

Leadership and Influence Learning Portfolio – Part :

My search to understand through the currents in my life

What leadership means to me – Community

For me, the reason for seeking positions of leadership should be for the betterment of society. I cannot help but feel that I have a duty to contribute to society in any way that I can. I have been privileged with many things, amongst them a loving, supportive family, good friends, a great education, relative wealth, and perhaps above all things, the ability to make choices in my life. At the beginning of this semester, for my Human Rights in International Relations course (POLS2113), we had to say what we human rights meant to us. To me, they mean the capacity to be able to live your life the way you want to without impinging on anyone else's right to do the same thing and without them impinging on your rights. Too many people are denied the choice to live their life as they wish and because I have been given the opportunity to, I feel that I must use it well. Kerry Arabena summed it up when she said "leadership is becoming the steward of your own destiny."

From the sayings of Muhammad:

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Every Muslim has to give in charity." The people then asked: "(But what) if someone has nothing to give, what should he do?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns)." The people further asked: "If he cannot find even that?" He replied: "He should help the needy who appeal for help." Then the people asked: "If he cannot do (even) that?" The Prophet said finally: "Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and that will be regarded as charitable deeds."

-- Sahih Al-Bukhari. Volume 2. Hadith 524

We tend to see things through our personal lenses, and for me, everything I see, at one point or another, filters through the lens of me being a Muslim. In Islam, there is the really important concept of *sadaqa*, or voluntary charity. For us, charity does not have the negative, paternalistic, agency-denying connotations that the word sometimes has in English. Indeed, charity in Islam can be as simple as clearing a blocked path or smiling at someone. Charity is the duty of every Muslim and I see leadership as a form of *sadaqa*, doing good deeds for the sake of others.

When I was younger, in addition to the fact that I could help others, I also quite liked the idea of being important and having cool badges and titles, for things like Vice-President of the Students Representative Council at school. The ultimate starting point used to be the position of leadership. Now, I see leadership merely as a way of paying back my debt to society, through service. Even if I have no money, I can still serve my community, and society in general, through doing good. Leadership is a means of service; I do not think that it should be an end in itself. As Chris Nailor said, "know what you are doing it for; that is, the institution, the task, the shared goal. That is who you are doing it for." As Peter Radoll said, "decisions made as a leader are for the community."

Obligations



Service



Leadership

In Creating Knowledge (VCUG2001), during the week on Pacific Ways of Knowing, the panellists said something really profound. We had been talking about the paramount importance of family and

community in Pacific Islander cultures and they said that if leaders in the Pacific were the ones making decisions about climate change, it would have been totally different. Instead of endless debates and petty mudslinging, there would be consensus on the need to act; the future of their families and the needs of their community are more important than party politics and point-gaining. Radoll said as much when he said that you need to make speak on behalf of those who cannot, including the next generation.

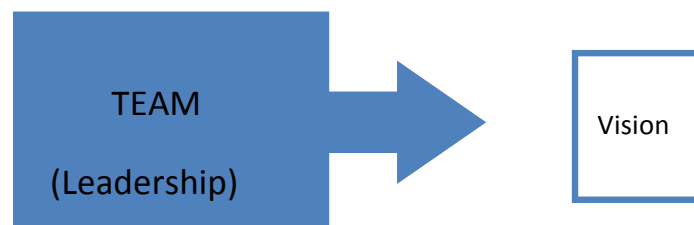
Success

I think that there is a difference between a good leader and a successful leader. I was a bit sceptical of Brent's assertion that leaders were not leaders unless they were going somewhere good, or moral. I am much more receptive to it now. Once again, we go back to Hitler, who was effective and successful to a large extent at doing what he set out to do but he was not a leader in that he lacked morality. Whilst he had his own value-set and sense of integrity, that is not enough to make him a good leader.

As Kerry Arabena put it, leadership isn't about success. Leaders and just people in general, need to give themselves the space to fail. During the week on business, Senge's chapter on the Fifth discipline really outlined the fact that vision should be a calling rather than a good idea, that leadership and success are a learning journey, rather than an endpoint, and that there shouldn't be a trade-off between morals and economics. I think often that is something that is hard to do; it is difficult to maintain integrity in the face of the bottom line and profit margins.

