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DEFINING LEADERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING DESIRED TRAITS OF LEADERS

Alex Acton



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Defining Leadership: Understanding Desired Traits of Leaders

By
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Requirements of the CSU Honors Program

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Abstract

What do people want from leaders? That question has been asked for generations. In recent history, a huge growth in leadership studies has produced a wealth of information on this topic, but because of the multitude of publications, there are now many competing schools of thought about what qualities make a great leader. This paper seeks to understand the qualities that people look for in leaders and to understand if any consistent patterns emerge from these desired traits. This is done through two avenues.

Firstly, a survey of the existing leadership publications in several different established leadership genres provides an understanding of what the experts seek from leaders. Several military publications show how the modern U.S. military is trying to develop quality leaders. A look at values based leadership publications shows what many leading consultants and professional leadership development experts are looking for. In addition, several business publications and international leadership sources expand the understanding of what the experts say a leader should be.

Secondly, a survey conducted among various individuals from different fields helps to determine what qualities are desired in great leaders. These two pieces of information, when taken as a whole, create an understanding of what people are expecting from leaders. In the end, a recommended typology for leadership development is presented as a means for spurring future research.

Defining Leadership:

Understanding Desired Traits of Leaders

What makes a leader? Humankind has been asking this question for ages. At one point in history, this question was answered through ideas about divine right to rule or systems of aristocracy. But in the modern age, society has begun to question historical definitions of leadership. Lawrenson (2008) offers four check points for identifying leadership...

1. "You are a leader only if you can get others to follow" (p. 1)

Essentially, a leader must lead to be a leader.

2. "The terms "leader" and "leadership" imply that you are going somewhere" (p.1)

Being a leader requires moving a group towards a goal. This can be either a positive or negative goal, but things cannot be static.

3. "Leadership is a social phenomenon, it's about people" (p.2)

Leadership is defined by the relationship between the leader and follower(s); therefore, leadership is about the individuals on both sides of that relationship.

4. "Leadership and power are two sides of the same coin" (p. 2)

Leadership and the inherent power that comes along with a leadership position are inextricably tied together.

Going into greater depth, Blanks (1995) offers nine laws of leadership:

1. "A leader has willing followers..."
2. "'Leadership' is a... relationship between leaders and followers..."
3. "Leadership occurs as an event"
4. "Leaders uses influence beyond formal authority"
5. "Leaders operate outside the boundaries of organizationally defined procedures"

6. "Leadership involves risk and uncertainty"
7. "Not everyone will follow a leader's initiative"
8. "Consciousness... creates leadership"
9. "Leadership is a self-referral process. Leaders and followers process information from their own subjective, internal frame of reference." (p. 10)

With this well-defined concept of leadership, it is evident that there are many leaders all across society. Leaders can be CEOs, doctors, teachers, parents, clergy, students, and everything in between, but how are all of these leaders doing? Bernthal and Wellins (2006) researched over 5,000 individuals from 42 countries to understand the current state of leadership. The study found that effective leadership can increase an organizations' effectiveness by up to 22 percent (Bernthal & Wellins, 2006, p.12). Unfortunately, almost 30 percent of leaders fail to demonstrate what Bernthal & Wellins (2006) call "qualities necessary for leadership effectiveness" (p. 11). Perhaps this is because of the changing role of the "leader".

Bennis (1989, *Why leaders can't leader*) explains that the adulation given to many prominent leaders today lends an almost celebrity quality to many leaders. There is nothing inherently wrong with leaders being considered heroes. The problem is that society tends to idolize CEOs and politicians that are in the limelight for negative reasons. Also, because of the materialism in society, "there is no higher statues or more admirable symbol than the topmost rung on the corporate ladder" (Bennis, 1989, *Why leaders can't lead*, p.71).

Given this, it is never surprising to see droves of leader imitators who seem like carbon copies of a boss or superior. Bennis (1989, *Why leaders can't lead*) calls this the "Doppelganger effect" (p.137). This has produced many generic imitations of leadership. Given these realities

about the current state of leadership, it is clear that more practical leadership knowledge is needed.

Military bodies, businesses, academics, and career researchers all seek the secret formula to the perfect leader. Despite the wealth of research into the subject, little consensus has yet to form. Whole schools of thought have emerged espousing various forms of leadership. These vary based on philosophical differences, field of application, and circumstances.

Ketter (2009) makes the perfect observation by saying, "There is no one-size-fits-all program that works for all people and all organizations" (p. 52). This is because every organization and its people are different. This is what has produced the entire field of leadership studies.

Ketter (2009) does suggest that there are some consistent characteristics about leadership regardless of organization. Ketter (2009) says that "leadership is context and situation specific," meaning that leaders must be adapted to an organization's culture, values, and situation (p.52). Interpersonal skills are also vital to any organization (Ketter, 2009). Remembering that Lawrenson's (2008) first quality of leadership dictates that the entire process rests on the leader and follower relationship, the use of interpersonal skills are vital. Finally, Ketter (2009) shows that the final necessary element of leadership is based on how the development of new leaders occurs. This is a common theme in many leadership writings. Anyone who has ever experienced the handover of power from an effective business, religious, or academic leader to an ill prepared replacement can attest to the importance of training new leaders. Many sports fans that have watched a beloved winning coach replaced by a less effective newcomer can also understand the importance of this principle. So while Ketter (2009) does acknowledge that some qualities of

leadership do span across different organizations, it is still true that these qualities must adapt to each different situation

The need for adaptation is what has created so many different leadership genres. In every situation where human beings find themselves interacting and heading towards a goal, a different brand of leadership geared to the needs and purposes of that circumstance has developed. For the sake of time and this author's interest, this paper will only look at a few areas of leadership. This exercise will help to show that even in the most varied situations, concepts of leadership are more universal than it might seem.

The purpose of this study is to make some sense out of the existing information on leadership. By reviewing military, business, and academic publications, any existing trends in desirable leadership qualities will be brought to light. Following this up with fieldwork, the author will yield an understanding of what people are really expecting from their leaders. Taken in tandem, the understanding of existing research and the personal opinions will paint a picture of the current state of leadership.

This understanding can then be extrapolated into a greater societal understanding for future research. Perhaps no definitive set of leadership qualities will ever be produced, but simply the understanding that individuals seek different traits from leaders in different circumstances provides an important lesson. With this information, the field of leadership training will grow in effectiveness, and a greater understanding of the role of leaders can exist in every discipline.

Review of Literature

Before a discussion of leadership publications can really commence, the scope of what can be discovered should be defined. Much of the research looking for specific traits of leaders,

i.e. young or old, tall or short, fit or overweight, has yielded inconsistent results at best (Hackman & Johnson, 2004). In many cases, there may be few if any similarities between leaders in demographical terms. However, Hackman & Johnson (2004) note that research can show sets of skills that will help ensure a leader's success. Three different areas of skills are noted by Hackman & Johnson (2004) as contributing to leadership strength. These skills are "interpersonal factors, cognitive factors, and administrative factors" (Hackman & Johnson, 2004, p.67). The interpersonal factors focus on others. The administrative factors are focused on business. The cognitive factors split between the two.

