Leadership Literature Review

Nicholas Cubita

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Dr. Jeremy Stringer

Seattle University

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Abstract

J. Thomas Wren’s *The Leader’s Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages* is a collection of literature from which this review derives its emphasis. This review of the literature examines different themes that exist in the multiple readings based on the complex concept of leadership. Many minds from various times in history have contributed to the ideologies that comprise this review. Each selection, while individually strong, collectively supports the concept of leaders showing ownership in their role, the focus of this review.
Introduction

No single definition is able to encompass the complex idea of leadership. Bass (1990) truthfully describes it as “a sophisticated, modern concept” (p. 37). While ambiguous, leadership is essential to success in an educational environment. Although various definitions contribute to its value, ownership of one’s role defines who and what makes a successful leader. J. Thomas Wren’s *The Leader’s Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages* provides a base of classic literature from which one can better understand the intricacies of leadership. This review of the literature will examine leadership in the context of higher education through the following three themes: successful leadership, framing leadership and leaders and followers.

Successful Leadership

Higher education institutions are comprised fully of leaders. Administrators, faculty, staff and students all lead in different ways that allow an institution to function smoothly. Each role asks something different of individuals, to which they attribute the characteristics that make their role as a leader their own. Leadership exists continuously on a campus – in the classroom, in student organizations, through volunteer positions. This opportunity provides growth for all on different levels, guided by the characteristic of awareness. In his book *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu (1985) claims “true self-interest teaches selflessness,” such that “by being selfless, the leader enhances self” (p. 69). By understanding one’s strengths, as well as one’s limitations, a leader can better serve others’ interests to maximize their potential. Through reflection and openness, one’s introspection can allow for a more effective approach to guiding others. For students who accept their shortcomings, approaching an instructor or administrator can lead them to greater success throughout their college career. Likewise, the instructor or administrator will be efficient by putting one’s self aside to focus on the needs present in the student.
Understanding one’s limitations is also vital. *The Prince*, discusses the purpose of faith in leadership (Machiavelli, 1513). Faith carries a different meaning for all, whether religious, spiritual, or in others, but without faith in oneself a leader will not sustain the confidence necessary to move forward. Machiavelli (1513) explains, “every one understands how praiseworthy it is in a Prince to keep faith, and to live uprightly and not craftily” (p. 67).

Although his view of a leader is more cunning than necessary today, confidence in one’s ability and willingness is necessary. Doubts will show, wavering one’s credibility to others. However, faith, in self and in action, will communicate to others one’s strength to move forward and provide success for all parties involved in one’s leadership.

“What Leaders Really Do” discusses the difference between management and leadership in relation to confronting and making change (Kotter, 1990). In an environment that evolves as quickly as education, leaders must face growth continuously. While administration involves some level of management, this is different from leadership – and effective management does not imply effective leadership. By setting a direction, aligning people and motivating people, Kotter (1990) explains that one can inspire and cultivate leadership. He explains, “institutionalizing a leadership-centered culture is the ultimate act of leadership” (Kotter, 1990, p. 123). Approaching change effectively as an administrator portrays exemplary leadership to students, and in turn molds them into successful leaders as well.

**Framing Leadership**

Framing one’s leadership is essential to the work of higher education administrators. Applying core values to practice, whether institutional or personal, provides an ethical base from which to enable others. “Universal Human Values: Finding an Ethical Common Ground,” examines this importance in pursuit of a universal code of ethics (Kidder, 1995). In doing so he
discovers the core values of Love, Truthfulness, Fairness, Freedom, Unity, Tolerance, Responsibility and Respect for Life (Kidder, 1995). While individuality is a factor in applying each, ascribing a set of morals and ethics to one’s practice as an administrator can effectively influence students and provide a consistent mindset through which one can establish credibility.

