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Executive Summary

The leadership forest of literature is growing and tangled. Teachers and students, like most scholars, tend to identify with a particular leadership theory or definition, often at the expense of excluding other good ideas. Joseph Rost and Ronald Heifetz have written recent books which forward important new ideas about leadership. This paper examines the leadership definitions forwarded by these two scholars as well as the definition offered by James MacGregor Burns, in order to identify their commonalities instead of emphasizing their differences. Exploration of these common ideas uncovers an important new path to explore in the leadership forest: applied civics.

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Lost in the Woods

Occupying a formal position in an organization is often associated with leadership. Indeed, most of what has been written about leadership has been the dissection of every conceivable trait, behavior, historical/political/economic context, follower/group characteristic, and myriad other variables associated with people who hold formal positions in organizations and society. Yet most will also readily agree that not all position holders exercise leadership, and that people who exercise leadership do not necessarily have to be organization position holders. Harriet Tubman, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesus Christ are examples of people who exercised leadership even though none were holders of formal positions in the societies they influenced.

James MacGregor Burns stated that "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on the earth" (Burns, 1978, p.2). It is a term many assume everyone understands. Observers often comment authoritatively on the exercise of leadership or lack thereof by leaders. People are readily classified as good or bad leaders, while others are sometimes pejoratively labeled as managers (another muddled term). Some who write about leadership try to avoid definition problems by omission. Joseph Rost in his neo-classic book on leadership carefully examined a significant subset of the leadership literature and found only 221 definitions of leadership included in 587 scholarly works he reviewed. While he offers insightful criticism of the definitions which were offered, he appropriately excoriates the authors of the 366 pieces who left the term undefined (1991).

What then is leadership? There is a protracted debate over whether or not leadership can be taught. Because there is no common agreement in the literature about a definition of leadership, there is no way to settle the debate. In order to study leadership and determine if and how it can be taught, the construct must be clearly defined. Is leadership the behaviors of those who are for some reason called leaders? Or, are people called leaders because of their leadership behaviors? Pursuing this circular definition is like being lost in the woods, passing by the same landmarks over and over again, never making progress toward understanding leadership as a construct.

Leaving the circular path does not necessarily mean progress is being made, for elsewhere in the leadership forest, more specific definitions of leadership (trees) are found. Some of the trees appear to be suspicious. Jermier suggested that part of the leadership literature is subject to "managerialist or other reductionist approaches that sometimes grip leadership theorists who become bent on simplifying ideas to promote their flashpan consulting interests" (Jermier, 1993, p. 219). Conversely, some eminent scholars have produced exceptional research in the field of leadership studies. Bernard M. Bass continued the work begun by Ralph M. Stogdill and developed the most comprehensive literature review about leadership available (Bass, 1981; Bass, 1990). Indeed the 1981 edition includes a reference list that is 190 pages long! Unfortunately, this momentous scholastic achievement has not contributed greatly to a clearer

definition of leadership. Bass's work is so overwhelming it is like venturing into a part of the forest where the trees are so thick that it is impossible to see where to go.

In the mid-1990's where are we headed as we proceed along this forest path toward a definition of leadership? Are we any closer? It does student and teacher no good to wander aimlessly, never understanding the significance or broader context of what we are studying. It is equally inappropriate to tramp up to an individual tree and suggest that this is the only tree in the forest that makes sense as some have suggested (Barker, 1994). It is important for us to explore the leadership forest with our students and teach about the interrelationships that give the forest meaning. To move forward, we need to step back from the excellent descriptions of individual trees competent scholars have developed and look at the forest where they live. This paper develops an integrating definition of leadership generated from the writings of the scholars who have recently shed the most light on the construct.

The Trees: Significant Evolving Definitions of Leadership

Transactional Leadership--James MacGregor Burns

James MacGregor Burns (1978) defined leadership as "the reciprocal process of mobilizing by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers" (p. 425). Burns further developed his definition by suggesting that leadership is exercised on a continuum between transactional leadership and transforming leadership, constructs he invented.

Transactional leadership occurs when "one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things" (Burns, 1978, p.19). Transactional leaders can function in roles as opinion leaders, bargainers or bureaucrats, party leaders, legislative leaders, and executive leaders. Others have suggested that transactional leaders fill traditional management roles (Rost, 1991; Sashkin, Rosenbach & Sashkin, 1995). Bass (1985) clarified the definition, suggesting the transactional leader is one who:

1. Recognizes what it is we want to get from our work and tries to see that we get what we want if our performance warrants it.
2. Exchanges rewards and promises of reward for our effort.
3. Is responsive to our immediate self-interests if they can be met by our getting the work done. (1985, p. 11)

Transforming and Transformational Leadership: James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass

At the other end of the leadership continuum, Burns (1978) proposed that transforming leadership is a "relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents (p. 4). Burns identifies transforming leadership as a *process* through which "one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Transforming leaders function in roles as intellectuals, leaders of reform or revolution, and heroes or ideologues (Bass, 1981, Burns, 1978).