These are general approximations for the sake of clarity. For instance, interpersonal factors include most communication abilities, which can include the ability to actively listen and the ability to give an effective business presentation. But even with the multi-faceted nature of these three areas, it is clear that what Hackman and Johnson (2004) lay out as the skills needed for effective leadership are generally based on business abilities and interpersonal abilities. This is a very similar dichotomy to one noted by Charan (2008), which will be discussed later.

Based on this understanding, it is pointless to seek to uncover specific traits shared by different leaders, especially since many traits cannot be changed. If traits were discovered that guaranteed leadership potential (i.e. tall, thin, and dark haired) it would be terrible for anyone who did not possess those traits. For example shorter blondes with weight disorders might be out of luck. Instead, this review will focus on areas of knowledge or skills sets that are shared by leaders. This will be done by reviewing various aspects of leadership as broken into the different genres of leadership. Four specific leadership approaches will be discussed. Firstly, military leadership as understood by the research arms of the United States Armed Forces and well known military leaders will be analyzed. Next, the values based leadership philosophy will be

explored using several of the leading research institutions and a few of the many books published in this area.

Leadership research focusing on business applications will then be reviewed. While this category is less clearly defined than others, the importance and sheer size of the business field has yielded a great deal of business specific leadership research. Finally, a brief discussion of international research on leadership will be reviewed. This last category is less a subject for discussion as it is a tool by which to measure the universality of leadership research. Any understanding of leadership will understandably vary with cultural/ societal norms, and the sheer wealth of information being put forth by the international community on the subject of leadership, and thereby, demands discussion.

An additional note needs to be made before the review of literature can commence. Because on the complexity of understanding leadership as a whole, the different genres of leadership will be presented with special regard for two different aspects of leadership. Charan (2008) looks at how to identify leadership potential. An open mind, successful planning based on facts, a willingness to commit to a decision, passion for the work, and integrity are all supposedly indicators of future leadership success (Charan, 2008). Most importantly, however, Charan (2008) points out that it takes two different types of abilities to be a successful leader today. These two abilities are a “people acumen” and a “business acumen” (Charan, 2008, p. 9).

The “people acumen” is described as “the ability to harness people’s energy” (Charan, 2008 p.9). The “business acumen” is described as “understanding how the business makes money” (Charan, 2008, p.9). The “people acumen” is related to the skills of communication, inspiration, teamwork, and development of others; whereas, the “business acumen” relates to the field specific expertise that separates a combat general from a Fortune 100 CEO.

These two elements are very important, and the relationship between the two can be very strong indicators of a leader's effectiveness. For instance, Bernthal and Wellins (2006) found that as many as one-third of leaders fail because of "poor people skills or interpersonal skills" (p. 9). The dichotomy between personal skills and technical, field-related skills is clearly recognized by many of the different genres of leadership. This will be specifically pointed out as the review progresses. The importance of these two distinct elements of leadership will be discussed later, but for now, it is enough to understand that the distinction exists and is found across the spectrum of leadership styles.

Military Leadership

The United States Armed Forces have published a great deal of internal training materials designed to teach soldiers the most important qualities of leadership. The publication *Army Leadership* defines leadership as "influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization" (US Army, 2007, p. 1) This definition places an emphasis on a leader's ability to unite followers around a goal and motivate followers towards that goal. The work goes on to further explain that the Department of the Army seeks to create leaders who are:

innovative, adaptive, and situationally aware professionals who demonstrate character in everything that they do, are experts in the profession of arms, boldly confront uncertainty, and solve complex problems. They are decisive and prudent risk takers who effectively manage, lead, and change organizations. Pentathletes are professionally educated, and dedicated to lifelong learning; resilient, mentally and physically agile, empathetic, and self-aware. (US Army, 2007, p.1)

Almost anyone would accept that these are outstanding qualities for a leader to have, and the Department of the Army created the *Army Leadership* training materials to train military leaders to exhibit these characteristics. Moreover, the army has put forth specific values that all military personnel are expected to exemplify. These are “loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.”(US Army, 2007, p. 2) Clearly, these values fit well with the given definition of leadership. In fact, these values add even more to the expectations on leaders. Later, the *Army Leadership* training material goes on to add even more to the expatiations of leaders including being able to communicate effectively, produce results, and aid in the development of others (US Army, 2007)

These are very high expectation for leaders, but in the interest of an ideal leader, these qualities are all well chosen. It is also important to note that many of the qualities changed significantly in this publication of *Army Leadership*. In fact, the edition discussed above is an update to a previous version. A version of *Army Leadership* published less than a year before provided a very different understanding of leadership. In this iteration, a leader is defined as...

anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals. Army leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking, and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization. (US Army, 2006, p.1-1)

This definition lacks much of the specificity of the updated version. Less focus is given in the definition of leadership, but much more focus is given to the specific skills. Motivation, vision, and improving others are all addressed with specific real-world examples (US Army, 2006). Overall, the difference between the two versions seems to be a greater focus on the development of the leader as a person in the updated version. But with either iteration, the point

remains clear. The Department of the Army has placed a very high premium on the development of its leaders. This is no different for other branches of the military.

Since 1978, the Navy Leadership Division (NMPC-62) has been doing research on the differences between outstanding and average individual performance in the Navy. In this research, analyses of extensive interviews with officers and enlisted personnel in various billets determine the "competencies" (or characteristics) that distinguish top performers. (US Navy, 2005, p. 7).

The Navy Leadership Division has published several reports that illustrate the traits of strong naval leaders. According to one of these reports, excellent naval leaders should remain calm, develop positive relationships, successfully demonstrate influence, focus on important issues, maintain morale, and develop others (US Navy, n.d.). Commanders should develop cohesion, lead by example, plan ahead, and demonstrate responsibility (US Navy, 2005). Again, as was the case with the army training materials, the expectations for outstanding naval commanders are set very high.

Similarly, the U.S. Coast Guard has published a list of 28 competencies that quality leaders should display. This list is very similar to the previously mentioned army and naval materials. Communication, leading by example, focus, development of self and others, and creating a unifying vision are all put forth as qualities of leadership (Leadership Competencies: U.S. Coast Guard, 2009).

These examples are only a small number of the many reports issued by various military agencies regarding the development of leadership, but even among these few examples, trends begin to reemerge. The effective use of influence, personal integrity, leadership through example, and the development of others are all common themes throughout the military leadership

documents. Whether in peacetime situations, upper echelon leadership, or combat command, the leadership paradigm for the military has placed a value on professionalism, personal interaction, planning, and leadership through example.

Another interesting area of military leadership comes from work published by individuals with military experience. While these works are not specifically endorsed by any government entity, the leadership principles that these individuals learned while in service to their country have certainly influenced their understanding of leadership. One prominent example of this is former U.S. Secretary of State General Colin Powell. Powell very much understands the delicate balance between his expertise as a general and the personal connection he must make with individuals he encounters. He will not begin instituting great change, “until I’ve got their folks on my side and believing in my leadership” (Harari, 2002 p.23). The important lesson to understand is that even an individual with preexisting authority stemming from expertise must still rely on the development of relationships in order to be an effective leader.

