

Leadership as a Key Requirement for Being an Effective Public Sector Manager: Evolution of the Concept of “Good Public Sector Leader” Over Time

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Abstract

The concept of leadership has been extensively studied over the last decades and it has taken today a significant importance in our society than ever before. Many different definitions and theories of leadership have been proposed by diverse researchers. According to Stogdill (1950), leadership is a process of influencing the achievement of goals. Leadership can also be described as an art in which people are mobilized for the shared aspirations (Kouzes and Posner, 1995). Leadership is understood to be a key requirement for being an effective public sector manager, and it has shaped what constitutes a “good public sector leader” over time by giving rise to different types of leaders. The present article discusses the evolution of the concept of leadership over time and its impact in public service management.

Keywords: leadership, leader, skills, effectiveness, follower(s), subordinate(s)

1. Introduction

Leadership involves change by influencing others to do what you want you want them to do. It’s a two-way interaction between the leader and subordinates. In this paper, anyone who exercises leadership is referred as a leader, while the one to whom leadership is being exercised is referred as a follower.

2. Evolution of the Concept of Leadership

There are four main eras that characterize the evolution of leadership:

1. Trait Era

The trait era is characterized by the Trait Theory (1930s-1940s) and the Great Man theory (1840s). In the 19th century, several research on leadership started focusing on the innate characteristics of a leader such as the personality traits and other qualities that constitute an effective leader. The Great Man Theory believed that people are born leaders and not trained or made (The Evolution of Leadership: Principles, History & Theories). Only few individuals have the sole attributes to be effective as leaders and reach greatness by divine purpose. Some illustrations are Abraham Lincoln, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Julius Caesar. People believed that they were born leaders with intrinsic traits of leadership which enabled them to lead while shaping history.

The Great Man Theory developed Trait Theory. Trait Theory believes that individuals can be born leaders or made (Buchanan, 2017), which means that the traits of a successful leader can either be acquired through practice and training or inherited. The objective of this theory was to determine the attributes that make a leader a good or an effective one by focusing on the social, physical and mental traits of a leader. However, by 1950s, there was a consistent set of traits that was produced. Today, Trait Theory is seen in psychometric tools that highlight personality traits such as team development and personal performance.

2. Behavioral Era

The Behavioral Era is characterized by the behavioral theory (1940s-1950s). This theory was developed from the trait theory and asserted that leaders are made and not born, and behaviors are able to be learned to ensure an effective leadership (Johns and Moser, 1989; Denison, Hooijber, and Quinn, 1995). This theory emphasizes the leader’s actual behavior and his/her characteristics or traits and ignores the environment or situation. Behavioral theory resulted in diverse patterns of behaviors that have been grouped together and designated as styles (Johns and Moser, 1989). This approach became prevalent within management training (Blake and Mouton, 1980). Today, the behavioral theory is represented in various leadership training programs which involve behaviors and leadership skills development.

3. *Situational Era*

The Situational Era is characterized by the contingency and situational theory (1960s) which recognized that the environment represents an important part in the dynamic of leader-follower. It's an era that focused more on leadership in specific situations than on the leader's characteristics or behaviors. This implies that a leader must have the ability to assess his/her environment and decide to adopt a style that fit best the situation. Friedler (1974), who developed the contingency theory of leadership in this period, focused on the significance of context for a productive leadership. The contingency theory does not believe that there is any best set of leadership traits or behaviors. But because a leader has a fixed style, he/she should be put into situations that can best match his/her style (Friedler, 1974). In other words, a leader's effectiveness is determined by the way he/she matches his/her leadership style in a specific situation or context.

4. *New Leadership Era*

The New Leadership Era is characterized by the Transactional and Transformational Leadership Theories (1990s). It is in this period that there was a need to focus on many aspects of leadership. As the world was entering into globalization, it was facing complex and challenging issues. Leadership theories emerged to support the rapid change of the world with technological innovations and climate change, leading to a new leadership era that focuses on the interaction between the leader, the followers, and the situation.

The transactional leadership theory focuses on the leader's authority to motivate followers. The leader uses reward to compensate followers' efforts, and punishment for those who fail to meet their goals. The transformational leadership theory, on the other hand, relies on the leader's ability to inspire, encourage, and motivate followers. This theory is used when an organization is undergoing changes.

