Personal Philosophy of Leadership of

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Introduction

In my first draft of this assignment dated September 13, 2006, I described my personal philosophy of leadership as being participative and believed that my leadership style was most closely related to the contingency theories of leadership. House’s (1971) path-goal theory and Vroom & Yetton’s (1973) normative decision theory are two contingency theories that have participative leadership qualities (Chemers, 1997, p. 44). In sum, a participative leader, rather than making autocratic decisions, seeks to involve other people in the process, possibly including subordinates, peers, superiors and other stakeholders (retrieved December 2, 2006, from http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/styles/participative_leadership.htm).

In addition, I noted that as I gained additional information over the duration of the course that it was possible that I might find that my personal philosophy of leadership more closely reflected another leadership style or that I may have more than one leadership style. As such, I referred to my personal philosophy of leadership as a thought in progress. As the semester progressed I became aware of the many styles of leadership, and that these styles were dependent on the leader's personality, the group situation, and the problem at hand (Chemers, 1997; Heifetz, 1994).

Prior to this course, I never gave thought to the idea of leadership, let alone the scholarship of leadership theories. Over the last fourteen weeks this course has introduced me to several leadership theories including: the Great Man, trait, behavioral, participative, situational, contingency, transactional exchange and transformational; and several concepts of leadership, including Heifetz’s (1994) theory of adaptive change and the three types of adaptive leadership styles: formal authority, informal authority and without authority; and the concepts of power-over, power-to/through and power-with (Allan, Gordon & Iverson, 2006).
As I was introduced to the many concepts and theories of leadership in this course, I could not refrain from noticing that as suggested in my initial draft that my personal philosophy of leadership was multi-dimensional as it encompassed a combination of the theories detailed below, perhaps with the exception of the Great Man theory.

Leadership Theories

The Great Man theory posits that great leaders are born and that their, “rise to power is rooted in a “heroic” set of personal talents, skills, or physical characteristics” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 16). According to Chemers (1997) and Heifetz (1994), Winston Churchill, Mahatma Ghandi and Abraham Lincoln are exemplars of this theory. Behavioral theories expand the scope of the Great Man Theory to assert that leaders can be made—they are not only born—and details that successful leadership is based on learned behavior (retrieved December 2, 2006, from, http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/theories/behavioral_theory.htm). In regards to trait theories, Chemers, (1997, p. 19) notes that Stogdill (1948) analyzed research in favor of the trait approach and identified that reliable differences in ability, activity and character were associated with the characteristics of the leader.

As eluded to earlier, participative leadership theories operate under the following principles: people are more committed to actions where they are involved in the decision-making process; people are less competitive and are more collaborative when they are working on joint goals; and when people make decisions together, the social commitment to one another is greater and thus increases their commitment to the decision. As such, a participative leader seeks to involve all individuals in the process with the notion that people working together make better decisions than one person working alone (retrieved December 2, 2006, from, http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/styles/participative_leadership.htm).
Situational leadership theories are somewhat ambiguous in that they rely on situational factors in determining how leadership is carried out (Chemers, 1997, p. 55-56). These factors include follower’s motivation and capability levels and the follower/leader relationship. The contingency theory model contends that a leader’s ability to lead is based on “situational factors”. Whereas, contingency theories are similar to situational theories in that there is no one right way to lead; however they differ in that situational theory states that leaders should adjust their leadership style to the situation in which they are in, i.e. the motivation of followers, their capabilities. Contingency theory models typically share the premise that there is no one correct way to lead, that leadership is dependent upon both internal (leaders, followers) and external (situation, environment) factors and that participation should be solicited from followers by the leaders (Chemers, 1999, c. 2).

The two main factors of transactional exchange theories are that people are motivated by reward and punishment and that social systems work best with a clear chain of command (Chemers, 1997, p. 157). Under this theory, followers cede all authority to the leader who dictates what is to be done with the expectation of reward for all who comply. This leadership style is based on the fact followers will complete their assigned tasks and that the leader will fulfill his or her promise. Finally, transformational leadership theories hypothesize that people will follow a person who inspires them, a person with vision and passion can achieve great things, and goals are accomplished by motivating others through enthusiasm and energy (Chemers, 1997, c. 6). These leaders are often charismatic and seek to “transform” their followers to a higher level. Martin Luther King, Mahatma Ghandi and Franklin D. Roosevelt are exemplars of this form of leadership.
Meta-cognitive Analysis

With the knowledge that I now possess about leadership theories and my own style, I now ask myself “how can I use this information to foster leadership and develop my own personal philosophy of leadership”? To address this question, I wish to include a statement from the first draft of my personal philosophy of leadership.

