

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The Leadership and Influence course this semester has so far caused me to re-consider my views towards leadership and has provided me with new stimulus to explore leadership from different perspectives. Each week's presentation has built upon my original conception that leadership qualities develop from holding a position of leadership. Whilst I still believe this to be true I have now discovered that having a position of leadership does not automatically make someone a leader. I now believe that in accordance with Michael Platow leadership is the process of influencing – not merely the acquisition of a position. In my learning portfolio I will address several key ideas from the course material, these being: the recognition of good leadership, that certain situations attract leadership, the role of social identity in the analysis of leadership and finally that leadership is a process not a position.

KEY THEME REFLECTION

Recognising Good Leadership

A useful key theme of this course is how to recognise good leadership in others and yourself. The concept of recognition of good leadership in others was introduced by Ron Brent. I found that it provided a really good foundation for my understanding of how to assess good leadership.

Prior to this lecture I had a preconceived idea of what I thought made a good leader – a person who spoke confidently in public, was hard working and empathetic. Ron Brent added to my initial thoughts by providing a logical assessment framework against which good leadership could be measured over a period of time and in clear stages.

Brent made clear that the key leadership skills are having a vision, the courage to pursue it, the ability to effectively communicate the vision and the capacity to engage other people to achieve the vision.

Since this discussion of how to recognise and assess a good leader based on these leadership stages and essential skills I have used this formula to re-shape my own attitudes towards leadership. I have used it to evaluate the way in which my class mates demonstrate leadership skills during their tutorial facilitations and also when thinking of effective

leadership in general. The most effective tutorial facilitation thus far has been where the objective of the tutorial was clearly communicated at the beginning, the facilitators were confident in their presentation of the tutorial outline and the tutorial material was presented in a variety of ways that engaged the class through creative expression, discussion and individual reflection.

It was Ron Brent's framework which strongly influenced the way in which I evaluated my person of influence in week 3 and formed the structure for my speech. I found that by having this lecture early on in the course the material presented has completely changed the way that I consider leadership as I now measure good leadership in accordance with these stages.

A second way that this course has emphasised the recognition of good leadership is by exploring strategies to evaluate your own leadership abilities. This is a difficult skill to acquire and I believe that the most effective strategy for self leadership evaluation is Geoff Mortimore's concept of 'stepping into your second person'. By physically telling yourself that you are going to 'step into your second person' you are able to redirect your frame of mind and consider your actions from a more objective perspective. This technique allows for consideration of what your vision is, the steps that you have taken to achieve it so far and how you can improve upon your current course of action. It allows you to become re-focused and to consider what worked well and what did not. The ability to use your second person is difficult but I have found it particularly useful in preparation for my tutorial facilitation next week as it has allowed me and my co-facilitator to be more task focused.

Certain situations attract particular styles of leadership

Another key theme of this course is that there are various circumstances which arise that foreground leadership qualities and determine types of leaders. This was a particularly important issue when it comes to leadership in business. The business world attracts a sphere of often unpredictable circumstances which produce different types of leaders and leadership styles. I found this concept intriguing as previously I had thought that leaders attract situations that require leadership rather than circumstances occurring that bring out the leadership qualities in an individual.

Ross MacDiarmid highlighted two different types of leadership that can be found within the business world – spontaneous leaders who take initiative when a daunting challenge presents itself and people in established leadership positions who draw from past experiences to determine their style of leadership.

I found that this contrast in leadership styles could be applicable in many different aspects of life. In particular I have found a minor example from our weekly tutorials. A favourite component of the weekly tutorial is the Tim Tam break at half time. In the first tutorial the group ate their way through 2 packets of Tim Tams and left one awkwardly sitting in the packet in the middle of the table. On observation it was apparent that two people sitting next to each other wanted the last Tim Tam yet were too shy to make the bold move and claim it. Several awkward minutes passed and eventually one of the two made the executive decision to take the Tim Tam and split it with the person next to them. Whilst this is a small example it demonstrated to me that this person weighed up the risk of taking the last Tim Tam – being judged by their classmates, and decided to take the initiative and share it with another. Ever since this display of spontaneous leadership in week 1 the awkward tension surrounding the last Tim Tam has alleviated and it is now acceptable to take the last Tim Tam. Hence, demonstrating the positive effects that one person's initiative can have.

