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Leadership, Personal Transformation, and Management

Tim Workman and M. Cleveland-Innes

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Tim Workman
Adamas Learning, Canada
M. Cleveland-Innes
Athabasca University, Canada

*Tomorrow's leaders need to be capable of handling dynamic agendas of possibilities and see the future as discoverable rather than predictable. (*Latchem & Hanna, 2001, p. 60)

Definitions of leadership abound! For the purposes of this discussion, we use Secretan's (2004) work which provides a perspective on how leadership should impact on other people, and identifies the need to inspire, not simply motivate:

> Thus, the principle purpose of the leader is to act as the main source of inspiration, personal development, support, and guidance for the principal customers of the leader – those who are followers. Otherwise, the role of the leader becomes superfluous since most followers know more about their work, goals, technologies, desired outcomes, and professional expertise than anyone who may be *leading* them. (p. 22)

What makes a person a leader? Is it simply an assigned authority or appointment of position that establishes organizational or hierarchical power over others? Is it a set of personality traits and aptitudes that create a capacity for one to lead and others to follow? Is it a unique ability to conceive ideas and inspire others with thought or actions that impart change in those that hear and act on the "message?" The answer to all of these questions can be "yes," which creates a particular challenge: In trying to understand and define "leadership" as a personal competency, the definition of a "leader" may be a potential distraction more than a useful descriptor. If one makes a concerted effort to establish a relationship between the concepts of leaders and leadership, the two ideas can be mutually supporting, but not so clearly linked.

The more one examines modern ideas about "leadership," the more it seems that most are simply techniques to support good person management, in essence, simply lessons on how to be a good leader from an organizational or hierarchical perspective. We submit that "true" leadership is best defined in the outcomes that are achieved rather than the inputs applied, which in turn leads to a singular critical learning: Leadership without personal transformation is simply different forms of management. What follows is a comparison and contrasting of different aspects of both leadership and management and an exploration of what this new perspective means to leaders in education innovation.

Blurred Lines Between Leading and Managing

Like many philosophical concepts, "leadership" is one that can mean many things to many people; this is perhaps best reflected in the current multitude of leadership theories and approaches applied to the subject. In the context of distance education, Beaudoin (2007) writes:

> For the purpose of this appraisal, leadership in distance education, as distinct from managerial functions in a variety of settings, is defined as a set of attitudes and behaviours which create conditions for innovative change, which enable individuals and organizations to share a vision and move in its direction, and which contribute to the operationalization of ideas that advance distance education initiatives. (p. 391)

In this passage, Beaudoin strives to establish a separation between leadership and management functions, and yet fails to do so convincingly; he essentially describes leadership as a series of inputs that creates conditions to achieve an operational or organizational objective. Consider this passage from Zaleznik's (1992) seminal work contrasting managers and leaders:

> Managers tend to view work as an enabling process involving some combination of people and ideas

> interacting to establish strategies and make decisions. They help the process along by calculating the interests in opposition, planning when controversial issues should surface, and reducing tensions. In this enabling process, managers' tactics appear flexible: on one hand, they negotiate and bargain; on the other, they use rewards, punishments, and other forms of coercion. (p. 63)

On the surface, this type of leading/managing can be seen from a behaviourist teaching/learning perspective as having the "leader" provide strengthening and weakening influences in order to have the "follower" conform to a desired idea or activity. This type of approach would align very well with the concept of "transactional leadership," which involves motivating and directing followers primarily through appealing to their own self-interest, and the main goal of the follower is to obey the instructions of the leader (Management Study Guide, 2012).

It can, therefore, be considered that from an operational perspective, leaders and managers have similar goals and simply different ways to achieve them. Zaleznik (1992) provides his distinction in this regard:

> To get people to accept solutions to problems, managers continually need to coordinate opposing views… Managers aim to shift balances of power toward solutions acceptable among compromising values. Leaders work in the opposite direction. Where managers act to limit choices, leaders develop fresh approaches to long-standing problems and open issues to new options. To be effective, leaders must project their ideas onto images that excite people and only then develop choices that give those images substance. (p. 65)

This is a subtle distinction: It still implies direct external influences in both cases, whether coercion on the part of the manager or motivation on the part of the leader. Ultimately, it remains a behaviourist exercise in shaping the follower's behavior through external influences and feedback. The passage citied from Zaleznik (1992) below perhaps underscores the complexity of differentiation; while acknowledging a key difference between leaders and managers, "leadership" is viewed as simply a technique to achieve one's ends.

