

# MULTILAYERED CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF “LEADERSHIP”: CONCEPTUAL VIEWS IN PSYCHOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

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## Abstract

This article aims to provide the liberal views on *leadership* in psychology, management and education through presenting variety of ideas and interpretations, though not the finalized conclusions. The main research question is raised: “What are the ideas regarding the concept of leadership in scientific literature of psychology, management and education?” The literature review was applied both to analyze the concept of *leadership* and narrate its’ descriptive text. Conclusions reveal that efforts to improve leadership should be built upon the foundation of well-documented and well-accepted leadership knowledge that already exists. We know that leadership is most successful when it is focused on processes, behaviors and perceptions. Nevertheless, leadership can take different forms in different contexts. The knowledge gaps referring to leadership covered by differed disciplines still exist, especially when this phenomenon is detached from specification of styles or its’ comparison with the management. Thus the description of leadership in the different disciplines still lacks the specifications of contexts, levels, cases, as well as other different components. The concept of leadership in different disciplines shares similar characteristics. Therefore these and many other considerations call out for further inquiry and vigorous conversation among practitioners, policy makers and scholars.

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**Keywords:** Education, leadership, literature review, management, psychology

## Introduction

Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things (Drucker, 2008). Great leaders possess dazzling social intelligence, a zest for change and above all, vision that allows them to set their sights on the things: that truly merit attention (“Psychology Today”, 2015). The concept of „leadership“ focuses not only on a leader, but also on followers, peers, supervisors, work setting or context, and culture. In this context, the individuals represent the entire spectrum of diversity. *Leadership* is no longer simply described as an individual characteristic or difference, but rather is depicted in various models as dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, global, and a complex social dynamic (Avolio, 2007; Yukl, 2010). Leadership can be enacted through any interaction in an organization and it is an emergent phenomenon within complex systems (Hazy et al., 2007).

The leadership in psychology is focused on leader’s behavior which encourages openness through sharing the information required to make decisions while accepting followers’ inputs. The leadership is also seen as a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which stimulates the greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and followers, fostering positive self-development (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Thus it is expected that leader’s behavior transforms and inspires followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The *leadership* in management is also seen as leader’s behavior(s) directed towards individuals or entire teams and consisting of delegating authority to employees, promoting their self-directed and autonomous decision-making, coaching, sharing information, and asking for input (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). Here the power-based relationships are on edge. Then the specific leadership strategies such as building natural rewards into tasks, self-management of beliefs / assumptions / mental images, self-dialogue, and thought patterns are needed (Neck & Houghton, 2006).

The leadership is a driver of quality and performance improvement in education (Osseo-Asare & Longbottom, 2002; Kanji & Tambi, 1999). The literature highlights the importance of leadership in generating and sustaining school improvement and change, and student learning (Aliakbari & Sadeghi, 2014; Muijs & Harris, 2003). The theoretical framework here focuses on leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures. Rather than viewing leadership practice as a product of leader’s knowledge and skill, the distributed perspective defines it as the interactions between people and their situation, not just the actions of heroes. These interactions are critical in understanding leadership practice within the educational area (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2000).

The concept of *leadership* in psychology, management and education is characterised by overlaps and some differences that could be based on empirical evidences (qualitative and / or quantitative results / findings) rather than conceptual analyses. Nevertheless, the absence of conceptual reviews could affect identification of overlaps or differences as knowing the conceptual basic of leadership is the essential aspect for providing the hermeneutical interpretations or arguments.

This article aims to provide the liberal views on leadership in psychology, management and education through presenting variety of ideas and interpretations, though not the finalized conclusions. The main research question is raised: “What are the ideas regarding the concept of leadership in scientific literature of psychology, management and education?” The literature review was applied to analyze the concept of *leadership* and narrate its’ descriptive text (Grant & Booth, 2009).

### **View on leadership in psychology**

The *leadership* in psychology is a more the cross-disciplinary than the monodisciplinary field. It integrates the study and practice of leadership, as well as organizational systems with the fundamentals of human psychology to create a contemporary approach to leadership (Snyder, 2005). This approach teaches leaders the skills and perspectives necessary to meet the challenges. One of the core propositions of psychology regarding the leadership theory refers to leadership perception failing to recognize it as merely the influential act of an individual or individuals which rather is embedded in a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The leadership in psychology emphasizes the need to understand individual and group behaviors in order to achieve positive and long lasting change (Roberts et al., 2005). Without followers, leadership would not materialize and the benefits of leadership would not be realised by an organization. Followers are an essential part of the leadership equation (Lapierre & Carsten, 2014). A pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needs to be related to decision-making while accepting followers’ inputs. Although people may recognize the need for a change, it is often difficult to set them in motion out of familiar behaviors, models and beliefs. This demands an adaptive approach to leadership (Roberts et al., 2005).

