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Transformative Leadership
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Integrative Paper

Reflecting on the last year, and my previous life experiences, in relation to the

issue of leadership has been an interesting project. I have made connections that I had not

previously realized, and come to some questions about leadership that are very troubling

for me. I will explain a newly realized early influence on my understanding of leadership,

speak about an on-the-job experience that reflects an early understanding of

transformative leadership, then I will talk about some of the learning I have done in the

last year. Finally, I will talk about some remaining unanswered questions and finish with

a troubling dilemma.

Everything I needed to know about leadership, I learned from M*A*S*H*

I was thinking back to what influences I had prior to Antioch that reflect on my

notions of leadership and followership. I keep coming back to *M*A*S*H** as a primary

influence. I would watch episodes on the television with my mother as a child, and

believe that the series helped to develop my current notions of the system of leadership

and followership.

People resist change, even if it's good for them

Frank Burns, the off-balance authoritarian, seems to be prototypical of the

organizational participant in a position of relative power that fears change, even if that

change is good for the whole. This fear seems based in a visceral, if not intellectual,

understanding that their position of power is not based on merit, but on the stable

existence of established hierarchy and role. Metaphorically, the series is pointing to the

absurdity of any organization that is structured in such a way as to promote and place in positions of power people that do not have the good of the whole in mind. This is the primary reason why the Colonels are excused their positions of power when others are not: they act out of the awareness of and desire to promote the good of the whole.

I recognize resistance to change is primary hurdle for my work as a change agent. I suspect that, for the rest of my life, I will be faced with people and organizations that either do not recognize their own need for change or that are so comfortable they are unwilling, consciously or unconsciously, to change their situations.

Those in charge are seldom in control

One learns from the way in which the clerk Radar goes about acquiring necessary supplies that informal networks are far more useful than official channels. This, and the fact that Radar is merely an enlisted man, reinforces the notion that those officially in charge are not in control.

The implication for me is that ability and ingenuity are more indicative of organizational influence than titles. As a change agent, I will constantly need to seek out and leverage informal networks within organizations and entities.

Grassroots power is most effective when authorized

Hawkeye and BJ had positions of effective power that were greater than their official rank. One primary reason for this was that they had allies in the power structure. The commanding officers, Col. Blake and Col. Potter, respected, protected and supported these non-rank positions of power.

I will probably have the most trouble with the level of political engagement with those in official positions of power necessary to maintain allies in the power structure of

the organizations and entities in which I am involved. I tend to keep informal relationship ties with people and seldom create long-term contacts or relationships with those people in whom I do not have a direct interest. I will likely forever struggle with a personal dislike for schmoozing and small talk.

Need power to be taken seriously

A follower that intends to have some influence on leadership needs to have some power over the leaders. In the case of the doctors, they had necessary skills that could not be done without. In the case of some followers, like Radar, there were important and necessary skills that gained them respect. However, for some followers, like Klinger, nothing could get those in positions of leadership to take them seriously. In fact, over the course of the series, the only point at which Klinger was taken seriously was when he assumed the necessary and indispensable role vacated by Radar's departure.

As a change agent, I will likely be constantly tested by other participants in change to validate that I have the skills, ability and ingenuity to back up my recommendations and projects.

Humour is necessary for sanity

A strong message of the whole series is that humour is a vital necessity for the maintenance of sanity in times of stress. When one is no longer able to maintain one's humour about one's stressful situation, one is likely to be unable to stay sane. Throughout the series, humour was used to lighten the hard moments, but also when situations became too difficult to handle people in the series would go temporarily insane or develop amnesia.

Humour is also repeated used to defuse overt authority in the series. Humour is implied to be the opposite and cure for those that take themselves or their situation too seriously.

The message about humour as an antidote to both stress and authority was one that I appear to have taken to heart.

Theatre as a transformative / dialogic environment

One of the most powerful transformative environments I've experienced has been in the theatre. I had the opportunity this year to reflect on my theatrical experiences in entirely new ways. I've come to recognize a fundamental relationship between my love of theatre and my focus on dialogue. This quarter I have come to view the creation of what I've called enabling dialogic environments as a function of transformative leadership, as described in Heifetz. (2003) I view the theatrical experience to be a multimodal transformative environment; therefore, those creating it are transformative leaders.

I have previously articulated my views of about the theatrical experience as both dialogical and transformative for the participants and for the community in which it takes place. This is for me an opportunity for what Vaclav Havel (1986) has called "self-conscious culture," which is a community that is aware of the development of its own culture.

Transformative Leadership in my workplace

I also had an opportunity to reflect on and articulate an experience that I had several years ago where I displayed an early awareness of the concepts of transformative leadership before any formal exposure. I attempted several years ago to articulate a

notion about developing a vocation which one would implement in whatever job one

found oneself. I articulated this in a speech I made to the helpdesk employees at a

company called Telisphere where I was taking over as official manager of the helpdesk.

