

Four-Cornered Leadership

A Framework for Making Decisions



John Roland Schultz



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This book is dedicated to our two boys, sons now grown,
who have been challenging but enjoyed and loved, each
unique and a leader in his own way: John and Vernon.

Preface

Is leadership a role or a mind-set? Are there differences that separate leaders from managers? These are questions that frequently arise when people attempt to define leadership. It is a topic that arouses emotions and brings out many competing viewpoints. The opinions offered usually diverge over a continuum, with one end grounded in research and the other in perception.

This book is about leadership. It describes a set of competencies that are based on four core principles that convey very different assumptions about people and organizations. Leadership in this case is about action and the knowledge that is gained when ideas are tested through practice. It is knowing how interdependencies affect the system people work in, knowing how variation—the normal difference between process contingencies—affects system stability and instability, knowing how people learn and develop so organizational capability can be increased, and knowing how individual behaviors can be structured and aligned toward the organization's common good. A distinctive way for viewing leadership is presented, one that is based on learning and continual modification in response to prevailing conditions. Goals are accomplished without force. People are brought onboard in a common effort toward shared sacrifice, struggle, and rewards. Effective leadership is the result of practical application. It is recognized and honored after the fact because events have demonstrated an ability to bring about meaningful change.

Leadership is a theme that receives considerable attention. Certainly, there is a large amount of material devoted to the subject. Libraries catalog and shelf numerous titles about the topic. Anyone interested in becoming a leader can—through effort—promote themselves by applying what is already known. Leaders, nevertheless, come and go. Some are successful for a while and then flame out as the enterprises they lead come crashing down. Recent circumstances have produced many failures in finance, industry, and politics. The consequences have been economically devastating, with failures in every sector. The individuals society has looked to for leadership have not facilitated improvement—have not delivered.

Often, people are called leaders because of the position they hold. However, leadership is dependent on situational circumstances and the needs of those who are disposed to follow. Leaders can arise at any time and are found at all organizational levels. Leadership is really a skill set that can be learned and applied by anyone. Persona and individual appearance—traits and personal characteristics—are not as important as the ability to cope with and manage situational demands. The concepts described in this book are process oriented, are adaptable under varying conditions, and are oriented around the four elements that comprise the system of profound knowledge. This leadership philosophy was first proposed by W. Edwards Deming, and places emphasis on the physical and tangible elements in a workplace that can be studied, analyzed, and modified to create a more productive yet enjoyable environment. Leadership in this setting is about moving ahead and getting work done without violating commonly held values or manipulating and forcing people to do what is not in their own best interests.

Leaders are successful because they are able to rally others to a cause—to a purpose—with events creating benefits for everyone involved. So, leadership is not about tough-mindedness or incentives, using the right combination of rewards and rep-

rimand, particularly for those who choose to follow. These are people who willingly subordinate a portion of their individuality to achieve results that the leader has deemed important. Simply put, the leader with the help of others brings about change. Leadership does not exist without delighted followers and a common vision realized through cooperative purposeful action. Leadership is tested and judged by the results that are produced.

Each of the four elements comprising the system of profound knowledge is analyzed and examined in relation to prevailing management and organizational theory. These concepts are not new, but ordered and presented as a tangible foundation for internalizing Deming's philosophy as a practical leadership method. The connection between the four elements and an individual's ability to lead is defined by proficiencies that are learnable and transferable to any organizational setting in government, industry, or education. Dispelled are popular notions about leadership characteristics, such as good looks, determination, persuasiveness, eloquence, forcefulness, decisiveness, and bottom-line thinking.

Although there is plenty of material dedicated to leadership and management theory, none of it has comprehensively explored the system of profound knowledge as a leadership tool—a method for getting work done that is based on understanding organizational complexity and follower needs. The intended audience for this book is newly appointed leaders, managers, and supervisors who have excellent technical skills but have not been exposed to the proficiencies or emotional concepts that typify a capable and effective leader. In addition, any person in a position of authority who is trying to adopt the principles of quality management and continuous improvement will find this book helpful and empowering.