A leader’s framework can also exist conceptually in understanding the relationships of leadership. Because of the different parties involved, both transactional leadership and transforming leadership have resulted as different leadership styles, as observed in Burns’ (1978) “Transaction and Transforming Leadership”. Transactional leadership is understood as one person initiating an exchange, or bargain, whereas transforming leadership is understood as an engaging interactive experience where both party’s purposes become fused (Burns, 1978). Transforming leadership enhances others’ self-worth in a mutually beneficial way, as discussed in Judy B. Rosener’s “Ways Women Lead” (1990). By bolstering others with praise and credit, their self-worth will rise, as will productivity (Rosener, 1990). A content work environment can be fruitful, and framing one’s administrative practice as transforming leadership can make a difference in students’ experiences as they continually develop and grow.

Leaders and Followers

Understanding the roles of leaders and followers is complex, yet foundational, to the work of student affairs administrators. Hierarchies and organizational ladders create a system of supervisors that establishes both personal and professional relationships. Servant Leadership opens a discussion of the servant as a leader by explaining, “the great leader is seen as servant first” (Greenleaf, 1977, p.19). This construct begins to define the purpose of roles as leaders and followers. Understanding that serving others is a form of leadership gives more supportive purpose to the role of follower. By first serving others, one will gain both the experience and
response to be seen as a leader. Adopting this idea as a graduate assistant can develop an understanding of one’s purpose that carries into professional practice. This growth and understanding, however, is relative to one’s “readiness level,” as scaled in Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard’s “Situational Leadership” (1995). Readiness level is defined as the “ability and willingness of followers to perform a particular task” (Hersey and Blanchard, 1995, p. 208). By reflecting on one’s service and readiness level, a graduate assistant would become aware of skill sets and areas for growth that would cater well to working with undergraduate students in different institutional departments.

“In Praise of Followers” proves the importance of followers in the relationships of leadership (Kelley, 1988). Followers are individuals that express independence, commitment and competence among other skills, and Kelley (1988) reminds us, “most of us are more often followers than leaders” (p.194). By seeing leader and follower as equal but different, leaders can trust their followers and reward them accordingly for their efforts. Followers also share equal responsibility in teamwork. Administrators collaborate in different teams, and allowing one’s followership to flourish will benefit a group’s success. However, Irving Janis (1971) cautions the dynamic of group settings in “Groupthink.” When sharing a collective balance of power, norms develop and some leaders fold to the pressure of conformity when making decisions. Janis’ (1971) concept of groupthink occurs when group members, “become motivated to avoid being too harsh in their judgments of their leaders’ or their colleagues’ ideas” (p. 362). In a higher education setting, this could negatively affect students’ experiences at an institution. A student’s experience is the priority of work for administrators. Respectfully advocating in group or team settings will keep other’s power in check, and ensure the focus remains in sight.
Conclusion

Leadership, defined in various ways, is essential to the success of a higher education institution. Understanding both personal and institutional function in a changing world can provide administrators a background through which to frame their practice. Selfless service maximizes a leader’s efficiency, and ultimate ownership of one’s role allows an administrator to utilize relationship dynamics in ways that maximize student success.
References


List of Works Read

- 1 – The Cry for Leadership, John W. Gardner
- 4 – Servant Leadership, James MacGregor Burns
- 7 – The Meaning of Leadership, Bernard M. Bass
- 8 – What is Leadership?, Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy
- 9 – Concepts of Leadership: The Beginnings, Bernard M. Bass
- 10 – The Hero as King, Thomas Carlyle
- 14 – How Princes Should Keep Faith, Niccolo Macchiavelli
- 15 – Tao Te Ching, Lao-tzu
- 17 – The Talented Tenth, W. E. B. DuBois
- 19 – Transactional and Transforming Leadership, James MacGregor Burns
- 22 – What Leaders Really Do, John P. Kotter
- 26 – Ways Women Lead, Judy P. Rosener
- 29 – Leaders and Followers, John W. Gardner
- 31 – In Praise of Followers, Robert E. Kelley
- 32 – Situational Leadership, Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard
- 34 – Domination/Subordination, Jean B. Miller
- 43 - Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle, Clayborne Carson
- 47 – Groupthink, Irving Janis
- 55 – Leadership Communication Skills, Michael Z. Hackman and Craig E. Johnson
- 64 - Universal Human Values: Finding an Ethical Common Ground