Powell’s expertise was also evidenced in his relationship building. In a chapter titled “Know when to piss people off,” Harari (2002) includes a section called “Who NOT to piss off” (p.24). This section teaches, “a good leader ensures that the right people are getting pissed off, and the wrong people aren’t” (Harari, 2002 p.24). This shows a good synthesis of both the expertise and interpersonal skills. Powell needed to have a deep enough understanding of the organization to know who held the power, where their sensitive areas were, and what upcoming decisions were likely to get under their skin. At the same time, he had to use interpersonal abilities to smooth over the difficulties.

Powell is also a strong believer in character (Harari, 2002). Speaking about the importance of living out what one preaches, Powell says the following:

“in leading young people...you can't lecture them at to what they're supposed to do. The way they really learn what they're supposed to do in life is by watching. They're not always listening; they're not always paying attention to what you're saying. In fact, they take every opportunity not to pay attention to what you're saying, but they're always watching. (Harari, 2002 p.205)

Powell is a strong believer in the principles of military leadership already covered, both in terms of strong soldiers and strong people.

Another example of individuals with military histories extending their understanding of leadership into the civilian world is Morgan and Lynch's *Leading from the Front* (2006). These two ex-marine captains have taken the established principles of leadership learned from the military and extrapolated them into other areas. One aspect that is somewhat unique is the role of having set standards. Many leadership publications almost favor the dissolution of established standards, since they might prove a hindrance to innovation. However, Morgan and Lynch (2006) offer a different view. The purpose of standards on a day-to-day basis is to ensure that you can meet any crisis at any time (Morgan & Lynch, 2006). The standards act as a daily checklist to ensure that everything is ready and able to take on any test. Leaders should also seek to exceed the expectations that are set for everyone else (Morgan & Lynch, 2006). This is similar to several ideas put forth by other leadership authors about the importance of leading by example.

Morgan and Lynch (2006) also offer practical advice about decision making such as “find the 80 percent solution” (p .33). This means that leaders do not need to have every single iota of possible information in order to make a decision. At some point, the value of reacting on the available information in the face of limited time outweighs the possible negative outcome that

could result from waiting too long. This also highlights the importance of having the technical expertise expected of a leader. Having as much preexisting knowledge when faced with a test can drastically shorten the time that must be spent on information gathering.

Morgan and Lynch (2006), like Powell, show a great appreciation for the value of character. Character can help a leader develop trust with others. Morgan and Lynch (2006) relate numerous occasions when trust was a vital element to the successful outcome of a military exercise.

Values Based Leadership

In 1970, Robert Greenleaf published *The Servant as Leader*, which was his first in a series of essays that he wrote on the servant-leader concept. He was convinced that leadership in the last half of the 20th demanded a different mindset. (Millard & Christmas, 2006, p.1).

Since Greenleaf expressed these ideas, the field of leadership has expanded drastically, but even now, one of the more prominent subsets of this field is Servant Leadership and values based leadership. "Greenleaf viewed leadership as a responsibility and obligation to serve" (Anderson, 2008, p.4). Therefore, Greenleaf (1970) said, "the servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead"(p.7).

"It is the understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader" (Laub, 1999, p.81). Patterson, Danhauser, and Stone (2007) list the seven core qualities of the servant-leader as: "Love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service" (p. 4). These characteristics demonstrate the basic and fundamental difference between Servant Leadership, and by extension the entire values based leadership

movement, and other genres of leadership. Most specifically, Servant Leadership is in opposition to a more “autocratic or paternalistic way of leading”(Laub, 2004, p.9).

But what exactly makes a servant leader. Many different authors have attempted to answer this question with somewhat varying but generally consistent results. Spcars (2005) lists 10 characteristics of the servant leader “listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and building of community” (p.3-4) Laub provides a detailed explanation of what qualitics Servant Leadership values in leaders. “Servant leaders value people, develop people, build community, display authenticity, provide leadership, and share leadership” (Laub, 2004, p.8). Patterson (2003) states the servant leaders care more for people than the company’s bottom line, are genuine, show appreciation, are sympathetic, communicate, listen, and show empathy. Griffith (2007) adds the traits of “trust, altruism, humility, empowerment, and service” (p.7-8).

Kahl (2004) writes about the value of Servant Leadership. According to Kahl (2004), the most important quality of a leader is character. This is because “the character of the leader becomes the character of the organization” (Kahl, 2004 p.13). This paints a good picture for why a leader’s character is important. Imagine the effect on an organization if the leader has a reputation for dishonesty, distrust, and a bad temperament. Therefore, “no trait of leadership is more important than the character that shapes the team” (Kahl, 2004 p.13). Creating a unifying vision, supporting ambition, and leading through love are also important elements to Kahl’s (2004) leadership paradigm. Kahl (2004) tells an interesting story about meeting Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart.

The first time Kahl met Mr. Sam, Mr. Sam had an armload full of computer printouts.

After shifting the documents around, the two were able to shake hands. Kahl later learned

that the gigantic stack of paper was actually sales reports. Mr. Sam had come into the office early to memorize sales figures before an important meeting with merchandising staff. Mr. Sam would forget everything he has studied by that night, but he would know enough to be the best informed at the meeting. Over the next few years, Mr. Sam would contact Kahl and ask if Wal-Mart was doing enough to serve the vendors (Kahl, 2004)

The traits demonstrated by Mr. Sam show many of the characteristics highlighted in so many leadership publications. Mr. Sam certainly demonstrated a strong expertise in his field. He would be the best-informed person at the meeting. He was ensuring that his technical knowledge of the business was the best. At the same time, he was genuinely concerned with developing trust and meaningful relationships with his vendors. Kahl (2004) contends that this fluid combination of excellent business practices and personal connection was what made Sam Walton so successful as a businessman.

Servant Leadership again sets a very high bar for leaders to achieve. Individually, Servant Leadership encourages leaders to develop themselves as well as others. A high premium is placed on such traits as empathy, vision, and communication skills. These are all personally focused traits that must be developed before they are needed. In addition to this, the other-centered focus accompanied with the idea of shared power provides a challenge in almost any hierarchical leadership paradigm. On the whole, Servant Leadership demands that a leader focus on the relationship with oneself as well as the development of external relationships.

Other writers may not specifically define themselves as servant leaders but are certainly within the realm of values based leadership. One such individual is Stephen Covey, an iconic leadership consultant and writer whose publications include *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, *Principle Centered Leadership*, and *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*.

Covey promotes an other-centered approach to leadership but not at the sake of losing focus on good business practices. Covey (2004) addresses several inter-personal skills that can affect leadership potential, such as seeking “first to understand then to be understood” (p.235). However, Covey (2004) also offers skills that promote healthy teamwork like “habit 6: synergize” (p.261). Covey (2006) gives four characteristics of great leaders that are very consistent with other value based leadership publications:

- 1) [Leaders] are trustworthy...
- 2) They clarify purpose – uniting people in a shared vision
- 3) They align systems to achieve that purpose.
- 4) They unleash talent (p. 40)

Clearly, Covey is consistent with many of the ideas already put forth by other leadership publications, but Covey does offer advice that encompasses the better parts of leadership in practical means. One instance of this practical application deals with the current financial systems that most businesses have adopted. The budgetary model directs many leaders to axe projects based solely on the bottom line or to expect success from a project if the money is there. Covey argues that leaders cannot only consider the bank account; they must also ensure that a climate for successful achievement of priorities exists. “It’s all about thinking in new ways about structure, system, and process” (Heffes, 2006 p.24). This new thinking can be demonstrated in a story told by Covey about a CEO who always espoused the value of teamwork in his organization.

