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INTRODUCTION: APPLICATION AND PRACTICE ARE EVERYTHING

Let's face it – it's not easy to find a leadership book that translates theory into practical application. Simply understanding the basic principles of leadership is not adequate preparation for actually leading in today's workplace. To that end, this is not an ordinary textbook. In fact, it is more of a user's manual for distilling abstract theoretical concepts down to tangible, usable strategies and perspectives for being an effective leader in the modern organization.

Case in point: when teaching a course on theory, an educator's risk is someone in the room thinking to themselves, *'What a joke of a class. There is nothing here that I'll ever use in real life.'* You've been there before – an instructor going on and on about hard-to-digest theoretical concepts that are fuzzy at best when it comes to knowing how to put

them into practice. Inevitably, the end result is low excitement about the course, limited transfer of learning into application, and downright boredom. And who wants that?

The good news is that the authors of this book have been there too. Back in the day when we were studying leadership theory in school, acing the class was all about memorization with almost zero focus on application. Sure enough, when we took our first management jobs, we each had a blinding flash of the obvious: what we had learned about leadership theory did not match the everyday challenges that actual leaders face.

In short, as newly minted leaders we had no idea how to translate leadership theory into action within the constraints of the real workplace. For example, how can you be a servant leader if your company's organizational culture reinforces self-preservation at all costs as opposed to humbly serving others? Or better yet, how do you account for workforce diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI) dimensions such as race, gender, generational cohort, and cultural background when applying leadership theories based on research conducted in the 1970s with primarily white American males over 40? Ultimately, as leaders we had to figure out what to do – and what not to do – by trial and error alone. Not a great prescription for success!

Rest assured we have worked hard to ensure a better experience and outcome for you as a reader of this textbook. We have put a heavy weight on the *application* and *practice* of leadership theory in the modern workplace as opposed to just teaching theory for the sake of theory. What we know to be

true is that even the best theory does not mean anything unless you have clarity on how to apply it in the real world. It is therefore incumbent upon us as educator-practitioners to provide you with more than simply knowledge and facts; we must take the learning process to the next level by providing you with a clear line of sight into what leadership theory looks like when applied and practiced in the modern workplace.

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Whether you already have experience in leading people or are preparing for a future leadership role, we are committed to ensuring that by reading this book you will be well equipped to apply any of the leadership theories we cover both at work and in other aspects of your life. If not, it will be a snoozefest and ultimately, we will have failed. So let's get started with a quick background (in first person) on who we are and why we chose to write this text.

MEET ADAM



I am not your typical student of life who graduated high school and then went to college to land the dream job. My story has more twists and turns than many would come to expect. However, my life lessons are why I've chosen a profession of serving others. The reason being is that theory never panned out the way it was supposed to happen.

In my MBA and Ph.D. programs, I didn't have a choice of what to read. So as my career took off, I made an effort to read everything that anyone said was a good book related to leadership. I read all that I could and was left with a bookshelf of management and leadership bestsellers. After reading all that I could stay awake to read, I found each book led me back to the thought of, *'Well, now what?'* I felt like I was missing something – and I was. I was missing the application piece. These books presented theory with no driving action to application, no questions or thoughts to leave me wondering about how to put into practice what I just read.

As the years progress, my career has revolved around human development in organizations, from building digital and in-person training to leading sessions with hundreds of people. I've used theories in my work and argued against theories because of

the missing application. I often find myself saying or thinking, *'This is how the theory is set up, but let me tell you how it works out in real life.'* The real-life piece is what this book is about. Yet, leadership theory alone will not drive change – the leaders who apply theory will.

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NOW MEET MARC



Like Adam, I went to a lot of school that filled my brain but did not adequately prepare me for becoming a leader. With a Master's in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in industrial-organizational psychology, I assumed that I could go out and conquer the world. Not the case! The reality is that working for \$4 an hour at Blanchard Training & Development while in graduate school taught me more about leadership than I ever learned in a book on theory.

Ken Blanchard at the time, and still today, is arguably one of the most well-known and prolific leadership gurus of all time in addition to being the co-architect of situational leadership theory with Paul Hersey. Ken became a true mentor and inspiration to me in my formative professional years. He had an uncanny way of taking complex theory and distilling it down into a few practical steps and simple truths that you could instantly apply. Examples of what I learned from Ken about leadership include the following:

- Catch people doing things right
- Treat every person as an equal regardless of title or rank
- Get clear on your values and then prioritize them so you know how to make the right decisions at the right time
- Be a situational leader based on your team's stage of development and your followers' level of commitment and competence
- Understand the value of partnership over self-advancement (i.e., get your ego out of your own way)
- Contract for performance and coach along the way
- Celebrate every win.

