



During the course of our many social interactions, the conversation frequently shifts to the concept of leadership, a seemingly abstract notion that allows for a multitude of implicit theories. The diversity of opinion and meaning provides an insight into the manner in which the leadership concept has been reified into an objective social reality, the attributes of which fit an ideological, or social construct, where assumptions are not questioned.

It is not uncommon to be asked to provide a succinct definition of what leadership is, best practice, and how best to identify or develop effective leaders. If you have questioned the efficacy of the ubiquitous MBTI or EQ, such questions are inevitable. The answer, which is essentially an outline of scientifically grounded and appropriately tested leadership principles, dimensions, and processes, is tested against numerous assumptions, cognitive simplifications, popular fads, and social constructions that rationalize the structure, use, and distribution of power and authority.

The short answer, which acknowledges the complexity of the leadership function, indicates that effective leadership, together with objective performance appraisal, is a distinct possibility in a properly designed organization structure, and repositions leadership as a function of every leader's role. The use of empirical evidence to support and validate a framework of what, in a practical sense, constitutes effective leadership, adds credence to the answer, particularly when confronted by embedded, and idealized, images of leadership, the origin of which is usually a bit fuzzy.

The answer, despite its brevity, is premised on a century of OD research that offers a validated outline of what constitutes effective leadership, including an appreciation of complexity and capability differentials across different levels of work. The knowledge of such theories, which are empirically true and pragmatically important, introduces a degree of objectivity into the leadership discussion. The approach, which shifts the discussion from an acceptance of idealised leadership constructs to a more evidenced based framework, leads to the acknowledgement that the nature and level of work across structures differs, as does the need for differential leadership capabilities. At this point in the discussion it is not uncommon for the notion of a requisite, and capability based hierarchical structure, to become self evident with the alignment of strategy and systems being a logical extension of the organizational design and development process.

In terms of the discussion, and given the social context, the outline is a simplification of a reasonably complex process yet one that, in a relatively short space of time, changes perspectives. The offering of a conceptual framework that incorporates concepts such as differential capability, levels of work and leadership effectiveness, reduces the dissonance that accompanies individual uncertainties regarding organizational leadership and in this regard, it is often quite rewarding to see how being exposed to grounded theory, together with practical examples, can contribute to a more meaningful understanding of organizational leadership and hopefully, best practice.



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