

The Failure of Correctional Management: Rhetoric Versus the Reality of Leadership

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THE FIELD of corrections has been sustained over the years as a result of dedicated, visionary administrators—persons who routinely manifest leadership. They are persons previously described as “progressive managers” (Cohn, 1995, 1987). Unfortunately, there are other top-level executives who do not provide their staffs with direction, are reactive rather than proactive in dealing with problems, and are those persons previously described as “pedestrian managers” (Cohn, 1995). Yet, competent management is not synonymous with leadership; the distinctions are significant.

For many administrators whose priority is to “keep the lid on,” their agencies, at best, provide adequate to mediocre service delivery systems. Staffs are not held accountable for working toward goal attainment, and they respond to crises as would “Chicken Little.” They apparently fail to understand that staff members really want direction, they genuinely look for additional resources to do their jobs competently, and they want to take pride in organizational success.

Correctional administrators and the superordinates they serve, unfortunately, perpetuate the myth that a criminal justice *system* actually operates in any given jurisdiction when, in point of fact, we have come to recognize that what we really have is a *non-system* (Freed, 1969; Cohn, 1974): a collection of individual agencies and programs loosely held together under the criminal justice umbrella, each dealing with the same clients, but each having created its own competitive turf. As a consequence, jurisdictional planning for a true system of criminal justice administration not only falters, it just does not happen as it should.

The Criminal Justice Non-System

I was asked recently by the chief justice of a mid-western supreme court to design a conference dealing with this issue. He expressed considerable concern that the non-system in his state worked against effective crime control and that, as a consequence, funds were being inappropriately spent, coordinated programming toward consensual goals was absent, and system-wide planning did not occur. For this chief justice, the issue was not the identification of what worked; rather, the critical concern was that of why agencies were not working as collaboratively as he thought they should.

In anticipation of a workshop in which representatives of all aspects of the criminal justice continuum in the state would come together to discuss goals, relationships, and communications, the design for this training session almost naturally fell into place. I designed a questionnaire for each of the participants to complete before the workshop. Each was asked to identify the three most critical problems facing his or her discipline. Thus, prosecutors had to identify what they believed to be their most pressing problems. Judges, probation and parole staffs, chiefs of police, sheriffs, and public defenders were asked the same question.

A second question asked participants the following: What, in your opinion, do you believe the other incumbents will identify as their most critical problems? They were instructed *not* to list what they believed to be the problems, but what the other respondents would identify and list related to their own disciplines. The findings, of course, were aggregated according to discipline.

For purposes of this article, the actual identification of problems is irrelevant to the significant conclusion that *no discipline by group came anywhere near identifying what the other groups identified as their critical problems, even though there was considerable consensus on the identification of problems as listed by their colleagues within the discipline.*

During the course of the workshop, it was not uncommon to hear: “I didn’t know that!” “Are you sure that’s the law?” “I didn’t know you had that program.” It became obvious that the major players in criminal justice administration in that state had blindspots and were ignorant of other agencies’ programs and activities and that there was no routine process of communications among and between them.

One chief of police was astounded to learn that juvenile detention workers were governed by law regarding intake. He had reported that one of his problems was that his officers always believed that youths brought to a detention center were routinely released even before paperwork could be completed. A member of the parole board admitted to being unaware of how parole violators could contribute to jail overcrowding because hearings for such inmates were frequently delayed—at the convenience of the board. A public defender complained that she was not routinely made aware of cases to be assigned to her due to faulty communications from the court, prosecutor, and jail.

All of the participants recognized that in the absence of an appropriate Management Information System, or some other data collection and analysis system, there was no way to determine overall cost-effectiveness of their various programs and services, nor was there any process in place to measure program effectiveness in terms of goal attainment. They also clearly admitted that there was no vehicle in place to communicate with one another to discuss problems of a mutual or inter-agency nature.

Parenthetically, it is notable that had there been some kind of coordinating council in the state, this workshop would not have been designed in the manner it was; rather, manager-leaders would have been given an opportunity to review how they communicate and problem-solve and otherwise develop appropriate solutions for defined problems.