“He has preached it, trained for it, psyched people up about it,” but his employees continued to demonstrate unhealthy internal competition. The answer appears when Covey sees a picture hidden on the wall that shows a mock horse with employees faces

pasted on the horses. The horses are all sprinting towards a trip to Bermuda. (Covey, 2005 p.234).

This system of reward was setting up an unhealthy attitude of competition among employees regardless of what strategies the leadership publicly supported. Covey (2005) therefore recommends the development of comprehensive organizational systems that will help provide a sense of consistency and trust for employees. This would result in increased teamwork. It should be noted, however, that this is still essentially the same advice offered by so many other writers, albeit more specifically laid out for application. Covey is really expecting leaders to demonstrate the technical industry-specific expertise that will provide a means for goal setting and growth while also focusing on “others centered” areas such as employee development and trust building.

Another strength of Covey’s (2005) work is the desire for accountability of leaders. Covey developed a tool known as the “xQ (Execution Quotient) Questionnaire” that has been used to survey the effectiveness of workers (Covey, 2005 p.2). Covey (2008) recommends using this tool or similar means to benchmark an organization against other industry leaders and assess individuals’ commitment to the organization’s articulated goals. A leader who uses this approach is executing both business and “others centered” skills simultaneously.

Another author who is squarely in the realm of values-based leadership is Ken Blanchard. Blanchard (1985) gained notoriety for *The One Minute Manager*, which has been translated into more than 27 different languages and sold more than 15 million copies (Kubicek, 2005). Blanchard supports the idea of *situational leadership*, which enables workers to execute decisions in a variety of circumstances without a sense of dependence on higher-ups (Kubicek, 2005). Blanchard says “you get your people feeling like they own the place. That’s what

situational leadership is all about” (Kubicek, 2005 p.18). Blanchard (1985) stresses the importance of adapting leadership to whatever the current situation happens to be, and definitely espoused the interpersonal aspects of leadership. For instance, an entire book was devoted to an understanding of how to make effective use of apologies. Blanchard and McBride (2008) use apologies as “an effective way to correct a mistake and restore the trust needed for a better relationship” (p .105). One great example of the situational nature of leadership comes when “the One Minute Manager” explains when the “*directing*” style of leadership is practical and acceptable:

Suppose you were at a meeting and the room burst into flames. Would you ask everyone to break into small groups to discuss what was the best way out of the room and then have each group report back so that the whole group could agree on the best course of action? (Blanchard, 1985, p.36).

Of course, no one would sit quietly brainstorming while the building burned down. This illustration helps to show that there are different approaches that leaders must adapt to different circumstances. The mastery of each different type of leadership requires different skills, but a good leader can find balance and move fluidly between styles.

This is important in many different groups. The military typically values a more external and goal oriented approach to leadership, but there are times when military leaders need to be compassionate and people oriented. It is important to note that both military and values based leadership value authenticity, development of others, and the establishment of shared vision and goals. The updated Army training materials cited previously in this paper share a great deal more in common with the concept of values leaders than did older materials, which focused more a hierarchical system.

It should be noted that the newer materials have begun to place a premium on the development of personal traits such as empathy and self awareness (US Army, 2007, p.1). This does not make either system inherently better or worse. The usefulness of either system is based on the circumstances. A hierarchical system might be more useful in battle when there is no time for discussion or consideration of new ideas. Whereas when the time to discuss and build strong teams is available, the shared power system of Servant Leadership might ensure more follower satisfaction and the development of future leaders. Whatever the practical applications of the models are, the important thing to note is that even in such seemingly opposed genres of leadership there remains many similarities. More to the point, there is nothing to say that a leader could not meet the ideals of both groups simultaneously.

Business Leadership

One of the most prolific authors on leadership for practical use is Warren Bennis. Numerous books, articles, and interviews have resulted in a wealth of information about what it takes to be a leader. In *Leaders*, Bennis and Nanus (1985) show the importance of communication, vision, and the development of trust. In *On Becoming a Leader*, Bennis (1989) tells potential leaders to develop themselves before trying to develop an organization, “To become a leader, then you must become yourself, become the maker of your own life” (p. 51). Achieving this self-awareness helps leaders to use personal energy and skills, and to trust these abilities. Bennis (1985B; 1989, *On becoming a leader*) generally advises leaders to know their own strengths and weaknesses and then apply the strengths to interpersonal and business endeavors.

Kanchier (2002) argues that communication, the development of others, and the management of change and stress are all key components to effective leadership; however, the

number one thing for leaders to focus on is the development of so called “leadership traits.” Kanchier (2002) says leaders must lead by example, demonstrate a common vision, and emphasize teamwork. Already, these characteristics are similarly to those already discussed above.

Two well-known authors that have also published a great deal of research uncovering the traits of effective leaders are Kouzes and Posner. Kouzes and Posner (2002) have been working on understanding leadership for more than 30 years and in that time have noted that many things have changed about the nature of organizations. Increased globalization, more focus on people, technological growth, and changing cultures are but a few of the elements of the new reality all that organizations face (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Given these factors, Kouzes and Posner (2002) offer the following five elements for effective leadership:

1) Model the way (p.42)

Leaders must lead by example and demonstrate the principles that they hope to create or sustain in the organization.

2) Inspire a shared vision (p. 108)

Goals are the life-blood of positive movement for organizations. It is a leader’s job to relate a common vision to others in order to ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction

3) Challenge the process (p. 172)

Leaders are responsible for inspiring innovation and creating new avenues for success. A leader cannot rely on old ways of doing things without evaluating those strategies in the light of a changing world.

4) Enable others to act (p. 240)

As many authors suggest, a leader must always keep an eye towards the development of others. This ensures that individuals feel empowered to make decisions in the short run and ensures quality future leadership for the organization in the long run.

5) Encourage the heart (p. 314)

This element is definitely part of Charan's (2008) people knowledge. Leaders must actively work to not only maintain morale but also to ensure that individuals feel valued and effective.

These characteristics represent both areas of which a leader must have knowledge. Practical business principles are covered by a willingness to create innovation, build consensus about goals, and delegate power through the ranks. The focus on people is plainly evident in the focus on encouragement, empowerment, and the leader's personal integrity.

Vitulli (2008) writes about a very specific area of business, namely finding leaders in the car retail industry. It is a highly competitive business and many auto dealerships end up placing individuals in leadership position because they have "put in the time." Vitulli (2008) rightly points out that each leader within the company has an important role to fill and must therefore be carefully chosen and vetted.