Four-Cornered Leadership is the perfect guide for individuals who feel leadership is about building follower capabilities—being an inspirational coach and mentor focused on long-term gain that is the result of continual learning and

renewal. The content is down to earth, easy to understand, and clearly written. The information is presented in bite-size and meaningful chunks supported by charts and graphs. The content arrangement and bulleted points are designed to appeal to the visual learner.

The five chapters that directly support the system of profound knowledge are Chapter 2, “Understand the Importance of System Interdependencies”; Chapter 3, “Understand Why People Behave as They Do”; Chapter 4, “Understand How People Learn, Develop, and Improve”; Chapter 5, “Understand the Variability of Work”; and Chapter 7, “Manage Interaction Dynamics.” These relationships are illustrated by Figure P.1.

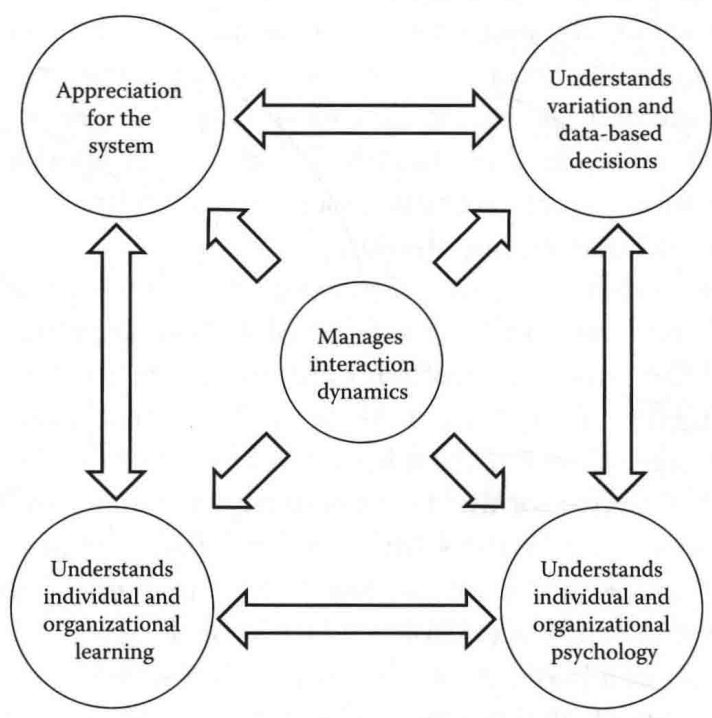


Figure P.1 The system of profound knowledge.

About the Author

John Roland Schultz is an independent management consultant and retired college professor. For 20 years, he taught management and supervisory development courses and was a program director overseeing an advanced technical certificate in quality management. Prior to teaching, his work experience included 25 years as a consultant, technical services manager, and new product development engineer. He has performed doctoral study in adult education, has a master of science degree in management, and has undergraduate degrees with a focus on industrial management and organizational behavior.

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Chapter 1

Leadership Defined

The job of management is not supervision, but leadership. ... The aim of leadership should be to improve the performance of man and machine, to improve quality, to increase output, and to simultaneously bring pride of workmanship to people.

Deming, 1986, p. 54

Often, people think leadership, even from Deming's viewpoint, is the result of specific traits or persona that if possessed predestine an individual to a position of prominence. Still others feel it is all about tough-mindedness—the ability to gain control through force of will. But, neither is true, and this verdict is supported by years of scholarly research. Leaders can be found at all organizational levels and are able to rally people to a cause because their skills and abilities match a particular set of follower needs and situational circumstances. These are competencies that can be learned and practiced by anyone with the motivation to step forward.