“In my current position where I have been for about six weeks I have taken on a role that I haven’t had to in quite sometime. I am still in the role of supervisor; however, I am also in the role of proximate supervisee. By this I mean, that there is someone who I am accountable to who is only an office—not a county or two and half hours—away. Only time will tell how I will integrate my views, attitudes, and style into this culture. I must admit, it is an awkward position; however I am confident that I will be able to draw upon previous experience, and perhaps, knowledge from this course to guide me in my journey.”

Before I address the question of how I can foster leadership, I wish to provide an update of my leadership experience thus far in my current position. As my seventeenth week begins as assistant residence hall director I am in awe of my development. My initial draft detailed how my immediate role both as a supervisor and supervisee was an adjustment from the position that I had held for the last five years and how I was not sure how I would adjust to the new culture while fulfilling my duties. I am happy to report that constructive advancements have been achieved.

An opportunity presented itself that allowed me to utilize some of the knowledge from this course. Approximately six weeks ago, I had a disagreement with my supervisor, which came about because I sent out an email to the entire staff (I supervise four of the
fourteen RA’s: two directly and two for committee work) without consulting him first. His position was that since he is ultimately accountable for the building and staff, including myself (power-over), that I should have discussed my intentions with him first (power-with). I pointed out that I felt that the matter had been discussed as we had talked about the issue and I had carried forth the solution he proposed (power-to/through) (Allan, Gordon & Iverson, 2006).

He stated that while it was discussed, resolution was not achieved and that he wanted to be “informed of all matters as they related to the staff as a whole, before they were disseminated”. Again, I told him how I felt that the issue had been addressed and how I believed that my input and opinions were not valued. He stated that this was not the case and asked that I discuss these matters with him “prior to” in the future. I agreed. During this conversation, we both agreed that we have different leadership styles; he tends to be more casual and hands-off, whereas I am inclined to be more official and methodical.

We agreed that neither of our styles was better than the other, but that I needed to defer to him when it came to all-inclusive issues. I do believe that prior to this course, I would have continued to contend that my supervisor was misusing his position of power and authority. With the assistance of Bensimon & Neumann (1993), Heifetz (1994), Wheatley (2005) and Allan, Gordon & Iverson (2006), I now know that perhaps he knows something that I do not—this is his sixth year in the position—and that I would do well to follow his lead until I establish some roots of my own, roots that will enable me to foster my—and those with whom I interact with—leadership skills.
As a result of this incident, I intentionally sought out ways in which I could advance my leadership skills. Accordingly, I resolved to cultivate my leadership skills with the following three guiding principles: by (1) providing direction to those whom I supervise and those to whom I answer to, (2) communicating my expectations, coordinating duties, and supervising and evaluating my staff, and (3) motivating those who I work and interact with. These principles, in turn, served as the basis for my personal philosophy of leadership.

**Personal Philosophy of Leadership**

As a leader, Marquita O. Rodgers, will (1) exhibit professionalism in the workplace, (2) serve as a professional role model, (3) observe and adhere to the four factors of leadership: follower, leader, communication and situation, (4) know and take into consideration: myself and others, and (5) become acquainted with my responsibilities in the position and the organization. As an aspiring student affairs practitioner I recognize that these five qualities are essential in my being able to educate, advocate for, and service the needs of students.

**Future Leadership Aspiration**

At present time, my leadership aspiration is simple: to continue to grow as a leader. As I continue my academic, professional and personal development, it is my hope that my ability to lead will mature as well. Just as I have gained insight into the various leadership theories over the duration of this course, it is my hope that I am able to recognize and seize the opportunities that are presented to me in the future; so that my knowledge, thoughts and actualizations are as adaptable as the four factors of leadership.
References