There are important points of departure between Bass and Burns. Bass believes leadership is transformational rather than transforming. Unfortunately, transforming and transformational leadership have been used in the literature in contexts which tend to obfuscate their meaning. At first glance, the difference appears to be insignificant. Couto has identified the importance of the difference:

Bass's development of transformational leadership differs substantially from Burns. First, Bass uses the term "transformational leadership" rather than transforming leadership which Burns originated and always uses. The adjective form of a noun, transformation, modifies leadership and suggests a condition or state. This contrasts with Burns's "transforming leadership" and the adjective form of a verb, transform, that suggests leadership as a process. Since Bass, "transformational leadership" is more often used in leadership literature than "transforming leadership" with the implied and subtle change from a process in which a leader participates to a state of being or character of a leader. (1995, p. 10)

Bass (1985) developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) which is used to determine transformational leadership factors: Charisma, Individualized Consideration, and Intellectual Stimulation. The primary focus of studies using the MLQ and Bass's transformational construct is to discover the significant characteristics of leaders. For Bass, leadership is leader centered. It is not an ongoing process engaging leaders and followers in a growing, transforming relationship.

Another major distinction between Burns and Bass centers on the relationship of leadership to morality. Burns views transforming leadership as morally elevating.

Moral leadership is not mere preaching, or the uttering of pieties, or the insistence on social conformity. Moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers. I mean the kind of

leadership that can produce social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs. (p. 4)

Bass (1985) suggests the effects of transformational leadership could be morally uplifting, or it could be costly to all concerned. Transformational leadership is morally neutral, it is instead focused on the leader's ability to inspire followers to perform beyond their typical expectations by committing their behavior to whatever values and outcomes are important to the group/organization. The values of the group/organization may or may not be morally uplifting, they simply supersede and transform individual values. Apologists for the morally neutral point of view usually center their argument around the ambiguity of morality. For example:

One could argue that a leadership paradigm that excludes all types of transformation except one, as in the moral requirement of Burns's definition, cannot be used generically as it is not representative of reality. Also, as definitions of what is moral and what is amoral may differ from person to person, it is impossible for researchers to agree on a conceptual definition of transformational leadership according to Burns's framework (Egan, Sarros & Santora, 1995, p. 103).

The moral neutrality proponents refuse to become entangled in arguments about right and wrong to determine if leadership has been exercised. Instead, both Hitler and Gandhi are judged to have exercised leadership.

Other scholars have entered this discussion, suggesting that the very term leadership implies elevation of a group or society to a higher moral plane as well as a higher level of performance. Sashkin, Rosenbach, and Sashkin have described the leader as one who has a positive impact: "We see the transformational leader as steward, not just empowering followers toward personal achievements but as showing followers how to help others direct their need for power in ways that benefit all" (1995, p. 7).

Leadership in the Post-Industrial Paradigm: Joseph Rost

Another important leadership scholar, Joseph Rost, conducted a comprehensive examination of the literature, and has developed an excellent case for his definition of leadership which also supports the notion that leadership is uplifting: "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (1991, p.102). In Rost's definition, leadership is transforming (intend real changes); it has a multidirectional noncoercive basis (influence relationship); rather than something a leader does to the group, leaders and followers are engaged together in a relationship where leadership is the activity generated in pursuit of the intended real changes valued by the relationship community; and finally the relationship is based on mutuality of common reasons/values (purposes) rather than agreed upon goals. Rost suggests this definition is more consistent with the needs of what he calls a post-industrial societal paradigm.

Predicting the nature of the post-industrial paradigm is complicated. Chaos theory, which is finding growing acceptance in the physical sciences (Gleick, 1987), may also inform the social sciences. Chaos theory suggests the next dominant paradigm will exhibit familiar patterns similar to previous paradigms, but its precise nature will be dictated by adumbrative nonlinear interrelations of multiple variables. Thus, it is impossible to predict with accuracy the paradigm that will follow the industrial paradigm. Rost has correctly observed that many of the edifices, rules, and assumptions associated with the industrial paradigm are crumbling under the siege of the emerging requirements of the post-industrial global village. We probably are currently in a state of transition between major societal paradigms.