Management Effectiveness Versus Leadership Effectiveness

The success of any organization whether it be public or private is measured by the degree to which products or services are produced in ways that achieve explicit goals as well as by its effectiveness. As one attempts to examine "success," it is important to distinguish between *management* and *leadership*. As Hersey and Blanchard (1977, pp. 111–112) suggest, leadership is a broader concept than management—a special kind of leadership in which the accomplishment of organizational goals is paramount.

Leadership, on the other hand, is the process of attempting to influence the behavior of someone else. Therefore, it becomes obvious that all leadership behavior is not directed toward achieving organizational goals. It is also a fact that when one attempts to influence someone else in the organization, the "influencer" may not even be a manager.

As will be discussed later, all managers are not leaders and all leaders are not managers. The leader is one who is an effective communicator, someone who has vision, and certainly one who is willing to understand and respect the roles of other persons with whom he or she should and does work. Thus, the participant at the above-discussed workshop who indicated that he didn't know something of importance, not only was sharing his ignorance; he revealed that he might have been a manager, but certainly not a leader.

Power

Although research findings in the area of leadership are often confusing if not contradictory, there is some agreement that one of the characteristics of leadership is that leaders exercise *power*. Etzioni (1961) many years ago discussed the difference between *position power* and *personal power*—a distinction that springs

from his concept of power as the ability to induce or influence behavior.

He claims that power is derived from an organizational office, personal influence, or both. Therefore, individuals who are able to induce other individuals to behave in a certain way because of their positions in the organization are considered to have position power. An example here is that of a chief probation officer instructing staff on how to complete a presentence investigation. Individuals who derive their power from their followers, however, are considered to have personal power; in fact, such persons may not have any positional power in the organization. Examples here include the manager who has charisma and staff willingly follow his or her lead, as well as the correctional officer who inspires inmates to want to attain more education. It is also possible, moreover, that some individuals exhibit both position and personal power

Position power can be elusive if not temporary even though a manager is believed to have sufficient control over the work of staff. But, in most public agencies, this kind of positional power is also *derivative*. Chief probation officers usually are answerable to a judge or a county executive, who at any time can reduce the chief's power even though he or she continues to occupy that top-level position. The same would hold in the case of a jail administrator who is appointed by a sheriff. Therefore, while authority attaches to the position and power attaches to the person, both can be stripped or changed by a superordinate.

Personal power is undeniably linked to leadership and can be described as the extent to which followers respect, feel good about, and are committed to their leader and who see their personal and organizational goals as being satisfied by the personal goals of their leader. In other words, personal power is the extent to which people are willing to follow a leader. As a result, personal power in an organizational setting comes from below—the followers. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1977, p. 113),

Although managers certainly can influence the amount of personal power they have by the way they treat their people, it is a volatile kind of power. It can be taken away rapidly by followers. Make a few dramatic mistakes and see how many people are willing to follow. Personal power is a day-to-day phenomenon—it can be earned and it can be taken away.

Pomrenke (1994, pp. 37–38) links managerial effectiveness with leadership skills that need to be combined in order to achieve a successful organization. He examines three basic areas of activity (as obtained from Kotter, 1990, p. 4):

1. Establishing Direction: developing a vision of the future (often the distant future), as well as strategies for producing the changes needed to achieve that vision.
2. Aligning People: communicating the direction to those whose cooperation may be needed, so as to cre-

ate coalitions that understand the vision and are committed to its achievement.

3. **Motivating and Inspiring:** keeping people moving in the right direction—despite major political, bureaucratic, and resource barriers to change—by appealing to very basic, but often untapped, human needs, values, and emotions.

From a simplified, managerial perspective, then, leadership in an organization is indeed *influence*—influencing others to complete tasks as effectively and as efficiently as possible and according to explicit organizational programmatic goals.

Leadership Traits, Characteristics, and Skills

Whether leaders are born or are trained is a debate without significance. Kotter (1990, p. 5) suggests that while any manager can be trained in leadership principles, it is the ability to *utilize* those skills to influence others. In fact, in a study of successful executives conducted by Kotter (1990, pp. 106–107), he found that these persons shared common characteristics, including:

- high drive, ambition, or energy levels (to achieve and succeed)
- above-average intellectual skills (most important in direction setting)
- no mental/emotional health “baggage” (allows manager to interact with others with a minimum of distortions or problems)
- integrity (contributes to direction setting and satisfies needs of others)

Caroselli (1990, p. 4) (as quoted in Pomrenke, 1994, p. 38) produced a list of leadership traits that are behavioral in nature and further enhance the notion that personality and life experiences are an integral part of leadership development. According to her, an effective leader is intelligent, mature, self-confident, and ethical; welcomes change; and is able to communicate, follow through, develop teams, energize and motivate staff, share knowledge, and envision the future.