In psychological literature the leadership is defined as a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Researchers argue that leaders who are more motivated to learn at the outset and have higher

motivation to lead will more likely embrace *trigger events* that stimulate thinking about their own development as an opportunity to improve their leadership effectiveness (Avolio et al., 2009). Avolio and Chan (2008) indicate the certain *trigger events* that activate leader's working self-concept, focused attention, and critical self-assessment. These *trigger* moments can occur naturally as the leader interacts with others during leadership episodes or it can be induced through formal training exercises and self-reflection (Roberts et al., 2005).

The *leadership* in psychology emphasizes the thinking and informational processes among leaders and their followers. Wofford et al. (1998) proposed a cognitive leadership model to explain the way transformational and transactional leaders view work with followers. In this field study researchers investigated schematic processes (e.g., vision, follower, the self) and scripts (behaviors associated with a schema), arguing that transformational and transactional leaders use different schemas to interpret events, which then results in the choice of different leadership behaviors or actions in response to those events (Wofford et al., 1998).

One of more recent developments in the scientific literature refers to the attempt to develop models of leadership in psychology. Lord and Hall (2005) designed a model of leadership development that emphasized leader's cognitive attributes or abilities. The previous models of leadership have been designed to accommodate more traditional hierarchical structures of organizations. Applying the concepts of complexity theory to the study of leadership has resulted in what has been referred to as complexity leadership (Day et al., 2004). Based on this framework, leadership is viewed as an interactive system of dynamic, unpredictable agents that interact with each other in complex feedback networks, which can then produce adaptive outcomes such as knowledge dissemination, learning, innovation, and further adaptation to change (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008; Pearce, 2004). Dooley and Lichtenstein (2008) describe several levels for investigating leadership interactions with the focus on (a) *micro* interactions, which mean daily interactions using real-time observation, (b) *meso* interactions (days and weeks) that incorporate the use of social network analysis, where one examines a set of agents and how they are linked over time, and (c) *macro* interactions (weeks, months, and longer) through event history analysis.

In psychology the *leadership* is viewed as a property of the whole system being solely opposed to the property of individuals. Effectiveness in leadership becomes more a product of those connections or relationships among the parts rather than the result of any one part of that system (O'Connor & Quinn, 2004). As a number of authors have discussed the idea of integrating *leadership* and *sharing*, the concept of *sharing leadership* emerged (Avolio et al., 2009). Yet, the criticism pointed towards the new

concept was focused on the lack of agreement on the definition (Carson et al., 2007).

The psychological literature provides the concept of *spiritual leadership*. However, Dent et al. (2005) argues that this term is marked by all the typical characteristics of *leadership* paradigm, still being under the development and here is a lack of consensus about a definition of workplace spirituality of the leader. Part of the challenge in this development covers attempts to define the meaning of spirituality without necessarily trying it to related to one particular religion or philosophy (Day et al., 2004).

### **View on leadership in management**

The *leadership* in management has typically been defined in two ways. *First*, leadership involves behaviors of formal leaders (or, those leaders who are in positions of status and authority in their organizations), such as encouraging subordinates to express opinions and ideas, promoting collaborative decision making, and supporting information sharing and teamwork. *Second*, to more completely account for its motivational effects, studies have conceptualized leadership as a power-sharing process by formal leaders, which enhances employee (both individuals' and teams') autonomy and investment in their work (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Skogstad et al., 2007).

In management the *leadership* is concerned with leader's behaviors that decentralize power by involving employees in decision-making (Carless, 2004). In addition, it requires leaders to provide followers with autonomy over their tasks, to express confidence in their performance, and to remove bureaucratic constraints (Ahearne et al., 2005). Leadership is generally associated with positive individual and organizational outcomes, such as higher perceived fairness, higher knowledge sharing and team efficacy, higher creativity, and better role performance (Humborstad & Giessner, 2015). An *active leadership* approach aims to develop followers to be their own self-leaders. An *active leadership* attempts to foster followers' sense of control at work by delegating authority and autonomy (Ahearne et al., 2005). It leaves a large degree of decision-making related autonomy and extra responsibilities (Frischer, 2006). Sosik et al. (2002) argues that such leadership approach may be perceived as facilitating empowerment. This raises questions referring to conditions under which followers might perceive their leaders. It could be argued that followers' perception of the leadership depends on the actual expectations followers have. Too much authority and responsibility handled may be seen as inappropriate if, for example, followers believe that they do not have the ability to fulfill these expectations or followers' workload increases above the level they can handle. In such cases, followers might actually attribute leadership to their leaders instead of

appreciating the empowerment (Ahearne et al., 2005; Pearce et al., 2003). It should be mentioned that leaders in management are those who consult their employees, ask for their suggestions, and take their ideas into consideration before making own decisions. It reflects how leadership aims to use employee input in decision-making (de Poel et al., 2014; Chen & Tjosvold, 2006).

