

# An Introduction to Leadership

**Y**ou will most likely find yourself—your interests and your attitudes—reflected on every page of this book, regardless of your age, gender, race, ethnicity, or academic major. You can find ideas that apply to your interests whether you are majoring in engineering or English or are planning a career in journalism, education, or law. Any number of other majors pertain to leadership as well.

Your habits are also reflected here. You might like details or you might only focus on the big picture. You might think best by speaking aloud or by turning thoughts over in your head before saying anything. However you work and think best, your perspective is distinctly yours and is represented in these pages.

Your unique experiences have shaped your view of yourself as a leader or member of a group. Think of the various leadership roles you have held or observed. Think about the various ways you have led formally, led informally, or been an active participant in various groups. Think about the leadership exhibited by the people you have admired in the national or international news, in your home community, on campus, at work, or in the career field you are choosing. Think ahead to the places and relationships in which you could become more active—your classes, class projects, student employment position, residence hall, honor societies, student government, Greek organizations, athletic teams, PTA meetings, your family,

friendship groups, your off-campus work, community service settings, your church or temple—the possibilities are endless.

You draw on your personal characteristics, experiences, and the settings in which you might be involved for different leadership purposes. Some readers may want to further personal development; others may want to enhance a career skill, still others to accomplish social change. Whatever your purpose, your journey through the leadership process will make a difference in all aspects of your life.

## Chapter Overview

In this chapter, we introduce key concepts and models that will be developed throughout the book, and we provide an overview of what we mean by leader, follower, and leadership. We show that new views on leadership are needed—views that call for ethical collaborations—and we describe ways to understand these new views. We assert our belief that leadership develops best when organizations and the individuals in them are open to learning together.

## Foundational Principles

We encourage you to critique and analyze the perspectives and frames we present in this book. You will probably agree and connect with some ideas and disagree with others. But try to figure out *why* you agree or disagree. Exercising critical thinking is a key to furthering your understanding about leadership. We encourage you to learn about leadership using different perspectives. To do that, you will need to identify the principles that are important to you and relate those beliefs to these perspectives. The foundational principles in this book are as follows:

1. Leadership is a concern of all of us. As individuals and groups, we have a responsibility to contribute effectively as members of organizations, local communities, nations, and in the world community. Members of communities (work, learning, living, and ide-

ological communities) are citizens of those various groups and have a responsibility to develop shared leadership and participatory governance.

2. Leadership is viewed and valued differently by various disciplines and cultures. A multidisciplinary approach to leadership develops a shared understanding of differences and commonalities in leadership principles and practices across professions and cultures.

3. Conventional views of leadership have changed. Leadership is not static; it must be practiced flexibly. The rapid pace of change leads people to continually seek new ways of relating to shared problems.

4. Leadership can be exhibited in many ways. These ways of leading can be analyzed and adapted to varying situations. Different settings might call for different types of leadership. Pluralistic, empowering leadership values the inclusion of diverse people and diverse ideas, working toward common purposes.

5. Leadership qualities and skills can be learned and developed. Today's leaders are made, not born. Leadership effectiveness begins with self-awareness and self-understanding and grows to an understanding of others.

6. Leadership committed to ethical action is needed to encourage change and social responsibility. Leadership happens through relationships among people engaged in change. As a relational process, leadership requires the highest possible standards of credibility, authenticity, integrity, and ethical conduct. Ethical leaders model positive behaviors that influence the actions of others.

Leadership development is greatly enhanced when you understand how important relationships are in leadership; that is, when you see the basic relational foundation of the leadership process. Three basic principles are involved: knowing, being, and doing:

- *Knowing.* You must know—yourself, how change occurs, and how and why others may view things differently than you do.

- *Being*. You must be—ethical, principled, open, caring, and inclusive.
- *Doing*. You must act—in socially responsible ways, consistently and congruently, as a participant in a community, and on your commitments and passions.

It is unrealistic to think that certain proven behaviors are required if you are to be an effective leader or collaborator in this time of rapid change. Leadership cannot be reduced to a number of easy steps. It is realistic, however, to develop a way of thinking—a personal philosophy of leadership—and identify core values that can help you work with others toward change. In today’s complex times, we need a set of principles to guide our actions.

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“Leadership is an electric current of believing. The energy created from people believing in each other fuels a constant positive reaction to work together and achieve.”—Lisa M. Stevens attended the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond and was active in the Women’s College Government Association and at the campus radio station.

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## Rapidly Changing Times

Peter Vaill (1989, 1991, 1996, 1998) describes these times as similar to swirling rapids—permanent white water. We can easily feel overwhelmed; we gasp for air as we navigate our fast-paced days with our many responsibilities. Your clock radio may awaken you to the news of suicide bombers and the latest horrific crimes in your community. You go to class to learn something you hope you can apply to real life, but you often find the material irrelevant. Just as you settle in to write a paper for class, one of your children falls and breaks her leg, changing your plans for days to come. You get to your

job in the student activities office and find that the work you left unfinished yesterday is needed in fifteen minutes, instead of in two days as you had thought. You just saw publicity for a program being sponsored on campus that confronts the very foundational beliefs that one of your organizations holds; you are incensed and have to figure out what to do. And the problems continue.

