

ABSTRACT
REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP
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Discussions and deliberations over the course of this conference have focused on orchestrating full careers; building excellence and leadership; developing a national network; and linking research to practice and policy changes. Accordingly, we have heard ideas and experiences related to the demands of work and family responsibilities and the pursuit of healthy lifestyles. We have heard how prominent nurse leaders have managed to juggle numerous activities, deal with competing demands, keep goals and priorities in perspective, and handle the pressures of their responsibilities. I note that concerns and questions have focused mostly on “**doing**”. What to do in certain situations. While no one asked how do you “**think**” about a particular situation or problem, you were advised to take some time to think. This I believe is very important, because the way that you think about something determines what you will do about it. So, my emphasis is on **thinking**.

Certainly, the leaders who have spoken here are exemplary of the respect and honor that can be earned by those who are able to consistently steer a group or organization along paths that enable them to achieve some specified purpose or outcomes—to do the right thing, right; to make important things happen. This implies the capability to influence the thoughts, decisions, and actions of others involved, such that their ideas and talents will be effectively utilized in the service of a group or organization. This is easier said than done. Yet, years of diligent investigations, have taught me that this is what leadership is all about.

I will share some reflections on that work, which began over 50 years ago and has continued to this day. It is my hope that these reflections will be useful to BAGNC Scholars, Fellows, and others who are endeavoring to make a difference in the quality of health care available to older adults throughout the country.

THE MEANING AND NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

From my early explorations to this day I have found various and often confusing conceptions of the meaning and nature of leadership. The term means different things to different people. It also means different things in different fields. Even in the same field, the term leadership may be used differently by certain scholars whose frame of reference is unlike that of others. Consequently there is no common language for talking about leadership—and no general theory to guide investigations of this phenomena (*James McGregor Burns, pp.vii; Barbara Kellerman, pp.ix-xi in Kellerman, ed. Leadership: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, 1984*).

Yet, there appears to be little doubt that effective leadership (what ever this is) is an essential asset for achieving the mission and goals of any viable organization or institution.

I define the term leadership as a *mechanism* for exerting influence within human relationships to achieve some specified purpose or goals. The term *mechanism*, as used in engineering, refers to a system of mutually adapted parts working together in--or as in-- a machine. Using this analogy, leaders and followers as the parts that must be fitted (mutually adapted) to work together as in a system, which is essential to steer the work and course of events-- within a group or organization-- along paths that must be taken to achieve some specified purpose or outcomes.

From this perspective, both leaders and followers are seen as the essential elements of leadership. Leadership is seen as the function of collectives, not of a single individual.

So, when I think of leadership, I envision an interactive process within a human collective during which one individual—say a leader-- influences the thoughts, decisions, or actions of those who are expected to follow and is concomitantly influenced by them—the followers.

I think that a good leader is ipso facto a good follower. I think that a good follower is one who assumes the role of leader as the situation demands.

From this perspective, leadership is plural. It is the function of a collective, which can not be effectively fulfilled by a single individual. The roles of both, leaders and followers are essential. Otherwise, there is no leadership.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

When I think of leadership development, I envision models and approaches for preparing individuals for effective performance in both, the role of leader and that of follower.

Those models avoid the tendency is to utilize narrow conceptions of leadership, which are focused mainly on **leaders, with inadequate attention to followers**. Those models/approaches give due attention to factors that enhance and those that are likely to inhibit effective leadership. They attend to the interactive and mutually dependent roles of leading and following and to the psychological, social, and political forces within the contexts of human collectives that can have a significant impact on performance of both, leaders and followers. Furthermore, they highlight important distinctions between leadership and management and the basis for those distinctions are described as clearly as possible.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Since leadership is often confused with management it is important to have some intelligent basis for distinguishing leadership from management. This is not an easy task, since definitions of management tend to vary as much as those of leadership. Nevertheless, I distinguish between leadership and management on the basis of three factors:

The first factor is: The necessity to link the function to formal organizations. Management is necessarily linked to formal organizations. Conversely, the leadership function is not necessarily linked to formal organizations.

The second factor is: The purpose of the function. The purpose of management is to fulfill those responsibilities that are most central to an organization's mission and survival. The purpose of leadership is to steer the course of events, within groups and organizations through cooperative and collaborative work towards some specified purpose or goals.

The Third factor is: The source of authority. The source of authority for management is the institution or organization. It is vested in positions within the hierarchy, not in the persons who hold those positions (Koontz and O'Donnell, 1972). The source of authority for leadership is the knowledge, expertise, and acumen of the person involved. That authority is confirmed to the extent that it is recognized and respected by members of the group or organization in which that person performs.

Authority for management is bestowed by the institution or organization.
Authority for leadership is earned by the individual and confirmed by his/her colleagues.

CONCLUSION

Finally, I feel compelled to note that I think of leadership development as a life time commitment. No matter how much experience, how much knowledge one may have acquired; no matter how capable we may think that we are at leading and following, there is always much more to be learned. This means that when it comes to leadership, we must not consider ourselves as finished products. To be consistently effective in leadership roles requires a life-long commitment and commensurate efforts, to develop and replenish the wisdom that effective leadership requires. To claim that wisdom, one must combine relevant experience and essential knowledge with the skill to apply them responsibly, critically, practically, and judiciously.

The basic tenets for this undertaking are: respect for self and others; responsibility for continuous self-improvement; and, the commitment to utilize of one's capabilities in the service of larger purposes, beyond the self. I have no doubt that the capacity to influence the course of events in human groups and organizations and in one's own life, is greatly enhanced by leadership development initiatives that are in conformance with these fundamental principles.