by Matthew Fairholm

I Know It When I See It:

How Local Government Managers See Leadership Differently

If you want to understand what leadership really is, why not ask local government managers? They practice leadership every day. And a recent research project did just that. Local government managers were asked: "What is leadership?"[1]

The managers' answers were thoughtful but inconsistent. One manager, for example, said, "Leadership depends on who is in charge of the organization, operation, or project."

But another manager said something quite different: "Leadership is developmental in nature, helping guide others to the next level of work and as a person. Therefore, interpersonal skills are imperative. You need to know yourself and help others know who they are. When you get the inward issues taken care of, then you can handle the outward issues. I ask my staff to look in the mirror and ask the questions: Who am I? Where am I? Am I the person I think I am?"

The differences between the views of these two managers are stark indeed. In the research, I have surveyed and interviewed hundreds of local government managers in the states of Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Virginia, as well as in Washington, D.C., and saw great differences in how managers personally viewed management and leadership.

From interviews and written materials gathered during the questioning, researchers learned:

- People describe leadership from five different perspectives.
- Knowing that different perspectives of leadership exist can help public managers learn how to measure leadership success for themselves and for others.
- Understanding the diversity of perspectives can help public managers perceive how other people may view their leadership.
- The manager's perspective and the public's perspective don't always match.

When you think you are managing successfully, others may have different points of view that grow out of how they see and describe leadership success. Because managers' descriptions of leadership might not agree with the public's descriptions, reviewing some findings can help local managers get a better handle on the "leadership thing."

YOU KNOW LEADERSHIP WHEN YOU SEE IT

The five perspectives that emerged from our research tell us a lot about both modern management and leadership ideas as well as about the way people interact in organizations. On a management-leadership continuum, managers interviewed during our study identified five behaviors used by local government managers:

- **Scientific Management.** Emphasis is on managers understanding the one best way to promote and maintain productivity among staff; managers rely on the authority of their position to accomplish this. Someone in charge makes plans and tells others what to do. "Leadership is how you are able to get an individual or group to attain goals that you set forth."
- **Excellence Management.** Focus is on systematic quality improvements with emphasis on people involved in the processes, the processes themselves, and the quality of products that are produced. "Because of leaders, some organizations are progressive and come up with, and allow for, new products and services. Leaders are enabled to redefine the workplace to make it more comfortable, productive, people focused, employee friendly, customer friendly, and diverse."
- **Values Leadership.** Relationship between leader and follower that allows for typical organizational tasks to be accomplished primarily through shared, prioritized values, not merely direction and control.

> **A manager may be working hard in terms of a personal measurement of success, but a peer or an employee may view that work effort and question its value or relevance.**

Leadership success depends more on values and shared vision than on organizational authority. It is at this point that management and leadership begin to look quite different. "Leaders aren't always at the top. Wherever you are, you are a leader . . . if you are a leader. You have to be what you want your followers to be. [You] need to demonstrate and model behavior. There will be values differences, but you bring them together through core mission and shared values."

- **Trust Leadership.** Interaction between the leader and the led on the basis of trust founded on shared values; allows for the sharing of leadership among many people at different times. "Leadership is a fluid thing with leadership flowing back and forth in the group. Leaders are followers and vice versa. Leaders need to trust others and have faith in them. That is a challenge. But they need to try to focus on followers' strengths. People will rise to the occasion if they trust you. Leaders must role-model trust, integrity, and ethics every day."
- **Whole-Soul Leadership.** Integration of the components of work and personal life into a system that helps people grow and improve themselves; fosters self-leadership so that leaders see others as whole people with a variety of emotions, skills, knowledge, and abilities that go beyond the narrow confines of the job. "At a certain point the skills, tools, and techniques are not enough. What you need is to comfort, assist, and be concerned about others and love them."

Many people insist management and leadership are the same, but others are adamant that they are different. Local government managers who participated in our research showed us that successful managers can manage successfully whether they believe management and leadership are the same or different. But managers who believe management and leadership go together use tools, behaviors, and approaches different from those who believe that management and leadership are separate.

Our personal perspectives shape how we internalize observations and externalize belief sets. Therefore, our perspectives determine how we measure success in ourselves and in others. Our personal truths about leadership are defined by these perspectives even though those truths may not conform to an objective standard.