We no longer have simple problems with right and wrong answers but are increasingly faced with complex dilemmas and paradoxes. For example, we may want to be civil yet affirm freedom of speech, or we may want to find community and common purpose but also value individuality and individual differences.

Vaill (1989) observes that traditional approaches like simply working harder may no longer be the most effective strategy to deal with rapid, complex change. The paradigm of hard work solving all problems is now too simplistic. Instead of working harder, we need to work smarter. Vaill challenges us to work

- Collectively smarter
- Reflectively smarter
- Spiritually smarter (p. 29)

Working collectively smarter means knowing, as the old saying goes, that all of us are smarter than one of us. Working collectively smarter recognizes our interdependence. It means believing that coalitions can accomplish more than single groups; it means knowing that collaborative practices build more community and commitment than isolated, individual actions do. It recognizes the transcendent importance of relationships in the leadership dynamic. Allen and Cherrey (2000), in their book *Systemic Leadership*, observe that “relationships are the connective tissue of organizations, relationships built on integrity are the glue that holds organizations together” (p. 31).

Working reflectively smarter means taking the time to make meaning out of what is happening in order to gain perspective and

understanding. Reflection keeps priorities in order; it helps new paradigms become clear and enables us to identify patterns as they emerge. Reflection helps us keep a sense of common purpose and becomes the beacon that guides us through the rapids.

Working spiritually smarter means being aware of the values, beliefs, and principles that become our rudder in white water and build our character. Instead of bouncing around with the swirl of the rapids, knowing our values and beliefs provides a rudder to guide ethical actions. Working spiritually smarter does not necessarily refer to an involvement in religion, but it does signal a personal purpose and centering that transcends unexamined action. "Spirituality is a way of being in the world" (Brussat & Brussat, 1996, p. 29). Working spiritually smarter means seeking wholeness. Some envision that we are in a "spiritual renaissance" and are recognizing the value of "a renewed search for contemplative values in the flurry of our active lives" (Palmer, 1990, p. 6).

Developing a personal approach to leadership that joins one person with others in an effort to accomplish a shared goal is difficult. It requires being intentional and thoughtful. Working to become smarter means examining our own assumptions and realizing that others might see things differently. Gaining new insight means learning to identify and understand paradigms.

## Understanding Paradigms

In every aspect of our lives, change is more rapid, confusing, and unpredictable than ever before. You buy and learn one word processing program only to find a new version released three months later. Daily newspapers bring awareness of complex local issues, and the nightly news flashes images of conflict at home and abroad. The conventional ways of thinking about and organizing our shared experiences do not seem helpful anymore. Instead of individual determinism, competition, and predictable structures, we seem to

need quickly responding, nimble systems; collaboration; and a new awareness of shared values that honor our diversity.

These different perspectives might be called different world-views, frames, or paradigms. Paradigms are patterns and ways of looking at things in order to make sense of them. Some paradigms are clear and help us function well. For example, you have fairly clear paradigms about playing baseball, going to class the first day, going to the airport, or attending the first meeting of an organization you wish to join. Consider going to that first class. You may sit in a preferred spot, expect to greet the person sitting beside you, get a syllabus, learn what text to buy, and perhaps even get out a bit early. That paradigm might be shattered if you arrived to find no chairs, or a professor who said, “I have not yet organized this class. What do you want to learn?” It is hard then to figure out what will happen; the rules no longer work; your established paradigms do not help fill in the gaps. Indeed, you might judge this class to be more exciting or more terrifying because it is unpredictable. We are surprised when some paradigms change, but we can adjust to the new paradigm. Imagine your customer-service paradigm. Until recently, when you called the customer service number for your telecommunications provider at the company’s headquarters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, you expected to be conversing with a person located at that site. With this same scenario today, you could be calling a Pittsburgh number but reach a customer service representative who answers the phone at an office in India.

There are widely divergent paradigms for what it means to be a good leader. For some, a good-leader paradigm signals a verbal, self-confident person clearly in charge and directing followers with confidence. Some would see a good leader as someone who delegates and involves others in the group’s decisions and actions. Still others think beyond “good leader” to consider “good leadership.” Some imagine a good leadership paradigm as a group of colleagues

sharing in leadership, with each contributing to the group outcome and no one dominating others. Deliberately thinking about leadership paradigms may help identify what was previously unclear or even unseen and what now might be very obvious.

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“I used to view the leader of a group as the director of a play, telling people what to do and teaching them how to do it. Over the past five years however, I realized the director approach may get things done, but it does not motivate people, help them understand the importance of what they are doing, or ensure that the group will function in the absence of the leader. I have learned that the best leaders empower the individuals they lead, enabling them to contribute to the group and succeed on their own.”—Daniel Gregory, majoring in Communication Arts and Sciences at the Pennsylvania State University, is the Marshall and Chaplain of Theta Chi Fraternity.