Rost's definition is an intellectually responsible attempt to provide a conclusive definition of leadership. In the forward to Rost's book, James MacGregor Burns suggests Rost's work has the potential for becoming the Bible for a "new school of leadership to face the leadership demands of the twenty-first century" (Rost, 1991, p. xii). Burns also accurately observed that Rost's definition ignores a reality present in the industrial paradigm which has not yet disappeared in the transition between paradigms: conflict is generated when people undergo transformations (Rost, 1991). Like many other definitions of leadership, the contemporary applicability of Rost's definition in the transitional paradigm is "episodic" (Rost, 1995).

Leadership and Adaptive Work: Ronald Heifetz

Ronald Heifetz has explored leadership as a construct and has developed a social reconstructionist (Rost, 1991) description of leadership rather than a succinct definition. Heifetz also sides with Burns and Rost suggesting that leadership is concerned with facilitating positive changes (adaptations) for individuals and organizations.

Heifetz organizes his description of leadership around two primary factors. The first factor is concerned with a leader's authority or lack of authority. According to Heifetz, formal position holders in organizations are defined as leaders with authority (1994). Heifetz defines authority as "conferred power to perform a service" (p. 57). Authority is conferred as part of an exchange, the conditions of which must be fulfilled or the authority can be withdrawn. Thus, when people in authority accept their positions they also must accept the responsibility of meeting the needs of those who sanction the position.

The exercise of leadership however, is not solely reserved for those in authority. Heifetz suggests leaders who lead without holding formal organizational positions are leaders without authority (1994).

Because we are not used to distinguishing between leadership and authority, the idea of leadership without authority is new and perplexing. As a result, the person without authority gets few relevant pointers from scholarship. Analysts have generally neglected the distinctive problems and opportunities of mobilizing work from positions of little or no authority. Thus, nearly all studies

of leadership, in addition to many histories, focus primarily on figures of authority. (Heifetz, 1994, p. 184).

The second major factor Heifetz uses to help us understand the leadership construct is the distinction between technical and adaptive problems. Heifetz claims problems fit into three general types: Type I problems are those for which there is a clear problem definition, the solution is also equally clear, and the role of the leader is to provide the technical solution to resolve the problem for the follower(s). Type II problems also have a clear problem definition and solution, but the solution requires the follower to learn more about the problem and solution before the follower can make the necessary personal/organizational adaptations to resolve the problem. The leader's role is to facilitate learning and support the follower(s) through the necessary adaptation. Type III problems are not clearly defined and have no clear solution. These problems require both the leader and the follower to learn about them, and both leader and follower may have to make adaptations in order for solutions to emerge. In both Type II and Type III problems, adaptive work must be managed by the leader so that the follower does not become overloaded, but can stay focused and succeed in making the necessary adaptations.

Adaptive work is an essential element of Heifetz's description of leadership. His assumption is that much of successful human behavior reflects an appropriate adaptation to circumstances. Propitious social adaptations are used by a culture or a subset of the culture to successfully respond to its challenges. Adaptive work is difficult because people must learn new ways of being, doing, and relating in their social and physical environment. Adaptive work introduces values challenges, conflict, disequilibrium, and uncertainty. If left alone, most people would choose to avoid adaptive work because of the stress it generates. For Heifetz, leadership encourages people and organizations to choose to do their adaptive work and supports them through the stressful process.

The Leadership Forest: An Integrating Definition of Leadership

These scholars have carefully described and defined leadership. For Burns transactional and transforming leadership are exercised in an environment which is influenced intensely by conflict. Rost envisions a societal paradigm where the need for transactions is minimized as conflict gives way to collaboration. Leadership results when collaborative groups intend to act toward real, positive (transforming) changes. Heifetz suggests that in some situations leaders have technical solutions at hand and they can develop a management strategy implementing solutions, which are readily accepted by followers. Other kinds of problems, even if they have technical solutions, may require leaders and followers to make adaptations. Adaptations successfully and positively resolve the dissonance between stated or desired values and actual behaviors or environmental circumstances.

The evolving tenets of transforming leadership have been described by these scholars. Bass's definition of transformational leadership is consistent with the hierarchical leader centered notion of leadership common to the industrial

paradigm. Burns's transforming leadership process signals the beginning of the end of the hierarchical character of leadership found in the industrial paradigm. Rost's definition has current episodic applicability and may become the standard definition for leadership in a favorable new post-industrial paradigm. Heifetz's description can be widely applied in the current transitional paradigm. The notion that leadership is analogous with the facilitation of adaptive work is a fresh way of looking at the transforming leadership construct. The work of these scholars are the "trees" which are the primary species in the transforming leadership forest. An integrating definition of leadership is forwarded to describe this forest.

