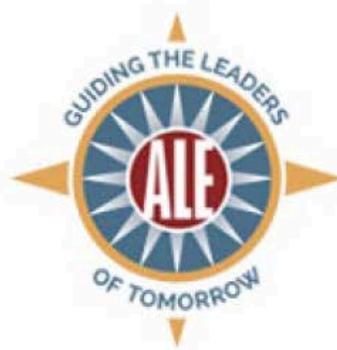


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Leadership Discourses: Exploring Students' Definitions of Leadership

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Abstract

Ever wonder how our emerging leaders frame and think about leadership? That insight could help us understand the future of leadership while revealing key priorities for leadership education, development, and research. This workshop will uncover the leadership discourses among college students through the collective wisdom of the workshop participants. The facilitators will engage the leadership educators and scholars in the room in a collaborative card-sort process of college students' definitions of leadership, as captured through the Multi-institutional Study of Leadership (MSL). Options for closed sort categories will be based on prior research, but open sorting will also be encouraged.

Introduction

Bernard Bass (1990) famously observed that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define it. Leadership educators, in particular, know this to be true. Oftentimes, the first assignment of a leadership course asks students to write their own definition of leadership. These definitions serve to solidify students' often nebulous conceptualization of leadership. However, students' definitions of leadership are also valuable to educators. Definitions give us insight into a student's conceptualization of what leadership is, and what a leader should be (Kaufman, Thornton, & Courtney, 2017). Definitions help us gauge where students are in their development and inform our coursework (Komives, et al., 2005). Definitions may reveal a student's discourse of leadership, which gives rich insight into their experience with leadership (Western, 2013). Definitions can also be used to help us plot the development of students' leadership development across time (Keating, Rosch, & Burgoon, 2014).

This workshop will tackle the process of parsing students' definitions of leadership through the collective wisdom of the workshop participants. The specific strategy applied will be card sorting, a technique for revealing mental models for how information is organized (Hinkle, 2008). Rugg and McGeorge (2005) note that sorts are appropriate as an exploratory technique for identifying categories of significance, yet they may also be appropriate for piloting the usefulness of a predefined set of categories. When identifying new categories, the process is called open card sorting; when validating an existing set of categories, the process is called closed card sorting (Hinkle, 2008). Research suggests the card sort technique can be a qualitative substitute for a quantitative factor analysis (Santos, 2006). The basic idea is that card sorting invites participants to group items in a way that makes sense to them. For this workshop, the facilitators will engage the leadership educators and scholars in the room in a collaborative card sort process to reveal themes and leadership discourses embedded in the leadership definitions of college students.

The definitions provided in this workshop will draw on the work of the Multi-institutional Study of Leadership (MSL). For more than 15 years, the MSL has been collecting students' definitions of leadership. This international research program focuses on understanding the influences of higher education in shaping socially responsible leadership capacity and other related student outcomes (Dugan, Kodama, & Correia, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007).

The workshop will utilize three well-known classifications of leadership: (a) Komives et al.'s (2005) Leadership Identity Development Model; (b) Grint's (2010) taxonomy of leadership; and (c) Western's (2013) four discourses of leadership. In addition, participants will be asked to derive their own classification system. A facilitator-guided debrief will allow further dialogue and advance the collective understanding of leadership discourses among emerging leaders.

At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Identify prominent leadership discourses and related frameworks;
- Recognize the potential of card sorting for group facilitation and qualitative research;
- Highlight specific examples of leadership discourses, as expressed through college students' definitions of leadership.

Review of Related Scholarship

Research suggests leadership definitions or conceptualization from childhood to adulthood may have an effect on leader emergence and motivation to lead. Findings from Gottfried et al. (2011) found adults who were intrinsically motivated to lead had more motivation to lead from childhood than others. Moreover, Guillén, Mayo, and Korotov (2015) found the ability to compare oneself with an 'influential' leader from one's past has a positive relationship on one's motivation to lead. Knowing one's conceptualization of leadership might help to move people from where they currently are to where they should be. According to Komives and Colleagues (2005), students typically enter college with a hierarchical and positional view of leadership, which limits their emergence as leaders. However, knowing their conceptualization of leadership could help inform a leadership program that is tailored to their needs and help move them from a hierarchical view of leadership to a collaborative and distributed view, thereby aiding their emergence as leaders. Moreover, an individual's definition of leadership could help determine their developmental readiness. Avolio and Hannah (2008) recommend youth leadership development programs take into account the developmental readiness of youths in order to speed up the leadership development process.