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As times change, standard approaches to a topic may no longer be effective. An awareness of needing new ways to approach problems may signal a paradigm shift. There was a time in our country’s history when the predominant paradigm held that women were not capable of understanding issues sufficiently to vote; at other times, the prevailing paradigm has held that education should be a privilege of only the elite, or that corporations could do anything to enhance their profits, or that smokers could light up anywhere they pleased. A paradigm shift means a shift in the previously held patterns or views. A paradigm shift in paying your bills means that instead of writing checks, you pay your bills through direct electronic banking deductions from your account. Instead of rushing to the bank in their limited open hours to get money from your account, you can use an ATM twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in thousands of locations. When your grandfather says, “We



had no TV when I was a boy, and all our social life revolved around the church,” he is observing a paradigm shift in how we spend leisure time, brought on by technology and transportation.

There have been numerous shifts in how people acquire information over time. Think of the changes from the early, sagelike scholars imparting wisdom to small groups of students sitting at their feet, to the volume-filled libraries we could borrow from, to the electronic retrieval systems that allow us to acquire information on the Web. Instead of going to the library to borrow a book, many of us now download articles from a web site. How reasonable is it in these changing times to use an old paradigm of measuring the quality of universities by the number of volumes in their libraries when any student can access thousands of volumes through interlibrary loan?

A paradigm shift, however, does not necessarily mean completely abandoning one view for another. The new paradigm or view often emerges “alongside the old. It is appearing inside and around the old paradigm . . . building on it, amplifying it and extending it . . . not replacing it” (Nicoll, 1984, p. 5). We encourage you to examine the conventional paradigm of command and control as a method of leadership and seek to identify other paradigms that may be emerging, through your own experiences as well as from reading this book.

If old patterns or paradigms no longer work well, those who see things differently and hold new paradigms begin to employ new approaches and paradigm shifts emerge. As we all begin to seek new ways to make sense out of the frequent confusion in our shared times, together we can find new solutions to our problems and more effective ways of relating through leadership. We are fully engaged now in the emergent paradigm that values collaborative processes among authentic people in organizations. Yes, there are bad or toxic leaders in some groups (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005), but group expectations have largely shifted to expect ethical processes among people of integrity.

## Examining the Paradigms

Leadership has long been presented as an elusive, complex phenomenon. Thousands of books and articles have been written about leaders and leadership, seeking to identify traits, characteristics, situations, and behaviors that signal leadership effectiveness (Bass, 1990). We will present an overview of several of these approaches in the next chapter so you can see how these paradigms have emerged and how leadership has been socially constructed over time. This impressive number of publications provides insight, but leadership is perhaps best described as using your personal philosophy of how to work effectively with others toward meaningful change.

Research in leadership studies is largely centered on the individual leader rather than the process of leadership. Most approaches examine what a leader does with followers to accomplish some purpose. Only in the last decade has the literature focused extensively on followers or group members themselves. The conventional way of looking at people in groups (whether work groups or friendship groups) is first to identify a leader (or leaders) and then describe their followers. However, “understanding the relational nature of leadership and followership opens up richer forms of involvement and rewards in groups, organizations, and society at large” (Hollander, 1993, p. 43).

Most leadership literature focuses on how managers function in organizational settings and assumes that the manager is also a leader. Therefore, much attention has been focused on the leader’s behaviors to get followers to do what the leader wants. This kind of leader usually holds a positional role like chairperson, president, or supervisor. This emphasis on positional leaders frequently promotes a passive approach to followers, often ignoring the role or effect followers have in the organization including the way followers affect the positional leader. This approach clearly does not adequately describe the leadership relationship among people in groups. Concepts of transforming leadership value how these followers could become leaders themselves (Burns, 1978).

We must reconstruct our view of leadership to see that “leadership is not something a leader possesses so much as a process involving followership” (Hollander, 1993, p. 29). Further, followership is really leadership in action among people in the group. In this book, we view leadership as *a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change*.

Some leadership approaches, such as participative leadership, acknowledge that followers must be meaningfully involved in everything from setting goals to decision making. Followers must be active participants. Often, these approaches do not go far enough to genuinely engage followers while sharing power with them. This difference signals a paradigm shift from controlling follower behavior to empowering followers to be central to an organization’s outcomes. Indeed, followers quickly see through and reject those leaders who ask for advice and input but rarely change their opinions. Followers usually embrace positional leaders who introduce issues to the group for discussion and decision.

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“I believe that everyone needs to be a follower many times in life. Followers are essentially the drive behind most groups. It is the power of all that accomplishes much, but one person can change the direction of that power. Often followers have the clearest sight of all involved.”—Laura A. Bennett was founder of Residents Against Substance Abuse at the University of Kansas and a member of the Friends of the Johnson County Libraries.

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## The Search for a New Conceptualization of Followers

Since childhood, we have heard the lesson “Follow the leader.” We have been taught that someone is in charge, so we let that person take the lead and we follow. If we are the leader, we expect others to cooperate and follow our lead. The leadership literature includes

a range of perspectives on followers, largely based on the role of the leader. On one extreme, if the leader is viewed as hierarchically apart from the group, then followers matter less and are to be more compliant with the leader's views. On the other extreme, when the leader is embedded in the group, it is a shared leadership process and followers are perceived as colleagues.