Teams

I have realised, more and more, that leadership is not about the leader, but about the followers, about the group and its dynamics. I think Michael Platow was the first to point this out really explicitly but it was something that dominated the rest of the course and my understandings and approach to it. Mick Cardew-Hall described leadership as a contact sport, and the importance of setting a culture. You need to work alongside your followers and you need to get the atmosphere right. Angus Houston spoke about the exact same thing almost two months later when he spoke of the importance of leaders setting the right culture and working tirelessly for their team, because only then would they be willing to follow their leader anywhere. As one of the groups pointed out in their group blog with their link on leadership, the first follower is arguably the most important leader because he or she is the one who legitimises the vision of an individual, stops that person looking like a "lone nut", as the video put it, and gets other people to share and work towards it.



This diagram above illustrates how I see leadership. It is all about the team, the group who work collaboratively towards a shared vision. Leadership is what holds the team together and shapes the direction. In the diagram, it is represented by the blue border which encompasses the team and directs it towards the vision.

Enabling people

One's role as a leader, as many others have put it, perhaps most notably Areti with his Maori proverb, is to enable people. This affects people in different ways. As Kim Rubenstein put it, the current structures do not enable women to reach high positions of leadership. It is the job of the leader to find people's passions and let them live it out, as Keith Houghton said. The Senge reading, from the Business week, really underlined the fact that the point of leaders is to enable, to help their employees realise their spiritual good and live the most enriching lives that they can. The tendency to think this way exists amongst leaders in the most successful companies. It also spoke about the fact that people hold back because of feeling powerless or unworthy. It is up to leaders to make sure that individuals in the team are supported enough to contribute ideas and enrich discussions and ultimately make the end product better. Angus Houston spoke about this very openly as well, when he spoke of leaders needing, above all else, to serve their people

Peter Radoll pointed out the importance of community and building cultural and social capital for leadership. You cannot lead alone, but need to understand that there is, as there was for him, a huge amount of people helping him, guiding him and supporting him. Sarah Pearson also spoke about the importance of mentoring. For me, this has been a massive part of my life, especially as a woman. I have always looked up to other women and approached them for help or advice. They are the ones who have enabled me, encouraged me and believed in me when I could not believe in myself. Often they were English or History teachers, sometimes my friends, coworkers or family. For example, someone whom I would count as a mentor now is a woman who chose me for a different leadership training program. When I asked her why she chose me, when there were so many more accomplished people around me, she merely said because of the potential she saw in me. That belief is something that has driven me thus far. Mandy Thomas also repeated this, with the fact that women tend not to have as much confidence in men and it is really important for somebody to see something in you.

Girl crush (n.): "refers to that fervent infatuation that one heterosexual woman develops for another woman who may seem impossibly sophisticated, gifted, beautiful or accomplished. And while a girl crush is, by its informal definition, not sexual in nature, the feelings that it triggers - excitement, nervousness, a sense of novelty - are very much like those that accompany a new romance.

This is not a new phenomenon. Women, especially young women, have always had such feelings of adoration for each other. Social scientists suspect such emotions are part of women's nature, feelings that evolution may have favored because they helped women bond with one another and work cooperatively."

Source:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/11/fashion/thursdaystyles/11CRUSH.html?adxnnl=1&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1320802528-LiOI5fP62SvPeKHa7SqqgQ>

Resilience

I realise more and more that resilience is key to leadership, to achieving anything in life. There will always be obstacles in your way, life will always through you a curveball. What is important is not what happened but how you dealt with it. I have wanted to be involved in Teach for Australia for years and a couple of nights ago, I went to an informal info session to talk to some people involved in the program. They said that the key things that were needed for the role, and that interview panellists looked for in the application process, were vision and resilience. The two ideas link really well together; Kerry Arabena put it as needing “a dream for yourself that you can rely on in times of incredible hardship.” I think her talk and Brené Brown’s TED talk resonated with me the most because picking myself up when I fall is something that I have always struggled with. Arabena also spoke about leadership being like a sword forged in a fire, if it is not tempered by flame and hardship, it will not be strong enough to withstand all that it will face.

I disagree with Ian Chubb’s assessment that leaders must never show fear. There is a disclaimer though, for as Sarah Pearson said, you have to be strong, directing and emotionless to some extent to get ahead in the business world and it is quite lonely because people will fire at you. Perhaps showing fear was not possible for ANU’s Vice-Chancellor, perhaps it was not possible for the Chief Air Marshall of the ADF. But I do not want to be either of those. Next year, my job will be to engage, inspire and empower forty other uni students through the Oaktree Foundation’s Generate Program. There is no way that I can pretend that I have all the answers or that can do it alone. Once again, Arabena hit the nail on the head when she said “you need to be strong enough to be vulnerable”, with Brown also saying that you need the courage to be imperfect. As a slam poet, pretence is something that audiences see through straight away, and as Brown said, “vulnerability is the source of joy, creativity, love, belonging and compassion.”

