

Three Leadership Models: Kurt Lewin, Hershey and Blanchard, and Edwin Friedman

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The topic of leadership has largely replaced the topic of management in a variety of managerial contexts and industries, including both profit, non-profit and the public sector. It seems that everyone wants a piece of the discussion, and everyone seems to have ideas about what leadership is and is not. What's important in the above "conversation" is to have some core models. Core models can be built on and brought into conversations; the results of such interaction could provide persons with insights and take-aways for implementation. What I am getting at here is that leadership is a situational practice in which leaders (those who choose to step forward in the moment) contribute a situated learning opportunity to others, around leadership. With this in mind it is important to have leadership models as reference points, from which to deepen one's understanding and skills, and expand through practice.

In this paper I will be discussing three leadership theories, describing each theory. The three leadership theories to be discussed are (1) Lewin's leadership theory, (2) Hershey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, and (3) Edwin Friedman's theory. After an initial description of each theory, including its origin, I will discuss strengths, weaknesses, and the role that followership plays. In my conclusion I will summarize the significance of these theories to me personally, and the roles each play in my own leadership life. Take-aways will be included to further improve leadership thinking and ability.

Case

Attending a community-wide inter-agency non-profit meeting about five years ago I listened to a speaker from a local parks and recreation service. The audience was filled with all levels of local hierarchies, and rustled about, as most audiences do. However, at one point the speaker uttered the following: "... and whether you are leading from the front or

leading from behind...”, and then continued with her sentence. With this utterance the room became very quiet, and I knew that her utterance fell on all ears. The silence signified this was meaningful, and that people wanted more of this wisdom. People wanted to expand and deepen what they knew about leadership.

Lewin’s Leadership Theory

Kurt Lewin is considered to be the father of social psychology. He founded what was to become the National Training Labs (NTL), which created such fields as organization development, diversity awareness, T-Groups, and contributed much to leadership theory, particularly democratic leadership. Lewin was forced out of Germany by the Nazi’s, lost many in his family to the holocaust, and vowed that such issues of diversity must never get to that ugly level of action again. This became the central vision in Lewin’s leadership journey. Lewin is still influential over 60 years after his death.

In 1939 Lewin conducted a classic study of leadership, and this involved three styles of leadership: *autocratic*, *democratic*, and *laissez-faire*. Lewin’s study focused on the training of graduate assistants in the leader behavior styles below (see Manning and Kurtis, 2009: p. 19).

Autocratic: Tight control over the group and its activities; decisions made by the leader

Democratic: Group participation and majority rule.

Laissez-faire: Low levels of any kind of activity by the leader.

The results of the study included the discovery that democratic leadership was more effective for group performance than the other two styles. The study emphasized the impact of the leader’s behavior, as well as the value of group participation. Lewin grew to favor the democratic style of leadership, as espoused below (Lewin, 2010: location 833).

Democracy cannot be imposed on a person; it has to be learned by a process of voluntary and responsible participation. Changing from autocracy to democracy is a process which takes more time than changing in the opposite direction. The learning of democracy in the case of a change from another pattern contains, therefore, a kind of paradox, which is similar to the problem of leadership in democracy. The democratic leader does not impose his goals on the group as does the autocratic leader: the policy determination in democracy is done by the group as a whole. Still the democratic leader should “lead”.

Bass (1990: p. 418) offers a comparative description of the three leadership styles. I will start with the democratic leader, who exists between two opposing poles of authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership practices. Bass writes that the democratic leader is socially close to followers, and participative. He or she is consultative, participative, relations oriented, and shares power, is delegative and consensual, practices consideration of others' ideas and situations, and is largely centered in egalitarian and affiliative practices with followers. The authoritative leader is centered in an authoritative and coercive mode of practice with followers. He or she initiates structure, is production-oriented and task-concerned, is directive and manipulative, socially distant, is arbitrarily controlling and power-oriented.

The laissez-faire leader is centered in a hands-off approach to leadership. He or she is isolated and passive, uninvolved and withdrawn, unconcerned and inactive, and abdicating.

Strengths and weaknesses of the Lewin leadership model

The strengths of Lewin's leadership theory is that it is one of the theories to identify behaviors and represents a shift away from the "Great Man" sensibility that provided a more mystical and vague description of leadership as individual traits. It is also a relatively simple theory on which one can build a set of competencies through behavioral change and reflection. This makes it valuable for executive and leadership coaching. This theory can also be integrated with other theories, and can serve as an organizing framework.

