

ADVANCING THEORY IN DEVELOPING THE PRACTICE OF BECOMING A CITIZEN LEADER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the literature from key contemporary authors in the study of leadership who offer insights on the phenomenon of citizen leadership. Additionally, this paper examines two real world examples in which citizen leadership is being demonstrated with regard to strengths and weaknesses, as well as personality traits and motivations. Commonalities exist, and suggest that further study might be useful to determine if citizen leadership can be taught in institutions of higher learning. The intent in this paper is to lay the foundation for future study that qualitatively captures the language patterns in becoming a citizen leader.

Keywords: Citizen Leader, Community Activist, Inspiring Others, Appreciating Diversity.

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledge and Appreciate the Vast Breadth and Depth in the Study of Leadership

The word lead or leader is derived from the prehistoric German word 'laithjan' which means way or journey. The English derivation expanded the meaning to cause to go along one's way (Ayto, 1990). According to Bass (1981) and Crawford, et.al (2000), the word leader did not appear in the English language in the mid 1300s. However, the notion of leadership only recently appeared during the first of the nineteenth century. At this time, the characteristics or condition of leadership appeared in writings about political influence and control within the British Parliament.

A review of the literature on leadership reveals a vast foundation of analysis dedicated to the subject. It is quite difficult to develop a single definition of leadership, for in truth, the concept of leadership and the qualities of leadership can be identified and interpreted in many ways. To a large extent, we are all somewhat qualified as authorities in the study of leadership. Either in person or through the media, we observe those individuals who carry the mantle and authority of leader. In our own ways we critique, assess, and measure the characteristics and attributes of how we perceive the person and their qualities of leadership. One might say that, true leaders are born. Others may argue that, anyone can acquire leadership

characteristics through education or experience in the military or in business. During political campaigns, the voting citizenry debates and argues the positive and negative aspects of the leadership characteristics of their chosen candidate. It seems obvious that, all members of society are constantly observing the leaders and assessing their leadership characteristics; but, the assessment of what a leader does may vary greatly among the observers. Thus, understanding leadership is extremely difficult when interpretation is so multi-faceted. James MacGregor Burns summed up the difficulty surrounding the concept of leadership when he stated that, leadership is "one of the most observed; but least understood phenomena" (Crawford et al., 2000, p.5).

With such a mindset, the intent of this paper is to explore the narrow and nuanced quality of ordinary citizens leading and making a difference in their communities. Insights from contemporary leadership experts are advanced to identify theory and concepts that add value to understanding the phenomenon of what makes a citizen leader in the 21st century. The purpose of this paper is not to categorize citizen leadership within a specific sub set in the study of leadership because each reader of this paper may justifiably observe the role and qualities of citizen leader based on their own perspective. Instead, the purpose is to identify relevant characteristics of citizen leadership by

examining two real world examples that demonstrate how citizen leaders view the context of their communities and how they can lead others in making a difference.

Scope: Theoretical Framework to Develop a Citizen Leader Practice

Contemporary authors such as Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Ronald Heifetz, and others form a growing group of scholars who are greatly expanding the study of leadership (Senge P.M 1990; Wheatley. M 1992 and 1997; Heifetz. R 1994 and 2002). All can be categorized as contributors to the transformational approach to leadership; but, they also have their own unique perspectives which add richness and quality to the study. Although these authors have a strong academic background, their primary audience appeal goes beyond the bounds of mainstream leadership, management, and academic study. These authors tend to have a more pragmatic and applied theoretical orientation to leadership. They tend to define the practice of leadership broadly with a more popular appeal. They open vision within the study of leadership that resonates with the non-traditional leader who is not in position of corporate power, but rather are leading others in non-traditional ways to make a difference in their own community. These writers have also observed that, a rather large audience is reading popular leadership literature and attempting to practice and implement the strategies in non-profit business, like Education, and Management in a wide array of organizational settings.

Another reason to focus on popular approaches to leadership is an attempt to flesh out specific aspects which speak to the individual citizen leaders. Leadership is a broad topic, yet studies tend to be caged in the context of business and management in the more traditional corporate/business setting. What has been lacking is literature which speaks to the heart and practice of developing citizen leaders. So, much of the scholarly research on leadership is concerned with the observable aspects of leader style and behavior and the effects this has on the follower in carrying out the goals of the organization. What lacks in traditional research is the unobserved phenomena of qualities demonstrated in

countless small ways by the citizen leader.

Margaret Wheatley speaks to the interest of citizen leaders and their role in becoming leaders. Wheatley views leadership not solely as the efforts of the single leader, but, participation from all members of the organization. The focus of leadership does not reside only in the business and work environment. Leadership needs to come from within, and is often applied within non-profits, interest groups, and families. Wheatley inspires all members of the universe to participate in the dance of life: "The more participants we engage in this participative universe, the more we can access its potential and the wiser we become" (p.65).