3. **Characteristics of Good Public Sector Leader**

In the 2000s, there was a shift in the concept of leadership that led to the development of collaborative and collective leadership practices (Lee-Davies, 2013). Therefore, the success of an organization depended more on the organization's coordinative leadership practices rather than on top individuals' actions. Servant leadership that emerged in this era emphasized on the importance of followers. The servant leader supported team members and was mostly concerned about serving others. Inclusive leadership also emerged, and it focused on a person-centered approach. Other contemporary leadership theories such as complexity leadership that deals with the modern world complexity, also originated. This theory considered contextual interactions that occur in the social system.

There is one responsibility that rests on public administrators' shoulders which is to be effective and principled to their public service jobs. We often wonder if there is a specific recipe for being a good public sector leader. To quote George Eliot, God gifted Antonio Stradivari with the skill to be the greatest violin maker in the world, however, it was his responsibility to refine this God-given skill and bring it to fruition.

3.1 *Characteristics of Good Public Sector Leader*

3.1.1 *Commitment to Serving Others*

The first element that constitutes a good public sector leader is the commitment to serving others rather than serving themselves. Today, many public sector leaders have lost of the difference between their nations or communities' interests and their personal interests. Serving others requires trustworthiness. The official Code of Federal Regulations in the United States describes public service in the following manner: "Public service is a public trust". Trust is crucial in public service, and it needs to be earned every day in our job by adhering to high moral standards such as integrity and honesty.

Another important part of serving others is to serve everyone and not just those who are like us. It means serving those who are different from us in their ideological views, demographic characteristics and in other ways. President Juan Manuel Santos, Former President of Columbia, once said that *the most important value for any public sector leader was empathy*. And empathy naturally leads people's concerns, people who did not have a fair chance to succeed, and who therefore need our attention.

1) *Diversity and Inclusion*

The leader must be able to lead and manage subordinates in the respect of their uniqueness. This style of leadership is free from bias, discrimination, favoritism, or other characteristics that are protected, and allows subordinates to feel valued.

Inclusion and diversity and HR experts have identified, in the 2019 Korn Ferry Institute Survey, keys that a leader can utilize to unlock the potentials of his/her subordinates:

- Reassure subordinate about equity and fairness in the organization
- Enable subordinates to bring their authentic selves in the organization, and
- Provide subordinates with a sense of empowerment.

An inclusive and diverse leader will bring the organization closer to its aspirations of being diverse, inclusive and equitable; champion affinity groups and diversity initiatives; advocate for change; hold people accountable; and act as a role model (CEPC, 2018).

2) *Respect and Fairness*

A leader who is seen as respectful and fair and values different opinions and ideas, encourages collaboration. The ability to unlock subordinate potential can only be done if the organization is led by an inclusive leader. Individuals who are from underrepresented groups usually face barriers and biases in their professional development. If they feel that they are excluded in the organization, they will not, most of the time, be able to reach their full potential. The leader must help them develop themselves and equip them with tools, strategies and insights to give their best in the organization.

A public sector leader must behave according to a set of principles and values such as honesty, transparency, integrity, fairness and trust. By being an ethical leader, he will inspire subordinate to also behave ethically. He must lead by example, treat all subordinates equally, offer them opportunities with no favoritism. The decisions that the leader makes must enact and reflect the organization values. Ethics will provide accountability not only between the leader and subordinates, but with public (Svara, 2004). That is why it is very important that a public sector leader adheres to a code of ethics by ensuring that not only his/her team, but also the public receive what they need in a fair manner. The leader's integrity will, therefore, help foster everyone trust, and let them know that he/she is working with their best interests in mind.

Additionally, a leader good ethics in public service creates transparency by building trust and minimizing potential issues. Communication here plays an important role and keeps everyone involved to work towards a common goal. Good communication shows the engagement of the leader with the people he/she leads.

3.2 *Skills of a Good Public Sector Leader*

Leadership is all about behavior, trait, and skills. Another element for a good public sector leader is a set of skills that he/she will need to understand and overcome public challenges. In his book titled *Dynamics of Leadership in Public Service: Theory and Practice*, Van Wart (2005) discusses six effective leadership skills:

3.2.1 *Communication Skills*

Communication is a basic part of the leadership process whether is to lead others, effect crucial organizational changes or direct business operations. Communication is a key skill in the repertoire of a leader because, to rephrase Lee Iacocca (1984), *the ability to communicate is everything*. Communication here is not only the act of informing, but also exchanging information effectively using active and passive means (Van Wart, 2005). It means that it can be conveyed directly with language or indirectly with postures or gestures etc. It's also a two-way approach that makes sure that not only the information is received accurately, but also that the leader receives it as well.