Managers we talked with agreed with the idea that different people see leadership differently—a significant finding because so much effort is expended in training and developing leaders in the public service.

One mid-level manager said, "A common denominator is that in my life my leaders have given me a chance to lead. They compel me to work harder based on getting to my sense of wanting to achieve, wanting

more. They allow me to lead, therefore they become stronger leaders." Another manager said, "Leadership is about actualizing other leaders."

THE LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES MODEL

The model in Figure 1 explains leadership in terms of encompassing perspectives. The smallest concentric triangle in the figure is Scientific Management, and the largest is Whole-Soul Leadership. The sides of the triangles—leadership in action descriptions, tools and behaviors, and approaches to followers—provide information that helps us differentiate among various perspectives of leadership. Perspectives placed toward the outside of the nested triangles can encompass and transcend the perspectives placed toward the center.

Values Leadership, for example, encompasses the ideas of Scientific Management and Excellence Management but also transcends them in ways that help us to see distinct activities and approaches that create a line between management theories of the past and leadership ideas in contemporary literature. Perspectives that are placed farther to the outside in Figure 1 depict the continuum of leadership as it encompasses and transcends management.

In Figure 1, we see that Whole-Soul Leadership, although not necessarily better than other perspectives (except to those who adhere to it), is the most encompassing and transcendent perspective of leadership and interaction. Management—the two most central triangles—can still be seen as leadership (and many do see it that way), but that view is more narrow.

Further findings suggested some interesting trends.

- Male and female managers reflected all five perspectives, although females tended slightly more toward Excellence Management and males tended slightly more toward Scientific Management.
- African American and Caucasian public managers expressed all perspectives with the same frequency;

thus Figure 1 applies regardless of the gender or race of the respondent-manager.

- The functional area in which the government manager works may influence that manager's perspective on leadership. Managers in public safety and justice lean toward the two management categories and the first leadership category: Scientific Management, Excellence Management, and Values Leadership. Managers in support, direction, and finance functions vouched for all but Trust Leadership, possibly because staff in these functions often check budget requests, verify work output, and audit performance; their jobs are to verify. Managers in human services and education, economic regulation, and public works reflected all five beliefs about leadership, but they leaned more toward management than toward leadership. In public works, a slightly higher number of managers reflected elements of Whole-Soul Leadership.

- The higher in the organizational hierarchy public managers were, and the more time in service they had, the more likely they were to subscribe to higher-order perspectives, that is, the categories toward the outside of the triangle. Individuals can move from the centered management perspectives to the more encompassing leadership perspectives by increasing their awareness of leadership activities, or their levels of responsibility, or both. Awareness does not depend on job promotion; a sense of leadership can grow whether careers remain at one level in the organization or careers span multiple levels.

One mid-level manager whose actions reflected Whole-Soul Leadership stated bluntly: "My views have changed over a number of years." A senior executive within Trust Culture Leadership said, "If you were to ask me five years ago, I would have a different answer; I'd have different thoughts."

It's possible that in the past these managers thought they were engaging

in leadership, but they were actually managing instead.

Perhaps many managers have felt frustrations similar to those of one public administrator who recalled, "In this current job, I jumped right into management [because] there was a lot wrong in that area, and I was frustrated that I hadn't taken the time to do the leadership. Now I am starting from scratch all over, focusing on the 'leadership piece' because the office still did not function well."

CONCLUSION

What good is it to know that people perceive leadership in at least five distinct ways?

You will realize that your measurement of leadership success may not be identical with others' measurement of success, be they staff, peers, elected officials, or citizens.

Although a person's view of leadership might not be objectively true or reflect the most encompassing perspective, that person believes it is true and will act upon it. Disagreement on what makes a leader can be a cause of organizational frustration.

A manager may be working hard in terms of a personal measurement of success, but a peer or an employee may view that work effort and question its value or relevance. Such comparisons of efforts, output, and measures of success can cause frustration, which often results in lower productivity, lower quality of work, and morale problems.

Understanding your personal point of view and the points of view of others can help to overcome personal and organizational self-deception and resolve organizational dilemmas, not only for changes in policy and procedure but also for leadership activities.