Kelly (1999) presented ideas related to community leadership in "The American Psychologist, advancing Wheatley's concepts". Two ideas stand out in Kelly's work. One is that "Context is not just something; it is the heart and soul of the matter" (p. 954). The concept relates to the fact, that leadership arises from a need during a particular time surrounded by a particular circumstance, and the community members respond accordingly. Leadership will often arise when an opportunity presents itself and the observers recognize it. The second idea is that leadership is like differing ingredients in a delicious soup. In community work, an individual rarely achieves something on his or her own. It often takes many to accomplish something in a community, and objectives are met through a diversity of inputs and skills.

This sounds like a very good idea, but how can the typical individual participate and practice this skill? How can the individual make a difference?. Senge suggested that, we look for, or create, "catalytic" experiences which challenge us to think beyond the traditional bounds of consciousness. The ability to think outside of the box can bring to light answers to existing problems and create new questions for problems yet to be solved. The ability to think and ask questions is essential in finding learning opportunities. Senge believes that the most important questions are the "what" questions: What do we have to do to become better in achieving organizational vision? What do we really want? What contributions can be made to help others? The quest of seeking answers to these questions creates the best framework of best practices to explore what makes

the 21st century citizen leaders. These questions revolve around motives when volunteering in a community that link to six themes; humanitarian concerns, peer pressure/approval, the desire to avoid potential social problems, ego, self-assessment, and career advancement (Bono, Shen & Snyder, 2010). Though there appear to be self-actualizing reasons for volunteering, the author agrees that, few community projects can be accomplished without collaboration among numerous individuals bringing varied skillsets. Further, the matching of individual motives to community projects helps volunteers to self actualize more readily. Generally, volunteers who are motivated by altruistic and social reasons tended to exhibit more consistency and longevity in their volunteer efforts. Many of the motivators are related to individual and collective vision, which is often based on values (Kouzes and Posner, 1995). The vision provides a focus among community activists based on the context of perceived needs. In another work, Kouzes and Posner (2006) pointed out that, a leader needs to communicate with their participants in order to make the hopes and dreams of others become reality. Community leader's vision needs to be translated into concrete ideas relating to the needs of the community in a manner to inspire action.

How is this Accomplished?

Wheatley and Senge suggest that, what will make a difference is to think outside the box in order to create positive change. Senge recognized that, our organizations work the way they work, we act the way we think, because we are stuck with mental models of thinking which are not suited for today or tomorrow. Instead, we need to "redesign these mental models" (intro. xv). But, here is the catch according to Senge, "We do not have mental models... We are our mental models" (intro xv). Wheatley viewed the process of asking questions. She challenges us to embrace a new perspective on leadership qualities in which the views change not simply from the outside in, but, more effectively from the inside out. This is a new quantum perspective of reality. For those who view things from this perspective, "the universe begins to look more like a giant thought than like a great machine". This perspective is a bold move from the traditional mechanistic world of

command and control leadership to a holistic non-linear view of leadership as creative and collaborative. As a result, Wheatley would exalt in the notion that, "people go from being predictable to being surprising. Each of us is a different person in different places ...this doesn't make us inauthentic, it merely makes us quantum" (p. 34). The traditional lens that people use to view the study of management and leadership is being replaced with a new set of lenses that allow to view and understand the universe and human interaction as it naturally exists.

Ronald Heifetz approached the concept of leadership much like Wheatley and Senge. Traditional approaches to the study of leadership describe the position with regard to specific leader traits. Heifetz took a different view. "Rather than define leadership either as a position of authority in a social structure or as a personal set of characteristics, we may find it a great deal more useful to define leadership as an activity...leadership as an activity of a citizen from any walk of life mobilizing people to do something" (p.20). This is very different from the traditional view and that is why the popular approach to leadership is resonating so well among today's average citizen of society. For now, they see themselves as citizen leaders.

Each person, in their own way, can make contributions within all aspects of life in order to create social change. Research by Born (2000) agrees with the notion that, the traditional view of leadership is not applicable in community leadership. In this author's work, the leader as a role model and as a facilitator supplanted the traditional view that the leader must be a charismatic, and an self-assured individual. Specifically, the research noted that facilitation is a primary task as a community leader must accomplish. The facilitator role includes the ability to make connections, share ideas, energize others, to foster creativity, and to engender collaboration to advance community goals.