A couple of weeks ago, at a particularly trying time, I came across a blog, thinkermaker.com, where I found this poster that the blogger had painted of all the ways in which she could describe herself. I particularly like what’s been written in the bottom right corner. Here is an excerpt from one of her poems:

We do our best
and try to be okay with that
instead of telling ourselves off
punishing
depriving
pushing ourselves into things
that deep down we know
don't mean anything
next to
loving
giving
believing in ourselves.
And when we can't love and give and
believe
we do our best
to be okay with that, too.



Teach for Australia also places a lot of emphasis on humility, one of my friends was saying that her friend got flown to Melbourne for a group interview and was ultimately turned down because he did not show enough humility. Ron Brent, in the first week spoke

about humility as one the key things you need to be a good leader. You need humility to be wholehearted, to be vulnerable and to know that failures do not define you, how you deal with them does.

Self-Awareness

Mick Cardew-Hall spoke about the importance of being self-aware and understanding how you think. For him, he wallows in the information until he comes to a conclusion or understanding. One of the things that I realised is the fact that it is okay to be in positions of leadership without necessarily being at the top, that it is possible to contribute a vision and direction to a team whilst working with, or under, someone else. This came out in Chris Nailor's speech, where he said that he realised that he worked best as a second-in-charge. I think realising that that is okay and something that is just as important as being the one at the top. This links in really well with the emphasis on influence throughout the course, indeed, it is only really now at the end of it that I realise how important it is. As Sarah Pearson said, "leadership is about more than just being at the top."

I really liked the idea that Noel Pearson spoke about, of structural and natural leaders. I identify a lot with the idea of the natural leader, I am really uncomfortable with structures and I think that was why I found the political science week role-play so problematic. That role-play, along with the Arctic role-play week showed me how uncomfortable I felt restrained by the rules and regulations of such meetings and negotiations. Admittedly, such constraints are only to be expected when there is a definite goal to be achieved through compromise between different stances, and I am sure to be working in such environments in the future. I find it difficult to maintain my integrity whilst achieving outcomes and I feel uncomfortable in positions where I have to claim that I am absolutely right. For example, I found the case study of the academic who had to deal with a colleague who was embezzling funds also very hard to navigate my way through. I did not like the idea of being a martyr and changing nothing, but I was even more against the idea of turning a blind eye. Similarly, during the group discussion after the Senate roleplay, when Brendan asked how our factions got what we wanted out of the bill, I quite honestly said that we lied. For me, that does not show leadership, no matter what our gains and success.

Group Blog Presentations

Values

This was a theme that came up multiple times in the presentations. Group 10 felt that integrity was vital to leadership and that it could broadly be described as values. Group 7, or the Planetees, and Group 3 also agreed with Ron Brent in that for them, the direction in which a leader takes their followers really does matter. Group 5 cited Professor Chubb to underline the importance of having a value set. What I think is interesting is that for Roger, the lone member of Group 1, morals are not important, and that leadership is something else entirely. He broke down the concept of displaying leadership or working towards goals, as it stands for him, into a step-by-step understanding, where it is premised on free will and I think this Nietzschean idea is interesting.

Art and Influence

A few groups talked about how there are other ways of exerting influence or displaying leadership in non-traditional ways, and amongst these was creativity and art. In Group 2, we spoke about it because we all have artists whom we admire. Peta's contribution was Banksy, a prolific UK graffiti artist. I love this particular picture because it sums up so well how so many of us see leadership.



Artists do not lead teams but they do influence us. As Keaghan, from Group 12 said, David Attenborough worked towards his goals *through* people, by instilling certain values in his viewers. I think Group 9, or Group b, hit the nail on the head when speaking about cross-cultural leadership and the importance of art and culture then, with their examples of East Asian art and Pacific Islander dance. Stephen, from Group 3, also spoke about how he used art as a director and

playwright to create change. As Group 3 said, leadership is inherently creative; to do it well, you have to be able to imagine something new. I think that ultimately, artists tap into the emotional to create change and to realise a vision more tangibly than perhaps any other type of leaders, and as Kai in Group 11 put it, leadership is about change; artists are *meant* to challenge the status quo, they are *meant* to dream.

Teamwork

In Group 2 we all got along, we all enjoyed spending time with each other, talking to each other. The level of dysfunction in some of the groups was really sobering. However, they all still seemed to get something out of it. Group 8, or the Spice Girls, all seemed to have very different approaches, and reading their pages, there seemed to some friction but I am impressed at the fact that they overcame it to create such an informative and fun page. Group 11 said that because they did not meet until very late and because they were all so busy with whatever other commitments they had, they had no sense of connection or obligation to each other, which meant that it was demotivating and hard to get things done or be accountable. I really appreciated their candour because it was a real illustration for me in the importance of building a team.

