

Deconstruction of Leadership Assumptions

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Creative and Critical Thinking

PHL700R

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December 11, 2006

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Leadership and its various impacts on people and society have been a vital attribute throughout time. Indeed, world history may be defined through an examination of the memoirs of each era's leaders (Carlyle, 1840, as cited in The Literature Network, 2006, ¶18). Throughout history, humans have continually sought leaders and guidance within their family, profession, and society. Because of this intrinsic human need to seek guidance and the consequent desire to identify the role of leadership, there are a variety of assumptions about its significance and the characteristics common to effective leadership. Such assumptions include the belief that leadership is elite, the notion that leaders are the center of action, and the idea that leaders must be intelligent.

One assumption is that leadership is an elite position within society and individual organizations. This may be a result of the ancient societal structure in which leadership was autocratic and dominated by a supreme ruler; for example, tribal leaders, pharaohs, emperors, and divine kings (Wren, 2005). Over time, however, new ideas and theories regarding leadership and management have emerged, and the belief that leadership is an elite position of supreme power has proven untrue. Leadership is no longer a role held by the select few. Instead, the transformational leadership styles common in today's society value the input and participation of followers and encourage the development of their individual leadership qualities (ChangingMinds.org [CM], 2006).

Another assumption about leadership is the notion that leaders are the center of all action in the organization or group. Rather than being based on the reality of leadership and its previously mentioned transformational nature, this may be attributable to individual experience within organizations or in group settings in which the leader's personal character was dictatorial

or over-bearing. In reality, leadership is a mutual process of motivation and action, wherein leaders and followers are equally engaged (CM, 2006).

Additionally, the idea that leaders must be intelligent is another assumption about the characteristics of leadership. Many people may incorrectly presume that, to be effective or successful, leaders must know more about their field or task than followers. However, this has proven to be a logical fallacy, or a belief that is based on illogical reasoning (Platine, 2006). For example, one might assume that a person is placed in the leadership role as a result of his or her knowledge in an area while, in reality, the person is placed in that role as a result of his or her leadership skills, previous experience, or ability to think creatively and critically about the task at hand. Indeed, intelligence tests reveal that “superior intelligence (is) not an absolute requirement for leadership” and expose “a considerable overlapping of the scores of leaders and nonleaders [*sic*]” (Bass, 1990, p. 64).

A reflection on these preconceived notions about leadership and the realization of their deconstruction allows a more informed, modern view of leadership as well as an understanding of past and present research into the field. As a lower-level administrator and leader within education, I will be able to use this information to enlighten other teachers and administrators regarding such fallacies, thereby enabling them to become better leaders and followers within their organizations and the field of education itself. Additionally, this information will provide the necessary understanding of leadership that will guide the doctoral journey and dissertation process in the coming months and years, providing a smoother passage and a more meaningful scholarly experience. Finally, I will use this knowledge to develop my children’s understanding of leadership and guide the development of their leadership and ‘followership’ skills, which will hopefully prepare them to succeed in their studies and, eventually, in their chosen professions.

References

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