No longer is the study of leadership, a matter solely of business and corporate discourse. Wheatley, Senge, and Heifetz view leadership and many other facets of reality from the inside out, rather from the outside in. They view the understanding of the universe from a holistic systems perspective rather than from a reductionism view of

breaking the whole down to the smallest definable parts. Heifetz, Wheatley, Senge, and others comprise a growing citizen approach to leadership. There are many new ideas emerging that must not be dismissed due to their lack of scholarly scrutiny. The concept of leadership is such a valuable component in our global community. Leaders wield great power and influence, but for the most part it remains in the hands of a few. The challenge is to fill in the gaps in the research in the study of leadership to include the average citizen. Further research is needed to explore emerging thoughts from a systems perspective. This approach may offer a great deal of hope for all individuals to become effective citizen leaders. Additional research is needed to gain new insight into the view of leadership from the inside out; to foster social change at the individual level; to understand that people need to embrace the notion that leadership is more than influence. "Leadership has a higher probability of producing socially useful results when defined in terms of legitimate authority, with legitimacy based on a set of procedures by which power is conferred from the many to the few"

Need for the Study

The fundamental question that the authors explore is whether, or not, specific leadership skills are required or recommended for people who lead or are involved with philanthropic activities. Many social entrepreneurship programs include leadership in their curriculum, but none, to the authors' knowledge, treat leadership skills differently than they would in an entrepreneurship or standard MBA program. Theory suggests that, the skillset is different, so, it is relevant and timely to study citizen leadership traits of these individuals so leadership courses can adequately address students' needs.

The development and demonstration of traditional leadership theory is broad and complex. Relegating the role of leader to a person in position of power and rank falls short in the power of building leaders for the future. Instead, the stronger emphasis needs to be placed on the practice of developing effective citizen leaders. The vision lies in developing citizen leaders to become the agents of change, local decision makers, and those who will practice a new perspective of leadership ready for the complex

challenges of the 21st century. The practice of what makes a citizen leader is described in the following two real world examples. These brief illustrations serve as representation of applied action in which the power of citizen leader is being nurtured and advanced in order to make a difference locally and globally.

CultureAll™ - Thinking and Leading Beyond Self

The Problem: A lack of Global Awareness and Appreciation of Cultural Diversity

Sherry Gupta, the founder and executive director of CultureAll™, has created a compelling story based on the organizational mission "to create discovery-filled experiences for students in Iowa to strengthen cultural understanding and appreciation in the daily lives of their fellow students." This organizational goal is achieved by professional presenters (ambassadors) to fill a gap that textbooks and traditional classrooms do not adequately address for kindergarten through 12th grade students. Unfortunately, that gap has recently been further widened as school districts and educators are required to focus more time and resources to ensure that students develop competencies in core curriculum subject matter. Concurrently, time and attention previously devoted to traditional social studies/humanities is regrettably decreased. For today's students, this crucial educational gap has created an unintended consequence causing a lack of their global awareness and lack of appreciation in cultural diversity. This educational gap is a common problem and one CultureAll™ is aggressively addressing.

The Phenomenon: To Expand Students' World View

The organizational goal for CultureAll™ is to conduct an active learning environment which facilitates each student's global awareness and opportunity to become a more informed citizen of the World. This is accomplished through connecting to the theoretical underpinnings of the transcendental phenomenology advanced by Strauss (1987) which advocates and urges students to expand their world view. Sherry Gupta has designed an evolving curriculum based on a holistic approach that addresses the gap that exists in current kindergarten through 12th grade curricula. As Gupta states, "Even though the typical classroom is full of many students from other cultures,

teachers often see this as a liability and hindrance to their own teaching rather than an asset. Everyday students see their peers from other countries, but they are uninformed about other student's country, their culture, and traditions" (S. Gupta, personal communication, June 22, 2012).

Awakening Students' Sociological Imagination to Lead

The CultureAll™ story came to light through a paper titled, *Awakening Students' Sociological Imagination*. In this paper, McCoy (2012) discussed the value for students who experience a transcendent moment by vicariously walking in the shoes of another person. This type of active learning utilizes the power of one's own sociological imagination in order to transcend beyond self in order to lead others more effectively. Even though the concept of sociological imagination was advanced more than 50 years ago by sociologist C. Wright Mills, there is high value in this concept which is demonstrated daily by the practice of what CultureAll™ is doing to engage students' imagination in active learning. The significance of this educational resource aligns with the theories of Mills (1959) as a means to advance knowledge on how Educators can better prepare students with an appreciation of other cultures so they can better assess contemporary events and social problems with a more accurate and realistic understanding (Mills C.W, 1959).

Closing the Gap is a Vital Work

CultureAll™ offers a unique service to K-12 educators to enhance cultural awareness in the classroom. So that, students can develop a broader global awareness in order to lead more effectively. This vital work is conducted through four components of: Education, Job readiness, Civility/inclusion, and Economic development. Nurturing students' global awareness is beneficial for the student in becoming more prepared as a citizen leader in the 21st century.