Behavioral Dimension of Leadership

Whether right or wrong, many researchers as well as practitioners believe that they understand management. In fact, volumes of research over the past 50 years have defined management in terms of tasks or activities such as planning, coordinating, and staffing. While debate continues over details, textbooks all tend to discuss the management process, with descriptions essentially the same.

Leadership, on the other hand, has been far less well defined, partly because we have decided that a leader has *charisma*. But the concept of charisma undoubtedly

falls into the same category as “beauty” or “love”—impossible to define due to its abstract nature and almost totally “in the eye of the beholder.” Thus, as Zenger (1985, pp. 45–52) delineates, there are six behavioral dimensions to leadership that separate the manager from the leader, including:

1. Leaders create values through communication.

Leaders are universally good communicators, especially when discussing organizational values and mission. They are articulate and express themselves persuasively, if not passionately, when in groups. Leaders also focus on emotional issues that connect them with their followers; that is, they focus on values that appeal to employees, enlisting them in a cause that gives purpose and meaning to their work. They convey a vision of the future while serving as catalysts to define the organization’s mission and potential, transmit that vision to their associates, and enlist their help in attaining it.

2. Leaders develop committed followers.

Leaders develop emotional connections with associates, who become their followers. They involve others, provide positive feedback, and build a climate of trust. People who work for manager-leaders feel responsible for making the organization successful. Further, when leadership is present, staff members know that they truly are empowered—because they are trusted and because they are treated as competent. The manager-leader appreciates and recognizes talent and thrives on the success of others.

3. Leaders inspire lofty accomplishments.

A manager-leader is willing to accept responsibility for ensuring that organizational goals and objectives are attained. He or she sets standards that are realistic and understandable, but high enough to demand creativity on the part of staff. Further, they use small wins to build confidence and motivate people to do more. Then, they move on to larger challenges, always trying to go beyond past achievements.

4. Leaders model appropriate behavior.

Leaders tend to be accepted by their colleagues, in part, because they reflect the values and norms of the group members, who, in turn, emulate leader behavior. Because of high trust, they will move as fast or as slow as the leader insofar as goal definition and task accomplishment are concerned. Followers want to see in their manager-leaders talent, a sense of direction, and one who is capable of taking action, but not precipitously.

5. Leaders focus attention on important issues.

Leaders are capable of defining problems and working toward feasible solutions. They are focused and, in effect, follow the river without being distracted by trib-

utaries. Leaders do not spend only 25 cents on a dollar issue, but, conversely, will not waste a dollar on a 25-cent issue. They have the ability to recognize that only a limited number of goals and activities can be pursued at any given time, so they take great care in determining what issues need emphasis and what the priorities should be.

6. Leaders connect their group to the outside world.

A leader clearly recognizes that there are internal and external environments, both of which need to be understood and which require special relationships. Leaders stay in touch with representatives of both groups, always sharing appropriate information. By keeping staff apprised of developments and issues, the leader helps colleagues to understand what others believe and are doing. Leaders, in fact, tend to spend more time away from their offices than behind their desks. They are constantly listening and communicating.

Zenger (1985, pp. 51–53) states that:

... organizations need both leadership and management. All leadership and no management would leave us without the required systems for analysis and control that make our organizations run efficiently. If we assume, however, that managers are in place, and we wish to add leadership skills to their repertoires, the following strategy can help promote those behaviors at all levels in the organization.

- Teach managers the nature of leadership.
- Train managers in leadership skills.
- Put managers in the proper environments to learn leadership.
- Train executives and managers to coach their subordinates on leadership skills (mentoring).
- Train subordinates to help train their managers in leadership.