In order to do this vetting process, Vitulli (2008) offers suggestions for what qualities leaders need to possess. Leaders should display integrity, a willingness to learn and grow, good judgment, a positive mental attitude, respect both given and received, the ability to teach and listen, an understanding of business, and the ability to inspire others (Vitulli, 2008). This list differs only slightly from others in that it specifically requires a strong business sense. But in truth, this is actually a call for expertise in the field.

This is very similar to the U.S. Army's (2007) description of leaders as "experts in the profession of arms" and "professionally educated" (p. 1). What Vitulli (2008) is encouraging is the conscious effort of developing new leaders. This is a recurring theme in many different leadership publications.

Bernthal and Wellins (2006) found that less than one-half of leaders have plans for the development of leadership talent. The same study found that organizations that did have leadership development plans in place experience better performance over time (Bernthal & Wellins, 2006). These statistics show the importance of development as suggested by Vitulli and others.

Nanus (1989) also explains several important elements that will contribute to a leader's effectiveness. Among these are effective business skills, initiative, and personal awareness (Nanus, 1989), but most importantly among these elements are the abilities to remain forward-looking and to maintain personal character (Nanus, 1989). Personal character is important because "all leaders require trust as a basis for their legitimacy and as the mortar that binds leader to follower" (Nanus, 1989, p.101).

Nanus (1989) then explains that a leader without vision makes individuals ask why and to what ends they are working. "This capacity to paint an uplifting and ennobling picture of the future is, in fact, what differentiates leaders from other credible sources" (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Beckhard, 1996, p.103). Leaders need to ensure that organizations have this vision. Coupled with the need for vision there exists a need to effectively communicate that vision. Vision has no tangible existence until it has been effectively communicated throughout the ranks of an organization (Nanus, 1992). The key to finding acceptance for the vision is through use of Charan's (2008) people skills.

Lynch (2003) echoes the same sentiments regarding the importance of the development of self and vision. However, Lynch (2003) does offer several other elements that leaders should consider, namely empowerment of others and management of power. Empowerment is certainly important and has been mentioned by many other authors.

The management of power is something a little more unique. Several scholars skirt around the idea of how to most effectively leverage power, but Lynch (2003) meets the idea head-on. By utilizing “status based” and “personal” sources of power, a leader can most effectively utilize his/her relationship with a follower (Lynch, 2003, p.26; p.39). Using power based on position can be as simple as saying “thank you” or “good job” to a worker. Personal leadership harkens back to Aristotle’s *ethos*. It relates to character and confidence. Even though Lynch defines the use of power more clearly than others, the nature of how leaders can execute power still falls into the personal interaction category of skills.

One additional note can be made about the distinction between the personal levels of leadership and the expertise required in the business community. While in many businesses the leader must possess a strong understanding of the industry, it has become increasingly relevant that leadership develop their people skills. Maxwell (2008) comments about a certain quality of some leaders that can dramatically increase the effectiveness of expertise, namely charisma.

Maxwell (2008) provides seven qualities of charismatic leaders that are almost reproductions of the other-focused leadership traits already discussed; however, this list is relevant because it assumes a preexisting expertise. Maxwell (2008) seeks to develop the qualities of leaders that will better create personal interactions with followers rather than increase any specific field related knowledge. This focus helps to show that the development of the people skills might be more relevant to current business leaders. Specifically, this brings

relevancy to the earlier stated statistic by Bernthal and Willis (2006) noting that many leaders fail due to poor people skills.

However, Maxwell (1998) also advises leaders to develop other areas of their abilities. “To lead tomorrow, learn today” is a piece of advice Maxwell (1998) gives to explain the importance of developing those technical expertise related skills of leadership (p. 27). The development of this expertise allows leaders to execute the other skills of leadership more effectively. For instance, Maxwell (1998) explains that effective leaders use a great deal of intuition to make decisions, but this intuition is strongly influenced by the knowledge built up from experience. Maxwell (1998) again supports the development of personal character. This builds up credibility, establishes trust, and can help a leader fill a position more authentically.

Buckingham (2005) seeks to address both the technical aspects and personal aspects of leadership in several practical steps that are supposed to make the life of leaders more enjoyable and productive. One suggestion is to understand and capitalize on universal fears, motivations, and needs (Buckingham, 2005 p.132). This means knowing enough about the specific industry to recognize the large trends and also knowing workers well enough to still appreciate the subtle differences that will arise in how each person relates to the same motivators. Buckingham (2005) also recommends such seemingly simple advice as understanding your own personal flaws and suggests that leaders stop doing things that make them unhappy. These are all very practical elements that are applicable to almost any individual in a leadership or management position.

Others direct their focus more towards one side of the subtle balance between business and personal skills. Coaching is one specific approach to ensure a focus on the other-centered nature of business. Harkavy (2007), a supporter of the coaching philosophy, believes that “convictions and courage” are what drive leaders on a day-to-day basis (p .19). For this reason,

leaders need to continually reassess their own convictions and bolster their courage in order to remain effective. Harkavy does address one specific aspect that is valued in many leadership publications, namely improving others, by providing four specific steps that will help in their endeavor.

- 1) Tell the truth
- 2) Serve others
- 3) Be aware of the brevity of life and the value of time
- 4) Appreciate talent (Harkavy, 2007 p. 25-26).

A coaching leader should “be moving and improving,” see people for who they can become, help people improve, see the big picture, be truthful, and be able to inspire others (Harkavy, 2007 p. 35). But even with this generous focus on the interpersonal elements of effective leadership, Harkavy (2007) also addresses the need for a business plan. This business plan should focus on the outcomes to be achieved, the disciplines that will get the organization to those outcomes, and the improvements that need to occur (p. 107-108). This plan will help ensure that leaders are addressing the technical business aspects that are needed.

Another author that has taken a similar approach in addressing the relevancy of the interpersonal skills of leadership is Romig (2001). Romig (2001) advocates active listening, power sharing, teamwork, acknowledging alternatives, and goal setting. These are all steps to enable effective relationship building, which should lead to more effective organizations. Romig (2001) assumes that leaders already have the knowledge and technical expertise to effectively execute leadership in their chosen field and instead focuses almost solely on the importance of the aforementioned people skills.

Pitino (2000) offers similar advice. Vision, message delivery, team pride, decision-making, adaptability, focus, consistency, a forward directed approach, and selflessness are all important (Pitino, 2000). These focuses all aid in the development of individuals as team members and increase the investment on their part. This avoids the alienation that might result from a purely business centered focus that ignored the humanity of employees. Indeed, this seems to be an important approach to many modern leadership scholars.

Stettner (2006) again fits in with this trend. Most of the advice in *The New Manager's Handbook* are steps for effective use of communication and relationships (Stettner, 2006). Only a few suggestions are related to practical business skills. Suggestions like “think strategically” (p.41) and “impress your boss” (p. 93) with knowledge and information are the only technical related skills conveyed (Stettner, 2006). Stahl (2007) offers more of the same advice. Communicate effectively, develop people, value people, and maintain good business practices are all suggestions that Stahl (2007) offers for leaders who want to make an organization successful.

