

Leadership Philosophy and Action Plan

Amanda Johnston

Northern Arizona University

Introduction

Interactions of leaders and followers are a result of beliefs, traits, abilities, and experiences which continuously change over time. My interactions have created a working definition of leadership to be a process in which an individual stimulates others to improve a skill set or accomplish a goal, while guiding, mentoring, and protecting them along the way (Northouse, 2016, p. 6). My work as Acting Program Director for a Physical Therapist Assistant program allows me an opportunity to lead students and faculty. Considering my definition of leadership and profession, I align with transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership styles and will blend them to create my action plan.

Leadership Philosophy

Transformational leadership encompasses charismatic and visionary leaders, motivating and empowering followers to reach their goals. The factors idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are essential for me to be an effective transformational leader (Northouse, 2016, pp. 163-170). Transformational leadership supports a changing environment and recognizes that outward leadership examples may change based on the scenario at hand. Due to the changing nature of my career as Acting Program Director, transformational leadership is necessary for my success.

Servant leadership places the followers at center stage. The leader is present to empower, develop, and aid followers through their process to meet individual goals and the goals of the organization. Characteristics embodying servant leaders include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community (Northouse, 2016, pp.227-229). Altruism is the key of servant leadership and comes easily to me due to my profession in healthcare and the core values of the American Physical Therapy Association

(APTA) to which I am required to follow to maintain licensure (APTA, 2008). Therefore, servant leadership is a natural style for me to employ.

Adaptive leadership is used by leaders to assist followers with the process of adapting to problems, challenges, or changes (Northouse, 2016, p. 257). Guiding followers through change allows opportunities for success in a variety of situations described as technical, adaptive or combination of the two. Technical situations are those with a clear path for solution, adaptive situations do not have clear resolution, and combination situations have clear challenges without consistently clear solutions (Northouse, 2016, pp. 261-262). As an administrator, it is my responsibility to guide students and faculty through all changes to meet their personal goals and the larger goals of the organization.

These three styles of leadership all place the follower as top priority. The needs of the followers, be they students or faculty in my situation, are always top priority. As Danene Brown mentioned in my interview, protection and guidance is a large component in successful leadership. I find that transformational leadership speaks well to the changing needs of my students and faculty as they proceed through the two-year program. Servant leadership demonstrates the fact that my decisions are made based on the best interest of students and faculty. Adaptive leadership supports transformational and servant leadership styles by emphasizing the process of handling challenges that arise each day in my program.

Danene also mentioned trust as a consistent piece of effective leadership. I agree to put the follower first and guide them to successful actions, trust must be established. Also, with the emotional component of transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership, trust needs to be confirmed throughout the stages or changes. This means that the trust I create with students in their first semester or faculty in their first assignment, needs to grow and develop in consecutive terms.

There are many similarities with authentic leadership and the concepts mentioned above. However, transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership emphasize specific characteristics and processes which I feel are definitive of my leadership style while authentic leadership only includes a moral component (Northouse, 2016, pp. 195-208). I do not lead using the situational approach because of the lack of emotion (Northouse, 2016, pp. 94-113). I also avoid the path-goal approach because I find it had a lack of mentoring and promotion of life-long learning (Northouse, 2016, pp. 115-122). Emotion, mentoring, and life-long learning are essential if I want my students and faculty to succeed, thus making me a successful leader.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5X-Short showed higher results for transformational leadership styles versus transactional or passive/avoidant styles. I scored four, or frequently, if not always, in idealized influence attributes and behaviors and individualized consideration. I scored three, or fairly often, in inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. Under transactional leadership section, I scored zero, or not at all, on both statements. In passive/avoidant leadership styles I scored two, or sometimes for both statements. Analysis and self-recommendations will be presented in my action plan.

The Servant Leadership Questionnaire was completed by one person instead of the required two due to availability. The scores demonstrated high range on all but one section. Analysis and self-recommendations will be presented in my action plan.

The Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire was completed by one person and myself. The scoring had more variability between components compared to the first two questionnaires. Identifying the adaptive challenge and give the work back to the people scored moderately low while the remaining components scored moderately high or high. Analysis and self-recommendations will be presented in my action plan.

Action Plan

My leadership action plan emphasizes transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership attributes to meet the goals of my students, faculty, and organization. I apply transformational leadership by demonstrating idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. I act on idealized influence and inspirational motivation by being a charismatic professor and mentor to my students. I incorporate real life examples from my time as a student in the same classes they are enrolled in and from clinical practice as a physical therapist assistant. Because I have been in their shoes, I can be an inspiring role model. They can see the result of hard work and dedication which will encourage them to succeed. I act on intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration in my leadership style with students when I challenge students to use material discussed to outline creative treatment plans for mock patients. This can be a difficult task for students as they question their knowledge and ability. By providing a listening ear, encouraging words, and guidance I can foster individualized learning in a supportive environment (Northouse, 2016, pp. 166-175).

Transformational leadership factors are also incorporated in my role with faculty. I emphasize moral and ethical conduct by following the core values of the APTA (APTA, 2008). This aids in establishing trust. I also share course learning outcomes and assessment measures to ensure faculty are aware of the goals of the course and program but allow them creativity to meet those outcomes. I find this empowers and motivates faculty. Finally, I support all faculty in their difficulties with students or processes and advise them on options to resolve their challenge (Northouse, 2016, pp. 167-175).