### **Followership**

Most hierarchical organizations are designed with manager or leader roles and follower or staff roles. To honor and recognize the important role of the follower, the term *followership* started being used in conjunction with the term *leadership* (Kelley, 1992). Followership skills are those skills and processes practiced by members of groups. However, not all followers are alike. One taxonomy, presented in Figure 1.1, presents approaches to being a follower by considering both their commitment to performing in the group and their interest in group relationships. Imagine Maria, who is passive and unengaged in her group. She will do what is asked of her but is a passive participant; she is a subordinate. James does not engage much with other members of the group, but he is diligent about getting his tasks done and meeting his obligations; he is a contributor. Tonya uses her interpersonal skills and really knows how to network with others, but she does not always get her work done or show commitment to the group's task; she is a politician. Carl both embraces the task and wants to do good work as well as join others in a successful team effort; he is a partner.

USAF Lieutenant Colonels Sharon Latour and Vicki Rast (2004) summarize their review of followership research and define effective followers as "individuals with high organizational commitment who are able to function well in a change-oriented team environment. Additionally, they are independent, critical thinkers with highly developed integrity and competency" (p. 6). They posit that dynamic followership is a prerequisite for effective leadership. Chaleff (1995) went a step further and encouraged followers to be

		Performance Initiative	
		Low	High
Relationship Initiative	High	Politician	Partner
	Low	Subordinate	Contributor

**Figure 1.1. Follower Types.**

*Source:* Adapted from Porter, Rosenbach, & Pittman (2005), p. 149. Used with permission.

courageous. Followers have special responsibilities to speak truth to leaders and to take risks when the leadership practices being used are not effective for the organization.

Just as there are skills or capacities to develop in leadership, many assert there are skills and capacities to develop to be an effective follower. Clearly there is a reciprocal relationship between the leader and the follower. Some authors advise followers how to be effective with their positional leaders. Lussier and Achua (2004) suggest that as a follower you should

- Offer support to the leader
- Take initiative
- Play counseling and coaching roles to the leader, when appropriate
- Raise issues and/or concerns when necessary
- Seek and encourage honest feedback from the leader
- Clarify your role and expectations
- Show appreciation

- Keep the leader informed
- Resist inappropriate influence of the leader (p. 237)

Latour and Rast (2004) promote several categories of important follower competencies (see Exhibit 1.1). These authors clarify that followership skills help develop leadership skills and are essential perspectives for teamwork.

Because most of the followership models are presented in the context of a hierarchical authority figure interacting in some way to influence followers, these models do not transfer well to non-hierarchical groups or community contexts in which public leadership seeks to address shared issues (Luke, 1998). Using public leadership as the context, Luke illustrates how the leader-follower dynamic differs in the public sector:

In an interconnected world, this model is simply inaccurate. One individual may be the leader who galvanizes and stimulates initial action. Then other leaders and autonomous stakeholders will refine the initial burst of vision, agree on directions for action, and pursue specific initiatives aimed at solving the program. Public leadership does not engage followers; rather, it involves collaborations, audiences, and other self-organizing groups . . . effective leaders are forced to become “leader-followers” simultaneously. Public leadership shifts, changes, and is shared at different times by different people in different organizations. (pp. 32–33)

We need to reconceptualize how we view followers and the nature of relationships in groups. It seems woefully inadequate to call group members by the term *followers*, implying they are following someone or something, unable to think for themselves, or remaining indifferent to the group’s goals, when actually they are creating and shaping the context themselves.

**Exhibit 1.1. Follower Competencies.**

Competency	Description
<i>Displays loyalty</i>	Shows deep commitment to the organization, adheres to the boss's vision and priorities, disagrees agreeably, aligns personal and organizational goals
<i>Functions well in change-oriented environments</i>	Serves as a change agent, demonstrates agility, moves fluidly between leading and following
<i>Functions well on teams</i>	Collaborates, shares credit, acts responsibly toward others
<i>Thinks independently and critically</i>	Dissents courageously, takes the initiative, practices self-management
<i>Considers integrity of paramount importance</i>	Remains trustworthy, tells the truth, maintains the highest performance standards, admits mistakes

Source: Latour & Rast (2004), p. 111. Used with permission.

**What New Term for Followers?**

Leadership scholars have been searching for a new term to more adequately describe followers. Followers have been called members, employees, associates, or subordinates. Kouzes and Posner (1993) suggest calling them the *constituents*. “A constituent is someone who has an active part in the process of running an organization and who authorizes another to act on his or her behalf. A constituent confers authority on the leader, not the other way around” (p. xix). Although the concept is usually found in describing how their constituents from their voting districts authorize political leaders, it is useful in other situations as well.

Imagine the senior class council discussing changes the provost's office is planning in the commencement ceremony; the president of the senior class will likely be empowered by her constituents and expected to carry the wishes of the council to the provost for consideration. The president would be speaking on behalf of others, not just carrying a personal opinion forward.

Crum (1987) likes the term *co-creator*, elevating the empowered, collaborative, transformational role of group members. “When we choose co-creation, we end separation, the root cause of conflict . . . They know through responsible participation that they can empower each other and ultimately their institutions and society, thereby creating a life that is meaningful and satisfying for everyone” (p. 175). Positional leaders who see group members as co-creators will take important decisions to the group and ask, “What do we want to do about this?”