In leadership, there are four major components of communication skills: oral communication skills which are the most prominent (speaking with individuals); written communication skills (for example reports, e-mails, memoranda, etc.); listening communication skills. They perform several functions (Hoppe, 2006) such as information about the state of mind of people, facts, attitudes, levels of motivation etc. A leader who listens shows respect. Therefore, listening also provides a strong bond than do writing and speaking; nonverbal communication skills such as eye movements, facial expressions, body postures, gestures, and body movements, convey immense information. For example, a leader who tries to inspire people about the prospect of a major change, and who is continuously looking downward, will not inspire people because they will sense that he/she doesn't exactly lay hold of the big picture.

A study by the US Office of Personnel Management (1997) reveals that oral and written communications are ranked as first and second among the important twenty-two competencies for new and experienced supervisors, managers and executives. A good leader must have strong communication skills. Major public sector competency studies have emphasized on communications skills (Bhatta, 2001). Howard and Bray (1988) have listed oral and written communications in their skills list, and Stogdill (1974) also emphasized communication in his skills list.

3.2.2 *Social Skills*

Social skills can be defined as the ability (that some people have) to effectively interact in social settings and to understand and productively harness their own personality structures and the one of other people (Van Wart, 2005). Because leadership deals with people, social skills are a crucial pillar of a leader's skill set. Roosevelt said that *"an essential element in the success formula is to know how to get along with people"*. To back this idea, researchers who are studying derailment observed that weak social skills are most of the time the main causes of failure in executive career (Lombardo, Ruderman and McCauley, 1988). Social skills have important innate factors, for instance, people who are extroverts easily deal with social settings than introvert people.

Three important factors characterize social skills: *Personal Likability*, for a good leader, it focuses on areas such as respect, tact, kindness and optimism; *Expressiveness*, which is to make sure that the right thing is done or said at the ideal time. A leader who is strong in expressiveness is able to put professional passions or emotions into words. This allows people to personally feel valued, infuses meaning into work, and combines efforts; *Social Perceptiveness* (Newcomb, 1961). Its baseline is an honest comprehension of the leader's own preferences, drives and values. This helps to understand others' actions and motives. Social perceptiveness has an inestimable value in leadership and its unique aspect holds the eleventh position among executives in public sector and a higher position among leaders in private sector.

Another aspect is the profound comprehension of interpersonal dynamics which is the source of bureaucratic politics and the glue of organizations. Bad or good, they are critical when it comes to the demand of leadership positions (Stogdill, 1948). One example is charisma. It can inspire allegiance or devotion. A charismatic leader can charm everybody, at least in the short term. Charisma can help a leader achieve his/her goals, but it can also lead to evil and mistakes as well, example of Hitler.

3.2.3 Influence Skills

Every leader has diverse kinds and proportions of power that give him/she the ability to impact people, outcomes and resources. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985, p.17), "*power is the basic energy needed to initiate and sustain actions or, to put it another way, it is the capacity to translate intentions into reality and sustain them*". The analysis of authority depends on the person, the position or even both. When authority depends on position, it includes traditional power of legitimate authority. It controls the surroundings and can punish or reward. This kind of authority is stemmed from established laws or rules. Controlling the environment means changing work patterns or physical environment.

Another influence skill is personal power or referent power. It influences outcomes based on different kinds of personal persuasion. For example, a social movement leader who exerts considerable effect but does not have a formal stand of authority. A leader who exercises authority over others will eventually expand or decrease his/her authority through the use of successful influence approaches. Van Wart (2005) characterizes eight influence strategies: *Legitimizing Tactics* that focus on the consistency of impact attempts with established practices, policies or procedure; *Pressure Tactics* that emphasize on the use of menaces and demands to influence, emphasize punishment such as shunning, poor evaluation, no raise etc.; *Exchange Tactics* that focus on mutual favors in either implicit understandings or explicit agreements; *Position Based-power* are the foundation of leaders' authority in most organizations; *Rational Persuasion* uses logic and facts to convince the target on the success of an achievable objective. It is the most common form of strategy used in bureaucracies; *Consultation* involves the target in the process of planning and provides feedback or makes changes; *Emotional Appeals* stimulate commitment and enthusiasm by arousing certain beliefs, preferences and values of the target; *Personal Appeals* are characterized by feelings of friendship, human compassion or loyalty. A leader can use personal appeals to increase shared bonds; Friendliness uses affable behaviors or praises to boost responsiveness to future orders or requests.

