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Transformational Leadership
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“How Leadership Influences Student Learning”

In the publication “How Leadership Influences Student Learning” produced by the Wallace Foundation, effective leadership is characterized by three major components: 1) setting directions, 2) developing people, and 3) redesigning the organization. It is with the practice of these leadership principles that student learning is reported to be positively impacted. Although this successful model of leadership refers to educational realm, it is applicable to any type of organization. A leaders’ emphasis on providing direction and development, as well as fostering an environment that is consistently being renewed to meet the goals set forth, is rooted in the transformational leadership model which can be applied in any leadership context. Although the report summarizes quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating the impact of leadership and student learning, for the purposes of this brief paper, I will only outline the three components of successful leadership discussed in the Wallace Foundation report in order to demonstrate their relation to transformational leadership theory, and conclude with personal insights gained from a more detailed exploration of transformational leadership theory.

The first component of successful leadership outlined in the Wallace Foundation’s report is “Setting Directions.” Setting directions involves “helping one’s colleagues develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals... which they find personally compelling...” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, p. 8 2004). A key component of setting direction is therefore communicating the

organizations goals, influencing colleagues in such a way that they share in the values and goals of the organization and creating a desire in all of the members of that organization to strive to achieve those goals. Under transformational leadership theory, this component relates to “the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection raises the level of motivation...” amongst the members of the organization (Northouse, p. 170)

The second component of successful leadership is “Developing People.” The authors recognized that although “clear and compelling organizational directions contribute significantly to members’ work related motivations, they are not the only conditions that do so” (Leithwood et. al, p. 9). Setting directions is not an independent variable in creating a successful organization but rather developing the members of the organization is equally important. The authors asserted that directions do not create the “capacity” of members to achieve goals. Therefore “intellectual stimulation...individualized support...[and] models of best practice” are needed to assist members of the organization in achieving goals (Leithwood et. al., p. 9, 2004).

“Intellectual stimulation”, under transformational leadership theory refers to the act of “support[ing] followers as they try to develop innovative ways of dealing with organizational issues” (Northouse, p. 177). “Individualized Support” under transformational leadership theory refers to leaders who “listen carefully to the individual needs of followers...leaders act as coaches and advisors while trying to assist individuals in becoming fully actualized” (Northouse, p. 177). Finally, “models of best practice,” refers to the creation of a standard of “beliefs” which are invaluable to the organization. Under transformational leadership theory, this belief system is entitled “idealized

influence” in which leaders set high moral standards for the organization (Northouse, p. 174)

The third and final component of successful leadership is “redesigning the organization.” Redesigning the organization involves “strengthening district and school cultures, modifying organizational structures and building collaborative processes” (Leithwood et. al., p. 9). This third leadership component relates to the leader's ability to transform and reinvent the organization to that which fosters the appropriate environment for that organization to reach its goals. Under transformational leadership theory, this type of leadership is called “social architecture” (Northouse, p. 183). The leader is willing and able to influence and redefine the culture of the organization.

The combination of these three leadership practices in the Wallace Foundation report were said to transform some of the most disadvantaged schools into schools that thrived. Although (Leithwood, et. al., 2004) focused on school leadership, the concepts, as I have outlined, can be clearly traced to Transformational Leadership Theory.

This report was very useful in demonstrating how transformational leadership theory although not explicitly stated is recognized and practiced in the public sector. Although there are many models of leadership that one can chose to employ, I think that the Transformational Leadership Model is “best practice” for the public sector. The goal of public organizations, one would hope, is to serve the needs of the public, who often require direction, development, and community redesign. Likewise, it seems fitting that a public organization would develop its members in the same way. Just like educators across the country realize that direction, development and reinvention are invaluable components of building a successful management team and school, these are also key leadership components for building successful communities.

Personally, I would prefer to work in an environment where the leadership demonstrated the delicate combination of charisma and the administration of structured direction. Furthermore, an environment that rejects status quo, and replaces it with a focus on the goals of that organization which may entail a restructuring of that organizations culture in order to adapt to those goals. An example of this would be my experience in a private school in Seattle. The school had been in existence for over 100 years, starting as an all-white boy’s school. It eventually admitted women, then students of color. In recent years however, the administration realized that the school still lacked ethnic diversity and changed much of its administration to both reflect and influence the

diversity within the school. The goal of this school is to provide quality education to students with potential regardless of race or socio-economic status and it proved faithful in keeping with this goal, to my surprise. Although this school is a private institution, it serves as an excellent demonstration of transformational leadership.

All in all, I learned a great deal from this exploration of transformational leadership theory, and can now clearly see its practical application in many organizations that I have been a part of. I also desire to administer the values of this leadership model in my management style as I grow in my career and ascend to a greater position of leadership.

Works Cited

Leithwood, K. Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., Wahlstrom, K. (2004).

How Leadership Effects Student Learning. Wallace Foundation. New York, NY.

Northouse, P. G. (2004). *Leadership Theory and Practice*. California: Sage.