Rost (1991) believes that the traditional meaning of the word *follower* is too embedded in all of our minds to adequately shift to a new meaning. He implores us to see that we have moved from an industrial worldview to a postindustrial era. In the industrial view, people in the organization are merely resources—like steel or other raw materials—whereas in the postindustrial view, people are essential because they bring information and wisdom and the capacity to adapt. Rost now encourages the use of the term *collaborator* for the role of people in this new way of working together. He clarifies, “I now use the word followers when I write about leadership in the industrial paradigm. I use the word collaborators when I write about leadership in the postindustrial paradigm . . . no amount of reconstruction is going to salvage the word [follower]” (Rost, 1993, p. 109).

In this book, we use the term *participant* to refer to people involved in groups in this new paradigm. Participants are involved in the leadership process, actively sharing leadership with other group members. Participants include the informal or formal positional leader in a group as well as all active group members who seek to be involved in group change. Participants are active, engaged, and intentional.

## A Word About Leaders

The word *leader* is used in this book in two primary ways. One use of the term refers to a person in a leadership position who has been elected, selected, or hired to assume responsibility for a group work-



ing toward change; this leader has defined responsibilities for decision making and action. Such a *positional leader* usually has a title of some kind, such as supervisor, general, team captain, chairperson, or vice president. Clearly, being in such a position does not mean that the person knows how to lead, is a good leader, or is looked to as a leader by others. We all have known committee chairs, supervisors, or organization officers who did not seem to know what they were doing, let alone know how to lead anyone or anything toward change. When we use *leader* to mean a positional leader, we will say so.

The other meaning of *leader*—and the one that we generally use—is entirely different. It refers to any person who actively engages with others to accomplish change. Whether as the positional leader or participant-collaborator-group member, a person can be a leader by taking initiative and making a difference in moving the group forward toward positive change. You can be that kind of leader.

## Purposes of Leadership

Leadership should attempt to accomplish something or change something. Leadership is purposeful and intentional. On a more profound level, leadership should be practiced in such a way as to be socially responsible. This kind of social responsibility is involved both in the outcomes or content of the group's purpose as well as in the group's process.

We are concerned about leadership that advances the welfare and quality of life for all. The outcomes of this ethical leadership approach on a broad scale—on your campus or in your community—would contribute to the public good. On a small scale, like in a club, this leadership would seek to incorporate the common good. The concept of common good does not mean the majority view but does mean shared purposes and common vision. This commitment to the public good or common good is a valuing of the role of social responsibility.

Social responsibility is a personal commitment to the well-being of people, our shared world, and the public good. It is “a way of being in the world that is deeply connected to others and the environment” (Berman & La Farge, 1993, p. 7). Being socially responsible also means you are willing to confront unfair and unjust treatment of others wherever it may appear—in classes, at work, or in your organizations. It means functioning within your organizations in ways that value relationships and act ethically with honor and integrity toward your responsibilities and each other.

Somehow, too many people have developed into observers instead of activists in their daily lives. They act as if they are spectators instead of citizens and active participants. Instead of complaining or doing nothing, we need to become engaged in the processes of improving our shared experience, whether at work, in clubs, in class, on a residence hall floor, on an intramural team, or in any of our other communities. Civic engagement is a heightened sense of responsibility for all those communities.

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“After being an active member for a year I saw the potential for improving the club. I thought that my vision was in unison with the clubs, and that I stood out as one of the more vocal candidates to play a leadership role. Also, I was passionate about what the club was out to achieve.”—Aaron Burke was vice president of En Circulo (Hispanic Club) and active in the Fiesta Del Pueblo volunteer group at North Carolina State University.

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## **Civic Engagement and Civic Responsibility**

Civic engagement is not as narrow as what ninth graders learn about in government class. Civic responsibility is the sense of personal responsibility individuals should feel to uphold their obligations as part of any community. Certainly, civic responsibility may mean voting in campus, local, state, or national elections. Yet civic

responsibility means far more. It means noticing that key campus parking lot lights are broken and stopping by an office to report them instead of merely thinking, “I sure hope someone doesn’t get assaulted in the dark.” Civic engagement means attending your academic department’s brown-bag lunch seminar to support your friends who planned the event and to be part of this learning community. Civic responsibility means saying, “If I am a member of this community, I have a responsibility to work with others to keep it functioning and make it better.”

## **Making a Difference**

Following the decade of the 1970s—in which some political leaders seemed less than honest, some religious leaders shattered their vows, and sports figures admitted to drug abuse and other offensive and illegal behaviors—it was no wonder that college students identified very few personal heroes. By the early 1990s, however, over 75% of 18- to 22-year-old students said they could name people they admired—people who made a difference (Levine, 1993). These admired people were local heroes: parents, the neighbor who started a local recycling movement, a minister, or the people who drove hundreds of miles to stuff sandbags to reinforce the levees in the Midwest floods or to rebuild houses after a hurricane in southern Florida. These were not major world leaders or rich corporate executives. These real heroes were average people who, together with others, made a difference in their communities, sometimes overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to do so. The nightly CBS news began identifying a weekly hero—average Americans who made extraordinary contributions. The community service movement in the 1990s solidified the practice of people helping others in their local communities. On May 29, 1995, the cover of *Newsweek* magazine featured two youths active in service to their neighborhood with the caption, “Everyday Heroes: Yes, You Can Make a Difference.” In a 1998 study of over seven hundred diverse

youth (aged 18 through 30), summarized in Exhibit 1.2, respondents' confidence in the average person in local communities to solve complex societal problems was clear.

