Nature of Eco-Leadership: Insights from Community Leaders
Presented by Eric K. Kaufman
April 11, 2019

Mapping Intentions

Participant outcomes:
- Recognize progression of leadership theory and practice.
- Articulate the value of networked approaches to leadership.
- Identify resources to guide further investigation.

Session Overview
1) Changing nature of leadership
2) Case study of NRV community groups
3) Case study of VALOR program
4) Discussion of broader implications

Session Overview

The Discourses of Leadership

1900 1960 1980 2005
Controller Scientific Management Therapist Human Relations movement Messiah Transformational leadership/agriculture control

“Leadership” has become a commodity

“Part of the problem is the number of employees who think they know the solution.”

To cite work: Western S. (2008) Leadership a Critical Text, Sage London
Empowering Others

“A leader is someone who can get things done through other people.”
- Warren Buffet

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”
- John Quincy Adams

Un-doing Understanding

• How does this relate to our theoretical and practical understandings of leadership?
• How might our deep-seated biases affect our ability to understand leadership?

Video at: https://ed.ted.com/features/bf2mRAfC

Controller vs. Therapist
Messiah vs. Eco-Leadership

Premises of Eco-Leadership
(Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005)
1) Leadership is an emergent process
2) Tension between industrial and ecological perspectives
3) Leadership occurs in a web of interdependent social and biological systems
4) Adaptability (productivity) determined by richness of feedback loops
5) Tension between social diversity and single-minded pursuit of common goals
6) Leadership process should be evaluated by adaptability

“Eco-Leadership shifts power from individual leaders to leadership … in an attempt to harness the energy and creativity of the whole system.” (Western, 2010, p. 44)

Eco-Leadership focuses on “a reciprocal relationship between leadership and its environment. It decenters individuals… claiming that by creating the right culture and conditions, leadership will emerge…” (Western, 2010, p. 36)

Pressing Organizational Bounds
We mistakenly recognize power at the center as strength and power at the margins as a structural weakness when neither is the case. Eco-leadership shifts the focus from individual leaders to leadership—a radically distributed leadership—in an attempt to harness the energy and creativity in a whole system.”

(Western, 2010, p. 44)

**Wisdom of Crowds**

- How does this research relate to the eco-leadership discourse?
- What are the implications for community sustainability?

**Turn the Ship Around!**

“Like so many times, my not knowing the answer ahead of time helped me.”

– L. David Marquet

**Case 1: Community Groups in Virginia’s New River Valley**

Explore eco-leadership in practice among community groups in Virginia’s New River Valley.

Objectives:
- Characterize the leadership culture of participating community groups
- Assess the cohesiveness of participating community groups
- Assess community groups’ project involvement
- Determine if a significant relationship exists between leadership culture, group cohesiveness, and community project involvement

**Research Purpose**
Mixed Methods Approach

Data Collection
- Quantitative
  - Group Cohesion Scale – Revised
    - (Treadwell, Lavertue, Kumar, & Veeraraghavan, 2001)
  - Team Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
    - (Avolio et al., 2003)
  - Project Involvement Index
    - (Leach & Sabatier, 2005)
  - Demographic information
- Qualitative
  - Focus group session

Sample
- Civic, Social, or Service groups
- Held face-to-face meetings regularly
- Sampling frame of 91 community groups
- Convenience sample of six organizations
  - 84 Individual participants
  - 61% male, 39% female
  - Mean age of 62
  - 82% white, 14.3% black, 2.4% Asian, 1.2% Hispanic
  - 34.9% Ph.D., 27.1% master’s, 13.3% bachelor’s, 19.3% “Some College or Less”

Project Involvement Index (Leach & Sabatier, 2005)
- May or may not engage in environmental projects
  - Range: 0.0 to 8.0 (out of maximum possible of 10.0)
  - Mean: 2.25
  - Standard Deviation: 2.60

“We have people going off in lots of different directions doing different things; and I think more in the last few years, things have evolved so that when people come up with an idea, they send it either to their chairman of their committee or the president… so it goes somewhere, other than just running around doing things.”

Full Range Leadership Findings
- Avolio et al.’s (2003) Team Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
  - Most Used Styles:
    - Idealized Attributes (mean = 3.3)
    - Inspirational Motivation (mean = 3.2)
  - Least Used Styles:
    - Management by Exception passive (mean = 1.0)
    - Laissez-faire (mean = 1.1)

“Our leadership style is very informal in a way. I think there’s a great deal of respect because people sort of rotate through the divisions anyway. But there’s a great deal of respect that everyone’s a volunteer.”
Group Cohesion Findings
Treadwell, Lavertue, Kumar, & Veeraraghavan’s (2001) Scale

- Range: 73.6 – 84.8
- Mean: 80.21
- Standard Deviation: 2.77

“I feel attracted to this group. I am proud of the fact that we are active in the community in so many different ways, and I’m glad to be part of it, and I want to continue to be a part of it. I mean, it motivates me to get here.”