3.2.4 Analytical Skills

Analytical skills *are* the aptitude to distinct, remember and deal with ambiguity and complexity (Van Wart, 2005). Van Wart (2005) distinguishes four major elements of analytical skills: *Memory*. Good memory has the advantage to help leaders make distinctions because of the accessibility of data. Good memory in a work environment may involve the knowledge of a specific language in code enforcement or a process to solve a problem; *Discrimination* is a second element of analytical skills. It distinguishes and uses different conceptual dimensions, example of a leader who uses nuances to make better decisions; *Cognitive Complexity*, it simultaneously uses and considers distinct aspects or uses distinct dimensions of complexity in diverse fields (Streufert and Swezey, 1986). It is a way of life as a leader moves up the hierarchy, he/she must make a lot of discriminations in diverse fields as well as subtles discernment calls on what to focus on for the good of the organization; *Ambiguity Tolerance* (Wilkinson 2006) suspends judgment during the gathering of new data. A leader who knows how to well tolerate ambiguity will be more willing to pay attention to anomalies to determine if there are contradictory or new emerging patterns. Analytical skills are important skills to leadership because they help solving issues.

3.2.5 Technical Skills

Technical skills are more important for supervisors than executives (Katz, 1955). Even though leaders hardly do the technical work, their technical skills remain nevertheless important. They must know enough of their field so that they don't get lost. If they don't know the program, they must at least master the major elements, if not they will not be able to command the respect and loyalty of those who are specialists in the domain and join them to work as a team. We believe that a leader who wants to have crucial effect on the operations will necessarily have strong involvement and technical skills. Such a leader can occasionally be the pioneer required to make great changes in processes, or he can

focus on personal expertise and technical issues. A leader's technical skills entail the practice, professional and organizational knowledge that are connected with a work scope (Van Wart, 2005).

Technical skills have three major elements: *Skills and technical information of the discipline*. For instance, a leader in transportation field will require an engineering degree and, in a hospital, he will need a nursing or medical degree (Carnevale, Gainer, and Schulz, 1990); *Organization information*, it includes rules, processes, interest groups etc. This is not an issue for those who are promoted internally, it is usually a problem for external hires who have just got to the job and are still trying to understand the organization functioning; *Basic management skills*. These skills are required from frontline workers and can include operational problem solving, leading teams and operations planning.

3.2.6 Continual Learning

Continual learning constitutes a significant competence. Since the past few decades, its importance has been rising due to the increased uncertainty and change in organizations (Vera and Crossan, 2004). Continual learning takes the responsibility to acquire new information, look at old information in a new way and find new ways to use old and new information creatively. Continual learning is characterized by two elements that equate the ability to learn proficiently in advance and basic modes: *The ability to use and glean new information and data*. The basic mode of learning requires that people review and monitor data and trends which can be internal or external to the organization; *the aptitude to expand knowledge* such as the creation of new knowledge that can lead to innovation (use of known processes/products in new ways). It also requires the dissemination of the said knowledge.

In view of all that has been said about the skills, traits and behaviors that characterize a good leader in the public sector, there are two questions that lead us to our research questions:

- How can we evaluate leadership quality of performance metrics in the public sector? and
- How can we measure leadership effectiveness in the public sector?

4. Evaluation of Leadership Quality

The evaluation of a leader in the public sector can occur for many purposes and at many levels.

4.1 Self Evaluation

The Evaluation can be done by and for oneself. The leader self-evaluation can be assessed for (1) the job short-term improvement, and (2) long-term improvement in the leader own leadership capability. This can take place through a formal mechanism like benchmarking or reports.

4.2 Evaluation Done for or by Followers

The evaluation done for or by followers is constant and inevitable at some level because they are affected by and exposed to the competence and commitment of the leader. It varies how much follower evaluation matters to the leader and the whole organization. There are leaders who focus their energy on the followers positive regard, meanwhile other ones are concerned about the positive view of their managers. Feedback can be provided using formal mechanisms like informal open discussions/ casual conversations, or formal survey form.

4.3 Evaluation Done by Superiors or the Voting Public

Most leaders experience formal processes of evaluation, while others seek intermittent feedback in order to adapt their performance to the formal demand of the people with major roles that shape their jobs.