After cutting my teeth in Corporate America, I partnered with Ken Blanchard in writing what turned out to be a bestselling book (*The Leadership Pill*) on how to turn values into effective leadership behaviors. Over the years since then I have worked with a long list of name-brand organizations across the globe doing executive coaching, designing and facilitating leadership development programs, and building high performing teams with senior leaders,

mid-level managers, and frontline supervisors. Across the board I continue to see that when it comes to being an effective leader, knowing is one thing and doing is another. My genuine hope is that this text will serve as a north star to guide you in putting leadership theory into practice as you address the many challenges of the modern workplace.

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LEADERSHIP IN A NUTSHELL

Leadership is not a magic pill. Definitions of leadership are abundant over time and include a number of variations on the same theme. Here are some of our favorites as collected in Jacob Morgan's recent article:

- "Ensuring that people have everything they need to achieve the missions of an organization. That's it, all else is footnotes."
— **Hans Vestburg, CEO, Verizon Communications**
- "A leader is someone who can think strategically, simplify the strategy so everyone in the organization can understand it and communicate that strategy simply, enthusiastically, and in a caring way."
— **Ajay Banga, CEO, MasterCard**

- “Leadership is getting people to willingly go someplace they wouldn’t go themselves”
— **Tom Wilson, CEO, Allstate**
- “The most basic definition of leadership is you set the destination. You come up with a strategy to get to that destination and do your best to align and supply the resources to make that happen.”
— **Mark Hurd, Former CEO, Oracle**

Regardless of the definition of leadership you choose to adopt, the key is to ensure you are clear on what the concept looks like when applied. Back to our focus on putting leadership theory into action – application and practice are everything!

LEADERS VS. MANAGERS

While some would argue that leader and manager are interchangeable terms, we would like to point out some of the distinctions between the two. Leaders inspire, managers administer. Leaders create a vision of the future while managers execute on tasks today. Leaders are more strategic just as managers are more tactical. Leaders focus on the big picture while managers execute on the details. Leaders build culture while managers maintain it. Leaders think long-term as managers live in the day-to-day. Leaders create followership, but plain and simple, managers just get things done.

The list goes on, but the takeaway is that leading requires more than just knowing how to manage. Effective leaders set themselves apart from run-of-the-mill managers and as a result they take organizations – and people – to new levels. And

leaders who understand how to implement solid theory as they address real-world workplace issues have a leg up on everyone else.

ARE LEADERS BORN OR MADE?

An age-old question that still has relevance today is whether leadership is an inherited set of genetic traits or a learnable skillset (we will explore this conundrum in greater detail as we dive into trait theory in chapter 2). We all know people who strike us as natural born leaders – it's in their DNA to get people to follow them. But what about all of the rest? It would be a depressing thought to conclude that only a small privileged few have the ability to lead.

Suffice it to say that we wouldn't be writing this book if we didn't think that leadership could be taught and learned. While nature has its place, i.e., *'it's in the genes,'* nurture too can play a significant role. That is why so many companies run leadership development academies, invest in executive coaching, start mentoring programs, send leaders to workshops and seminars, and use succession planning tools like 9-box to not only evaluate a leaders' performance but their potential as well.

So if you aren't one of the lucky ones who woke up one day and realized that being a leader comes easy, then this book is for you. And even if you have leadership in your blood, this book is also for you because you can build on your natural born strengths and become a better leader. All of this is taken up a notch when we add theory into the mix as this helps us plan and predict the outcomes of our leadership behaviors, which in the end increase our

chances of being more effective leaders and getting the results we desire.

While some people have natural born leadership talent, all of us have the ability to learn how to lead.

APPLYING LEADERSHIP TO THE MODERN WORKPLACE

In preparation for writing a textbook that focuses on application and practice, we went to the well and queried leaders in businesses large and small on what they see as the biggest leadership challenges in the modern workplace today. In essence, we asked them what keeps them up at night as a leader. While almost all of them agreed that getting results, growing the business, and cutting costs are core priorities for any successful financially driven endeavor over time, these bottom-line imperatives were also seen as outcomes that hinged upon how well certain current leadership issues were addressed. What follows is the list they came up with, which is also supported by a plethora of research in the recent scholarly and practitioner literature. Throughout the remainder of this book, we will tackle *how* to apply theory to topics such as the following.

Leading Change

By far and away, leading change was the most frequently cited leadership challenge. Every leader in today's workplace will sink or swim based on their ability to embrace change and lead it from the front. Specific subtopics related to leading change include

disruptive technology, digital transformation, global economy, increased competition and lower margins, and evolving post-pandemic issues.

Leading through Influence

As more and more companies move to a matrixed organizational structure, project-based work, and cross-functional initiatives, leaders are finding that they increasingly need to lead through influence versus relying on their position in the hierarchy. When there is a dotted-line reporting relationship as opposed to a direct line, leaders often struggle with how to achieve their objectives since they can't simply tell people what to do and expect that they'll do it. In addition, when individual contributors and leaders who have no direct reports are called upon to lead new service or product lines, special projects, or key strategic initiatives, leading without formal authority can be a herculean challenge.

