

The Drama of Leadership

Overview

Robert Starratt, in this book *The Drama of Leadership*, has given a classical description of the various roles of leaders in institutions and has used drama as an analogy. He explained that leadership can be likened to a drama whose script cannot be guaranteed to remain static. There are a lot of uncertainties and upset which arise in the course of leadership many of which were not planned for. Leaders have to therefore be educated and equipped to be able to respond to on and off-script events which arise in the leadership journey. The book also underscored the fact that the actions and inactions of leaders are very important, so it is important for those who educate leaders to know that they are playing a highly sensitive role because the stakes are high

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The DRAMA OF



LEADERSHIP

Robert J. Starratt

Chapter 1: Extraordinary Incursions



The author explained that this book reflects an attempt to educate himself more broadly for the daunting task of educating leaders. Initially that education involved reflecting on his own experience in the field, followed by immersion in the extant literature on leadership.

I need to explore the assumptions I make when I try to define leadership, and certainly the assumptions I make when I try to encourage others to think about their own leadership. Those assumptions are not simply intellectual. They are moral as well.

...Starratt R,J

As Bernard Bass observes, 'From its infancy, the study of history has been the study of leaders. For better or worse, leaders seem to 'make' history.'

What leaders do or do not do, seems to matter enormously in the course of human affairs. Therefore, those who would educate leaders should know what they are attempting because the stakes are high.

Being a leader today involves one in a drama whose outcomes are largely unknown. Leaders have to improvise on available plots and scripts and, in many cases, rewrite the script as the drama unfolds. Leadership means being a playwright, a lead actor, a stage director, a drama critic and a director all in one.

John Gardner postulates six characteristics of leaders which distinguish them from the general run of administrators:

- Leaders think long-term; they look beyond immediate problems.
- Leaders look beyond the agency or unit they are leading in order to grasp its relationship to larger realities of the organization as well as the external environment.
- Leaders reach and influence people beyond their own jurisdiction.
- Leaders emphasize vision, values and motivation; they intuitively grasp the non-rational and unconscious elements in the leader-constituent interaction.
- Leaders have political skills to cope with conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies.
- Leaders never accept the *status quo*; they always think in terms of renewal.



This chapter focused on discussing the various approaches to leadership by different scholar and business leaders.

Chapter 2:

Excursions into the Sociology of Action

Leadership presupposes an institutional social setting in which people have a reasonable knowledge of what they are doing. (Capture thoughts from the introduction)

The Tacit Structure of Everyday Life

Human social action has a dynamic, but tacit component that usually goes unnoticed in everyday social life. In the process of social interaction, people speak and act as they perceive the circumstances warrant such speech and action; yet, the speech and action likewise generate the context, as those involved in that context are perceived to agree that that definition of the context is indeed correct.

Hence, contexts both validate and originate the action; action responds to and reproduces the context; the context is the medium and the product of action as the action between social actors flows over time.

The Interpenetration of Intelligibility and Morality

As the action between social actors proceeds, each person makes sense of the interaction as well as the dynamic context which is in the process of being both influenced and produced by the action. When things proceed as expected and are perceived as proceeding sensibly, then the action continues to flow. Everybody knows, though usually in a tacit manner, what is going on



Those who 'manage' social systems can think of the collective routines of action as having structural dimensions

Structuration Theory

Giddens' theory attempts to avoid the dualisms contained in much of social theory, dualisms such as the individual and society, structure and agency, subject and object, autonomy and constraint. He builds on the work of Shutz and Garfinkel, affirming that human agents continually interact with their environment in an ongoing stream of experience and action, using a common stock of meanings and typification to interpret what is happening.

The Structuring Influence of Consciousness

Giddens posits three levels of consciousness. At the deepest level, the unconscious represents those aspects of psychic life that have been repressed or forgotten.

Structure as Enabler and Constrainer

Structures are described as compelling individuals to act in certain ways. Every situation we face imposes constraints of some kind or other on our action; yet every situation offers opportunities for action as well.

A Focus on Action, Not on Subject

Giddens claims that the basic domain of the social sciences is not the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any social institution but 'social practices ordered across space and time. If asked to provide a reason for one's action, a person can usually provide a 'theoretical understanding of the grounds of their activity.¹⁰ But that rationalization would not be the same as a discursive reflection on specific items of conduct tied to the environmental context and the dynamic interaction one was in the process of experiencing

Social life is dynamic; it is being reconstructed at every moment. If people do not participate in the drama, then what we know as society simply stops, or it thins out, or slows down to a mindless, monotonous, drab, zombie-like, meaningless, slow-motion trance

Chapter 3: Leadership and Charisma

Weber defines charisma as 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities. Recent treatments of charismatic leadership and transformational leadership have tended to focus on business leaders exclusively; this focus has led to a concentration on what is meaningful and valuable to business people, or at least to those chosen for the studies—a concentration that would not apply to leaders in other fields

- The charismatic leader has a special relationship with his or her followers. They see this person as endowed with exceptional qualities far exceeding their own.
- Charismatic leaders seem to have a clear sense of themselves.
- They seem to understand the big picture, to see the relationships between the whole and its parts in ways the followers had not thought of.
- The charismatic leader often functions with a passion and intensity to achieve something great, noble, heroic, extraordinary.
- There is a courage, a willingness to risk, to risk all in order to achieve the necessary breakthrough in the present circumstances.