> Leadership is simply a practical effort to direct affairs; and to fulfill his or her task, a manager requires that many people operate efficiently at different levels of status and responsibility. It takes neither genius nor heroism to be a manager, but rather persistence, tough-mindedness, hard work, intelligence, analytical ability, and perhaps most important, tolerance and goodwill… (p. 63)

Different Types of People, Different Types of Intelligences

If a leader is considered a person with certain motivations, attributes, and behaviours, then trait-based leadership must be considered. Trait-based leadership theories assume that people exhibit qualities and traits that make them suited to leadership roles. Trait theories often identify particular personality or behavioral characteristics shared by leaders (Gill, 2006). As a result, leadership training is often focused on developing skills and attributes associated with exemplar leaders of reference, with the expectation that these elements can be equally recreated within learners. Gill (2006) proposed a model with four dimensions to leadership: intellectual or cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioural. He suggests that these dimensions are forms of intelligence that underlie an integrative, holistic model of effective leadership (p. 64). He further provides that effective leadership entails the following defining functions (pp. 91-92):

- **Vision and mission**. Effective leaders define and communicate a meaningful and attractive vision of the future and a mission or purpose through which the organization will pursue it

- **Shared values**. Effective leaders identify, display, and reinforce values that support the vision and mission and that followers share

- **Strategy**. Effective leaders develop, get commitment to, and ensure the implementation of rational strategies that enable people to pursue the vision and mission and that reflect the values they share

- **Empowerment**. Effective leaders empower people to be *able to do* what needs to be done

- **Influence, motivation, and inspiration**. Effective leaders influence, motivate, and inspire people to *want to do* what needs to be done

While his model has some merit, there are two key shortcomings. First, there is little distinction provided that would define these functions as "leadership-based" versus "management-based;" they appear to be practical approaches to achieve organizational goals and objectives, which aligns with the management concepts described earlier. Secondly, and more importantly, the consideration of these dimensions of leadership as "intelligences" creates a significant potential barrier when considering leader or leadership development as intelligence cannot necessarily be created through training and development.

Gill's leadership intelligences could easily be associated with Gardner's (2006) interpersonal intelligence as a component of one's ability to interact with others. The challenge in this case is that the theory of multiple intelligences speaks to a biological affinity to these intelligences that is not practically transferrable. In consideration of multiple intelligence theory, Christensen (2008) notes that Gardner's research shows that although most people have some capacity in each of the intelligences, most people excel in only two or three of them (p. 28). This would suggest that a belief that anyone can be taught to be an exceptional leader

is perhaps naïve; in the same way that teaching others how Wayne Gretzky played hockey will not provide the learners with his level of skill and ability, so, too, teaching others about the traits and methods of great leaders will not provide learners the innate capacity to become leaders of high calibre. That is not to suggest that there is not value in emulating these great leaders, but simply that following their lessons may have limited results.

 Secretan (2004) recounts a story of Gandhi that illustrates this point:

> One day when Mahatma Gandhi was on a train pulling out of the station, a European reporter running alongside his compartment asked him, "Do you have a message I can take back to my people?" It was a day of silence for Gandhi, part of his regular practice, so he didn't reply. Instead he scribbled a few words on a piece of paper and passed it to the journalist: "My life is my message." (p. 67)

While many have followed the teachings of Gandhi, and emulated his traits, there have been few who effectively recreate the value of his leadership message.

Multiple Leadership Theories, Multiple Parallel Rabbit Holes

Numerous other theories seek to explain leadership by modelling the interactions between leaders and followers. *Contingency/situational leadership theories* focus on particular variables related to the environment that might determine which particular style of leadership is best suited for the situation. *Leader–member exchange theory* conceptualizes leadership as a process of interactions between leader and follower and centers on the dyadic exchange relationships between both (Winkler, 2010). *Complexity theories of leadership* use systems theory to derive models that help define dynamics of leaders, leadership, and the nature of interactions and interdependencies within an organization or situation (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

Each of these theories speaks to input activities that shape the short-term actions of the followers; in many ways, they are simply other forms of interpersonal transaction models that seek to align a follower's immediate actions with a leader's wishes. If the outputs of these actions remain predominantly short-term behaviouristic responses, then all of these "leadership" approaches appear limited to external influences, and as such are simply generating managerial outputs.

In an educational context, Bates (2000) notes that while the senior management team is responsible to develop a vision and plan for their institution as a whole, providing a draft vision and undertaking an extensive internal consultation process can be an effective strategy to initiate stakeholder input, acceptance, and support. As with the previous passage, this appeared to be sound advice within the context of collective, shared, or distributed leadership.

However, now consider this counter perspective from Secretan (2004), which provides an interesting commentary on the functions of leadership and management:

> Another contemporary myth about vision crafting is that it should be a shared idea, thus reducing the risk of others failing to buy into it. As a consequence, missions and visions that were once extraordinary ideas are adapted, modified, and pummeled until their fire and passion have been squeezed out of them. These "consensus" missions and visions reach for the lowest common denominator where an accord can be built – egalitarian and democratic no doubt, but soulless and lacking in magic. In other words, they suffer from a fatal flaw – compromise – and this leads to mediocrity. (p. 68)

Clearly his view of the leadership function is foundationally different from the management functions of what he refers to as "old story leadership models" (pp. 19-20). He contends that this is a mechanical model based on leadership concepts that seek to manipulate, control, and exploit the personalities of followers. Using Zaleznik's (1992) premise that "leadership is simply a practical effort to direct affairs," it can be seen that the leadership functions within this "old story" model support management outcomes – and are not well aligned with the essence of "true" leadership.