Management

It is important to first distinguish management from leadership. Management is the execution of technical/transactional solutions to technical problems where no adaptation/transformation is necessary. Heifetz (1994) calls these Type I problems. In this definition, management falls on the transactional leadership end of Burns's (1978) continuum of leadership. Self-managed, collaborative groups described by Rost can readily apply technical solutions to technical problems.

Leadership

The definition of leadership which delimits the transforming leadership forest has three general qualities. 1) Leadership is a process concerned with identifying and learning about problems, and providing the catalyst for the adaptive action executed by the followers/group which resolves problems. Problems are conditions which require reduction of dissonance between stated or intended values and/or behaviors and actual behaviors and/or environmental circumstances. Adaptive action usually produces conflict and/or stress. It is possible under unusual circumstances for "Rostian" collaborative groups to engage in adaptive action even though adaptive action produces conflict. In most situations however, conflict must be regulated (when possible) by a leader and resolved by the followers/group. Successful resolution of the conflict and associated stress allows the group to persevere with the adaptive action. 2) Leadership can be exercised by a person (or group) with an established formal or informal position in an organization. In addition, a person or group external to an organization, or without a formal or informal organizational position can also exercise leadership. 3) Leadership is morally uplifting. To engage in adaptive action which does not further the authentic needs of followers is to mislead, engaging in mere power wielding (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991; Heifetz, 1994) rather than leadership.

Adaptive action is transforming leadership. Actual and theoretical examples from the works of Rost (1991) and Heifetz (1994) illustrate adaptive action as it is expressed in favorable paradigmatic situations. In addition, contributions from scholars like Senge (1990), Stacey (1992), Conger (1988), Sergiovanni (1986), Terry (1993), Wills (1994), and many, many others can also enrich our understanding of leadership when they are examined from this integrating frame of reference.

Implications for Leadership Scholars and Teachers

It is unprofitable for leadership scholars to continue to focus their study on the leader and what the leader does. Adaptive action is not the characteristics or the traits of a leader, nor is it a collection of leadership skills. Adaptive action requires leaders and followers to participate in a process, not an event. Both leaders and followers must be participants in the process. The characteristics of the relationship, the roles and responsibilities of followers, change as one moves from leader dependent situations described by Heifetz (1994) to conditions which support Rost's (1991) collaborative groups.

Leadership studies must be concerned with the analysis of all of the elements of the adaptive action process. Numerous courses, programs, and projects have been established to promote the development of leadership in communities, elementary and secondary schools, and in colleges and universities (DeMott, 1995; Freeman & King, 1992). The development of followers is easily as critical as the traditional focus of developing leaders through leadership programs. Scholars have been far too silent about this essential element of leadership studies. Responsible, involved followership, "applied civics" (Bigelow, 1995) has not been the focus of leadership educators and scholars. Recently, leadership scholars have been challenged to reinvent ways to teach citizenship as an integral part of leadership studies:

...are not leadership studies themselves a catalyst for change? Are they not rooted in Jeffersonian democracy? Are they not basic to the idea of citizenship? Are they not directly involved with service? Are they not naturally interdisciplinary? Are they not unusually suited (albeit indirectly) to aid people in developing values for and by themselves? Are they not flexible? And are they not applicable to any group (e.g., elementary and secondary students to whom little attention has been given--where the greatest opportunities exist)? If such a list as this were acceptable to the profession, then, instead of spending time to develop theories of leadership and to write more books about it, doesn't it behoove the leaders in leadership studies to get on the ball and begin to develop an educational strategy? (Bigelow, 1994, p. 6)

A new educational strategy for leadership and citizenship education can be subsumed under the adaptive action construct. The foundation of adaptive action is the transforming leadership theory originated by Burns (1978), Rost's (1991) prophetic vision of the future where collaborative groups are involved in real (transforming) changes, and Heifetz's notion that with or without authority leadership facilitates the resolution of problems by managing the adaptive work of followers. For Heifetz and Burns leadership is a function of a relationship between a leader and followers. Rost forwards the notion that leadership is something self-managed groups do. Each of these scholars identifies the necessity for leaders and followers to be engaged in a transforming process. Understanding and developing ways to teach what it means to be a responsible,

involved, *adaptive* follower represents a new path to explore in the transforming leadership forest.

The individual contributions of these scholars through their definitions/descriptions of leadership are profound. They bring into focus the huge and ambiguous leadership literature. Yet as individual works their efficacy is limited to favorable episodic circumstances that support the theory. They are too parochial to be the singular definition of leadership, and leave too much unsaid about followership. Taken together, however, they form the foundation for a new transforming leadership gestalt--adaptive action--which scholars can explore with their students. This gestalt, then, is the basis upon which the scholars in leadership studies can "get on the ball and begin to develop an educational strategy" (Bigelow, 1994, p. 6).

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