Leader Identity Development

Contrary to popular belief that 'identity' is a personality trait that is inherently ingrained in individuals, identity is constantly changing, and might even be interrupted (Burke, 1991). Leaders' identity development over time influences their leadership definition. While there is a plethora of research in extant literature that focus on leader identity development in adulthood, little attention has been paid to leader identity development in childhood (Oliver et al., 2011). However, a more robust way to study leadership development would be to take a 'long-lens' approach that studies the trajectory of leader identity development from childhood to adulthood (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Adolescents' conceptualization of leadership is limited, and mostly based off of the experiences of childhood (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998). Many adolescents conceptualize a leader as someone who has certain superior characteristics (e.g., tallness) which they may not possess (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998). However, this leader identity continues to change as they go through multi-faceted experiences of life.

The family forms the foundation upon which other leadership experiences are built and might go a long way in shaping perceptions of leadership. Oliver and colleagues (2011) found children who were given more responsibility and opportunity to participate in decision making at a young age would be more likely to perceive themselves as leaders. The research reveals a significant relationship between the type of family environment in childhood and transformational leadership development in adulthood, when mediated by self-concept (Oliver et al., 2011).

Research has also shown that interventions such as youth development programs have helped to shape leader identity in youth. Miscenko, Guenter, and Day (2017) found a significant change in the leader identity of youths who participated in a seven-week leadership development program. However, many youth leadership development organizations have focused on the impact of their programs, while failing to take into account the impact of leader identity on the outcomes of their programs. Day and Harrison (2007) suggest the type of leader identity development initiative (i.e., individual, relational, or collective) should depend upon an individual's level within the organization. For example, if an individual is at lower levels of an organization, leadership developmental efforts should be geared towards developing the personal and relational leader identities; yet leadership development efforts should be focused on collective leader identities for individuals at higher levels of management.

Leadership Definitions and Discourses

Many different definitions of and approaches to leadership exist extant in literatures, and this might be indicative of its many forms and ever evolving nature (Bass, 1990; Day & Harrison, 2007). Grint (2010) resists the idea of a universally accepted definition of leadership and contends that our continued quest in trying to define leadership might help us to elucidate its constituents' parts. Day and Harrison (2007) summarized leadership definitions based on their level of complexity and inclusiveness:

- Most basic: Leadership as a position. Many traits and behavior theories fall in this category (see Bass 1990; Zaccaro, 2007).
- Mid-level: Leadership as influence. For example, the Leader-Member exchange theory (LMX) (see Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995).
- Most advanced: Leadership as shared between individuals. Distributed approaches to leadership fall in this category (see Western, 2013).

Western's (2013) four discourses of leadership offer an alternative means of categorizing a student's understanding of leadership. Based on a meta-analysis of leadership from historical, socio-political, and economic perspectives, Simon Western (2013) identified four discourses of leadership during the past century: (a) controller, (b) therapist, (c) messiah, and (d) eco-leader. The discourses name the major shifts in our collective understanding of what leadership is, and what a leader should be, during the past 100 years. The strength of the four discourses is that they offer historical and social context for the various conceptualizations of leadership a student may have.

Controller Discourse. The controller discourse was the dominant discourse of the early 20th century, when our understanding of leadership was heavily influenced by the Industrial Revolution. The first scientific studies of leadership were conducted during the early decades of

the 20th century, and the resulting industrial paradigm of leadership emphasized the “preeminence of leaders and the machine-like qualities of organizations” (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005, p. 236). In this discourse, followers were relegated to worker status and reduced to “cog[s] in a machine, mirroring standardization and mechanization within the mass production of the factory” of the time (Western, 2008, p. 162). The archetypical controller leader values efficiency and productivity among his or her workers. They expect workers to respect positional authority and power, and to know their place in the hierarchy of the organization.

Therapist Discourse. Following World War II, the therapist discourse emerged among calls for a more democratic society and a bet on the “principle that ‘happy workers are more productive workers’” (Western, 2010, p. 39). This approach made leadership more people-focused; it reflected the “wider social trends of atomization, self-concern, and the post-war individualistic expectations of being fulfilled, successful and happy” (Western, 2008, p. 163). With this in mind, the therapist leader seeks to maximize production by increasing the motivation of workers through promoting personal growth. While there is an emphasis to encourage workers to create their identity and find fulfillment through work, the underlying purpose is still to maximize productivity and shape individuals to fit desired norms (Western, 2010).

