

Sublime, Beautiful and Picturesque Leadership

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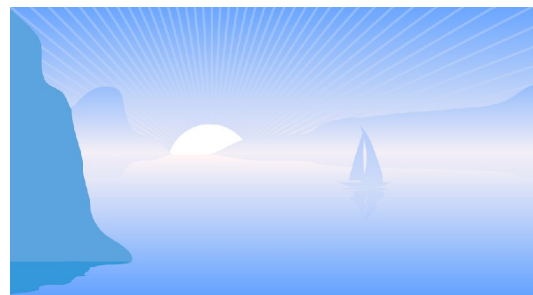
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Regardless of the subject, people have so many different tastes, perspectives, and desires. Further more, even people who share an outlook will make very different decisions based on varying situations. This is because human nature varies so greatly, as does the situation we find ourselves in. This truth makes the application of leadership less of a science, and more of an art.

Leadership is intangible, tacit, and a natural phenomenon that touches the heart when executed elegantly. It is an extension of humanity manifested in natural needs and behaviors, and realized within the context of the environment or situation. Without consideration of the human within the environment, leadership will lay dormant and without purpose. To assume to lead in a vacuum is similar to assuming that all people will enjoy the same art and music. This is impossible.

The phenomenon of leadership can be documented, traced, described, and mapped as characteristics, traits, and actions and never fully be understood or predicted. Leadership is felt and perceived by people in the moment, as an emotion within a context. This essay attempts to

examine leadership as a phenomenon by combining and positioning theoretical elements with natural emotions. A model is presented for organizing concepts, yet the reader must access personal emotions as a path to understanding the link between humanity and events that shape leadership.



Transformational and Servant models

Contemporary leadership philosophy embraces transformational leadership models as productive in open organizational systems (Scott, 2003). Leaders and organizations continue to evolve towards open organizational ideas such as transparency, flatness, and follower empowerment. These transformational leadership ideas are grounded in the premise that leaders must influence followers towards a common purpose, stimulating values and behavior, and providing individualized consideration to

produce change (Higgs, 2003). Authority and rigid employee behavior no longer can compete in our fast pace world.

Transformational leadership provides for individual consideration, emotional intelligence, and the development of people. Leadership becomes more focused on releasing the proper energy in people by allowing them to use more of their human capacities. Leadership, therefore, is about allowing people to be people. In addition, productive transformational leadership provide for followers to become transformational themselves. Turning followers into leaders, even if they are just leading what they are responsible for, creates a collection of people who are practicing leadership behaviors.

Tom was an excellent engineer working for a large defense company with a long history authority and results. As a middle manager, he perceives his role as returning project results and working within the long held policies and procedures that where developed over a long period of time. When his company hired a new CEO, who was considered a transformational change agent, Tom was moved and excited about the dialog of change. As time progressed, the CEO proposed several ideas that would destroy many of the strict organizational paradigms that where long held within the company. Eventually, Tom's learned

behavior of compliance for rules and comfort of structure began to create internal conflict. Tom embraced the new organizational ideas, was influenced by his new leader, but struggled to make decisions on his own. He was trained to please rather than think and act. The new CEO needed to help Tom embrace that he needed to move outside of old habits of compliance and following the rules, and begin to act as a leader himself. If Tom did not consider himself a change agent, and trust his own ability to make decisions, he would eventual fail in his new environment. Tom needed to be come transformational himself. Rather then rely on policies, structure, and the comfort of others making decision, he needed to assume responsibility himself, and step out of the manager and employee mentality.

The new paradigms of transparency, flatness, and follower empowerment required Tom to build and influence relationships, tap into his own emotional intelligence, and to influence followers towards a common purpose. He needed to stimulate his followers and peer's values and behavior, and provide them with individualized consideration. This transformation did not happen quickly, and it never will. Tom eventually was inspired enough by his new CEO to begin to change his behavior, and was ultimately successful. This situation emphasis that Tom's micro

transformation required outstanding transformational leadership by the CEO, by allowing Tom to come into himself and have the confidence he needed to lead people without authority. This change required the right leader, in the right situation, at the right time. The stars needed to be aligned. The CEO had to be artful and manage both human beings and a situation, all the while considering the reality of the firm's mission, purpose and goals.

While influence must be directed towards followers, the transformational leader's intention is to yield organizational results. Therefore, transformation also requires a macro perspective and focus on the organization, while using the individual as the instrument to attain organizational success (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). This perspective is organizationally self-serving, as the ultimate goal is to influence people for organizational purposes. However, Tom also benefited from the changes, grew personally and professionally, and ultimately was successful. Transformational leadership allows for everyone to benefit (those who want to), because it approaches the individual and the organization as a whole for the same purpose of success. Still, the organization remains the central purpose of transformational leadership. If Tom did not adapt, he would fail.

In contrast, a servant leader seeks individual goal attainment as the end rather than the means (Speares, 2004). Servant leadership first considers what followers need, and creates a relationship of service in both directions. The servant leadership philosophy accesses an individual's natural desire to serve. "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (Greenleaf in Speares, 2004, p. 8). With the highest priority being one's need to serve, other's needs are fulfilled, allowing people to be freer, autonomous, wiser, and healthier, resulting in a collection of servant leaders. For Tom, this meant that the new CEO would have begun with developing Tom (and all other followers) rather than inspiring and influencing and waiting for a result of transformation. With the total focus on the individual, the organization is can be ultimately served.

