

Leadership Theory: A Reflection and Presentation

As I reflect on what I have learned and come to understand about leadership through the study of leadership theory (LEAD 638), here are a few of the major leadership theories that have greatly influenced me:

1. Action-Observation-Reflection (AOR)
2. Kotter's Model on Leading Change
3. Transformational Leadership
4. Path-Goal Theory

I realized that many of the things that we have done in leadership have been done intuitively or grown out of our practice and experience over many years. I am sure that we have made many mistakes. I know that we cannot rely completely on intuition; however, as I shared in the Week 12 Forum Post with my group, I believe that what we do grows out of the AOR Model. We act and observe what happened, reflect on the results and apply what we think might work better. Trial and error is a tough teacher. I think that the Kotter's Eight Step Theory of leading change allows us to lead change more proactively and effectively.

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
2. Creating the Guiding Coalition
3. Developing a Change Vision
4. Communicating the Vision for Buy-in
5. Empowering Broad-based Action
6. Generating Short-term Wins
7. Never Letting Up
8. Incorporating Changes into the Culture

What I am amazed by is the fact that all of us are leading in extremely diverse circumstances but are using and applying leadership principles that appear to be universal. Maybe they are not universal but the principles sure seem to be broadly applicable across varied and complex contexts. What does that say about leadership?

I believe that the bottom line of leadership is accomplishing work through others by leading and directing change. In light of this change we all face adaptive challenges that require adjustments in what we do. Transformational leadership theory yields itself more to changing the status quo than any other type of leadership theory that we have studied because it embraces and applies the principle of vision. I am sort of like Gandalf, the wizard-leader from J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings*, because I have learned that as a leader lead as Gandalf did in uniting men, elves, dwarfs, and Hobbits against a common enemy to end the tyranny of evil. I have always liked the metaphor of Gandalf concerning my leadership because it describes well what I try to do as a leader in challenging the status quo and changing it through collaborative action. Gandalf demonstrates what is defined as transformational leadership. According to James McGregor Burns transformational leadership is a form of leadership that "changes the status quo by appealing to follower's values and their sense of higher purpose" (Hughes & Curphy, 2012, p. 577).

I find this type of leadership important because in order to deal with change or change the status quo, transformational leaders must be able to identify what is wrong and present a “compelling vision” (Hughes & Curphy, 2012, p. 577) of what could be for the group, organization or society. As Hughes (2012) emphasizes and what I find most appealing is the fact that “transformational leadership is ultimately a moral exercise in that it raises the standard of human conduct” (p. 577). As Gandalf galvanized warring men to fight against the coming oppression of “Middle Earth” in *The Lord of the Rings*, I must lead men and women to transform our status quo and advance our mutual work toward a better tomorrow.

Burns profoundly altered the interchange concerning charismatic leadership and emphasized that leaders transform the status quo by casting a vision of a better future that “is intimately linked to the values of both the leader and the followers” (Hughes & Curphy, 2012, p. 577). One interesting aspect of Burn’s theory of transformational leadership is that transformational leaders “teach followers how to become leaders” and lead them to take on “active roles in the change movement” (Hughes & Curphy, 2012, p. 577). I highly appreciate this aspect of leadership because everything that I have done as a leader can be boiled down to developing leaders and equipping them for the task at hand. In other words I believe in multiplying other leaders around me by engaging, equipping and releasing them to do what I do.

The path-goal theory stresses that the best way for a leader to achieve work through others is to focus on the final outcome, purpose or reward of the work and then collaborate or partner with followers to determine the best way to move toward realizing the common purpose. The Hughes (2012) text explains in this leadership construct, the leader provides four types of behaviors. “Directive leadership” similar to that of Situational Leadership, which means that the leader tells the “followers what to do, how to do it, when it is to be done, and how their work fits with the work of others” (p. 543). The leader also supplies “supportive leadership,” which are behaviors that display interest in all followers as people treating them with courtesy and respect, while being “open and approachable to others” (p. 543). Additionally, leaders practice “participative leadership,” which emphasizes a consultative process that ensures that followers are involved in making important decisions regarding the direction of the work meaning the leader solicits input from followers and considers the input of others “in the decision making process” (Hughes & Curphy, 2012, p. 543).

I realize at this juncture that I am facing a complicated leadership task that is not completely captured by one leadership theory; however, the path-goal theory fits well nicely with the overall intent of what the leadership task is in moving people toward a common goal and determining a way to do it together. Secondly, the path-goal theory allows for me to be flexible in my leadership style in being directive, supportive, and participatory or achievement orientated in my leadership style. Combining the above components of the path-goal theory with the elements of Burns’ and Bass’ transformational theories I have a wide range of tools that will allow me to cast vision, use rhetorical skills, build trust (an element of integrity), and influence tactics (power) among those that I lead. I do not consider myself to be overly charismatic; nonetheless, I can cast a compelling vision but I also see the importance of gaining the trust and credibility of those that I lead, which leads them to make strong bonds with me elevating my

charisma with them. This dynamic interchange has allowed me to work collaboratively with others toward realizing God's mission in this world today.

References

Hughes, R. L., Ginnett, Robert C. , & Curphy, G. J. (2012). Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience. In B. Gordon (Ed.): McGraw-Hill/Irwin.