

The Appriser

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A Leadership Theory of Everything

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As silly as it sounds, I've been working on a leadership theory of everything. I am in agreement it cannot be done, and perhaps even a valiant attempt falls far short, but I find it a helpful exercise in humility and human limitation.

To lead a large organization, or hold a statewide or federal elected office, or even to serve as a spiritual leader of a faith community, the leader is subjected to expectations that they have something intelligent to say about everything, that they can lead their way through anything without fail, and that they will lessen everyone's perceptions of their own sufferings. When those expectations are not met (and it is guaranteed they won't be), the leader is ever more quickly subject to derision. Thus, the leader has an impossible task lived out in front of others who expect them to do what no one can. I wonder, can a leader at least have a theory of how to approach this fatal and normal circumstance. Here are a couple of insights I'm gaining from this deep thinking:

1. **The leader must know where their competency begins and ends and how it connects to the competencies of others.** When that connection needs to be made, the leader needs to act quickly and not to begrudge the spotlight shining on someone else. The spotlight is a fickle mistress anyway.
2. **The leader must foster awareness that even where she or he is competent, there is much they know they don't know, and an infinite amount that they don't even know they don't know.** This fosters desirable qualities and habits such as humility, an ability to say *mea culpa*, and continuous learning.
3. **Leadership teams that are well-led, nimble, and up to date are more desirable than a figurehead who has to pretend he or she is competent when they are clearly not.** Let the figurehead use their charismatic gifts to foster good communication and deep relations among the leadership team rather than expecting colleagues and followers to stop thinking and follow blindly.
4. **The importance of multiple scenario planning cannot be overstated.** Coupled with this is the notion that **higher level decision making tends to be complex and uncertain which raises the importance of decisions being decisive, but also flexible.**
5. **Higher level decisions have a greater potential for simultaneous benefit and harm, and on a greater scale.** There is no escaping this complexity so it is wise for the leader to embrace it.

The theory of everything as I'm developing it might emerge at another place and time. It felt more important to note the observations for now.



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