**CHAPTER 11**

**LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION IN THE NEW WORKPLACE**

1. Introduction
   1. Leadership is often presented as “charismatic” or larger than life. The purpose of communication leadership is to understand, beyond charisma, the ways in which leadership is crafted and enacted in much more nuanced ways than popular images of leaders/heroes permit us to imagine. This chapter works to draw a more complicated picture of leadership, a picture that entails meaning, power, and communication.
   2. The complications of leadership:
      1. Leadership is a desirable quality, but there is little consensus surrounding “what” leadership is, how to “get” it, how it should be measured, etc.
      2. Leadership as *socially constructed phenomenon*, implicated by social, economic, and political conditions.
      3. Leadership *is a discourse* that has been (and continues to be) constructed that helps to frame the world and how we interpret it.
   3. A critical communication perspective on leadership is to problematize the concept of leadership, looking at the conditions of our culture that assume that “leadership” is the answer to so many problems.
2. Traditional Perspectives on Leadership: Looking at three broad approaches to leadership over the last century in order to how each attempts to identify and isolate the key factors that explain leadership.
   1. The Trait Approach: Leaders are born, not made. “The right stuff.”
      1. Attempted to identify the personal qualities of successful leaders (captains of industry), focusing largely on:
         1. Physical Appearance: “THWaMP” – Tall, handsome, white, alpha-male of privilege described (and still describes) many powerful leaders.
         2. Abilities (intelligence and fluency): must be intelligent but not *too* intelligent (followers will feel inadequate), have a “gift of gab,” self-confidence, gumption, and extroversion.
         3. Personality
      2. Limitations of trait research:
         1. Inconsistent findings made it hard to classify “one best way” or formula for leadership.
         2. Approach attempted to find “one best leader” to be the ideal leader, regardless of circumstances.
         3. Ignored the role of followers and follower-leadership relationships.
         4. Ethically, the idea that leaders are born possessing a certain set of traits (THWaMP) is unsatisfactory *and* reproduces the status quo without challenge.
      3. Taylor, with Scientific Management, muddled the notion of “a great man” being a leader, because he contended that the best managers were those who could scientifically apply a set of specific rules to employees in the work process.
         1. As rational/bureaucratic organizations became the predominant model of organizing, leadership shifted to a set of skills necessary to master the bureaucratic system.
   2. The Style Approach: Dominant from the 1940s – 60s, with an emphasis on training and skills associated with good leadership. Style studies were characterized by a tension between *satisfaction* and *productivity* (a concern since the Hawthorne Studies).
      1. Three styles of leadership (Kurt Lewin, through experiments with Boys’ Clubs):
         1. Autocratic: Highly controlling leadership style, effective when leader present, though followers did not work when leader was not present. Most effective in terms of productivity.
         2. Lassiez-faire: “Hands off” leadership style, ineffective.
         3. Democratic: Active involvement and group decision making, effective when leaders was present *and* absent because everyone was involved in the process. Most effective in terms of *satisfaction*.
      2. Satisfaction/Productivity Tension
         1. *Consideration*: when leaders show concern for followers as people and respond humanely to followers’ needs.
            1. Higher morale among followers.
         2. *Initiating structure:* highly task-oriented leadership, with clear definitions for leaders.
            1. Higher productivity among followers.
         3. Further research showed that a combination of both of these styles was ideal.
      3. Managerial Grid (Robert Black and Janet Mouton)
         1. “Concern for people”/“Concern for Production” provide axes for managerial grid, resulting in the following leadership styles:
            1. Impoverished (low concern for people and production)
            2. Country Club (high concern for people, low concern for production)
            3. Authority Compliance Management/Produce or Perish (low concern for people, high concern for production)
            4. Team Leader (high concern for people and production)
            5. Middle-of-the-Road (compromise on both production and people, but not willing to sacrifice morale *for* production).
      4. Limitations of Style Approach
         1. Attention directed toward designated/formal leaders, which forgets that most organizational leadership happens in the day-to-day by rank-and-file members.
         2. Like trait research, style research was inconsistent, and it was hard to draw clear cause/effect lines between a leader’s style and outcomes.
         3. Universal leadership styles ignored the necessity/influence of context/situation.
   3. The Situational (Contingency) Approach: Emerged in the 1970s in response to critiques of the style approach’s de-contextualized tendencies. Argued that the contours of the task at hand and the communicative situation make a difference in “what works” for leaders.
