop the best way to be and to work. Once this differentiation process is established and is well under way, linkages are formed among strong, confident individuals, each of whom is able and more willing to contribute uniquely to the organizational objective.

Paradox II. The best way to change is not to change (Beisser, 1970). The Gestalt approach focuses heavily on what is rather than on what should be. Assisting a leader to be more aware and appreciative of how she is rather than how she should be puts that person in a better position to make a conscious decision to remain in this position or to try something different. In short, once the effective Theory X leader is told, "It's really okay to be how you are," she no longer has to expend effort in defending her position or hiding it. Making it genuinely safe for her to relax and experience her present position more fully is a change! Any modification in her approach that she makes from this position is because

she chooses to do so; if successful, the change will become permanent change. Permanent change is the only kind of change that has lasting impact on increasing the effectiveness of the individual and the organization.

Paradox III. No "One Best Way" is the one best way. People are much more different from each other than they are similar, and the same can be said for organizations. The range of uniqueness is infinite and is limited only by an inability to recognize the differences that do exist. No single approach, theory, or set of assumptions is going to be universally applicable to the individual's or the organization's needs—this one included.

If, for example, after reading this article, you reject it, you have, paradoxically, acted in consonance with the approach. That is, you have allowed yourself to try something new, have weighed it carefully, and have then consciously chosen to reject it in favor of an existing position. In this process, you have become more aware of your existing position and how it is of more service to you than the one presented here. You are more aware of how our respective theories and assumptions differ, and at least for now, you are more sure that your position is more useful and correct for you than is mine. At the very minimum, you have gained another alternative that might be useful to you at some later date.

Some direct implications can be shown for the future training and development for the leaders of today's and tomorrow's organizations. Currently, most leadership training and development programs are geared specifically to the expansion of theory, the pursuit of objectives, and the learning of new techniques. What has been missing is the essential first step—assisting individual leaders in becoming more clear and more confident in the assumptions they make about themselves and others and in their ability to provide the necessary leadership to get the organization where it needs to go.

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