However, all the reviews of leadership training (e.g., Gordon, 1985; Burke & Day, 1986; Bass, 1990; Lewis, 1995) stress that we know very little about the processes in leadership and managerial training that contribute to organizational performance. At least one reason for this lack of knowledge, according to Fiedler (1996, p. 244), is the scarcity of meaningful and rigorous research. The sole evaluation of most management training too often consists of no more than asking trainees how they liked the program or whether they thought they had learned something (Saari et al., 1988).

Insofar as leadership training is concerned, Fiedler (1996, p. 245) argues:

... that we are most likely to make important further progress in selecting managers less by assessing leader abilities and knowledge than by fully using the abilities and knowledge they already have.

He goes on to state (p. 245) that predictions of how a leader will perform in a particular job that are based on

the individual's intelligence have been marginal at best. Further, experience and job knowledge have been shown to be completely unrelated to leadership performance (see, for example, Fiedler & Garcia, 1987, pp. 31–48; Fiedler & House, 1994, pp. 1–16).

Leadership Style

McCall (1977, p. 4) summarizes the literature up to that time and reports that data show that leaders change their behavior in response to situational conditions as well as subordinate needs and behaviors. That is, leaders are not perceived by subordinates as having only "one style." Thus, the search for invariant truth—the one best-way-approach—may not hold answers for all situations and conditions. Most leaders, it appears, have numerous behaviors to choose from as they face a wide variety of circumstances; yet, a number of leadership behaviors may be equally effective in the same situation.

If the situation requires compassion, the leader is capable of being compassionate. If the situation requires toughness, the leader is capable of being tough. This does not make the leader either fickle or unable to make a decision. Rather, since there is a repertoire of behaviors available, he or she responds to situations appropriately. Subordinates clearly recognize that manager-leaders are willing to confront issues and seek resolutions that are in the best interest of the organization and the personnel involved.

For organizational leaders, according to McCall (1977, pp. 9–10), the data indicate that their worlds consist of many activities, most of which are of short duration, frequent interruptions, a large number of contacts beyond the immediate work group, and a preponderance of oral communication. And, "what observational studies have shown us is that the leadership we react to—the inspiration, or lack of it, the autocratic or democratic behavior—is only a part of the larger and more complex set of phenomena comprising the role of the leader" (p. 10).

Leadership Training

A review of the literature suggests that most leadership training is based on the behavioral science approach, which seems to repeat the mistakes of leadership research. As examples, training tends to focus quite narrowly on the relationship between the leader and the group and specifically on the issue of leadership style. It fails to take into account the nature of managerial work: many activities, fragmentation, variety, nonhierarchical relationships, etc. Also, when situational considerations are included in training, they tend to be limited to the situation of the immediate work group (e.g., the task of the group or the nature of the immediate problem).

It may be useful for managers who strive to become leaders to develop a knowledge of leadership styles and a sensitivity to their contingent application, but applying such learning on the job undoubtedly is a different matter. If this is the case, then I would suggest that instead of teaching content, leadership training might better focus on creating situations that truly reflect the daily demands of the manager-leader role and, through the use of extensive and intensive feedback, allow the trainees to study, understand, analyze, and practice their performance—and the impact on the self and others (not too dissimilar from assessment center practices).

One result of the hectic pace of managerial work is that managers seldom have time to reflect on their behavior, and this is also true for the manager-leader. On-the-job feedback is likely to be fragmented, badly timed, vague, sometimes hostile, and occasionally lacking altogether. Further, there are always “hidden agendas” that interfere with critical decision-making and problem-solving.

Therefore, one valuable anticipated outcome of a training experience (for leadership or management) is that it can provide the opportunity to examine and explore the process of how to be a leader. However, to maximize this potential, the training must generate behavior that approximates the leader’s actual role as well as provide valid feedback on what the behaviors were and their impact and significance.

Core Ideology and Envisioned Future

While the manager attends to daily functions to ensure that the organization fulfills its mission and according to declared processes, it is the leader who looks to the future, anticipates and attempts to control the future, and otherwise has a vision that is not only acceptable to subordinates, they do their best to ensure it becomes a reality.