This chapter helps characterize Four-Cornered Leadership as realized through W. Edwards Deming's system of profound knowledge and sets the stage for its application. The following

topics define current thinking about leadership and present several examples:

- Leadership and profound knowledge
- Leadership competencies
- Leadership, power, and followers
- Leadership and management
- Leadership approaches
- Leadership implications

Leadership and Profound Knowledge

Many individuals have a grandiose vision of leadership. This image may have more to do with the pretentious behavior displayed sometimes by visible and important people. Most may think this style of governance has always existed, but it has not, and change is seriously needed. The system of profound knowledge that will unfold in the following chapters is a way to alter current thinking. The following story about a spell-binding personality demonstrates this present-day and popular point of view:

Gertrud Grossmund was the president of a historically acclaimed college. She was well spoken and recognized by the community at large as a forward-thinking individual who had introduced strategic planning and consensus management at the college. To the faculty and staff, however, she was viewed as a rather flamboyant self-promoter and a wheeler-dealer who was a masterful talker. Articulate and savvy, she was able to present a convincing image. For example, when board positions opened for appointment, she used her reputation and influence in the community to seat people who, captivated by her self-assurance and persuasive manner, were affable to her many and far-reaching ideas.

Upon arriving five years ago, she set about replacing the executive-level deans with new executive-level vice presidents. The realigned positions included those in financial

services, administrative services, student services, instructional services, information services and human resources. All the new arrivals were capable individuals who were friendly and generally well liked by their staff. Yet, each was no match in stature, eloquence, or demeanor to Grossmund. These people were diligent but unusually quiet and unassuming. They acted at Grossmund's behest but never stepped forward with their own ideas. She seemed to have had a knack for picking introverts who went out of their way to avoid controversy.

Grossmund would hold a monthly open meeting—she called them forums—with students. When confronted with difficult issues, she would wholeheartedly agree but then counter with a plausible explanation. Speaking brilliantly and in a measured directive tone, she would offer a solution that the crowd found appealing and compelling. Many nodded their heads in agreement, yet when all was said and done, students left questioning the exact sequence of reasoning and the logic that had won them over. This ability to sell ideas and convince others to follow was used on staff and faculty alike. In the end, however, individuals often wondered to what they had agreed.

Of course, as time went on, people began to realize that many issues were left to fester, and that grand ideas never came to realization. Although there were yearly reorganizations, with departments shuffled and reshuffled and deans or department chairs promoted or reassigned, opportunities were missed, and enrollments did not grow in proportion to other schools within the state system. In the end, after one sabbatical too many, pressure from the community, and a loss-of-confidence declaration by faculty, the board asked for Grossmund's resignation.

Real leaders create opportunities and value people primarily for their talent and ability to contribute. They invite people to meetings to look for ideas and find solutions but do not dominate the discussion. They facilitate by asking the right questions. Real leaders are not afraid to advance subordinates' ideas and make a case for their realization. Yet, people are drawn to individuals who appear strong, deliberate, and willing to take control. Why are style and flair such compelling lures?

We live in a complex world where many institutions are having difficulty sustaining a meaningful and coherent existence over an extended period. Some organizations seem to function well for a while, but then falter as competitive and economic pressures expose vulnerabilities. News stories document the many failures of business and government. Some individuals feel organizations have become too large, and that leaders are not in touch with public needs. Disgruntled interest groups demand results, while the disenfranchised raise questions about fair and ethical conduct and wonder what can be done. They cling to the hope that big ideas accompanied by swagger and bravado will get them to a “promised land.”

Leadership is a topic that has received considerable attention. Libraries catalog and shelve numerous titles devoted to its practice. Similarly, leadership has a variety of meanings. The following definitions are just a few examples:

- “There are no bad soldiers under a good general” (Siu, 1980, p. 303).
- “Leadership is the pivotal force behind successful organizations, and to create vital viable organizations, leadership is necessary to develop a new vision of what the organization can be, and then mobilize the organization’s ability to change toward the new vision” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p. 2).
- “Leading is the central part of a manager’s role, which involves working with and through others to achieve organizational goals” (Stoner and Freeman, 1989, p. 459).
- “The job of a leader is to accomplish the transformation of his organization. He possesses knowledge, personality, and persuasive power” (Deming, 1994, p. 116).
- “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (Kotter, 1996, p. 25).
- “Leadership is the presence and spirit of the individual who leads and the relationship created with those who are led” (Scholtes, 1998, p. 372).