Based on the MLQ Form 5X-Short, I have a small gap in inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. I feel this gap is most apparent in my leadership of faculty. I plan to open communication with my faculty members earlier and more consistently throughout the semester. I have previously

given guidelines and allowed for creative teaching. I will continue to do this but will increase my verbal interaction throughout the semester so more opportunities for reflection, motivation, and inspiration are included as well as visit the classroom prior to instruction to show support of faculty and foster team approach. I feel the gap in intellectual stimulation is present because of the small experience I have in the role of teaching and being an administrator. Although I allow for creativity, I feel that my bag of tricks in this arena is not full. I plan to attend educational conferences and enroll in further leadership courses on Lynda.com to learn techniques I can offer faculty to facilitate learning. This further training will also provide me with confidence to lead faculty to challenge old ways of thinking in education and bring innovative resolutions.

Servant leadership is largely embraced in my action plan. Of the ten characteristics mentioned, I plan to emphasize listening, empathy, conceptualization, and building a community. To understand challenges, a leader must be able to listen without preconceived notions. Sometimes, listening solves problems for students and faculty. A leader can be effective by being a sounding board. I listen to students educational and personal challenges and faculty professional and personal challenges. After I listen I recommend solutions. Empathy is necessary for effective leadership and helps to establish trust. I have been in the student and faculty shoes so it comes easily for me. I can relate to stress of school, family, and work as well as the challenges in facilitating learning. Conceptualization is necessary because I must understand the numerous processes of the organization, department, and program to provide good leadership to students and faculty. Building a community is a way to volunteer and give back to those in need. This is another core value of the APTA and therefore a necessary component of my leadership with students and faculty (APTA, 2008).

Based on the Servant Leadership Questionnaire, I have a gap in creating value for the community. I chose to make this a component I will emphasize from servant leadership to address this

gap. I plan to attend more meetings of our local professional chapter as well as community events relating to healthcare. I will also seek opportunities for students and faculty to volunteer and promote the field of physical therapy in our community. Another benefit that will come from this is promotion of our program.

Finally, adaptive leadership will be used in my action plan. Technical challenges are easily incorporated with students in courses I teach. In these courses, I provide a solution or treatment option for a problem which includes a pathology or functional limitation. This is also present with faculty when they ask a procedural question that is governed by information in a manual. Adaptive challenges are the majority of challenges with students regarding critical thinking concepts in coursework. I explain the gray area that includes multiple decision options and guide them to their decision based on all factors at hand. With faculty, adaptive challenges tend to be dealing with difficult students. Educators want success for their students and if that success is not being met, the gray area of options is also present. The combination challenges tend to involve ethical dilemmas because there is not a solitary solution. These again focus on the gray area of education and healthcare and rely on solution being a result of mentoring by me as their leader and the student or faculty experience (Northouse, 2016, pp. 261-262).

Based on the Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire, I have a gap in identifying the adaptive challenge and give the work back to the people. To resolve the gap in identifying the adaptive challenge, I plan to address the archetype speaking the unspeakable. I will speak out in "risky" situations to support my students and faculty. In the past, I hesitate if a risky conversation is needed to avoid stress. Instead, I plan to think through the scenario and address any concerns in a quiet, professional, objective manner to avoid stress. To address the gap of giving work back to the people, I plan to share more responsibilities with other faculty members. I normally keep most challenging work to myself so I know the work is completed at an appropriate level. This factor coincides well with building trust. Trust needs

to go both ways in a relationship. If I can trust fellow employees, I can share the work. I will practice the mantra from the Disney movie Frozen and let it go.

I recognize that my action plan describes emotional leadership styles commonly seen in women. I strongly stand by my leadership plan because of the type of program I am leading. In healthcare, we heal and support people by supplementing our objective knowledge with feeling. A practitioner who treats a patient with purely objective feedback is missing a component of that patient and their healing. I am responsible for creating a balance in my students between emotion and facts and transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership styles can do that. My faculty members are also used to this type of leadership since they are all therapists.

I recognize that gender issues are present in the workplace and that my leadership action plan may need to change as my professional goals change. Research by Eddy and Cox (2008) support the mismatch of women in leadership at community colleges and the number of females enrolled. They looked at four women who were community college presidents to see what characteristics they embodied which allowed them to get over the gender barrier (Eddy & Cox, 2008). When reading this study, some of the women chose to pursue career advancement after children. This fact causes me to think that the emotional aspect of leadership may not be effective as leaders rise in ranks.

A final thought on diversity and equity relates to my students. Our program is a lottery based entry to ensure equity. Although this causes stress amongst our faculty and results in roughly four or five students not making it through the program, it allows for opportunity to those who may otherwise not have it. I can guide students from all ethnicities and cultures through their education and into a career. I feel that transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership styles will support students from all cultures and aid their success because I can empathize, listen, and mentor them through challenges.

Conclusion

My interactions, successes, and challenges have molded my leadership style to include transformational, servant, and adaptive leadership. My role as an educator and administrator for a healthcare program necessitate an emotional component in my leadership. I plan to address the gaps in my action plan to develop and progress my ability to effectively lead using these theories. I believe it is important to recognize that my leadership style will change as my experiences change and to be open to modifications. When those changes arise, I have knowledge and ability to seek guidance from resources to address future gaps. I am a life-long learner and my leadership style will always be effective because of that.

References

American Physical Therapy Association. (2012). Professionalism and Core Values. Retrieved from <http://www.ptcas.org/Professionalism/>

Eddy, P., Cox, E. (2008). Gendered Leadership: An Organizational Perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 142. Retrieved <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.libproxy.nau.edu/ehost/detail/detail?sid=d1a6d8a8-087c-4a6c-95a8-dbc6fd09aa15%40sessionmgr4006&vid=9&hid=4102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWlhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=EJ797392&db=eric>db=eric

Northouse, P.G. (2016). *Leadership Theory and Practice* (7th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.