Collins and Porras (1996, p. 66) discuss this aspect of leadership and write:

A well-conceived vision consists of two major components: *core ideology* and *envisioned future*. Core ideology, the yin in our scheme, defines what we stand for and why we exist (organizationally). Yin is unchanging and complements yang, the envisioned future. The envisioned future is what we aspire to become, to achieve, to create—something that will require significant change and progress to attain. . . . Any effective vision must embody the core ideology of the organization, which in turn consists of two distinct parts: core values, a system of guiding principles and tenets; and core purpose, the organization’s most fundamental reason for existence.

It appears, then, that core purpose is the organization’s reason for being; that is, what it is expected to accomplish. Moreover, an effective core purpose reflects people’s idealistic motivations for doing the organization’s work. The leader, therefore, understands that the core purpose does not just describe the organization’s output or services, it captures the *soul* of the organiza-

tion. Purpose, however, should not be confused with specific goals or agency-based strategies; the former is enduring and unchanging while the latter constantly changes. “The core purpose is forever pursued but never reached” (Collins & Porras, 1996, p. 69).

Core ideology is not created, it is *discovered*. It does not come from an administrative order, a court decision, or a law. It does not come from the external environment. You understand it by looking inside, for it has to be authentic. It reflects core values that are truly and passionately held. And it is the leader who helps subordinates to identify and embrace these core values. The manager, on the other hand, is only concerned with output and numbers, not with why the organization exists at all. It is the leader, furthermore, who attracts to his or her organization potential staff who are predisposed to share core values and purpose, retains them, and pushes out those who do not embrace these values. *Thus, the successful leader is one who views the building of strength of the organization as a primary way of creating the future.*

According to Collins and Porras (1996, pp. 76–77):

Many executives trash about with mission statements and vision statements. Unfortunately, most of these statements turn out to be a muddled stew of values, goals, purposes, philosophies, beliefs, aspirations, norms, strategies, practices, and descriptions. They are usually a boring, confusing, structurally unsound stream of words that evoke the response “True, but who cares?” Even more problematic, seldom do these statements have a direct link to the fundamental dynamic or visionary [organization] . . . *preserve the core and stimulate progress.* (Emphasis added)

The concern of the leader then becomes one where the vision or mission of the organization is cast into an effective context for building a visionary organization. He or she leads and subordinates (and colleagues) follow because they are motivated to want to, because the vision is congruent with personal values, and because they want the organization to prosper.

Intellect and Performance

The finding that intellectual abilities and experience do not seem to predict performance has major implications for management. Effective leadership requires sound judgment, wise decisions, the ability to evaluate both simple and complex information, and a commitment to create and translate a vision for the organization. These and similar attributes are intellectual functions. Yet, we seem to place more trust in leaders who have experience and expertise than in those who are relatively inexperienced and know very little about the task.

The fact that these intellectual resources and leadership performance are unrelated suggests that they contribute to performance about as often as they fail to contribute or are detrimental to performance. Therefore, Fielder (1996, p. 245) asserts that “helping leaders

to make effective use of their cognitive resources, for which they were hired in the first place, would also be the most efficient and cost-effective method for improving leadership performance.”

Discussion

Whether leaders are born or are created is an academic argument that does not help us understand how leadership skills can be enhanced within an organizational context. While we recognize the difference between leadership and management, a successful organization strives to have manager-leaders: intelligent and experienced practitioners who not only define core values and purpose, they translate these into viable strategies that subordinates and colleagues accept and attempt to implement. They are motivated by the manager-leaders to create and sustain an organization that reflects their own values as well as those of the organization.

Although the research literature does not tell us conclusively what a leader is, how she or he operates, or training required to create or enhance leadership skills, somehow within organizations “we know leadership when we see it.” But leadership is more than that which is in the eye of the beholder, however important that is. It is a sustained approach to organizational prosperity; it is an environment in which creativity exists; it is an organization that has vision, has direction, and anticipates the future for the changes that are likely to—and should—occur.

In the final analysis, the literature on leadership suggests not only that leadership is a complex phenomenon, but that it reflects an interaction between the leader and the leadership situation. However, this principle still must be translated into practice. Fiedler (1996, p. 249) states: “We cannot make leaders more intelligent or more creative, but we can design situations that allow leaders to utilize their intellectual abilities, expertise, and experience more effectively.”

Rhetoric about leadership in terms of what is desired for the organization is not helpful. The reality of leadership, how leaders behave and how they can be trained, on the other hand, is what we need to understand and translate into practice.

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