> One of the big things that I think is important for Management to do is to help you find out what to do here. When I graduated from High School, they said that one would on average completely change careers 6 times in a lifetime. I think I recently heard that that number had increased.

> So, the important thing for you to do is not to figure out what career you want to do. It's not a career at Telisphere; it's not a career in Computers.

> What you need to do is find out what your vocation is. By vocation, I mean what it is that you do because you are self-motivated to do. What is it that makes you happy to do?

> For example, everywhere that I go, I end up finding a way to do creative writing. Like doing the internal and external website, doing the newsgroups, doing documentation, etc ... That's something that I enjoy doing and I gravitate toward no matter where I go.

> So, you should think about what your vocation is. Then what I want to do is try to figure out how I can pay you to do that. That's about avoiding burning out on helpdesk, but it's also about helping you help Telisphere. If I can pay you to do what make you happy, then I think that can do nothing but make Telisphere stronger, and do nothing but making Telisphere a better place for you to work.

> Coming to work is about doing a good job, taking personal pride in what one does. It doesn't matter what other stuff is going on: take pride in what you do and do the best that you can do. That's probably the best bit of wisdom I can give, and since at least one of us just had their wisdom ripped out of their head, we need all we can get.

> For example, when I was at the Other Place, and I was definitely not happy being there, I came to work everyday with the goal to make at least one thing better than it was before. I'd make things better to support everyone on the staff, no matter what I thought about the company. I did this because it's what I had to do to feel

good about myself. My sense of personal pride was not going to be sacrificed, and so I did what I needed to do to feel good about what I was doing. This is life advice, not just Telisphere advice.

Where to go from here?

At some level, I wonder if leadership, as a culturally determined phenomenon, has some interesting consistency and coherence with different cultural legal traditions across the globe. This would be something worthy of further research through the literature of comparative legal traditions and traditions of leadership.

I also find myself thinking about metaphors for leadership and how those would reflect on cultural ideals of leadership. For example, a metaphor of leader as one that pulls from the front, from the etymology of the word, has important differences from a metaphor of a leader as one that pushes followers. I wonder if this turns out to have interesting cultural implications, consistency and coherence with pluralistic goals, one would likely want to be aware of these differences.

What does it mean that the difference between management and leadership appears to mirror the metaphorical dichotomy between Lakoff's political family metaphors in Moral Politics. Lakoff (2002) proposes that there are two competing political models which could be metaphorically described as "Strict Father" versus "Nurturant Parent" that powerfully inform the way politics in this country is framed. Isn't this division similar to the division between management, as a strict authoritarian model, and leadership, as a nurturing and supportive model? Further, isn't it dangerously polarizing that these roles appear to be roughly divided along traditionally gender-identified lines? The fundamental division in Lakoff's metaphorical model is one that

implies, culturally, gender such that those in authoritarian roles are viewed as masculine, and those in nurturing roles are viewed as either feminine or effeminate. This both reflects and perpetuates long standing patriarchal dogma.

Many authors have reflected on this division. One example is how Carol Lee Flinders (2002) contrasts what she calls the "values of Belonging" versus the "values of Enterprise." Flinders develops a strong case that the values that I associate with transformative leadership were sequestered into typically gender-identified roles and in religion around the historic onset of agriculture.

Other divisions that may be of interest in reflecting on these divisions are those of Jane Jacobs' *Systems of Survival* (1994), a reiteration in some ways of Plato, and in Ray and Anderson's *The Cultural Creatives (2000)*.

It strikes me that this division is not a new one, and that it shared many characteristics with many long-standing cultural threads that might be called the mystic tradition. If so, then I fear hope for success is doomed to be relegated the same respected, but alienated position of all mystic movements historically. Writing in the 30's, Israel Regardie, noted scholar of mystic traditions, wrote words that could summarize how I feel about my place in society today:

> "… [T]hose few individuals who are aware with certainty
> in which there is no doubt of a destiny propelling them
> imperiously forward to the fulfillment of their ideal natures,
> constitute perhaps the sole exceptions [to the trend toward
> destruction]. These, the minority, are the born Mystics, the
> artists and the poets, those who see beyond the veil and
> bring back the light beyond." (Regardie, 2004, pp3-4]

> "With an inner anxiety it [that group of people aspiring to
> be different than the complacent masses] is restless to
> obtain an abiding spiritual integrity. It is mercilessly
> ground underfoot by the social system of which it is a part,

and harshly ostracized by the mass of its fellows."
(Regardie, 2004, p4)

The story is not much changed in the intervening years, it seems to me. Those that are interested in an alternate, compassionate model of awakening human potential are outsiders surrounded and outnumbered by masses that are more than happy to stay within the funhouse surrounded by the funky mirrors that show them convenience illusions. Further, there are those in positions of power and privilege that benefit from the complacency of the masses.

Campbell's (1973) monomyth details an archetypal story of the hero's journey to bring the light back to the world, a world grown sick and in dire need of healing. Metaphorically, then, the role of the transformative leader is to convince the world to take the hero's medicine. This is an unenviable task for anyone to take on.

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