International

The growth of international organizations has led to the necessity of global leadership. This category no longer only contains political leaders. Many business, nonprofit, religious, and academic leaders maintain a certain degree of international influence. While the leaders of yesteryear rarely needed to bother with anything outside their own organization, “leadership today requires a global perspective” (Patterson, Danhauser, & Stone, 2007, p.2). This means that leaders must be sensitive to cultural variations and must take extra care to communicate effectively (Barnes, 2005). To do this, there are two different aspects that must be considered;

and of course, the two aspects are the same elements that make up the rest of this discussion of leadership.

There are both technical aspects that must be considered and people issues. For instance, Barnes (2005) reminds leaders who work internationally that one must consider things like accents and time zones when conducting business over the phone. This seems like a very simple concept, but the international leader is expected to demonstrate these technical elements of expertise. Barnes (2005) also points out several more interpersonal aspects of leadership on which international leaders must focus. For instance, workers on the other side of the planet might have a hard time conceptualizing an idea that originated in a place they have never been (Barnes, 2005). The leader must also deal with his/her own personal perceptions of members of another culture (Barnes, 2005).

Patterson, Danhauser, and Stone (2007) explain that a leader must actively address cultural aspects such as “language barriers, religion, attitudes, social organization, social value systems, and education” (p. 8). Ignoring or refusing to address such issues can result in such fundamental breakdowns in communication and trust that failure is highly likely. Again, the suggested attributes for the new international leader focus on business skills, such as communication, and personal skills, such as an awareness of the cultural influence (Patterson et. al, 2007). Also, many of the same skills and abilities that are considered valuable in leaders of any other stripe reappear as valuable skills in the international leader. Global leaders must create vision, empower others, encourage innovation, and collaborate with both employees and other leaders (Patterson et. al, 2007).

The international community has published a great deal of work on leadership in other countries. It would be an oversight if this overview of leadership failed to at least consider these

contributions. This is especially true given that “Fortune 500 companies are showing a trend of outsourcing facets of their business more and more since 1999” (Barnes, 2005, p.2). With the growing exportation of whole branches of industry to remote areas of the world, it is important that leadership studies begin to consider the international aspects of leadership development.

For instance, The South African Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel called for tangible leadership development as an answer to his country’s continued economic struggles (Invest in tangible leadership training, 2007). This is important because the “tangible returns” of leadership training are evidenced through things like increased investor activity and rising stock prices. This places a much greater focus on Charan’s (2008) “business acumen” than many of the leadership development publications in the United States. Dave Ulrich, a human resources professor, calls the personal elements of leadership “fuzzy” (Invest in tangible leadership training, 2007, p.1). This is a marked difference from the U.S. leadership community.

Nigeria has also opened a Center for Leadership and Development that many of that nation’s leaders hope will carry it into a brighter future (Leadership makes the difference, 2008). Officials in Nigeria point to Ghana and Singapore as successful leadership examples and praise President Yar’Adua for his application of “servant leadership” to Nigeria’s current problems (Leadership makes the difference, 2008, p. 2). This goes to show that even though a great deal of expertise is needed in the leadership roles of such countries, they too value the person focused elements of leadership. Again, the dichotomy evidenced in U.S. leadership studies between expertise and personal interaction is thrown into even starker contrast when viewed in other nations around the world.

Research Question/ Hypothesis

RQ: Are certain qualities perceived as more desirable in leaders than others?

H1: Individuals desire interpersonal skills in leaders the most.

H2: Individuals also desire field specific technical expertise in leaders but to a lesser degree than they desire interpersonal skills

Method

This study seeks to understand what individuals are looking for in leaders. As such, a survey instrument was used to elicit opinions about what qualities are desirable in leaders. Additionally, the survey sought to gain an understanding of the respondent's relationship to leadership and to understand any pre-existing notions about leadership.

Participants

Participants were primarily students at a mid-size southeastern university but other individuals from the community were also approached. Convenience sampling was used to engage participants. All participation was voluntary, and all participants were guaranteed both confidentiality of their answers and complete anonymity in any published information.

Sample

The sample consisted of 47 individuals. As seen in figure #1, the sample was fairly balanced between males and females, although females were represented slightly more.

Fig. 1

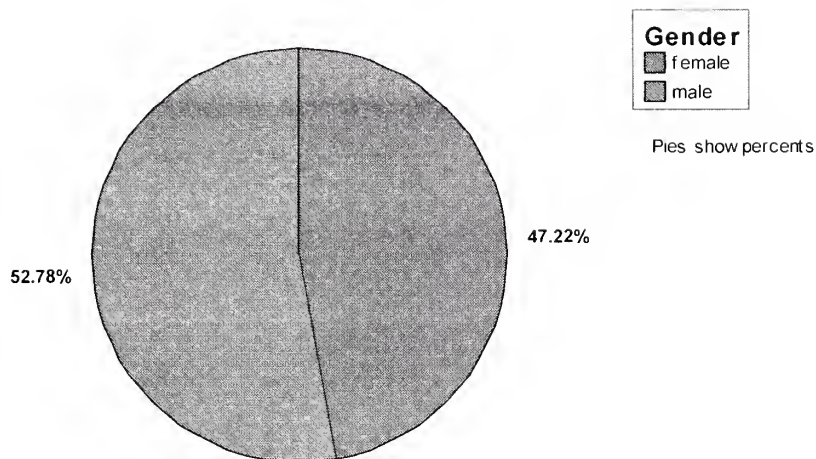
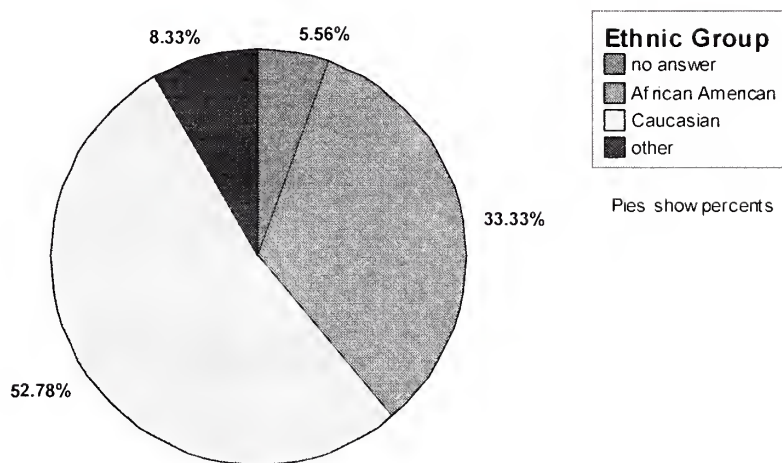


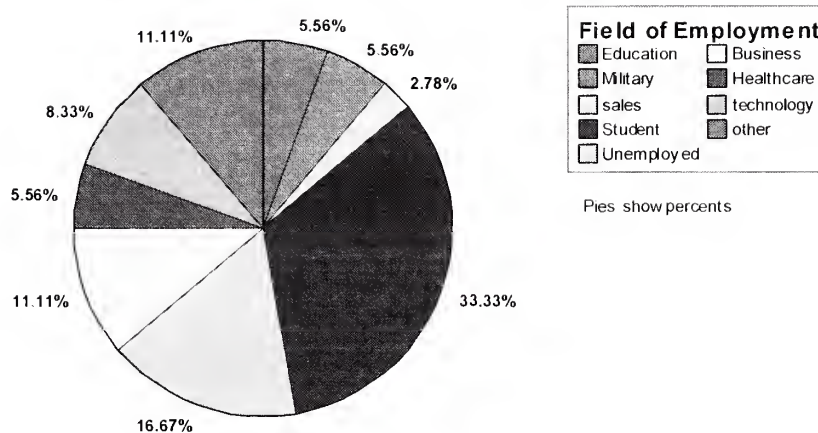
Figure #2 shows the ethnic background of respondents. As seen, respondents were primarily Caucasian and African American with a small percentage of other groups and non-responses.