Lewin's theory has been validated somewhat by occupational psychologists, for example it has correlations with the Managerial and Professional Profiler, a personality instrument out of the UK. The weaknesses are that the theory is grounded in a hypothesis of behaviors that could be considered outdated, and on that basis may not have enough competitive cache with more recent and popular theories.

Hershey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model

Hershey and Blanchard's situational theory of leadership is also grounded in behaviors, albeit ones more specific to situations present in leadership contexts. The model was developed in 1969. Bass (1990: p. 488) writes that the Hershey-Blanchard leadership model is based on the following:

- Leadership styles can vary from leader to leader;

- Some leaders primarily initiate structure in order to accomplish tasks; Other leaders build and maintain good personal relationships. Others do both of the above, and still others do none of the above;
- Effective leadership requires the leader to vary with the situation at hand;
- The best attitudinal style is a high task and a high relations orientation;
- The job and psychological maturity of the followers is most crucial in determining which behavioral style of leaders will result in the most effectiveness;
- Maturity of followers relates to the stage in a group's life cycle or to the previous education and training of the followers.

What we can determine from the above is that newly appointed and inexperienced employees, followers described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as “newcomers”, need task-oriented direction and often need to be told what to do, followed by being told at a later period to continue their performance. At a later date such followers need more relational orientation and be helped to participate more. The leader's task oriented and relations oriented style needs to match the followers' maturity and needs at the time (see Bass, 1990: p. 489). This is also iterated in the following words from Ken Blanchard (2001: p. 2):

I think people want to be magnificent. It is the job of the leader to bring out that magnificence in people and to create an environment where they feel safe and supported and ready to do the best job possible in accomplishing key goals. This responsibility is a sacred trust that should not be violated. The opportunity to guide others to their fullest potential is an honor and one that should not be taken lightly. As leaders, we hold the lives of others in our hands. These hands need to be gentle and caring and always available for support.

While the Situational Leadership model focuses on behavior it is not exactly a behavioral theory that seeks the one best behavior for all situations (one size fits all), and definitely not a trait “great man” theory. Rather, it best fits with the contingency approach, which holds that the most appropriate actions and qualities varies with each situation (Manning & Kurtis 2009: p. 24). Contingency theory and the approach of matching leader behaviors with the situation-at-hand was made famous by Fiedler (1976).

Strengths and weaknesses of Hershey and Blanchard's leadership model

Hershey and Blanchard's model of situational leadership has many strengths. First it is an applied model that seeks to match the behavior of the leader with the maturity of the

follower(s). This makes it a highly applied relational approach to leadership. It is also prescriptive and relatively easy to follow. The four leadership styles, or choices of behavior, are as follows:

- 1. Directing → matches low competence and high commitment
- 2. Coaching → matches low to some competence and low commitment
- 3. Supporting → matches moderate to high competence and moderate commitment
- 4. Delegating → matches high competence and high commitment

The Situational Leadership program (2001: pp. 6-7) asserts the following about the four different levels of competency and commitment (maturity)

- The low competent and high commitment follower is often an enthusiastic beginner
- The low to some competence and low commitment is often a disillusioned learner
- The moderate to highly competent and moderate commitment is often a capable but cautious performer
- The high competent and high commitment is often a self-reliant achiever

Another strength of the model is that once a leader begins to apply it he or she can further develop greater understanding by discovering what works and what doesn't work, and build on this further. A final strength is that the leader has choices: if one thing does not work, another choice might, and this brings the importance of being able to assess the maturity level of the follower(s) the leader is working with. The principal weakness is that the model might be too simplistic, and prescriptive: there are possibly many more levels of competency and commitment than the model prescribes.

Critiques of the model have been numerous, ranging from accusations that the curvilinear approach to leader behavior lacks internal consistency in its measures, its conceptual ambiguity, and has no theoretical or logical justification (Bass, 1990: p. 492). The central question remains: should leaders be flexible to meet the demands of the situation as the model suggests, or should leaders be consistent. If leaders vary their style to fit the situation are they at risk of being accused of being inconsistent (see Bass, 1990: p. 493). The contingency model, which advocates matching leader behaviors with situations, was criticized by Schriesheim and Hosking (1978) as having too many problems to render it usable for remedial actions by specific individuals in specific situations; Hosking was my chief professor for six years of PhD study in organizational studies.