Messiah Discourse. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the messiah discourse emerged “with the aim to create strong, dynamic organizational cultures under the vision and charisma of a transformational leader” (Western, 2010, p. 40). During this era, the organizational leader became a social character of influence, leading through his or her own symbolism and status (Western, 2008). Business schools, corporations, civic organizations, and churches embraced this transformational (messiah) leader who could offer vision and passionate leadership to create inspired, loyal, and committed followers. The archetypical messiah leader uses charisma and passion to inspire devotion and loyalty from their followers.

Eco-Leader Discourse. In the beginning of the 21st century we find ourselves facing numerous complex and interconnected challenges. The nature of leadership under the eco-leader discourse is that it redistributes leadership and power from a centralized, hierarchical structure throughout the organization in an attempt to leverage the energy and creativity of the entire system (Western, 2010). In this discourse, the role of leadership is to bring together people, ideas, and organizational structures so that organizations can develop strategies to address adaptive challenges (Allen, Stelzner, & Wielkiewicz, 1999). The archetypical eco-leader thinks like an “organizational architect, connecting people and creating networks using processes and technology” (Western, 2013, p. 275). They create spaces for others to lead, recognizing that leadership is a collaborative, collective process.

Lesson Plan Description

The general structure and flow of the workshop will be as follows:

- Introduction to the MSL and the concept of leadership discourses (10 minutes).
- Small-group brainstorming of frameworks and models for sorting leadership definitions (10 minutes).
- Large-group sharing of proposed frameworks and models for sorting leadership definitions (10 minutes).

- Overview of the card sort technique of facilitation and qualitative research (5 minutes).
- Small group card sorts of leadership definitions collected through the MSL (30 minutes).
- Discussion and debrief of prominent themes and discourses emerging from the card sort process (15 minutes).
- Dialogue about opportunities for future application (10 minutes).

Depending on group size and readiness, we may share copies of the sample categorization of leadership definitions (Appendix A), as well as framework overview pages: Grint's taxonomy (Appendix B), the LID model (Appendix C), and Western's discourses (Appendix D).

Discussion of Outcomes/Results

The idea for this workshop emerged as a result of discussion during the poster session at the 2017 annual conference of the Association of Leadership Educators. There seemed to be a variety of useful perspectives on how to classify students' definitions of leadership and the extent to which the findings illuminate information about our leadership education programs. This workshop will be an opportunity to build upon those earlier discussions and inform the research that is continuing with the 2018 Multi-institutional Study of Leadership.

Workshop Implications

Some preliminary research with the MSL applied both Grint's taxonomy and the LID model, for categorizing students' definitions of leadership. While these were a useful starting point, some leadership educators challenged the classifications and overall fit. The participants in this workshop will have the opportunity to further the dialogue and advance the collective understanding of leadership discourses among emerging leaders.

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Appendix A: Sample Categorization of Leadership Definitions

The following example is excerpted from Kaufman, Thornton, and Coartney (2017).

Leadership Definition	Approach to Leadership				LID Stage
	Position	Person	Result	Process	
“To me leadership is being able to bring people together to collectively reach an agreed upon goal. To inspire and encourage individuals and the group as a whole and to embrace differences within that collective. A leader should be approachable by colleges [sic] but firm with the power to make final decisions that has been appointed to them.”	X	X	X	X	4
“Set the standard by example. Push others to do better and be better, while also pushing yourself. Getting done what needs to get done.”		X	X	X	4
“Motivating and guiding yourself or a group through and obstacle or challenge to the end goal.”			X	X	4
“Coordinating others.”				X	3
“How one person influences others to a greater common good.”				X	5
“I think leadership is something learned over time and while theories and can be taught, an effective leader has years of experience of both leading and following.”				X	6
“A person who inspires others through either direct or indirect contact and sets an example for others to follow.”		X			4
“The position or function of a leader; a person who guides or directs a group.”	X				4

Appendix B: Guidance for Categorization Using Grint's (2010) Taxonomy

When considering categories for definitions of leadership, one option for a closed card sort comes from Grint's (2010) taxonomy in *Leadership: A Very Short Introduction*, where he considers four perspectives: (1) leadership as position, (2) leadership as person, (3) leadership as result, and (4) leadership as process. While this taxonomy captures different perspectives, they are not mutually exclusive. There are a variety of scholarly commentaries discussing the complexities of Grint's framework. For a practical overview, though, Webster (2013) offers a helpful summary:

