Chapter 11
From Followers to Leaders:
Building First-Time Leaders Through Transformational Leadership and Lifelong Learning

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to respond to the emerging scholarship regarding first-time leaders and their situational and potential lifelong learning environment. While transformational leadership may be the long-term goal, this chapter explains how the process of other traditional leadership theories can help assess and build upon its effectiveness. In this regard, this chapter argues that transformational leadership can be conceptually understood through five other supporting leadership theories, namely behavioral, psychodynamic, situational, path-goal, and leader-member exchange. Thus, there are essential characteristics from traditional leadership theories and others that can help aspiring transformational first-time leaders. Through lifelong learning and development of these leadership approaches, culminating characteristics for aspiring transformational first-time leaders must include not only motivation and morality, but also care and concern for others.

INTRODUCTION

The central question of this chapter considers which characteristics and experience of first-time leadership are best suited for aspiring transformational leaders? This central question requires a deeper analysis into both characteristics and experiences of leadership. We argue that the essential characteristics are drawn from other fundamental leadership approaches. Also, that significant experiences serve as resources for continued education, development, and lifelong learning. From the perspective of first-time leaders, many of them have acquired these characteristics and have identified such experiences that can allow for becoming transformational leaders. Thus, this chapter helps aspiring first-time, transformational leaders to emerge more confident and certain of their role and impact upon individuals, groups, organizations, and our greater society.

Given the rapid changes in our society, there is an opportunity to review leadership research and theory in newer ways. A leader cannot only exist or function in complete isolation. The success and effectiveness of leaders greatly depend upon the support surrounding leaders. Also, such leaders must consider how to not only receive and nurture support, they must learn how to develop themselves while developing their followers and members to become leaders as well. However, less attention has been given to how followers, members, and other leaders must commit to the process of building leaders, especially first-time leaders or those who may be at the early stages in age, knowledge, experience, even ability. Thus, there requires attention into how to build and develop leaders while they lead others.

BACKGROUND: BUILDING LEADERS AS WE FOLLOW

The current aphorism, "build the plane as we fly it," is a memorable expression that helps to describe the principle of acting in real-time, while figuring out the specifics at a later time, or even at the same time. This aphorism arguably describes the obvious feeling of first-time leaders. In fact, emotions, and feelings such as risk and uncertainty, are relevant to all leaders (including first-time leaders). Yet such feelings and emotions do not solely belong to the leader. It would be perilous to ignore the role that followers or fellow members play in the support of first-time leaders, which influences the overall action, feeling, emotion, and effectiveness of the leadership situation (Bryman, 2011).

For this reason, we propose a similar expression of "building leaders as we follow" to capture the collective role of leaders and their teams to make leaders effective and successful through the real-time process of development. To build leaders in this way, there must be attention given to lifelong learning (Yorks & Scott, 2014), or the continuous learning that helps build intelligence, confidence, and experience. Imagine how motivated a leader would be, if she knew that she had the full knowledge and support of her team and colleagues.

Some historical theories, such as trait theory, or the Lange-James theory of emotions, places the leader in isolation. Left with their own personal traits, characteristics, actions, and emotions, leaders must present themselves as sufficiently finished products. William James (1911) *On vital reserves*: *The gospel of relaxation,* gives an explanation about actions and emotions regarding what James describes as the psychological literature of Lange-James Theory:

"So to feel brave, act as if we were brave, use all our will to that end, and a courage-fit will very likely replace the fit of fear" (p. 45-46).

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