The Friedman Leadership Model

I am going to discuss the Edwin Friedman approach to leadership because it is provocative. Robert Crosby, who founded the Leadership Institute of Seattle (LIOS), told me that Friedman's model was often taught at LIOS and in his own experiential leadership relations program "Tough Stuff" (personal communication, August, 2013). It should be noted here that I supervised two graduate students from LIOS, and it was from working with these students that I became familiar with the model. I later got to know Crosby, his son Gil, and John Scherer, one of his early LIOS associates.

Dr. Friedman, a Jewish Rabbi and fellow of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, was a protégé of Dr. Murray Bowen, who pioneered the family systems model of understanding family dynamics and intervention. Family systems was based on the natural systems approach (also known as "general systems theory"). Friedman, being the curious person he was, began observing the interaction dynamics going on in his synagogues and began teaching and consulting on leadership in both Jewish and non-Jewish faith-based communities.

Components of the Friedman model

The Friedman model can best be described as visionary and charismatic, and is grounded in relational connection with followers. An important component of the Friedman model is that it is visionary. Friedman believed that it was vision and commitment that brought Europe out of the doldrums of the Middle Ages into the Renaissance and the history of this forms the basis of his model.

The next component of the Friedman model is leader "presence" and this is where things get interesting. Presence is the trail of confidence, poise, bearing, calmness, focus, and energy one leaves wherever one goes and this can have an empowering effect that can permeate throughout an organization or faith community. Friedman (2007: p. 229) wrote that presence also has to do with emotional maturity, the willingness to take responsibility for one's own emotional being and destiny: he believed that this is *the* critical variable in one's success as a leader.

A third component is the emotional field and the biological basis of human systems in which all leadership takes place. Friedman believed that any leader with a serious vision would meet a lot of resistance from followers. The reason for that is what he terms as anxiety in the system and that human systems mirror their biological roots. On Friedman's model, Fox (2006) writes the following: ...

... any organization, like a family, is a living system composed of biological organisms made up of protoplasm. One's human beingness is a protoplasmic basis, and carries with it some inherent qualities. First of all *hierarchy* is inherent in protoplasm. From the cellular level to the organizational level, hierarchy is a natural phenomenon. Secondly, *resistance* is built into living systems. A living system will do all it can to keep itself in balance, to maintain homeostasis. When initiative is taken in a living system, it will be met with resistance B a basic survival tactic. The underlying dynamics in an organization will work to return to a state of equilibrium. Third, a leadership model based on the behavior of human protoplasm is by definition *cross cultural*.

Because an organization is a living system, leaders and followers are intimately connected through an emotional field they have created – with positive or negative effects on the health of the organization. Followers do not have to observe a leader directly, or even be in some direct “chain of command” hierarchy, in order to be affected, positively or negatively, by the leader's functioning (Friedman, 1996a, 1996b, 1999).

Friedman believed that wherever the head goes, the body will follow (Friedman, 1985). If the leader (i.e., head) of an organization clearly defines the direction the leader is going *AND* if the leader stays connected to the members of the organization, the members will follow the leader's direction. This cause-effect happening will be automatic. Conversely, a leader needs to be aware that change cannot be brought about in an organization without disturbing the homeostasis. Tremendous energy is needed to tip a system out of equilibrium. And, even if the system can be disturbed significantly to bring about change, what may unintentionally be triggered is that a symptom (e.g., personal problem, relationship strain, health of a member, dysfunctional behavior of a member) may simply relocate to a new location in the organization.

Strengths and weaknesses of the Friedman model

Strengths include that the model is based on a well-known general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1969), and further based in the Bowen Theory of Family Systems (see references section for more). The advantage of this is that a seasoned practitioner can really get down to what works in groups at the human level and the model can therefore be a great

foundation in team building, breaking through conflict, forming a foundation for leader-follower relation, enhancing interpersonal communications, and much more.

Weaknesses: the model is not well known in corporate circles, and has mostly been used with leaders and boards of directors of faith-based communities, from Judaism to Christianity. However, the model has been taught at The Leadership Institute of Settle graduate programs.

Conclusion

In this article I have provided overviews of three models of leadership, including their strengths and weaknesses. From a relational perspective it becomes important to respond to each situation and person as it presents itself. I have found that high task and high relationship work best because these components address the need to get projects done and the need to instill trust in followers. Have a core of leadership models to draw from can enhance a leader's capacity to lead. The Lewin model provides the leader with material for reflection but it is probably best when its components are integrated. The Hershey-Blanchard model provides a set of behaviors when can be followed and fine tuned to a variety of situations. Finally, the charismatic visionary model provided by Friedman, while placing an emphasis on staying strong on the project target, also encourages the leader to bring "presence" and "connection" into the leader-follower relationship.

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