A more serious example of a situation in which leadership qualities come to the fore in business was given to us during the panel discussion. We were provided with a scenario where the Head of a University Department had become aware of the fraudulent use of research funds by another colleague. As a group we had to discuss the course of action that we would take. This scenario required the consideration of the ethical issues associated with actions taken and each solution posed risks and benefits. We decided that this was a set of circumstances that could demonstrate leadership skills such as honesty and effective communication from an established leader – the Department Head. We also recognised that there was potential for a lack of leadership in this situation and that it would be easy to ignore the issue. Using Geoff Mortimore's 'second person concept' we entered an objective frame of mind and decided this situation required a combination of spontaneous and established leadership. There was a need for a quick solution to a challenge yet the nature

of the circumstances allowed the individual involved to draw on past experience of working in the department to know that communication and honesty were the skills required.

From this exercise I developed the idea that for leadership in stressful situations your decision should be guided by past experience and that leaders with similar past experience to the situation at hand will feel more comfortable in asserting leadership qualities than those who do not. Furthermore, situations which involve serious ethical considerations attract leadership qualities rather than leaders seeking out circumstances that will provide an opportunity to display leadership skills.

Effect of Social Influence on leadership

Another key theme of this course is that your social influences greatly shape the style of leadership that you employ. Dr Michael Platow emphasised two points in relation to this psychological perspective on leadership. Firstly, that exposure to the behaviours, opinions and values of others affects our attitudes when it comes to decision making. Secondly, that leadership is based on a group leading people somewhere rather than an individual.

I agree with the first concept and think that it is necessary for a leader to be able to consider the values of other people and how their decision will affect them. Platow acknowledges that this is usually a long process of learning whereby we are pre-conditioned by the traits of others as we grow up and that this influences how we exert leadership qualities and which qualities we prioritise. Clearly everyone will be influenced in their formative years by the views of their parents, teachers and friends however I believe that as a person grows older that they are more capable of stepping into their second person and subsequently deciding the extent to which they will allow social influences to affect the way they conduct themselves as a leader.

In addition, I think that the group must recognise that to make a decision a leader must reach their decision by considering the values of the people their decision will affect and ultimately making an objective judgment that considers these values but is not solely determined by them.

This ability to be consider the value of others in decision making correlates well with being an 'in group member'. Within the realm of social identity Platow emphasised the need for a leader to be the best representative of 'the meaning of us' through their ability to encapsulate the concerns and interests of the group. However, I think that for the leader to be an 'in group member' they also need to have the ability to step into their second person and look at the viewpoints put forth by the group objectively and make their decision from a less biased stance. They need to be an in group member in order to demonstrate that they are capable of relating to those in the group and can effectively convey the main issues of the group yet ultimately make an individual decision based on the values of the group.

Platow's presentation altered the way that I think a leader must relate to the group that they represent. Initially I placed more emphasis on the leader being an individual yet since the presentation now I see that the group must not feel a significant divide between the leader and the group. It is important for the group to consider that the leader is an in group member in terms of their values and interests yet the group must respect that ultimately decisions should be made by individuals based on group values rather than group decisions. Effectively the leader becomes an impartial adjudicator of the groups concerns by stepping into their second person and making a more objective decision.

CONCLUSION

Having studied leadership for the past 6 weeks from different perspectives the main concept that I agree with and from which I have learnt the most is Dr Platow's notion that leadership is 'a process of learning and not a position'. This process of learning is a cumulative process of trial and error over one's lifetime. Social influences and challenging circumstances test our ability to utilise the values of others in decision making, maintaining independence and in recognising good leadership in other people and ourselves. The acquisition of a position does not automatically make someone a leader, yet time spent in that position will enable the person to experience circumstances which attract leadership skills and allow them to learn which qualities are required for different situations. What a person does with a particular office that is entrusted to them can be fundamental in developing and recognising good leadership skills. In addition I have learned that this process of learning is a process that anyone can embark on and is not restricted public

leaders. For the remainder of the course I will endeavour to apply the concept of leadership as a 'learning process' applicable to all aspects of life and hope to become better at recognising good leadership in accordance with Ron Brent's leadership assessment framework.