Steven Covey (1991), author of the popular *Principle-Centered Leadership*, encourages people to say, "I am not a product of my culture, my conditioning, and the conditions of my life; rather, I am a product of my value system, attitudes, and behaviors—and those things I control" (p. 257). This responsibility operates from a philosophy of being proactive instead of reactive. Instead of complaining about what "they" are not doing, this commitment to civic awareness acknowledges what "we" must do together. Clearly, oppressive structures such as racism and sexism can keep people from realizing their potential, but all of us can be more active agents in our own lives than we perhaps are.

## Leadership Viewed from Different Frames

Leadership cannot be touched, smelled, or tasted, but it can be understood by how it is seen, heard, thought, and felt. Leadership is, therefore, a socially constructed phenomenon. To understand social construction, think of the fact of most people being one of two sexes—a woman or a man; however, the concepts of feminine or masculine are socially constructed. Many phenomena are given meaning by how they are constructed. Seeing, hearing, thinking, and feeling are all perceptual processes. People interpret their perceptions and draw meaning from them.

Many disciplines provide their own framework for viewing social constructions like leadership. Leadership is explored in many majors—including anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, political science, education, and business—as well as through literature or the arts. Leadership comes in various forms and relates to different disciplines and majors in different ways. When we think of leadership, we often think of political science—the study of

**Exhibit 1.2. Young Americans' Model for Leadership.***Which Would You Prefer?*

- 71% The best model for leadership is to build from the bottom up, that is, for many people to share responsibility for making decisions and moving forward.
- 25% The best model for leadership is to build from the top down, that is, for strong leaders to assume responsibility for making decisions and moving forward.
- 78% No one group is mostly responsible for solving social problems, and communities and individuals are responsible for solving their problems collectively.
- 17% Big institutions, such as government and business, are best suited to take responsibility for the well-being of citizens and for solving social problems.
- 65% We should look for leadership from ordinary people in the community, regardless of their position or level of authority.
- 31% We should look for leadership from people who have achieved an important position and earned the authority and respect that comes with that position.
- 79% Average people have the resources and practical know-how to solve most of their problems in their community.
- 18% Our problems are very complex, and we need experts to solve them.

Source: Hart & Associates (1998), p. 6.

systems of governance at local, state, and national levels in countries around the world. But leadership is also evident in other fields of study.

Consider how leadership might be constructed in your major. What paradigm might professionals in your field assume as a shared view? Anthropologists might study indigenous groups and try to discover how their leaders are selected and the qualities that the members of their culture believe are most important. Sociologists might study grassroots movements of people who embrace certain causes and how leadership develops in such groups. Psychologists might study the characteristics of leaders and followers and try to further the understanding of why they act in certain ways. Speech and speech communications majors often study how the messages leaders convey influence or inspire others to act. Organizational communicators are often concerned with how communication works in large, complex organizations and how various interpersonal communications can help or hinder such leadership processes. Education majors study leaders and leadership at all levels—from leadership in the classroom to being a district superintendent to running a college or university. Business majors study leadership in many different forms, including leading work teams, entrepreneurship, and providing a vision for large businesses. Fine arts majors often learn the challenges of leadership firsthand through being a first chair in an orchestra or directing a school play, and science majors experience leadership in research teams and various application projects. And the list goes on.

Each field of study may emphasize different elements of leadership, yet each field has an interest in how people can work more effectively together toward some outcome. “Leadership is like beauty: it’s hard to define, but you know it when you see it” (Bennis, 1989, p. 1). Every academic major can benefit from a better understanding of the nature of leadership. Think about your own major. How can knowing more about leadership make you more successful in your future career or other endeavors?

## Leadership Requires Openness to Learning

The story is told of philosopher-author Gertrude Stein lying on her deathbed. Her longtime partner, Alice B. Toklas, leaned over in despair at the impending passing of her companion and asked, “Gertrude, what is the answer?” Gertrude thoughtfully looked up at Alice and replied, “What is the question?” Leaders and participants ask questions, inviting others into the dialogue, and are open to diverse ideas. The question mark becomes a tool of leadership because participants need to ask questions, listen, and learn. In his classic *Rules for Radicals*, Saul Alinsky (1971) writes, “The question mark is an inverted plow, breaking up the hard soil of old belief and preparing for the new growth” (p. 11). Asking questions invites the group to examine its purpose and practices instead of thoughtlessly continuing old practices.

Conventional leaders, who may think they have all the answers and that their passive followers should merely obey, are the dinosaurs of rapidly changing times. These times call for leaders who know how to let go of the past in the face of uncertainty because they have done it before and have succeeded. It is a paradox. Effective leaders will be the ones whose experience has shown them that they cannot rely on their experience. . . . they will use the expertise they have gained through experience to tap the experience and creative energies of others. (Potter & Fiedler, 1993, p. 68)

Leadership today shows that there is great wisdom and energy in the group. All members of the group have a great deal to learn from each other. Certainly, learning occurs inside the classroom, but it is very real in the world of experience. Involvement on and off campus provides the laboratory for enriching this learning.