Management research places a great deal of emphasis on understanding self-leadership of a leader. Self-leadership posits the follower's behavior to be often supported by external forces, though the leader's actions are ultimately controlled by internal rather than external forces (Stewart et al., 2011). Thus one of the important characteristics of active leader refer to his / her self-leadership. Neck and Manz (2010) introduce self-management of a leader as a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks, as well as managing oneself to do the mandatory work facilitating behaviours that are not naturally motivating. The authors pointed out that leadership is distinguished from other related concepts such as self-control or self-management by addressing higher level standards that govern self-influence more fully incorporating intrinsic motivation, and providing a wider range of self-influence strategies (behavioral, cognitive, and intrinsically motivating) (Bryman, 2007; Neck & Houghton, 2006).

### **View on leadership in education**

The leadership in education is seen through collective interactions among school (educational organization) members taking leadership responsibilities. Mayrowetz's (2008), Reitzug's (2008), and Hallinger's (2003) conception of leadership in education covers the three main goals: i) defining the mission of school, ii) managing the instructional (counselling) program, and iii) promoting positive learning climate at school. Definition of school mission includes working with the staff to ensure identification of clear and measurable goals which are clearly communicated within school community. These goals are primarily related to students' academic progress.

The *leadership* in educational context is engaged with transformational leadership (Hulpia et al., 2009). The four different practices are addressed to leadership theory within the educational context (Mayrowetz, 2008; Scribner et al., 2007): i) inspirational motivation, ii) individualized consideration, iii) idealized influence (charisma), and iv) intellectual stimulation. Leadership is based here on a simple exchange relationship with followers, including the practices of contingent reward and management by exception-active. Hallinger and Heck (2010) refer to collective leadership among individuals regardless of their formal role in

educational organization. Thus these terms focus on numerical action with an emphasis on illuminating how roles, responsibilities, and positions are shared by multiple agents (Spillane, 2006). In theory, leadership responsibilities or practices can be deployed or distributed across the educational organization, even though educational community members do not share the same values or goals.

There are distinct differences between leadership theories within the education. *First*, educational leadership proposes more distributed or used bottom-up approach, while instructional leadership functions are practiced more from the top down (Hallinger, 2003). For example, leaders create a common vision, establish a consensus among educational community members, and inspire followers to accomplish this vision through a more autonomous process. In contrast, instructional educational leaders tend to manage and reward educational community members toward a predetermined set of goals instead of creating a common vision among educational / academic staff. *Second*, the leadership theories within education differ referring to their involvement of educational staff members in soliciting change and school (educational organization) reform (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Woods et al. (2004) proposed the three distinctive characteristics specific to the concept of leadership in education: i) *emergent property*: this characteristic contrasts with leadership as a phenomenon that arises from the individual. It suggests that leadership is formed by the interactions of various leaders at different times and under various situations. As a result, the nature of leadership has fluidity and plasticity; ii) *openness of boundaries*: at the heart of a distributed perspective is the principle that leadership is shared across various members of the organization. This characteristic extends the scope of the leadership team to include other members of school community, such as teachers. In this relation the openness cannot be merely devoted to school teachers as there are other members of school community – students – whose roles need to be considered; iii) *leadership according to expertise*: this characteristic makes the framework a practical option. It points out the issue to secure leadership practices by facilitating knowledge, skills and experiences of educational community members referring to a wide range of levels: society, institutional and individual. These characteristics are helpful in providing conceptual clarity for teacher leadership.

The leadership has two functions in education - providing direction and exercising influence; this explanation has several important implications (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003): i) educational leaders do not merely impose goals on followers, but work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction. In public education, the aims are increasingly centered on student learning, including both the development of academic knowledge

and skills, and the learning of important values and dispositions. ii) educational leaders primarily work through and with other people. They also help to establish the conditions that enable others to be effective. Thus, leadership effects on school's goals are indirect, as well as direct. iii) educational leadership is more a function than a role. Although leadership is often invested in – or expected of – persons in positions of formal authority, educational leadership encompasses a set of functions that may be performed by many different persons in different roles throughout a school.

### **Conclusion**

Efforts to improve leadership should be built upon the foundation of well-documented and well-accepted leadership knowledge that already exists. We know that leadership is most successful when it is focused on processes, behaviors and perceptions. Nevertheless, leadership can take different forms in different contexts. The knowledge gaps referring to leadership covered by differed disciplines still exist, especially when this phenomenon is detached from specification of styles or its' comparison with the management. Thus the description of leadership in the different disciplines still lacks the specifications of contexts, levels, cases, as well as other different components. The concept of leadership in different disciplines shares similar characteristics. Therefore these and many other considerations call out for further inquiry and vigorous conversation among practitioners, policy makers and scholars.

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