REFLECTION ON WEEK 3 TALK

In order to communicate why I found Diana, Princess of Wales influential I used Ron Brent's essential leadership skills to inform the class of what I considered to be her vision, how she demonstrated the courage to pursue it, her communication techniques and finally how she had the capacity to engage others to achieve her vision.

After my speech I received very positive feedback from my class mates. They focused on my passionate tone, good eye contact and easy to follow structure. They were also very useful in providing constructive criticism for how I can improve for my oral presentation in week 13. Of particular note they highlighted the need to focus on refining the amount of content and slowing my pace down slightly. It was really valuable to have the opportunity to practise giving a speech and to receive such good feedback from my peers prior to the oral presentation in week 13.

In this tutorial there were two speeches that were memorable as the first demonstrated an effective use of leadership skills and the second a lack of leadership. The first speech provided a positive example of taking a risk. The presenter was faced with the challenge of having to deliver a speech on the same person of influence as the presenter before him. He had two options – to deliver his pre-prepared speech and remain in his comfort zone, or to be spontaneous and adapt his speech to keep the audience engaged. He chose the latter and presented an impromptu speech that was both informative and funny. This use of initiative demonstrated to me the value in taking a risk and the positive effect that it can have. It indicated great leadership ability on the presenter's behalf as it showed his capacity to calmly assess a situation, adapt his plan and achieve a positive outcome. I believe that these skills are fundamental to being a leader and hope to be able to be more spontaneous by the end of this course.

The second speech highlighted a lack of preparation and the negative effects that this can have on the audience. Unlike the first presentation I discussed, the second was given by a

presenter who was under prepared and had clearly not engaged with the topic. As a result the speaker was noticeably nervous, lacked coherent structure and had difficulty communicating why their person was influential. In juxtaposition to the first speech, the audience was clearly distracted by the speaker's fidgeting and lack of structure. This speaker would have benefited from developing a plan prior to giving the speech and carefully thinking about the most appropriate way to communicate their message. For me this indicated that in order to give a good speech one needs to plan ahead, and engage with the key themes of the topic. By doing this in advance it is much more likely that the speaker will be able to adapt their method but still effectively communicate their presentation should a challenge present itself.

INDIVIDUAL PROPOSAL

A way in which to improve the student experience at the A.N.U is for the last lecture of each undergraduate course to be run by 3-4 ANU Alumni. The Alumni would be introduced by the lecturer for the course with a short explanation of when they were at the A.N.U, what profession they have selected and how they have been successful in their field. Each speaker would then be allocated 15 minutes to discuss how their time at the ANU helped them pave the way to their success and also how current students can be inspired to be successful in their careers. Each speaker would also discuss the career path that they have taken and how it relates to the course the students are about to undertake. The remainder of the lecture would be facilitated around a panel discussion where students would direct questions to the speakers regarding career choices and life beyond university using that subject/degree.

This idea is necessary to firstly combat the lack of direction faced by most students when they come to choosing a career. Secondly, it would be a strategy that would direct the minds of students to the diverse opportunities and careers available after university. Finally, it would aid the ANU in achieving its ANU 2020 vision by providing a forum in which Alumni can be actively engaged in the learning of current students. By directly involving Alumni in a scheme that would engender inspired students it would also foster the building of relationships between Alumni and current students.

To be successful this initiative would need to be implemented by the relevant faculties. It would also be possible to delegate the task of selecting appropriate Alumni to student run committees within the faculties for example in the Faculty of Law – the Law Students Society could be entrusted with the task of organising these lectures in order to relieve the faculty of some pressures involved.

In order to implement this initiative it is unlikely to require much if any funding. It could hopefully be conducted by Alumni on a 'good will' basis. A realistic timeframe of one to two years ought to be allocated in which to get the required faculty approval and to select speakers for each lecture. By 2014-2015 this idea could commence and by 2020 would be reasonably well developed.

The benefits of such a strategy would be that students are able to allocate a portion of their course to considering options for the big question of what to do after university? This scheme would allow students to feel a greater affinity with success as it has been achieved by those who have had a similar university experience to them. Ultimately it would allow A.N.U undergraduates to have a better sense of direction for their lives after university through exposure to realistic career options.