Arts Leadership Alliance

Personal Leadership: Inspiring a Town

Examples of grass-roots leadership abound. Supporting points made by Bono, Shen & Snyder, 2010 and Kouzes and Posner (1995; 2006), Ann Langley of Tracy, California led the effort to raise nearly \$20 million for an arts center in

her small Central Valley town. What began as a conversation around a dinner table between several couples blossomed into an arts complex in the Tracy, CA, downtown that, now serves approximately 20,000 individuals yearly, many of whom are children and seniors.

The idea of an arts complex began through a community process called 'Tracy Tomorrow'. Tracy Tomorrow was conceived by the city leadership with the purpose of involving a wide array of Tracy citizens in the planning process that would provide the blueprint for growth over the next 20 years. Coupled with several downtown usage studies, the need for an arts venue was clear, but despite several efforts by the local arts commission to bring the idea to fruition, no progress was made. However, a few passionate citizens lead by Langley were able to convince the city manager and council to work with them so they could determine the level of need and interest in the project. Community surveys ensued, followed by a presentation to the council. In Langley's words, "I was shaking in my boots giving that presentation." But her impassioned plea coupled with solid research driven data won Ann and her small cadre of helpers enough monetary support to hire a professional arts planner to help them take the concept to the next level.

The next level required a task force, and Langley was able to assemble 20 community activists to help her. Together, they interviewed and hired a consultant out of Los Angeles who helped to provide a plan for the "where, how and why" of the incubating process. The plan encompassed the where—what properties best suited the vision; the how—what funds were needed and how they would be raised; and the why—the compelling case that would be presented to the city and potential donors. Langley and her crew developed a public/private partnership with the City of Tracy and the newly formed Arts Leadership Alliance. Their goal? To raise \$20 million in public and private funds to buy an old theater in the central business district, then to renovate the theatre and add space for performances, galleries, and studios. What began in 1997 as just an idea, blossomed into the Grand Theater – Center for the Arts that opened with a concert by Linda Ronstadt in September 2007. Today the complex boasts 37,000 square feet

including three galleries that are fully booked all year, a main and a black box theater, and many studio spaces that teach dance, ceramics, painting, and more. Further, the Grand has been honored with awards from the California Heritage Council and the California Preservation Foundation and has been acknowledged in the State Legislature and U.S. Congress. The Center was recognized nationally as one of the fifty unique and important cultural redevelopment projects studied in 2010 (History of the Grand, 2015).

The Grass Roots Activist

Circling back to what motivates a community activist to achieve such an impressive goal, Langley said it best, "If anyone told me what we were going to build and how much time it would take, I would have been terrified." However, Langley has lived by several mantras that underscore her secret to success in becoming a citizen leader. One is to "give away credit with both hands," and the other came from something her dad told her as he lay dying. Ann asked him about his time serving in the Pacific in WWII, wondering if he was afraid. His answer? "The only thing that scared me was to not lead a useful life." The apple did not fall far from the tree. Though Langley lives by her philosophy of giving credit with both hands, no one who has ever worked with her would dispute the fact that Langley provided the passion, patience, persistence, collaboration, and vision that resulted in something Grand.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Telling this story of CultureAll™ and the Arts Leadership Alliance is a worthy endeavor that will hopefully intrigue others to continue their own conversations on the phenomenon of observing the development of citizen leadership. Insights can be gained from this study on the impact of how individual leadership in these two organizations is creating dynamic community awareness that results in making a difference. An overarching component in this brief description of the organizational objective of CultureAll™ and the Arts Leadership Alliance strongly aligns with contemporary insights of Gardiner (2009), Heater (2002), Kingwell (2001), McIntyre-Mills (2000), and Phillips (1972) to advance knowledge on the theoretical proposition of creating an active community

environment that permits students and community members to become better citizen leaders.

However, it is essential to note that this study represents a first step in the process to advance greater understanding on the phenomenon of citizen leadership. The intended purpose of this brief study is to serve as the initial step to continue the conversation and expand the research. Possible future research questions to examine are: Is there a different approach necessary when teaching citizen leadership within social entrepreneurship programs in the US? Is there a sufficient evidence in the body of literature to fully support a theoretical framework of citizen leadership? Does current leadership literature adequately support the phenomenon of citizen leadership as identified by this paper? Even though this paper lays the foundation for future study by providing theoretical background and supportive documentation with two real world examples, the recommendation is to encourage more in depth examination of applied examples and to assess if significant and relevant language patterns could be advanced that qualitatively capture essence of what makes citizen leader.

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