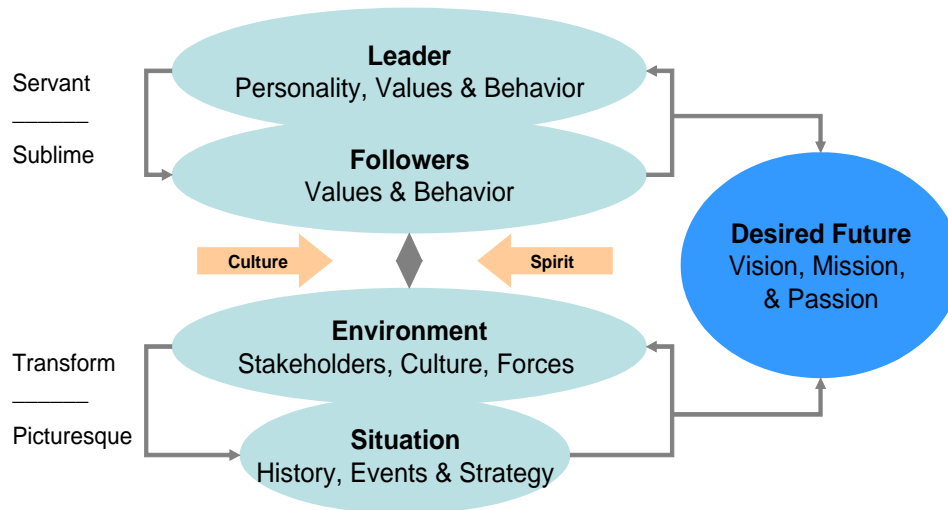
Both transformational and servant leadership provide philosophies with merit and address the needs of people to participate and serve. Critical to these concepts is the context in which people work. Leadership ultimately serves a purpose to advance a vision to benefit the whole. Therefore, the environment and situation leaders and followers find themselves in is critical.

Servant leadership recognizes transformational qualities, but does so as a philosophy of work and life towards changing society (Spears, 2004). This is a community perspective that must consider environmental contingent factors. Therefore, the community must be examined for the purpose of determining a desired direction to which leadership can be applied, and develop proper strategies for which the servant can direct their focus. To just consider the individual growth first as the primary end result, the community (or organization) results will only be a collection of individual needs solidified and fractured. While it is likely that there is benefit from this altruistic approach, the community's initial desired purpose may be lost. In Tom's situation, if the CEO only recognized that Tom needed structure, direction and

feedback, and that was what Tom desired, he may not have grown, and the firm may have merely perpetuated the authority, rigid structure, and policy following. This might have resulted in the firm not adapting to changing industry and customer situations, and the firm may ultimately be sacrificed. If transformational leadership approaches (focused on the outcome of the firm) are combined with servant leadership approaches (focus on the outcome individual), a better, more flexible model may be achieved.

Figure 1 represents a model combining the concepts of servant leadership that interacts in an environmental context (contingent), with the ultimate goal of achieving a universal leadership (for the entire organization) and strategic purpose.

Figure 1. Contingent servant leadership model.



This model places servant leadership in a context by combining transformational and servant qualities within environmental and situational events to allow each individual to serve their community. The focus still remains on the actors, while providing collective direction.

The goal of the model in figure 1 is to illuminate the value of individual spirit in the context of a greater community, and how leaders and followers can interact on a larger scale with the environment.

Therefore, Tom held work values and behaviors that where in conflict with the CEO approach of transformation to a flatter less bureaucratic organization. The CEO, taking a servant leadership approach can consider deeply Tom's needs and work with Tom around his professional transformation. However, this servant approach can not exist in a vacuum. The situation of the company, the need and strategy to respond to the industry environment create a mission for the firm. Furthermore, the firm has a culture, a set of principles, and environmental forces that are shaping the direction of strategy. The CEO must inspire, move, and transform Tom and the organization in the context of the environment and situation. The CEO can do this as a servant, but as a servant to both Tom and the firm. This can be done by instilling in Tom (and others) that to serve the greater community (which is the point), Tom must find his spirit to be a servant, and

to apply that spirit to the entire matter of transformation.

There is a deep human yearning to make a difference. We want to know that we've done something on this earth, that there's a purpose to our existence. Work can provide that purpose, and increasingly work is where men and women seek it...

When leaders clearly communicate a shared vision of an organization, they ennoble those who work on its behalf. They elevate the human spirit (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 152).

Spirit exists in the sharing of purpose, and is manifested in energy of people to act on that purpose. The environment provides that purpose which leaders and followers can engage with. Mary Parker Follett understood the value of collective purpose and the desire of people to serve society. "To free the energies of the human spirit is the high potentiality of all human association" (Follett in Davis, 1997, ¶ 7). Spirit is a natural energy that when focused and released can provide human meaning. Therefore, leadership can provide meaning by combining servant philosophies, within and environmental context, to release natural energy in people.