A Transformative View of Leadership

Gardner (2011) provides a different definition of "leaders" based on what can be seen as an output effect on other people (as opposed to management, which has an output effect on tasks, projects, and organizations): "Persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings (here termed *followers* or *audience members*)" (p. 8).

Gardner (2011, p. 10) also provides three magnitudes of leaders observed within this continuum:

- The ordinary leader, by definition the most common one, who simply relates the traditional story of his or her group as effectively as possible;

- The innovative leader, who takes a story that has been latent in the population, or among the members of his or her chosen domain, and brings new attention or a fresh twist to the story;

- The visionary leader, who is deemed by far the rarest individual leader. Not content to relate a current story or to reactivate a story drawn from a remote or recent past, this individual actually creates a new story, one not known to most individuals before, and achieves at least a measure of success in conveying the story effectively to others.

This hierarchy suggests that "true" leaders can therefore be defined based on their ability to impart personal change in others, and measures of their leadership could be determined by considering multiple variables.

The key distinction that supports this transformative view of leadership is that actions are written as a description of outcomes for the followers, and are not based directly on the perspective of the leader or manager (as opposed to Gill's 2006 framework provided earlier, which appears to be written as leader-based outcomes). This "follower-centric" approach reflects ideals also associated with "servant leadership," where leadership is seen as a serving relationship with others that inspires their growth (Secretan, 2004, p. 152) as opposed to the traditional role of followers serving the needs of their leader(s). Kotter (2001) also provides support to the idea of fostering intrinsic inspiration and personal drive as opposed to simply providing external motivation:

> For some of the same reasons that control is so central to management, highly motivated or inspired behaviour is almost irrelevant... Leadership is different. Achieving grand visions always requires a burst of energy. Motivation and inspiration energize people, not by pushing them in the right direction as control mechanisms, but by satisfying basic human needs for achievement, a sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, and feeling of control over one's life, and the ability to live up to one's ideals. (p. 68)

The transformative perspective of leaders and leadership tends to create the foundational difference between management and leadership: Management affects outcomes for *efforts*, while leadership affects outcomes for *people*. This critical distinction creates a clear separation between leaders and managers that is reflected in a final perspective from Zaleznik (1992):

> Leaders tend to be twice-born personalities, people who feel separate from their environment. They may work in organizations, but they never belong to them. Their sense of who they are does not depend on memberships, work roles, or other social indicators of identity. And that perception of identity may form the theoretical basis for explaining why certain individuals seek opportunities for change. The methods to bring about change may be technological, political, or ideological, but the object is the same: to profoundly alter human, economic, and political relationships. (p. 90)

Applying Transformative Leadership to Education

A critical problem exists with legacy models and structures for education that is preventing their transformation into contemporary learning models and organizations – the lack of the visionary leadership necessary to create disruptive, transformative, and persistent change. Through an examination of multiple cases, it has become clear that there are numerous social challenges in Canada that could be addressed through education, whether considering public education systems, aboriginal/First Nation education, and even corporate applications. Yet these challenges are tied together by a common theme; in almost every case, it is not a shortage of resources, time, or technology that is holding back change – it is people. As a result, simply improving managerial leadership will have limited impact on innovation; while it may improve outcomes with respect to particular projects or initiatives, it will not create the vision or people-conditions necessary for transformative change. Kotter (1996) states that

> Vision plays a key role in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people. Without an appropriate vision, transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all. (p. 7)

If there is no grand vision upon which to base change in education, little will happen. The historic segregation of education as a jurisdictional responsibility, whether by province or districts, has fragmented the community into pockets of effort that are largely disconnected from each other, further eroding potential synergies and collaboration necessary to transform. There are few Canadian visionary thought or organizational leaders in the field of education or learning who have been willing to stretch into this space, and there has been a governmental and organizational inertia impeding change (as noted earlier, organizations will not naturally disrupt themselves).

The comparison of multiple leadership theories and perspectives in literature has done little to create a definitive or singular definition of what it takes or means to be a leader. All of the theories and approaches considered have merit in their own right, and cannot be discounted; indeed, it is likely the synthesis of all these inputs that help develop the less-than-fully-tangible competency known as "leadership." Also true is that leadership effort must be adjusted to fit the needs of a given audience, circumstance, or situation. While leadership as a competency will be employed by both managers and leaders, leadership success will be determined by the people being led, and their individual and collective needs, which will also differ according to audience, circumstance, or situation. The challenge for every leader is to know how best to affect an outcome of effort, an outcome for people, or both, regardless of the situational context.

What, then, does this mean for education innovation? Innovation requires shifts in perspectives and structures – a transformation process. First, leadership as management is

not enough. Second, transformational leadership rests on collaboration and shared purpose, difficult to accomplish in more resistant environments (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Third, leaders need to be the innovation they wish to create, and support change: "start with serious self-reflection, understand the change context, and balance passion for change with enlightened self-interest" (Cleveland-Innes, Emes, & Ellard, 2001, p. 25). While striving to emulate great leaders of the past, remember to serve those who follow as well as, if not better than, they serve. Finally, and perhaps above all, remember that in all its forms, leadership without ongoing personal transformation is little more than management.

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Athabasca University