Fig. #2



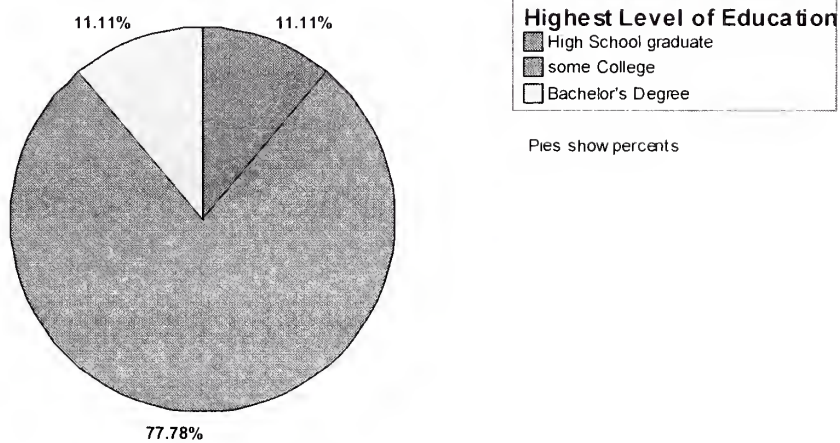
Students did make up one-third of responses, but almost 50 percent of responders reported being involved in various other areas of employment.

Fig. #3



The respondents were also predominately educated. Almost 80 percent of respondents reported having at least some college education.

Fig. #4



Instrumentation

The survey instrument for this study was designed specifically for this project. The instrument consists of a three-page questionnaire designed to elicit responses about the characteristics of an ideal leader, the respondents' relationship with leadership, and gather basic

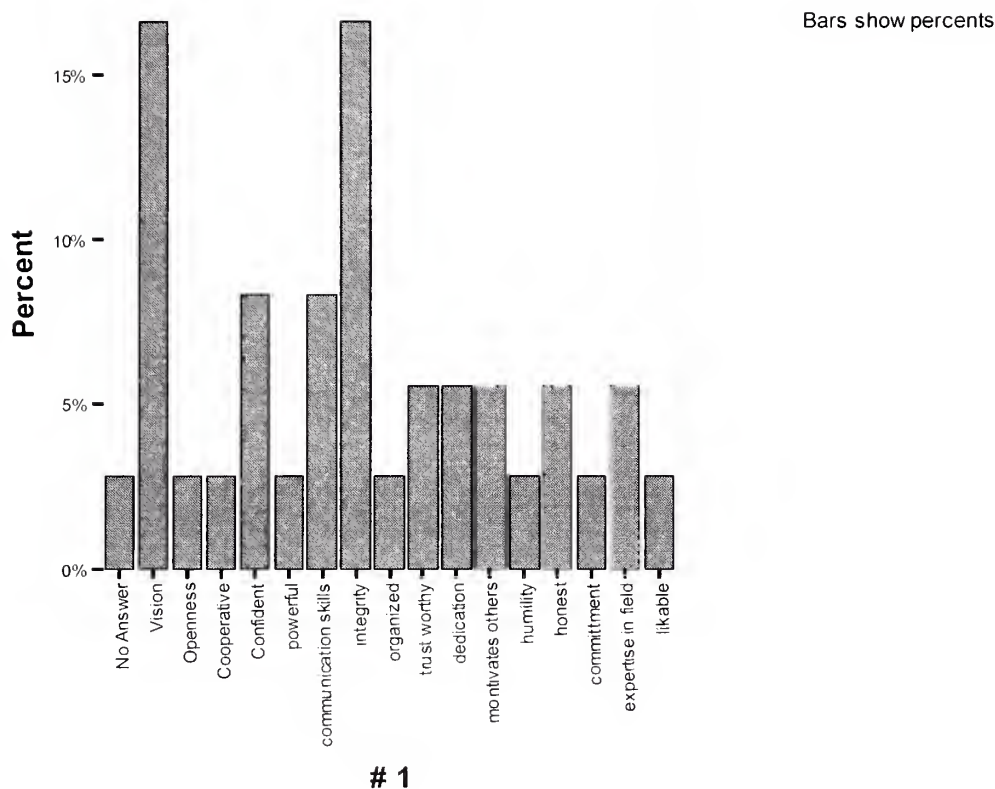
demographic information. This tool is divided into four different sections. The first section contains a list of leadership qualities and asks respondents to rank order the characteristics they feel are most important. The second section asks respondents to provide a definition of leadership in their own words. The third section asks several questions seeking close-ended responses about the participant's personal interactions with leadership. The final section elicits demographic information. The tool was designed to be relatively short in order to lessen the time commitment on the part of participants. A copy of the tool has been included in the appendix.

The tool was slightly adjusted after initial pretesting, but during the course of the study several flaws were found. The most significant flaw resulted from respondents ignoring the directions on the first section. Instead of ranking the 10 most important characteristics, several respondents checked all choices they felt were important. This resulted in several respondents' answers being omitted from the final results. Future use of this tool should include explicit verbal instructions to lessen the chances of improperly completed surveys.

Results

In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked to choose their top ten characteristics of a leader. As shown in figure #5, integrity and vision were chosen as the most important characteristic most often with over 30 percent of respondents ranking one of those two characteristics as the most important quality of a leader.

Fig. 5



When looking at the top ten characteristics ranked by respondents, some interesting trends are seen. Two characteristics were chosen by more than 50 percent of responders, “confident” (53.3 percent) and “motivates others” (51 percent). These two characteristics were the most often chosen among the top 10 qualities of a leader. Other high-ranking characteristics were “integrity” (48 percent), “honest” (48 percent), “communication skills” (48 percent), “vision”(42 percent), and “cooperative”(42 percent).

The lowest ranking characteristics were “process focused” (0 percent), “affluent”(2 percent), “headstrong”(4 percent), “curious” (4 percent), “consistent” (7 percent), “flexible” (7 percent), “powerful” (8 percent), “punctuality” (8 percent), and “history of success” (8 percent). Two characteristics were included that related to technical expertise in a specific field. Both of

these items ranked relatively low: “expertise in field” (26 percent), “Technical skills specific to field” (11 percent).