Relationships Between Variables
- Weak-to-Moderate relationship between Community Project Involvement and:
  - Idealized Attributes (r = .283, p < .05)
  - Inspirational Motivation (r = .257, p < .05)
  - Extra Effort (r = .241, p < .05)
- Group Cohesion not significantly related to Community Project Involvement

“So that strikes me as interesting that although we’re very social in the club and at the board and all the times we get together, we don’t do a lot outside of the projects or the club meetings.”

Qualitative Code Co-Occurrence

Findings at Each Analysis Stage

Case 2: VALOR Program
The mission of the VALOR program is to develop leaders “who can effectively engage all segments of the Virginia agricultural community to create collaborative solutions and promote agriculture inside and outside of the industry.”

More specifically, the program is designed to “develop new partnerships and foster deeper collaboration across Virginia’s organizations, groups, and sectors.”

The long-term vision is that the VALOR program “will provide a sustainable future for Virginia’s agricultural community by maximizing potential for successful growth through a system of networking, collaborative decision-making, and development of strong leaders.”
VALOR Program Objectives

Participants will:
• Be advocates for agriculture
• Be able to influence policymakers
• Be able to lead others to solutions affecting agricultural issues through exhibited leadership skills.
• Have a deeper understanding of global agriculture.

Research Aims
• Characterize VALOR program participants’ leadership discourse preferences, as measured by the Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses (WILD).
• Investigate relationships between WILD questionnaire and other personality assessments administered through the VALOR program.
• Describe VALOR program participants’ perceived impact of leadership development activities on their norms and assumptions about leadership (i.e., leadership discourses).

Mixed Methods Approach
• Explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)
  – First quantitative, then qualitative to explain
  – Ongoing quantitative for statistical power
• Stentz, Plano Clark, & Matkin (2012) argue that multiple methodological approaches are necessary to understand the complex processes involved in leadership

Quantitative Methods
• VALOR Program Participants (N=23)
  – Class I with 10 participants
  – Class II with 13 participants
• Self-Assessments as part of programming
  – Western Indicate of Leadership Discourses (WILD)
  – Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
  – Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)
  – Kirton’s Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI)
  – Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i)
• Considered raw scores and rank order, where appropriate

Leadership Discourse Preferences
Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses (WILD)

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Note: Coefficients in bold are significant where p<.05
WILD & TKI Correlations

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Qualitative Methods

- Interview sessions (n=9) facilitated by researcher
  - whole-text analysis of verbatim transcripts
  - constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).
- Coded in Atlas-ti
  - systematic text excerpts (Ary, et al., 2013)
  - categories and themes supported by participant quotes and aligned with research objectives

Qualitative Themes from Participant Interviews

- Positional leaders do not have all the answers
- Effective leaders value relationships
- Effective leaders promote committed followers
- Effective leadership promotes collaborative environments
- Participants value practical, day-to-day leadership skills gained through program

Positional Leaders Do Not Have All the Answers

“I [thought] leadership was very much a top-down kind of deal.”

“Organizations that aren’t so effective … lead by positions of authority.”

“I don’t assume that I have all the answers or the best ideas and… I think there’s a lot to learn from others. So I think to really be effective…you risk a lot if you think you can do it all.”

Effective Leaders Value Relationships

“The true value of VALOR was that understanding of myself and how to relate that to others.”

“Call it what you want, but an organization is nothing but people. It’s a group of people with a common purpose…and should be run in a manner that all those people in the organization matter.”

Effective Leaders Promote Committed Followers

“I am very conscious now of involving those people that work for me in the process… I don’t involve them … only to make them feel good… but I do it because I recognize it as a needful thing.”

“A follower’s] role is to support the leader, but not to be a ‘yes man’ for the leader, you know, to support the leader with ideas, thoughts, and opinions.”
Effective Leadership Promotes Collaborative Environments

“We’re all hands-on, doing different things…”

“Anyone can be a leader to one degree or another.”

“I am a leader and other people are leaders, but they don’t know it. And part of my role as a leader is to enlighten other people and enable them.”

Participants Value Practical, Everyday Leadership Skills Gained

“When you get the confidence to speak up in a very high power meeting, you see that you can make a difference and I think that’s part... of the relationship.”

“Peer learning, and watching others become more confident, more skilled, more articulate... we shared experience.”

Conclusions

• More research is needed
  – This is a single program and small population
  – Relationship between Introversion and Eco-leader is intriguing
• Other leadership research emphasized extroversion
• Slight preference for eco-leadership could reflect context for application
• “I really think the key is understanding the people that you’re working with.”

Implications for You and Others?

The Diversity Paradox

“Friction is essential for arriving at the best solutions.” (NeuroLeadership Institute, 2018)
Other Ideas or Considerations?

“Well, the boss did say we would be given a Forum.”

Continue the Conversation

Eric Kaufman
EKK@VT.Edu

“I had a miraculous dream in which our list of questions all had answers.”

Thank You!

Eric Kaufman
EKK@VT.Edu

“I’m feeling a sense of conclusion here, so let’s draw things to a close.”