

Educational administrators: Leaders or managers?

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Introduction

The image is striking. A business man dressed in his suit is sitting on a wooden chair that has been placed on the pebbles very close to the water's edge. He has his legs crossed, hands in his lap, shoulders back and with an air of authority he is staring out across the lake. In the background one can see the mountains on the other side of the lake, giving way to the expansive sky overhead. Words have been overprinted in the sky which simply read, 'Now I invent instead of Predict. I am a Visionary'. Underneath the image the rest of the advertisement begins by proclaiming, 'The Advanced Management Program—Creating Innovators.'

Leadership is both the most studied and least understood topic in all social science

If we were to observe the activity where one had to say the first thing that comes to mind when one hears the words 'Invent, Visionary and Innovators,' we could almost guarantee that the first word would not be 'manager,' 'Leader', possibly; but 'Manager', extremely unlikely. Leadership literature often goes to great lengths to attempt to differentiate the roles and functions of a leader and a manager. This is exactly why the advertisement described above (from the Harvard Business Review, January 2007, p.11) is so intriguing.

This raises the question: What exactly is the distinction between leadership and management? Is it important to differentiate between the two? If there is a difference, does that difference truly affect the day-to-day workplace (Kotterman, 2006)? Or is this much like the 'is a leader born or made debate' which Warren Bennis (1996, p.156) labels as an 'indulgent diversion from the urgent matter of how to best develop leadership (and one could add, management) ability'? In other words, does this debate simply distract leaders and managers from doing what they need to do most? Managing and leading!

The aim of this article, first, is to briefly outline the differences, often cited in literature, between leadership and management, because as Kotterman

(2006, p.13) notes, 'Virtually all organisations . . . are concerned about the difference and believe it is important'. We then look at the roles of leadership and management in the practice of administration.

Let us return to the distinction between leadership and management. However, before one gets very far on this 'journey', attempting to separate the differences between leaders and managers, one encounters a 'speed hump', and it is potentially a large one. This hump has to do with the very definition of the two terms. Leadership theorists have pointed out on many occasions that there are nearly as many definitions for leadership as attempts to characterise it (Kotterman, 2006). This gives rise to people like Warren Bennis stating that 'leadership is both the most studied and least understood topic in all of social science' (Bennis, 1989, cited in Krantz, 1990, p.50).

The dilemma then is immediately apparent, if there is disagreement in the definitions, how then is it possible to find agreement on what distinguishes the two? Added to this is the fact that the two terms are so often used interchangeably in the workplace that any differences that may exist have become blurred. It is not surprising then that Gordon and Yukl (2004, cited in Kotterman, 2006, p.13) declare, 'The ongoing debate as to whether or not a clear distinction exists between leadership and management generally remains unresolved.'

Yet it is perhaps in attempting to differentiate between leaders and managers that ironically we can also come closer to understanding the role of those in leadership positions. The framework used in this article to further investigate this difference is to examine the literature in terms of leadership and management within the domains of vision, change and people.

In terms of vision, Bennis and Nanus in their book *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge*, state:

'To manage' means 'to bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of or responsibility for, to conduct.'

'Leading' is 'influencing, guiding in direction, course, action, opinion.' The distinction is critical. Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing. The difference may be summarised as activities of vision and judgement—effectiveness versus activities of mastering routines—efficiency (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p.21).

Maxwell (1993, p.iv), says 'Management is the process of assuring that the program and objectives of the organisation are implemented. Leadership, on the other hand, has to do with casting vision and motivating people.' Kotter (1990, p.104) expands on this by arguing that 'managers ensure plan accomplishment by controlling and problem solving, but for leadership achieving a vision requires motivating and inspiring people'. It is claimed that leaders 'chase vision', while managers 'chase goals' (Boomer, 2007). Or in the words of Bennis, 'The manager has his eye always on the bottom line; while the leader has his eye on the horizon' (cited in Higginson, 1996, p.26).

Christians who are called to lead should always remember the biblical advice, 'where there is no vision, the people perish' (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). Further, vision is seen as 'the commodity of leaders' (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p.18) and 'it is what provides a steady, stabilizing core for leadership' (Dale, 1992, p.8).

Finally, Krantz (1990, p.59) concludes, 'If the emerging literature is any guide, then the issues of vision, purpose, and meaning are pivotal for developing leadership capacity in modern enterprises.'

This leads to the second domain for investigation: Change. Kotter (1990) argues that leadership copes with change, while management brings order and consistency. He believes that part of the leadership function is to produce change, however in doing this the leader needs to be aware that the more change is initiated, the greater the demands on leadership will be. Therefore, in creating change 'the leader must be able to generate highly energised behaviour to overcome inevitable barriers that will be associated with it' (Kotter, 1990, p.107). While leaders can create this change, it often falls to the task of management to see through and implement these changes.

In summarising some of the recent findings in the leadership and management literature within the change domain Kotterman (2006, p.14) states:

Managers have a narrow purpose and try to maintain order, stabilize work, and organize resources. Leaders seek to develop new goals and align organizations (Kotter, 1990; Zaleznik, 1998). Managers control and problem solve while leaders motivate and inspire. Finally, managers produce standards, consistency, predictability, and order. Leaders produce the potential for dramatic change, chaos, and even failure (Kotter, 1990).