Watkins and Marsick (1993) present a useful model that applies to learning (see Figure 1.2). The model also applies to the learning

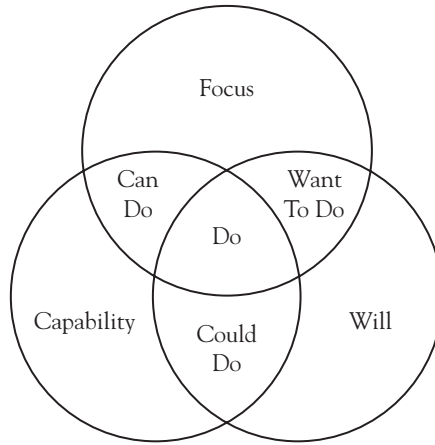
that occurs in the teams and groups. This model presents three components to learning: focus, or knowing about the learning opportunities; capability, including the resources and skills to learn; and will, or the motivation to engage in learning. You begin your exploration of yourself in the leadership equation when you examine your own goals, roles, and capabilities. Stop for a minute and think about something you are trying to accomplish. What is your focus? What do you need to accomplish this goal? What is your motivation or will to persist? On an even more complex level, we believe that the most effective organizations and communities are learning environments in which learning is ongoing, constant, pervasive, and valued.

Rapidly changing times and exploding information indicate we must all be lifelong learners. Vaill (1991) comments that we must all be comfortable being beginners again all the time. “It is not an exaggeration to suggest that everyone’s state of beginnerhood is only going to deepen and intensify so that ten years from now each of us will be even more profoundly and thoroughly settled in the state of being a perpetual beginner” (p. 81). This means admitting when we do not know something, yet having the confidence that together among a diverse group working together on a shared problem we can figure it out. Remember, all of us are smarter than one of us.

## **Personal Responsibility for Learning**

The conventional view of leadership assumes that leaders do the planning and motivating and that they carry a major share of responsibility for accomplishing anything with their group. We do not believe this is true. All of us are responsible for ourselves and for helping others. The whole group of participants, including positional leaders, needs to make sure the environment is open to learning, making mistakes, and sharing knowledge. Any behaviors or circumstances that block learning in organizations are likely to block empowerment and inclusion as well.





**Figure 1.2. The Learning Model.**

*Source:* Watkins & Marsick (1993), p. 37. Reprinted with permission.

Self-development, with the goal of students becoming more effective leaders and participants, is a primary goal of most colleges and universities. Leadership skills are life skills that can be applied to personal relationships as well as to work and organizational responsibilities. By redirecting your own life in the context of family, values, and dreams, you can become a productive colleague with others. As we said in the Preface, we believe in this approach to leadership because all of us can learn about ourselves, about others, and about change. Through learning, we stay vital and renewed.

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“Through participation in classroom activities and student organizations, I have learned that the differences between a leader and a follower is his/her ability to take initiative to make things happen and to accept personal responsibility for his/her choices.”—Gideon Craymer is a criminal justice and Spanish major at Grand Valley State University. He serves as secretary of Alpha Phi Sigma Criminal Justice Honors Society.

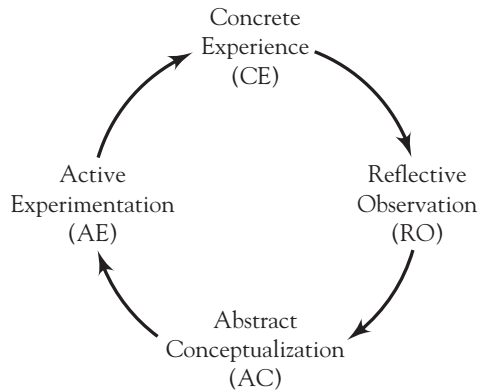
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## Experiential Learning

Understanding how you learn and develop leadership will be important to exploring yourself in the context of this book. David Kolb (1981) built on the work of such scholars as Lewin and Dewey to explore how learning occurs. Kolb suggests that we come to new information in one of two ways: by doing something (concrete experience) or by thinking about something (abstract conceptualization). We then process that information either by reflecting on that information (reflective observation) or by applying that information (active experimentation). This process is best understood as a cycle. Figure 1.3 illustrates this process. Much of how leadership is learned is in the real, concrete experiences of being in groups that are trying to accomplish something. Imagine you have just had an experience. To learn from that experience, you would want to reflect on it and make meaning from it. Next, you would form some hypotheses about it, and in thinking about it you would wonder if this is true for others—if it would work in other situations—and you look for connections to other information you possess. Then you would want to apply this new theory or learning in a real situation. And the cycle continues. This may be best understood as “What?” “So What?” and “Now What?” Kolb reminds us that what happens to us does not become experience without reflection. Without it, events are just things that happened. Many things happen from which we learn nothing because we do not reflect on those experiences to seek their deeper meaning.