Public managers can grow in their understanding of leadership activities in three ways:

- Recognize that management functions and leadership functions are different. Managers working themselves up through an organization's hierarchy might be more aware of the differences, but the realization

Figure 1. Leadership Perspectives

1. Ensure efficient use of resources to ensure that group activity is controlled and predictable in order to—

2. Ensure verifiably optimal productivity and resource allocation.

3. Foster con tinuous process improvement environment for increased service and productivity levels in order to—

4. Transform the environment and perceptions of followers to encourage innovation, high-quality products, and excellent services.

5. Help individuals become proactive contributors to group action on the basis of shared values and agreed goals in order to—

6. Encourage high organizational performance and self-led followers.

7. Ensure cultures conducive to mutual trust and unified collective action consistent with the—

8. Prioritization of mutual cultural values and organizational conduct in terms of those values.

9. Relate to individuals such that concerns for the whole person is paramount in raising each other to higher levels of awareness and action so that the—

10. Best in people is liberated in a context of continuous improvement of self, culture, and service delivery.

Leadership in Action Descriptions

Whole-Soul Leadership

Trust Leadership

Values Leadership

Excellence Management

Scientific Management

Approaches to Followers

1. Incentivization
2. Control
3. Direction.

4. Motivation
5. Engaging people in problem definition and solution
6. Expressing common courtesy and respect.

7. Values prioritization
8. Teaching and coaching
9. Empowering (fostering ownership).

10. Trust
11. Team building
12. Fostering a shared culture.

13. Inspiration
14. Liberating followers to build community and promote stewardship
15. Modeling a service orientation.

Tools and Behaviors

1. Measuring, appraising, and rewarding individual performance
2. Organizing
3. Planning.

4. Focusing on process improvement
5. Listening actively
6. Being accessible.

7. Setting and enforcing values
8. Visioning
9. Focusing communication around the vision.

10. Creating and maintaining culture through visioning
11. Sharing governance
12. Measuring, appraising, and rewarding group performance.

13. Developing and enabling individual wholeness in a community (team) context
14. Fostering an intelligent organization
15. Setting moral standards.

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can occur at any level and may actually help managers prioritize their activities within organizations. One manager said, "I . . . am trying to think it through. Leadership is different from managing people. Relating to people in a way that they follow you through a mutual embrace of values, ideals, goals . . . that is leadership. In the end, a leader must have followers." Another manager said, "The goal is to lead . . . to lead as opposed to manage. People want to have someone to look up to and to follow. Leaders have to stand for something. You stand for something or you don't."

• Realize that leadership is more personal than some organizations (or people) are willing to admit. One manager said, "You must understand who the people are—their skill sets, the knowledge they bring. Leadership has a personal component to it. . . . It is hard to do. Early in this job, I didn't do that and I found myself in a rough

place. Understanding values and skill sets—that is the beginning of the relationship." Another manager saw things this way: "You need to relate to [staff] personally. People need to know their leader. The leader has to be really visible. You need to know them, talk to them. We are not in an ivory tower giving commands. You should be out and about and lead by example and participation."

- Different perspectives of leadership may help us overcome personal and organizational self-deception. Discerning which perspective you hold and then recognizing that other valid perspectives exist allow us to see our work as public managers more clearly and more honestly.

The leadership perspective model shows the way to understanding the phenomenon of leadership and also to teaching and developing the leadership activities of individuals. The model in Figure 1 reflects the value of

How to Get Started Thinking About Leadership

Consider these tips:

- Clarify to yourself what equals success in leadership, and let others know what you think.
- Know what values your view promotes; for example, productivity, compliance, cooperation, community, participation, respect for others, justice, and fairness.
- Ask colleagues what they think equals success and discern which values those views promote.
- Recognize that your work entails both management and leadership and that the two may not be the same.

public managers helping other public managers do their jobs better as they share their ideas and their perspectives about leadership. **PM**

[1]*Conceiving Leadership: Exploring Five Perspectives of Leadership by Investigating the Conceptions and Experiences of Selected Metropolitan Washington Area Municipal Managers*. Matthew R. Fairholm, Ph.D. Sponsored in part by The George Washing-

ton University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership. A summary version of the study is published under the title "Different Perspectives on the Practice of Leadership" in *Public Administration Review* 2004, volume 64, issue 5, pp. 577–590.

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