Final Individual Presentations

Vision

One of the key things that everybody identified as key to leadership was vision. I think Keaghan summed it up most succinctly when rather than saying how leadership is demonstrated, he said how it is not, and that is by maintaining the status quo. I think Zhemin also summed it up well by showing how different panellists saw vision in different ways, Angus Houston saw it as people rather than task-oriented and Xuemei Bai saw vision as directed by civic duty.

People

Over the course of this semester, I think many of us realised that leadership was not about one person, the leader, but about the collective. Sean McKenzie cited both Michael Platow and Houston as saying exactly the same thing, "leadership is all about people". Georgia very explicitly said that leadership should not be about oneself or about power, it is about humility and that leaders should seek advice from others who know more. Izzy identified more with the subtle leader, one who was honest, valuing people, and acted as leaders in their day-to-day lives. Jad spoke about knowing when to step back and let people do it for themselves. Time and again, Areti's proverb about enabling people came up, used most eloquently by Nick, from Group 3, who takes on that idea of being a day-to-day leader for his own daughter. For me, ownership and agency are something that I really connect with; giving responsibility means giving trust. The importance of influence really came out here, with Peta speaking about Sarah Pearson's idea that influence is to get through the cracks with sneak attacks.

Complexity

I really liked how a lot of the courses linked the importance of leadership very clearly with complexity, I am sure Richard liked it very much too! Bridget said that it was the key to solving complex problems. Obviously we need better leadership or better approaches to leadership in order to fix these problems, because as it stands, they are getting worse. In the earlier presentations, Sean M also spoke about the fact that cross-disciplinary approaches are important for opening people up to other experiences and perspectives, and also identifying the connections. Sasha, from Group 5, takes this a step further, with the idea of "cross-life" interaction, an idea which I love. Complex issues like climate change, as EP points out, need such an approach. Carla, from Group 3, spoke about leadership as being part of networks, because we, as social creatures, exist as part of complex, multilayered structures and relationships. We need to understand this in order to be able to lead and work, both constrained within and empowered by, these very same structures. Ultimately, I think Garry, from Group 5, sums it up best with the fact that complexity is a mindfuck, but we need vision and idealism in order to be able to step back, see the bigger picture whilst appreciating the details, and come up with bigger, more holistic solutions.

My final reflection – The bullshit moment

I think one of the times I was most engaged was during Neil Hamilton's presentation. When he showed us the footage of all those young people on the Voyage for the Future, I got restless watching it, sitting there doing nothing about any of the issues that I care about. Neil summed it up perfectly for me, action needs a "this is bullshit" moment and youth can create change. As youth become more and more apathetic towards and disillusioned with traditional party politics, as Ian McAllister pointed out, I think it will be the "bullshit" moments amongst youth that make the greatest change, moments like the "Arab Spring", moments like the anti-war movement of the Vietnam era.

I have had so many of those moments; that absolute poverty still exists is bullshit, that globally, girls are more likely to die than boys because their families do not value them is bullshit, that there are children in Australia who do not get a good enough education is bullshit. These are just some of the things that drive me and make me feel like I want to create change, because the status quo is not good enough.

I want to leave this learning portfolio with the first real slam poem I ever wrote and performed. It was at the beginning of last year and I still have not changed my mind about the poem's sentiments. I keep those feelings with me for when I need them to pick myself back up and work towards what drives me.

Do We Dare?

The nights seemed darker back then,
when the stars blinded your minds with their beckon
"Do we dare?"
was the question brightening the eyes
of you Pretty Young Things
And you didn't.
The fear
and the anticipation
and the secret shared sniggers
and the disappointment
were enough for you
back then.
You didn't dare.
But you should have
because gone is the arrogance of youth immortal
that could propel you to the outer moons of Jupiter

and steal a kiss from Juno on a whim,
just because you can, biting your thumb at him
gone is the chutzpah
the sheer nerve, to make living it up an art
gone is the idealism
and the acoustic guitar.
And you've wasted your youth being lost,
whilst knowing exactly where you are
and now your youth
is lost to you.
Gone is the chance
to make your mark.
Look back
I know that you wish,
oh so badly,
that you'd dared.
That you'd cared enough
That you'd stared
all the stars in the sky
in the eye
And said
"This is me,
And I dare."