Leading the Multigenerational Workforce

While not a new issue, the presence of multiple generational cohorts in the workplace continues to be a formidable leadership challenge, especially with the advent of the Millennial generation entering the workforce in recent years. It has been well documented that certain socio-political, technological, and economic forces and events can shape a particular generation such that people in this cohort grow up in a different environmental and psychological context than the generations before.

While Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials may share certain values or even seem more similar

over time, the way they experience the world can be markedly distinct from one another. The implication for leaders is that different generations may view work differently. The extent to which each generation needs feedback, responds to authority, requires structure, embraces technology, or conceptualizes work-life balance is just the tip of the iceberg.

Leading Diversity-Equity-Inclusion (DEI)

There is no doubt that a transformation is afoot in the majority of organizations today with regard to diversity awareness and inclusion. More recently *equity* has also become a focal point of the mix as social movements targeting race and gender inequities in society and in the workplace take hold. From a leadership perspective, many companies sponsor initiatives and awareness campaigns to programmatically address DEI issues.

Organizational leaders who take the focus on DEI to the next level set timebound goals and make actual commitments to increase representation of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity not only at the employee level but in the leadership ranks. They also take a hard look at pay inequities and initiate action accordingly. In addition, many companies are creating designated DEI leadership positions and roles beyond the establishment of DEI committees, task forces, or councils.

Leading Virtual Teams in New and Interesting Times

Rounding out the list of modern workplace leadership challenges is leading virtual teams, which

is a challenge that has touched almost every organization, if not all organizations, at some level during the pandemic. Telecommuting and remote work have been around for decades with varying levels of acceptance and effectiveness, but COVID-19 redrew the map forcing leadership teams worldwide to figure out how to operate their businesses without being face-to-face.

With the world slowly moving into post-pandemic mode and economies gradually reopening, there is also the dilemma of when, and to what extent, companies will move their employees back to the office. As leaders seek to sort this out, it is becoming quite clear that the remote workforce is here to stay. There is also a new work mentality in the making as people realize they actually can operate out of a makeshift office in their home or find a different job that allows them to have more freedom than a daily 9 to 5 grind. If you wanted a leadership challenge, this is it!

Effective leaders must be able to apply leadership theory to current issues in the modern workplace.

A LOOK AHEAD: CHAPTER FRAMEWORK

As you can expect by now, the remainder of this book is heavily weighted toward application and practice. Each chapter is structured using the following framework:

- An overview of a specific leadership theory including its key tenets, seminal author(s),

evolution of the theory over time, and recent research that advances the theory

- A clear delineation of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory applied
- Specific applications of the theory under study to modern workplace practice such as, but not limited to, the topics we introduced above:
 - Leading change
 - Leading through influence
 - Leading the multigenerational workforce
 - Leading diversity-equity-inclusion
 - Leading virtual teams in new and interesting times
- A self-assessment questionnaire related to the leadership theory under study
- Discussion questions that challenge you to apply what you learned
- Chapter “highlight reel”

APPLYING WHAT YOU LEARNED

Time to take action! Spend a few minutes self-reflecting on each of the following questions with an eye toward practical application:

1. What is a time when you’ve had difficulty putting theory into practice at work or in other aspects of your life – what was the theory (doesn’t have to be a leadership theory, i.e., Maslow’s hierarchy of needs) and what made it hard to apply?

2. How do *you* define leadership, and why is this an appropriate definition for the modern workplace?
3. Who do you know that is a “born” leader, and in what specific instances have you seen them work their magic?
4. If you had to prioritize, what would you say is the single most important leadership challenge or opportunity facing leaders today, and why?
5. What are you personally hoping to get out of this book as it pertains to your future as a leader?

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHT REEL

So let's wrap this chapter up. Following are some of the key highlights, feel free to add your own:

- ⇒ This book is about application and practice; theory in and of itself gets us nowhere. Think about *doing* as opposed to just knowing.
- ⇒ However you choose to define leadership, the key is to have a clear picture of what this definition looks like when put into action.
- ⇒ Leaders and managers are not one in the same. Leaders inspire, managers administer – and so on.
- ⇒ While some people have natural born leadership talent, all of us have the ability to learn how to lead.

- ⇒ To be an effective leader in the modern workplace, you need to be able to apply leadership theory to key challenges such as change, influence, the multigenerational workforce, diversity-equity-inclusion, and virtual teams.

REFERENCES

Morgan, Jacob (2020). 14 top CEOs share their definition of "leadership," what's yours?

<https://medium.com/jacob-morgan/14-top-ceos-share-their-definition-of-leadership-whats-yours-2b89a58576a6>