- Leadership as Position: Position-based leadership assumes it is *where* people operate that makes them leaders. This view usually takes the form of authority in a formal hierarchy (e.g., the general or CEO). This definition implies that the character of the leader is less important than their position.
- Leadership as Person: This definition of leadership emphasizes the importance of the person's character. Person-based — or character-based — leadership says it is *who* you are that makes you a leader.
- Leadership as Result: With this definition of leadership we look at the results of leadership. Results-based leadership focuses on *what* leaders do.
- Leadership as Process: The process-based definition of leadership considers the relationship between leader and practice. It is what leaders *do* that matters.

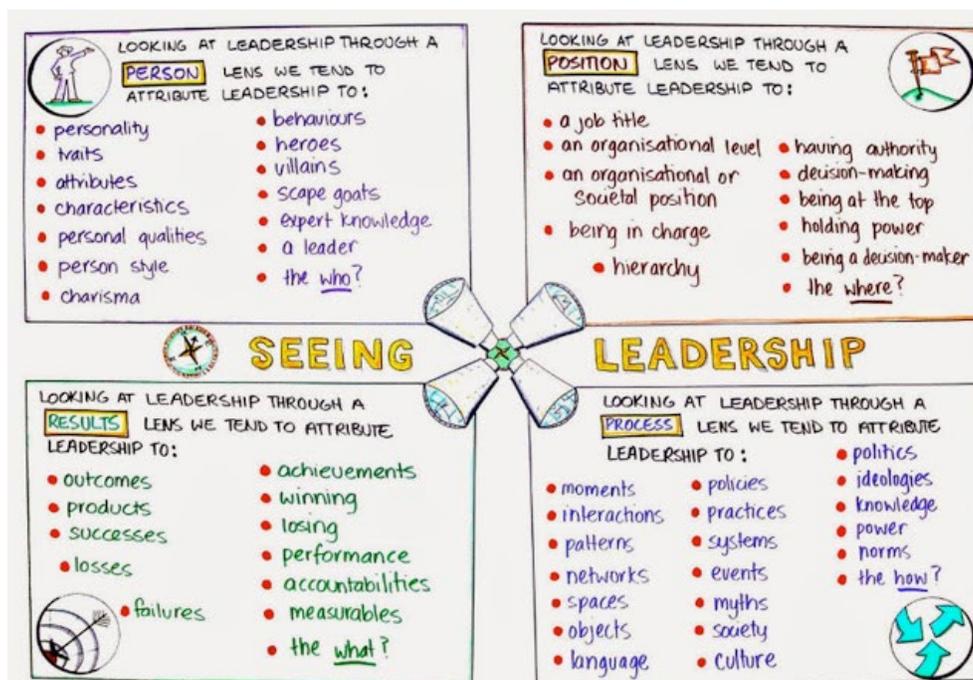
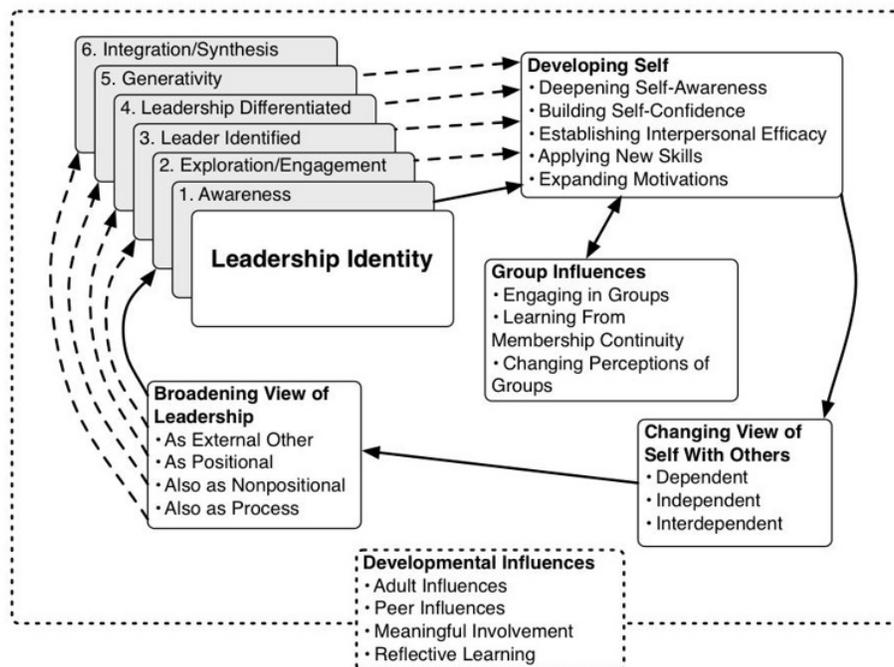


Image developed by Brad Jackson (2009) for "What's So Different (and Difficult) About Leading in New Zealand?"