      1. Contingency Model of Leadership (Fred Fiedler).
      2. Effectiveness of organizations depends on:
         1. The personality of the leader
            1. *Relationship-oriented*: striving to accomplish tasks through good relationships with followers
            2. *Task-oriented*: striving to produce tangible evidence of their abilities
         2. The degree that the situation at hand provides the leader influence and certainty (lack of uncertainty)
            1. *Leader-member relations*: The extent to which the leader feels supported by members
            2. *Task structure:* The degree to which the task is clear-cut or ambiguous
            3. *Position power*: The ability of the leader to reward and punish followers
      3. *Least Preferred Coworker*: the instrument Fiedler used to determine leader personality.
         1. *High LPC**(relationship-oriented leaders)*: Seek relationships and support among followers first, then deal with the task secondarily. Most effective in “temperate” control situations.
         2. *Low LPC (task-oriented leaders):* Seek the task at hand first, and figure out support later. Most effective and low- and high-control situations.
      4. Limitations of Contingency Model
         1. Focus is exclusively on formal, official leaders; this emphasis misses all informal processes of leadership.
         2. Because his focus is on personality, which is difficult to change, he essential is arguing that personality must be matched to job (vs. there being flexibility to make one’s wok one’s own).
         3. Inconsistent findings, which threatened validity, as well as questions about the reliability of the LPC (least preferred coworker) instrument.
   4. Conclusions to “Traditional Approaches”
      1. Primarily social scientific data that fails to articulate a clear relationship between communication and leadership action.
      2. Operates within relatively conservative understandings of leaders and followers.
      3. Followers are mostly missing from analyses.
      4. If/when communication is used in these models, the understanding of communication is very rudimentary (a transmission model-type understanding of communication).
      5. Uncritically accepts that leaders and leadership are natural parts of organizational life.
3. New Approaches to Leadership
   1. Leadership as Symbolic Action
      1. Leadership as symbolic action corresponds with emergence of “corporate culture” and interpretive perspectives (Chapter 6).
      2. Focus shifted to “grander vision” of leaders as creators and maintainers of symbolic realities.
      3. Return to “heroic leaders” of the end of the 19th century, but re-tooled (socially, culturally, economically) for the end of the 20th century.
      4. Emphasis on *sense making for others* and *consensus building*.
      5. Leadership is socially constructed *through interaction*, and is therefore ***a process.***
      6. ***Leadership as symbolic action emphasizes the leader’s role to shape and maintain organizational culture.***
   2. Transformational Leadership: *Leader as Hero, or neo-Charismatic Leadership*
      1. Emerged in the late 80’s in response to need for “visionary” leaders in American industry.
      2. *James MacGregor Burns*: originator of transformational leadership, distinguishes between two kinds of leadership:
         1. *Transactional*: Exchanges between leaders and workers where goods (pay, recognition) are exchanged for work. Represents a managerial viewpoint.
         2. *Transformational*: Binds leaders and followers together for higher moral purpose, where all become their “better selves” by working together.
      3. *Bernard Bass*: industrial psychologist who characterized transformational leadership primarily by noting effects on followers. Argued that transformational leadership involves:
         1. *Charisma/inspiration:* Leader commands attention and inspires followers.
         2. *Individualized consideration:* Leader gets to know individuals so to help individuals grow “beyond themselves.”
         3. *Intellectual stimulation:* Leader challenges others to think in new and innovative ways.
      4. Transformational Leadership vs. Charisma:
         1. Transformational leadership requires charisma but charisma alone is insufficient to transform, because other skills (individual consideration, intellectual stimulation) are necessary to bring about change.
         2. Charismatic leadership tends to focus on the individual, while transformational leadership emphasizes the growing process among people.
   3. Followership
      1. The changing nature of work (related to the economy and forms of working) from the 80’s forward have de-stabilized the typical life-long social contract between an organization and employee, necessitating new forms of leadership, namely, the notion that leaders only exist in relationship to followers.
      2. Followership studies take into account the *dialectical nature* of leadership and followership (they need one another to exist).
      3. Takes seriously the notion that most people are *followers* rather than stand-alone leaders, challenging the individualism of a lot of leadership studies.
      4. Characteristics of followership (Robert Kelley, 1988), used the following matrices to discuss five “followership types”:
         1. Independent critical thinking vs. Dependent, uncritical thinking
         2. Positive energy and active engagement vs. negative energy and passive engagement
            1. Sheep: passive and uncritical
            2. Yes People: active and uncritical
            3. Alienated Followers: passive and critical
            4. Pragmatic Followers/Survivors: At the intersections of all of the dimensions and are able to adapt to organizational whim and folly.