## Relational Leadership

This book will explore the evolution of leadership thinking and some of the many theories that help make meaning out of the varied and complex approaches to leadership. Yet studying leadership does not magically make you a better leader or participant. As learners about leadership in the context of today’s challenges and opportunities, we propose that you focus on core, basic principles of



**Figure 1.3. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model.**

Source: Adapted from Kolb (1981), p. 235. Used with permission.

leadership that can guide your effectiveness. To reiterate: we define leadership as *a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change*.

There is not one right way to lead. Leadership should not be studied as a recipe or a checklist. It is more important to develop a philosophy of leadership to guide your actions. This philosophy would value being ethical and inclusive. It would acknowledge the diverse talents of group members and trust the process to bring good thinking to the socially responsible changes group members agree they want to work toward.

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“Leadership is a role open to anyone. Leadership is living by a personal set of rules in which you motivate others to do the right thing, be engaged in the world, and to listen to others and their concerns. Leadership is focused on the other person.”—Chandra Johnson was an officer in Alpha Xi Delta and Dance Marathon as well as serving as a member of Order of Omega of the University of Iowa.

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Relationships are the key to leadership effectiveness. Because leadership is inherently relational, it is perhaps redundant to use the term *relational leadership*. There is, however, strength in the affirmation of repetition. As leaders and participants in all our communities, we should be and expect others to be

- Purposeful
- Inclusive
- Empowering
- Ethical
- Process-oriented

These aspects of relational leadership then become foundational to working smarter. How we relate and work together in all of our communities (families, classes, organizations, work sites, and neighborhoods) matters. You need to examine your role as a member of these communities, whether they are made up of five people in your family or fifty people on your residence hall floor.

## The Real World

Does this approach to leadership seem ideal and unrealistic or real and possible? Why don't we see these leadership practices widely embraced and used by all around us? This confusion between a preferred and an actual state is called cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962). When the president of your university speaks eloquently at the opening convocation about the campus being an ethical, learning environment open to change, yet your experience is that campus administrators resist trying anything new and even seem fearful of change, you likely feel dissonance. When the president of a student organization says, "We want to have all your feedback on this plan before we decide" and then proceeds to represent the plan so

defensively that all comments are quickly silenced and you would not dare raise a question, there is dissonance.

Conversely, think of the times you have been treated with serious purpose, included, and aware that your contributions matter—perhaps in your study group, your favorite class, your office, or your committee planning a project like a clothing drive for a homeless shelter. These are the places where you matter because you find congruence in the principles you value and in the values the group practices.

Even when things are not what they ought to be, each of us can practice a personal philosophy of being the kind of person, leader, or participant we value. This brings a sense of personal congruence and authenticity. Educators have been challenged to see that “it is not nearly enough to teach students how the world is. We must also encourage them to think about how it ought to be. Without some hope for a better world, it is all too easy to think only of oneself and all too easy to leave the responsibilities of citizenship to others” (Harriger & Ford, 1989, p. 27). Clearly, community is not someone else’s responsibility. It is a commitment from each participant. Likewise, leadership is not someone else’s responsibility. It is a shared responsibility among participants. In short, as a participant, leadership is your responsibility.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, we have asked you to explore aspects of your unique characteristics and experiences that you bring to leadership. Rapidly changing, complex times indicate a need to work together in different ways than those promoted by conventional or industrial approaches to leadership. This chapter introduced the value that leadership must be for socially responsible purposes. An overview of leadership with an emphasis on followers as active participants in the leadership process was presented in this chapter. This relational approach to leadership is committed to positive change,

inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process-oriented. Relational leadership is best practiced in learning organizations.

## What's Next?

The next chapter presents an overview of how leadership has been understood over time. It discusses how the complexity of today's times demands a more relational way of solving shared problems.

## Chapter Activities

1. Which of the six foundational principles used to develop this book do you most closely agree with and why? Which is most difficult to endorse and why? Which is the most difficult to practice and why? Which is the easiest to practice and why?
2. Create words that could substitute for the term *follower* that would have an empowering connotation to others. How do you, or would you, react to being called a follower?
3. In response to the question "What is the purpose of leadership?" reflect and answer that question for yourself. What is your leadership purpose?
4. What community are you associated with or do you know about that is the most involving, ethical, empowering, and inclusive? How do people in this group empower others, make decisions, elicit feedback, and share power and authority? How does this community introduce and implement change?
5. How can knowing more about leadership make you more successful in your future career or other endeavors?
6. Using the Learning Model, stop for a minute and think about something you are trying to accomplish. What is your focus? How are you able to accomplish this goal? What is your motivation or will to persist?

7. What experiences have you had that you reflected on and from which you drew a leadership lesson? Using Kolb's model, describe that process.

## **Additional Readings**

- Allen, K. E., & Cherrey, C. (2000). *Systemic leadership: Enriching the meaning of our work*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Kelley, R. E. (1992). *The power of followership: How to create leaders people want to follow and followers who lead themselves*. New York: Currency/Doubleday.
- Lussier, R. N., & Achua, C. F. (2004). *Leadership: Theory, application, skill development* (2nd ed.). Eagan, MN: Thomson-West.