Attention now focuses on the third and final domain, that of people. According to Waldron (1990, p.6), 'Management tends to focus on things, when perhaps, through leadership, we need to focus on people'. On the other hand, Buckingham (2005, p.72), couldn't disagree more. 'Great managers,' he says, 'discover what is unique about each person and then capitalize on it.' He goes so far as to define management as 'the genius of understanding individual differences' (Interview with Moorcroft, 2005, p.11).

Buckingham (2005) likens the role of a manager to that of an expert in the game of chess. In chess, each chess piece moves in a different way, and you can't play if you don't know how each piece moves. He believes that the ability to keep tweaking roles to capitalise on the uniqueness of each person is the essence of great management. He goes on to explain:

Great managers know and value the unique abilities and even the eccentricities of their employees, and they learn how best to integrate them into a coordinated plan of attack. This is the exact opposite of what great leaders do. Great leaders discover what is universal and capitalise on it. Their job is to rally people toward a better future (Buckingham, 2005, p.72).

Buckingham, in an interview with Moorcroft (2005, p.11) concludes by stating, 'If you want to manage, start with the individual, if you want to lead, start with the future.'

In this brief survey of the leadership and management literature, three key areas of difference have emerged:

- A leader casts a vision, while a manager implements it.
- A leader creates change, while management see these changes through.
- A leader motivates and inspires people to action, while a manager discovers the gifts and talents of a person and puts them to good use.

In comparing the different roles of the leader and manager, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that one role is more important than the other. Zaleznik (1992, p.127) isn't exactly complementary when he says, 'A manager is a problem solver. . . it takes neither genius nor heroism to be a manager.' Another famous example comes from the advertisement in the New York Times which began with the words, 'People don't want to be managed. They want to be lead. . . ' (cited in Maxwell, 1993, p.iv). Harris Lee wisely warns of the dangers of thinking one role is more important than the other when he said:

To appreciate the roles of leadership one need not, however, embrace a negative attitude towards management. While it is helpful to distinguish

“A manager is like a chess expert: each piece moves in a different way and you can't play if you don't know how they move”

leadership from management, in actual practice the two activities are often integrated (Lee 2003, p.32).

Indeed, Waldron (1996, p.3) suggests 'Leadership and management, as a practice, are not discrete—they are inextricably interwoven'. He goes on to say 'One can persuasively argue that in the exercise of management one displays leadership and, on the other hand, in the exercise of leadership one displays management.' Supporting this conclusion Vercoe (1994, p.65) asserts, 'The essence of management is, from my point of view, something else that cannot be learned in a strict sense; it is leadership.' It was Gardner (1990, cited in Kotterman, 2006, p.15) who noted that every time he had encountered a first-class manager, the manager turned out to possess a lot of leadership ability. Finally, Bass (1990, cited in Kotterman, 2006, p.15) would agree, concluding that 'the vast amount of research into leadership versus management indicates that sometimes leaders manage and sometimes managers lead.'

Because of this, Hybels (2002, p.145) in what he recognises some will say is an oxymoron, believes that one valid leadership style is what he has termed the 'managing leader'. Talking about this style he states, 'I'm describing a leader who has the ability to organise people, processes, and resources to achieve a mission.' He cites the biblical characters of both Joseph and Nehemiah as people who were excellent managing leaders.

So how does a 'managing leader' process these seemingly conflicting orientations? Particularly, when an emphasis on 'Leadership' with its focus on vision, change and motivation, from the management perspective, could be characterised as unguided opportunism where every new opportunity is pursued, ungrounded vision that lacks substance and is more akin to dreaming and wild fantasy, introducing the program of the week where something new is constantly being launched or tried, and premature responses to opportunities or ideas rather than performing appropriate due-diligence (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff & Thakor, 2006, p.157).

And an emphasis on 'Management' with its focus on organising, matching and implementing, from the leadership perspective, could be characterised as

micromanaging the work force so that they have little discretion, procedural rigidity that drives out independent thinking, over-regulation where outside controls make it impossible to do any thing but respond to rules, standards or procedures, and iron-bound tradition and the 'not-invented-here syndrome' where barriers exist to any suggestion for change or improvement (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff & Thakor, 2006, p.158).

Indeed, can such divergent perspectives ever be united?

Further, and perhaps more importantly, much of educational administrators' training, both formal and informal, has programmed them to first determine which of these orientations is 'right' and by elimination which is 'wrong'. And in practice it is so much easier just to emphasise one role over the other.

So how can administrators deal with divergent, even conflicting perspectives? How can one possibly be a 'managing leader'? Perhaps the answer lies in what Roger Martin (2007) has termed 'integrative thinking'. Integrative thinkers, according to him have

the predisposition and capacity to hold in their heads two opposing ideas at once. And then, without panicking or simply settling for one alternative or the other, they are able to creatively resolve the tension between those two ideas by generating a new one that contains elements of the others, but is superior to both (Martin, 2007, p.62).

Why not try integrative thinking. It may be the solution to some of your more difficult challenges.

TEACH

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“Integrative thinkers creatively resolve the tension between two opposing ideas”