            5. Star/Exemplary Follower: active and critical. *Self-managing, committed to the organization, and looking for ways to work better and to improve.*
      5. *Romance Leadership Perspective* (James Meindl) focuses on how followers construct, or romanticize, their leaders
         1. Leadership is a *product* of the ways that organizational members interact
         2. Leadership is constructed by followers’ sense-making/interpretation and communication surrounding work in the organization
         3. Puts emphasis on *followers’ power* to shape organizational and leadership realities (more than other concepts of leadership or followership)
      6. Virtues of a “followership” approach to leadership:
         1. Decenters the notion of a heroic/charismatic/visionary singular leader
         2. Decenters leaders as the locus of activity and brilliance in organizations, placing more of an emphasis on followers/members – an emphasis sorely needed in the ever-propagating market of “leadership” studies.
4. A Critical Communication Perspective on Leadership
   1. ***Critical Communication Perspective*:** “Ambiguity perspective” (Alvesson & Spicer)
      1. Rejects separation of leader and follower (both “leadership” and “followership” studies focus on one process vs. another)
      2. Leadership as a socially (communicatively) constructed process in which people co-construct what leadership means in various contexts
      3. Communication is central to the production of leadership
      4. Understands leadership as distributed; *post-heroic* approach
      5. Challenges traditional leadership research and emphases power and control and possibilities for resistance
   2. Leadership and Disciplinary Power
      1. Understand leaders are constructed through broader social, economic, and cultural discourse (understand subject-creation in particular historical contexts)
         1. Culture of high assessment, with an industry that’s built up around it (which makes the culture harder to change).
         2. Results of tests/measurement tools promotes culture of high surveillance and use of assessments to determine whether one possesses “leadership potential” or not.
   3. Resistance Leadership (Heather Zoller & Gail Fairhurst)
      1. Leadership is not about managing dissent and coordinating behavior; *dissent itself* can be a form of organizational leadership.
      2. Resistance leadership is disconnected from *management* and instead reframed as *a political act connected to the well-being of a community*.
      3. Acts typically “problematic” to traditional notions and practices of leadership (whistle-blowing, for instance) are viewed as important acts that asks organizational members to challenge the status quo and operational assumptions of the organization.
      4. *Resistance leadership is all about possibilities of leading to make change*.
   4. Narrative and Leadership (Alan Perry and Hans Hansen)
      1. Organizational stories play a leadership role, they aren’t just something *used* by leaders.
      2. Communicative model of leadership: leadership is constituted in the *communication processes that constitute organization* rather than in a person.
      3. Stories “exhibit leadership,” which puts emphasis on the socially-contingent understandings of leadership (romance leadership) and the importance of followers (whose use/buy-in of stories cast who “has leadership ability” and who does not).
      4. Stories are interpreted in ways that “perform leadership” or not, so interpretation becomes an important factor from this perspective.
      5. Additionally, possibilities for counter-narratives exist, elevating the possibilities of resistance (see Smith & Eisenberg’s DisneyLand study (1987) about the competing root metaphors of managers and employees, for instance).
   5. Gender and Leadership
      1. “Ways Women Lead” (Judy Rosener): argues that women have a different leadership style than the authoritarian style typically associated with men.
         1. “interactive leadership”: Rosener’s term for “women’s leadership,” marked by interactivity, power-sharing, and communicativity
      2. Shortfalls of Rosener’s approach:
         1. Ignores context and situations which might call for different types of leadership approaches.
         2. *Relies* on gender stereotypes and attempts to them into virtues.
         3. Ignores organizational power relations and could perhaps marginalize women to particular forms of communication in the workplace.
      3. *Disappearing leadership*: Joyce Fletcher argues that when women practice “distributed leadership” (post-heroic leadership), their contributions are rendered invisible.
         1. Though organizations advocate power-sharing and post-heroic leadership, the characteristics associated with post-heroic leadership are gendered and, unfortunately, perceived as less powerful/powerless.
      4. *The glass cliff* (Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam): the precarious position where women find themselves after shattering the glass ceiling.
         1. Women more likely to be appointed CEO in times of crisis; men more likely to be appointed CEO in times of stability.
         2. Women often associated with senior positions in greater risk of failure than male leaders.
         3. Women who are successful (breaking the glass ceiling) are most likely candidates for precarious positions, while “cushy” or stable positions most typically go to men.
5. Conclusion
   1. Understandings of leadership reflect the political, cultural, and economic realities of the time.
   2. Despite attempts to think in terms of cause-and-effect, leadership is complex and ambiguous.
      1. Despite this fact, time and time again problems in corporations and organizations can be traced to alpha-male embodiments of leadership, who aren’t necessarily socialized for humility or power-sharing.
   3. Critical communication-oriented definition of Leadership:
      1. “Leadership is a coordinated social process through which people communicatively construct and experiment with new possibilities for thought and action. Such possibilities are recognized by the group or organization as moving beyond self-interest and meeting a collective, higher good. Within this communication process, individuals may be constructed as leaders who help guide and facilitate decision-making and action” (Mumby, p. 536).