Appendix C: Guidance for Categorization Using LID Model

When considering categories for definitions of leadership, one option for a closed card sort comes from the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model provided by Komives and colleagues (2005). A key advantage of the LID model is that it is an emergent grounded theory from research with college students. The five leadership identity stages include:

- Awareness (Stage One): becoming aware that there are leaders “out there” who are external to self, like the President of the United States, one’s mother, or a teacher;
- Exploration/Engagement (Stage Two): a period of immersion in group experiences usually to make friends, a time of learning to engage with others (e.g., swim team, scouts, youth choir);
- Leader Identified (Stage Three): viewing leadership as the actions of the positional leader of a group, an awareness of the hierarchical nature of relationships in groups;
- Leadership Differentiated (Stage Four): viewing leadership also as non-positional and as a shared group process;
- Generativity (Stage Five): a commitment to developing leadership in others and having a passion for issues or group objectives that the person wants to influence; and,
- Integration/Synthesis (Stage Six): acknowledging the personal capacity for leadership in diverse contexts and claiming the identity as a leader without having to hold a positional role (Komives, et al., 2005).



Appendix D: Guidance for Categorization Using Western's Discourses

When considering categories for definitions of leadership, one option for a closed card sort comes from Western (2013) leadership discourses, based on a meta-analysis of leadership from historical, socio-political, and economic perspectives. The four discourses of leadership during the past century include: (a) controller, (b) therapist, (c) messiah, and (d) eco-leader. The following table maps the four discourses (reprinted from Western, 2012).

Leadership Discourse	Controller	Therapist	Messiah	Eco-Leadership
Vision Aims	Iron cage Maximises production through transactional exchange, control and coercion.	Motivate to Produce Maximises production through increasing motivation, personal growth and team work	Culture Control Maximises production through identifying with the brands strong culture, and leader's values and vision.	Holistic and Sustainable Success is re-defined, value is measured not only in financial terms. Quality, sustainability and social responsibility are connected.
Source of Authority	From Above Science The leader passes authority down the hierarchy. Leaders gain authority from position power and scientific rationalism	From Within Humanism The power of therapeutic discourse is translated into management discourse and techniques (e.g. 360 feedback, psychological contracts)	From Beyond Charisma The charismatic leader embodies the company values and vision, utilizing a secularized form of transcendent authority (e.g. Steve Jobs)	From the Eco-system Inter-dependence Eco-leadership draws its authority from the laws of nature, and from the belief in inter-dependence and connectivity. It also gains authority from an ethical and spiritual conviction to save the planet and society.
Perceptions of Employee	Robots Employees are human assets, working as unthinking robotic machines 'cogs in the wheel'	Clients Employees are clients to be healed and made whole through reparation and creativity at work	Disciples Employees follow the leader and learn to be more like them. Identity is created by belonging within a community of believers.	Actors in a Network Employees are part of a network, with agency and with autonomy, yet also as part of an inter-dependent, connected greater whole
Leads What?	Body Focus on the body to maximise efficient production, via incentives and coercion.	Psyche Therapist focuses on the psyche, on motivation, designing job enrichment that enables autonomy, and self-actualising behaviours	Soul Followers align themselves to the vision, a cause greater than the self (the company). The <i>Messiah</i> leader is a role model, linking success with personal salvation.	Network Eco-leaders lead through paradox, by distributing leadership throughout the network, making spaces for leadership to flourish
Organisational Metaphor	Machine Takes a technical and rational view of world, thinks in closed systems. Controls internal environment to maximise efficiency	Human Organism Creates the conditions for personal and team growth, linking this to organizational growth and success.	Community The <i>Messiah</i> leads a community (at its extreme this can mimic a cult). The emphasis is on strong cultures, the brand before the individual.	Eco-System Leads through connections in a network. Organisations are inter-connected networks; eco-systems connected to the wider eco-systems that affect the social context and the environment.

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