

The Lamplighter: Strategic Leaders' Views on Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The vast quantity of leadership literature discusses factors that may contribute to leader development. However, strategic leaders—defined as those individuals in key positions at the organizational apex—are a subsection of the research that deserves more attention. In particular, what sets these leaders apart or enables them to excel is an area of particular interest and is explored in this dissertation. The purpose of this study was to understand the process of leadership development, specifically through the experience and beliefs of successful senior leaders.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. How do strategic leaders for the federal government describe effective leadership?
2. How do they explain the development of effective strategic leadership?
3. How do the described behaviors of strategic leadership compare to the Executive Core Qualifications established for civilian federal government leaders by the Office of Personnel Management?

To answer the research questions, the study employed grounded theory as the primary analytic procedure. The subjects interviewed were from areas of the federal government dealing with national security, predominantly Department of Defense. Both military and civilians subjects participated. Data were analyzed qualitatively and a conceptual model of strategic leadership behavior was developed. Finally, implications and suggestions as to how to foster the development of such capacities are offered.

The findings show, as did earlier behavioral research, that the two aspects of task and relationship are important to successful leaders. In this case, both functioned predominantly in the leaders' behavior, but under the fabric of their contextual experience built on their own self-efficacy and relations with others. It follows that more attention paid to developing self-mastery and strong relationship skills are in order.

Since studies on military leadership vice civilian federal service are more likely, the findings were examined in relation to the established qualifications for senior civilian leaders, revealing a gap. While the qualifications for senior executives are behavior oriented, the research indicates a need for stronger focus on personal development, growth as an individual, and contributions made to the development of others. The relationship aspect of leadership does not receive the proper emphasis.

Dedication

This accomplishment is dedicated to guardian angels.

To my angels in heaven: Grandmother Nana Rose, Brother Keith, and Sister Kim. The love they showed me in life transcends the distance between us. Their never-ending care continues to give me strength and comfort whenever drawn upon.

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