Section two asked respondents to provide a definition of leadership in their own words. Four individuals left this section blank, so there were 41 responses to this section. Of those 41 responses, 27 individuals defined leadership by describing the skills of the leader. Twenty-five responses focused on the relationship between the leader and others. Clearly, some individuals used both approaches in their definition of leadership. Expectedly, responses were varied. For instance, one response defined a leader as, “...not a follower” while another said, “Leadership is not only being able to lead, but able to follow...”. Many people also mentioned the ideas of creating movement towards goals.

The third section asked respondents to respond to several questions in order to gauge their relationship to leadership. When asked if they considered themselves a leader in their own personal lives, over 58 percent said, “yes”. The remaining 41 percent replied that they were “sometimes” leaders in their personal lives. None of the 47 respondents said, “no.” More than 80 percent of respondents replied either “yes” or “sometimes” when asked if they were leaders in their workplaces. More than 94 percent of respondents said they were pleased or sometimes pleased with leaders with whom they worked. Finally, fewer than 3 percent of respondents said they did not trust work leaders. The remaining 96 percent said they at least sometimes trusted those leaders.

Discussion

The first section of the survey clearly shows the importance of the inter-personal skills that a leader must possess. People want leaders that are self-aware and have developed their own personal characteristics. The high ratings for “integrity” and “confident” demonstrate this. The

high rating for honesty can also be closely related to the rating for integrity. The importance of the relationship between the leader and others is demonstrated in the high ratings for “cooperative” and “motivates others.” As noted earlier, few respondents chose technical field related expertise as a top quality for a leader. The closest high-ranking qualities would be “communication skills” and “vision.” It is very important to note that many of the characteristics chosen by individuals in the survey are the same characteristics that are valued by many leadership writers.

The balance between definitions of leadership related to the leader as a person and leadership as a relationship show the varying ideas that many people hold about leadership. The definitions of leadership offered in the beginning of this paper placed special importance on the relationship between the leader and the follower. The survey helped to show that while many scholars focus on this relationship, many individuals still see leadership as an inherent position related to the skills of the leader. This is incredibly important; because, leadership is actually a social construction (Lawrenson, 2008). Future efforts may be needed to ensure that people understand the proper role of leadership.

The third section of the survey shows that almost everyone considers themselves a leader in some respect in their own personal lives. It also shows that many individuals consider themselves to be leaders in their workplaces. This is significant given the high percentage of students that responded to the survey, most of whom are likely to be in lower level positions. Future research should ask if people believe they exhibit the qualities of leadership on a consistent basis. This would help to show whether people only maintain an idealistic image of leadership or if they actually try to be good leaders.

The third section also shows that people have a fairly positive opinion of leadership. They tend to view their relationships with leaders as positive and tend to trust leaders. This is good considering that many social stereotypes tend to cast leaders in a negative light. It is a great boon to leadership studies that people have a positive relationship with the idea of leadership. It is also positive the people consider themselves leaders. This will help to encourage future research and improvement in the leadership field.

Conclusion

The responses to the survey fell consistently in line with much of what leadership scholars have advised. In light of these similarities, the following typology for the development of leadership is proposed.

Leaders must...

1. Be experts in their field.

Leaders must have a practical and ever-growing knowledge of their own specific field. This includes staying aware of industry trends and trade publications. This also includes being aware of the nature of how an organization is successful. For an army general, it would include military history and theories of warfare. For a CEO this would include an understanding of mergers, acquisitions, sales, and shareholders. This is why a successful army general cannot just be transplanted into the CEO position of a Fortune 500 company without significant retraining. This also includes more than just a general knowledge of the field. In the day-to-day practice of leadership, it requires a continual effort to remain awareness of the organizations changes. Sam Walton's memorization of sales figures, as discussed earlier, provides a perfect example (Kahl, 2004).

2. Remain focused on others

As discussed multiple times, leadership is defined by the relationship between the leader and others. It is important for leaders to focus on others in order to best utilize the role of leader.

3. Communication Skills

Leaders must develop the ability to effectively communicate in order to interact with others. If the leader seeks to motivate others, communicate a vision, develop trust, or just remain effective, the leader must be able to communicate. This includes everything from presentation skills to interpersonal skills.

4. Consistently demonstrate character

Leaders are expected to lead by example and demonstrate character. Doing this consistently can be referred to as integrity.

5. Remain future-minded

Leaders must learn from the past, lead in the present, but look to the future.

Leaders must have a clear vision for future of the organization. Leaders must empower and develop other individuals in order to ensure the long-term viability of the organization.

These five areas demonstrate the skills that are advised by much of the leadership literature. In addition, many of these skills were pointed out as valued by individuals in the survey. These five areas should be drastically expounded on in future research. Each category for development includes many individual skills or traits. Future research should also work to profile successful leaders in various fields to demonstrate whether the leaders exhibit these skills. It can be expected that one or more of the five areas might be more useful in different situations. A

successful leader should be able to utilize all skill areas and move fluidly between them.

Hopefully, this typology will contribute not only to the understanding of leadership in academic terms but also provide advice for leaders on how best to execute their positions.

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Appendix

Please rank order up to ten characteristics that you feel are most important in a leader, with #1 signifying the most important quality.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--|------------------------|
| ___ Vision | ___ Integrity | ___ Dedication | ___ Humility |
| ___ Openness | ___ Creative | ___ Fair | ___ Assertive |
| ___ Cooperative | ___ Organized | ___ Self-aware | ___ Honest |
| ___ Trusting | ___ Trust worthy | ___ Consistent | ___ Responsible |
| ___ Goal setting | ___ Educated | ___ Affluent | ___ Commitment |
| ___ Confident | ___ Punctuality | ___ Motivates others | ___ Team-player |
| ___ Curious | ___ Empowers others | ___ History of success | ___ Expertise in field |
| ___ Decisiveness | ___ Proactive | ___ Flexible | ___ People centered |
| ___ Process focused | ___ Sense of humor | ___ Willing to take risks | |
| ___ Powerful | ___ Convincing | ___ Headstrong | ___ Likable |
| ___ Communication skills | | ___ Technical skills specific to the field | |
| ___ Personally motivated | | | |
| ___ Other: | _____ | | |
| | _____ | | |

Please provide a brief definition of leadership in your own words: _____

Please circle your answer:

I am a leader in my personal life:	yes	sometimes	no
I am a leader in my workplace:	yes	sometimes	no
I am pleased with leaders I work with:	yes	sometimes	no
I trust leaders I work with:	yes	sometimes	no

Demographics:

(Please circle the descriptor that best applies to you)

Sex:

- Female
 Male

Ethnic group:

- African – American
 American Indian / Alaskan Native
 Asian
 Caucasian
 Hispanic/ Latino
 Pacific Islander
 Other: _____

Highest level of completed Education:

- Some High School
 High School graduate
 Some College
 Bachelor's degree
 Graduate/ Professional degree

Current Field of Employment:

- Agriculture Business
 Education Healthcare
 Homemaker Government/ Public Service
 Military Non Profit
 Sales Skilled worker, craftsman or foreman
 Student Technology
 Unemployed Other: _____

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your answers will be kept confidential and strict anonymity will be observed for all participants during the reporting and/or publication of any results. Please return this packet to Alex Acton. Any questions or comments may be directed to acton_alex@colstate.edu.

