Leadership: Theory and Practice (4th ed.)
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Sage Publications, 2007, 395 pages, ISBN 1-4129-4161-X or 978-1-412941-61-7 (pbk.)

Peter Northouse, professor of communication at Western Michigan University, has taught leadership and organizational communication for more than 20 years at the graduate and undergraduate levels. He’s worked in the areas of leadership education and conflict management. As with previous editions of this book, Dr. Northouse bridges the gap between theoretical and popular approaches to leadership.

Chapter 1 reviews definitions and components of leadership. The plan given here for the book is “based on substantive theories but written to emphasize practice and application” (p. 12).

Chapter 2 introduces the trait approach, one of the first systematic attempts to study leadership. The chapter ends with a very useful starting point—the leadership trait questionnaire (LTQ). Of special note in this chapter is the Five-Factor Personality Model, the basic factors making up personality. These factors are the basis for entry-level tests of “fit” in major organizations.

Chapter 3 explores the skills approach, abilities that can be learned and developed (as opposed to traits that are considered to be largely fixed). Management skills at various levels of organizations—top, middle, and supervisory—are described.

Chapter 4 emphasizes the behavior of leaders, their styles or what they do and how they act. Subordinates enter the picture here since style starts with two behaviors: task and relationship. Combining these two behaviors explains how leaders influence subordinates in their efforts to reach goals. A style questionnaire finishes this chapter. It has been my experience in teaching graduate classes of business persons and engineers that most are task-oriented, and some have seemed to be almost fearful of relationship behaviors. This chapter at least starts a conversation on the matter.

Chapter 5 brings us to Hersey and Blanchard’s situational approach. This is a pictorial process of applying directive (task) and supportive (relationship) behaviors depending on employee competencies and commitment. This approach is easy to teach others about the two main behaviors.

Chapter 6 details Fiedler’s contingency theory, a leader-match theory in which the context or situations prescribe which leadership style to use. Here leader-member relationships, task structure, and position power assessments determine which style will work most effectively. The questionnaire for the chapter is the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) Measure.

Chapter 7 focuses on the Path-Goal theory and offers readers insights on their strong and weak styles: participative, directive, supportive, and achievement oriented. A questionnaire scores these.

Chapter 8 centers on the interaction between leaders and followers through the Leader-Member Exchange Theory, a focus of recent research. By promoting partnerships with all employees in the work unit, leaders create networks to focus on organizational goals and a leader’s own progress. This chapter opens up the formerly relationship-shy students, as it should since it is a pivotal concept in leadership process.

Chapters on transformational leadership, leading teams, women leaders, ethics, and the psychodynamic approach (bring out your MBTI assessment material for this) finish the book. The chapter on culture uses House’s research as well as Hofstede’s GLOBE studies, and is particularly well done.

Each chapter follows the same format. The first section describes the leadership approach and applicable research studies. The next section evaluates the approach through its strengths and criticisms. This is followed by a series of brief case studies to prompt discussion, and the final section provides a leader questionnaire to measure readers’ leadership style. A summary and reference section ends each chapter.

The writing style is user friendly, brief and to the point. Designed for upper-class and graduate students, this book would also be of interest to business personnel seeking to identify and improve leadership skills in organizations. Special features of this book are an excellent PowerPoint presentation series for each chapter, a testbank, writing assignments, and chapter reviews, all of which are available on a CD.

I recommend this book on the basis of having used it in undergraduate leadership classes as well as weekend Master’s classes for business people. A concise, critical consideration of prevalent leadership theory and practice is a rare find.

A recent Sage addition is W. Glenn Rowe’s Cases in Leadership, featuring 30 real-world cases and 14 practitioner readings which follow many of Northouse’s chapters. The additional discussion possibilities sink in the leadership offerings in both books.

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