Sublime, Beauty, and Picturesque

Leadership theory is possibly the most studied human behavior in recent years, yet no absolute model can be affirmed (Higgs, 2003). If leadership is embodied in spirit and existing within context, then any attempt to characterize or prescribe one methodology for all situations will ultimately fail. The leader's ability to move follower spirit in a natural way will yield great things for organizations and society. How to access a natural spirit may be found in the recognition of emotions, a deeper and less tangible way of connecting to people.

A metaphor exist in our ability to recognize spirit within art. While we walk through a museum, some will stop and be fascinated by one piece, and others a quite different works. Some find beauty in portraits, while others find it in landscapes. A portrait may evoke emotions, relationships, and values that are recognized and desired. A landscape of mountains may create emotions of space and time. Whatever attracts us, it is emotional and recognized. Leadership may possess the same qualities.

Thomas Cole visited the White Mountains in New Hampshire in 1827, and was inspired to paint landscapes of Mount Washington (Johnson, 2006). During this period nature was romanticized and evoked emotions in art and literature. Cole subscribed to traditional art theory that emphasized the

sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque as natural emotional human triggers. The sublime, beauty, and picturesque provided Cole and other artists a way to translate infinite power and connection that existed in the environment, understand clearly the tension of good and evil, and understand aesthetic value. Leadership may be as intangible and individual as beauty. Therefore, examining leadership in this context may be useful in understanding the deep indescribable phenomenon which evokes emotions in people.



In Thomas Coles work, sublime was the translation of terror and awe within the environment (Johnson, 2006). While the grandeur of a mountain in the background is the predominate powerful feature on the landscape, the closer objects of destructive streams and broken trees put the mountain in context. In order to understand the emotion of awe, we need to see more then a mountain. We see the mountain within a destructive and difficult environment. To ascend the mountain will require a taming of

the wilderness, which evokes emotions. In the leadership context, the environment of problems, crisis, and difficult situations is required for leadership to be recognized and evoke emotions in followers. Tom and his CEO were experiencing a sublime situation. By allowing themselves to recognize the sublime they can come together for a purpose. If Tom was left to follow a scripted structure, policies and pleasing behaviors, he would miss the sublime. It was the CEO's job to show the mountains of success, while recognizing the sublime problems and obstacles in their way. Together they would recognize the emotion this contrast provoked, both beautiful and challenging.

Beauty is "...that quality or those qualities in bodies, by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it" (Burke in Johnson, 2006). In Cole's paintings of Mount Washington, it is hard to escape the beauty of the snow topped mountain. Regardless of the sublime, beauty instills a sense of security, peace, and calm. In leadership, regardless of the environment and situation, followers are attracted to the security and sense of care that a leader can instill through behavior. Therefore, while the obstacle for Tom and the CEO are sublime, the recognition of the mountain top instills emotions that will satisfy their needs.

Picturesque is the blending and juxtaposition of the sublime with the beauty to form a

sense of drama and appeal to the viewer (Johnson, 2006). This property is less defined and more creative in an attempt to draw in the viewer to understand the struggle between the emotions of sublime and beauty. Within leadership, the positioning of communication, gestures, and behaviors towards a vision in the face of challenges provide a follower a creative way out of the dilemma, or a creative direction for accomplishment.

In visual art, natural human emotions are accessed in an attempt to move people. In a museum some may stop long enough to feel something. A combination of colors will not attract everyone, only those who sense a connection to the artist's message. The combination of environmental conditions that are foreboding, the beauty of the leader's vision, and the positioning of the leader's actions will attract certain people in a certain situation to a cause. If the connection is made, the human spirit and energy are accessed, and leadership emerges. Therefore, leadership is not one set of characteristics, behaviors or values that will create a leadership situation. It is the leadership beauty in a sublime situation that establishes picturesque behaviors and actions that move some people towards a goal.

People feel and recognize emotion, and may feel something that is the essence of leadership. Greenleaf believed that

leadership was best realized in service, and that people naturally understood the value of serving others (Spears, 2004). He further believed that accessing individual's need to serve others would create the conditions to replicate this philosophy in others. Yet service without context is merely a task, or a mechanical process. Service with context transcends task and becomes emotional and meaningful. Leadership is the same thing.

Conclusion

Leadership is a phenomenon of nature and spirit in the context of the environment. There may be similarities in behavior and characteristics that are consistent in varying landscapes, but no prescription can be given that will fit into every situation or environment. The masterful leader must touch other humans at the deepest levels of

values and emotions to evoke action. In contemporary environments, knowledge workers seek inclusion and respond to transformational values. In future organizations, servant workers may respond to inspirational persuasion. Regardless, each situation requires a context and a communication of spirit for a leader to move people towards what is natural and good. Therefore, leadership requires painting an individual picture based on the landscape, and evoke emotion in people to follow. The CEO did this with Tom, and Tom became a critical and successful actor in an environment that was changing. The relationship between these two people was complex and unique. A leader who subscribes to one method or model for leading may be successful in a particular situation. However, true leadership requires one to adapt, and engage, in an evolving world. Leadership is an art



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