

Chapter 10

Preparing Managers to Lead for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

The psychological theories of leadership have a great deal to offer today's organizational leaders. Four of these theories—transactional, transformational, authentic, and servant leadership—are complementary in style, aiming to serve the self-actualization of employees as well as the greater good of the organization. This chapter explores the similarities and differences between these leadership styles, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their basic principles and assumptions, especially as pertains to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practitioners in educational settings. This chapter examines the benefits of integrating these theories, along with some newer and lesser-known theories, into a multimodal approach that can be effective for managers coaching team members toward greater organizational equity. A brief case comparison illustrates how the principles of DEI leadership can be applied.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in leaders as well as in leadership styles, approaches, and personal traits continues to draw attention across the behavioral and social sciences. However, leadership is not solely the interest of academics; indeed, a quick Google search of the term leadership results in some 200 possible definitions. One definition of leadership frequently referenced in the literature is by Northouse (2019), who said that “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). With this definition in mind, much investigation has taken place to uncover the best processes for influencing individuals, as well as ways leaders can identify common goals and strategies for bringing out the best in others, while creating as little interpersonal harm as possible. Moreover, the

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hunger for ethical and authentic leaders is widespread, especially considering the continuing distrust in and dissatisfaction with—as well as corruption among—many of today’s leaders (Covelli & Mason, 2017). However, despite this high level of general interest in the development of good leadership, while surveying the literature related specifically to answering the question of what style of leadership is best for organizational change aimed at facilitating diversity and equity within institutions of higher learning, Adserias et al. (2017) found that little such direct research has been conducted. It is currently unclear what link, if any, exists between different leadership styles and the effectiveness of diversity agenda implementation.

What leadership is and what makes a good leader remain critical questions, especially as pertains to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practitioners in educational and managerial settings. This chapter seeks to examine four approaches to leadership that center on ethical, just, and inclusive leadership behaviors: transactional, transformational, authentic, and servant leadership. A definition, core assumptions, and principles are provided for each theory, concluding with a discussion about their cultural considerations and relevance to DEI practitioners. The chapter does not provide an exhaustive review of these leadership theories; rather, the focus is on key concepts and linkages to inclusion and on their potential for individual, institutional, and broader social transformation. The authors make the case that, when integrated with several additional relevant theoretical approaches, these theories have the potential to serve as a diversity-centered, equity-advancing, inclusive approach to managerial leadership and leadership development.

The first author draws on close to three decades of facilitation, professional coaching, action research, and field study specializing in DEI leadership; management communication; and group dynamics. Her field research on leading for equity provides the theoretical underpinnings for this chapter. She posits that equity leadership theory has a vibrant role to play in the development of a more radically inclusive managerial style, one that incorporates other humanistic, people-centered, and empowerment models of management. This new conceptual framework leaves room for team-based operationalization that meets teams where they are (i.e., not a one-size-fits-all approach), while highlighting best or promising practices in equity leadership. The objectives of this chapter are (a) to provide an overview of the relevant existing leadership approaches, (b) to propose a multimodal approach to DEI leadership that integrates the best aspects of the existing approaches, and (c) to briefly illustrate what such a DEI leadership approach might look like when managers apply it as a tool for coaching leaders toward organizational equity.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership definitions, theories, and approaches abound. In a literature review on leadership theories and styles, for example, Khan et al. (2016) highlighted the following seven theories that have shaped many corresponding leadership frameworks: (a) great-man theory, (b) trait theory, (c.) contingency theories (situational), (d) style and behavior theory, (e) process leadership theory, (f) transactional theory, and (g) transformational theory. These authors also supplied a comparative analysis of transformational leadership and transactional leadership theories. Northouse (2019) mentioned as many as 65 classifications systems used over the decades to define leadership styles.

In the behavioral and social sciences, theories can be used to shape ideas and observations into research questions that can be tested and proved or disproved. Sole and Landrum (2016) further explained the importance of theories in general as follows:

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