4.4 Evaluation Done Outside of the Organization

This evaluation is done by vendors, indirect customers of services, clients and partner agencies who are among the people who can assess the performance and competence of a leader. For example, for a welfare agency, it can be prospective employers, welfare recipients, or other social services.

Of all the types of evaluation mentioned above, we believe that the most difficult evaluator of all this can be time. What will be the leader effect in the long-term? Will his/her contribution be so relevant that it can be associated with some level of organization development? The test of time can be the testament that will be offered by people in appreciation or recognition for the job well done. This level of evaluation is usually for the most passionate and dedicated leaders who are concerned with excelling.

Because a leader needs information to act effectively, his/her evaluation must rationally be the priority. The leader needs to make a global assessment that steers is/her overall decision about priorities and goals, and detailed assessment that ameliorates strategic alignment, follower development and quality.

5. Measurement of a Leader Effectiveness

Many researchers have tried to measure leadership effectiveness using the leader actions, the attitude of his/her followers,

and the study of his/her behaviors. Assessing the consequences of the actions of a leader is another common way to examine the effectiveness of a leader (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). For example, if a leader can influence the subordinates to obtain positive outcomes, it simply means that the leader is effective, or it is a good leader.

There are many indicators that are used to measure a leader effectiveness. These indicators assess how well the leader can achieve organizational goals.

5.1 Measurement of the Specific Outcomes of a Leader

The specific outcomes of a leader can be used to assess the effectiveness of a leader through the following measures:

- *The performance of the group and the success of their goals*

A commonly used measure to assess a leader effectiveness is by evaluating the performance of his/her performance as well as the scope to which goals are met (Dhar, 2001). For example, an organization goal to increase sales or to achieve budgeted sales. Subjective measures will be utilized to evaluate the effectiveness.

- *The evaluation of the leader effectiveness by subordinates*

In this section, followers will be asked to determine the performance of their leader and his/her accomplishments of the specific outcomes (Dhar, 2001). The outcomes that are to be evaluated are: (1) the leader performance of his/her organizational unit; (2) the promotion of the leader into a higher position in the organization; (3) the satisfaction and commitment of followers; and (4) the leader's evaluation based on his/her abilities.

- *Subordinate job satisfaction*

The job satisfaction of subordinates is also an indicator of the leader effectiveness. Subordinates can be asked how satisfied they are with their job to evaluate the effectiveness of their leader.

- *Improvement of subordinates*

The effectiveness of a leader can also be assessed by examining the performance of subordinates. Research show that the increase of subordinates' performance indicates how effective is a leader in his/her leading (Yukl et al., 1992).

- *Advancement of subordinate commitment*

When subordinates are committed to their job, the organization outcomes are enhanced.

- *Improvement of decision-making*

Rephrasing Vroom and Yetton (1973), a good or effective leader is the one who is able to make good decisions and increase the commitment of his/her subordinates.

5.2 The Evaluation of the Leader Effectiveness by Subordinates

The evaluation of subordinates is also seen as a crucial tool to measure the effectiveness of a leader. The assessment can be used as followed:

- *The opinion of subordinates on their leader*

There are six factors developed by Ehrhart (2001) that can be used to measure the effectiveness of a leader: (1) the willingness of subordinates to work for their leader at a high level performance; (2) the agreement of subordinates that they like working with their leader; (3) subordinates getting along with their leader; (4) the admiration of subordinates toward their leader; (5) subordinates find their work style compatible with the one of their leader; (6) subordinates have similar ideals with their leader.

- *Leader Overall Effectiveness*

To measure the leader overall effectiveness, subordinates can be asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their leader in order to compare it with the performance of other leaders that they know.

- *Team Leader Effectiveness*

Another way of measuring the leader effectiveness can be by comparing the leader's evaluation of his/ her own performance in reaching the goals of the organization.

- *Comparison of the assessment of the leader and followers of the leader effectiveness*

In a study of Vecchio and Anderson (2009), they asked subordinates to rate their leader through: (1) their satisfaction with the quality of the leadership that is provided; (2) assessment of the leader effectiveness; (3) comparison of the leader to an ideal leader; (4) aspirations of subordinates to become like the leader; and (5) assessment if the leader is helping the organization to thrive.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the traits, behaviors and skills that we have highlighted in this study determine the impact of a leader in an organization. We must understand that a leader must lead by example. If a leader wants to be qualified as a good leader, he/she must take into account the people with who he/she works, as well as the environment.

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