The charismatic quality of an individual as perceived by others or himself, lies in what is thought to be his connection with (including possession by or embodiment of) some *very central* feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives.

Charisma and Institutions

Charisma is usually thought of as antithetical to institutions. Institutions tend to stand for order, routine, predictability, uniformity governed by rules and policies, and so forth. Charismatic persons are usually thought of as non-predictable, spontaneous, intuitive, guided by their own rules, and resisting constriction within institutional procedures. Often charismatic persons are seen as threats to institutions, legitimate authority, and to the prescribed order.

Recapitulation

when a charismatic leader offers ordinary humans a deeper understanding of their lives and their work, they tend to respond to the leader's vision. While there is obvious attachment to the person of the leader, the real power of the leader is the power of the meanings and values central to human life which connect the longings and identities of the followers to a central ground of significance



Chapter 4:

Leadership of Flawed Institutions

Leadership grounded in a profound grasp of meanings central to human fulfillment is able to infuse the work of institutions with those meanings, and thus to draw the allegiance of the other members of the organization toward those meanings and purposes. But what if the organization or institution one seeks to lead is badly flawed?



Alienation

Every leader of an organization must look closely into the members' feelings of alienation toward the organization. Every institution causes alienation among its members, simply because organizational life interferes with the personal and individual wishes and interests of the members. Leaders, however, will recognize that institutional life can be an opportunity for creativity and self-fulfillment of the members

Structures of Domination

Domination is a word people in professed democracies are uneasy with. The word suggests intentional cruelty and something approaching enslavement. The fact of relationships of dominance does not mean that the non-dominant person is helpless. Rather, the relationship of domination tends to diminish the fuller autonomy of the person, inhibiting a more complete expression of the agency of the person.

One can think of domination as stretching across a large continuum of relationships, some of which are horrifying, and some of which are the stuff of situation comedies

The Corrective of Ideal Speech Conditions

The ideal speech situation is constituted by communication and discourse where a genuine symmetry among participants promotes equality of dialogue where no forms of domination exist.

Interpretive Phenomenology in Policy Analysis

The critique of this form of policy analysis and formation does not rest on Habermas' model of deal speech, but rather on the phenomenological analysis of social action. This analysis uncovers that human beings are much more complex than the simplistic needs-driven models of behavioristic psychology.

The constancy of institutional failures due to their lack of concern for the internal human culture of the institution and for the social and physical environment they are intended to serve constitutes a massive scandal. The cure for such failure rests with human beings deciding to recapture their life-world as a humanly fulfilling journey. Such is the task of leadership.

Looking Forward

we have sought new understandings for leadership by studying the deep structures of social action, by probing deeper into the meaning of charisma, and by studying critical analyses of institutional life. Humans monitor their responses and the responses to their responses through their practical consciousness, adjusting to what their environment seems to demand from them.

Chapter 5:

Leadership in the Postmodern Context

The argument of this chapter contends that in the present the serious exercise of leadership cannot be carried on with the tacit assumptions underlying modernity or the industrial age, or classical liberalism—at least not without serious qualifications of those assumptions. Postmodernism arises from the bewilderment of the modern world at what it has wrought. Despite advances along many fronts, modernity has also witnessed the opposite of all it had Promised.

The Enlightenment Ideal

The Enlightenment project proposed that human beings govern themselves. They would govern themselves armed with two essential tools, human reason and science. In theory, they could create their own state, appoint or elect other persons to run the necessary offices of government, and pass laws to protect and promote the freedom and happiness of the individual and the community. This world view can similarly be charted by listing some apropos generalizations under the categories of nature, society, and the human person

The Emergence of Individualism

The major project of the Enlightenment was the positioning of the individual at center stage. No longer would tradition or church authorities or elders determine what was right or true. The individual was to be the source of truth and moral principles. Using reason, the individual was to arrive at truth, either by deductive logic or by scientific proof.

The Disenchantment of Nature

Along with individualism, the Enlightenment enshrined rationality and its most advanced expression, science. Through science, human beings were to understand the laws that governed the operation of nature, from the movement of the stars to the causes of headaches, from the minerals which nourish the human body to the geological causes of earthquakes.

The Disenchantment of Humanity

the success of the natural sciences led to the assumption that the social and human sciences should imitate the methods and perspectives of natural science. Under the microscope of the human sciences, even human beings became 'disenchanted'. Once their 'problem' had been identified, the instrumental reason could come up with a solution to return people back to a state of equilibrium. Natural interpretations of human behavior was cast aside as 'anthropomorphic'.

The Myth of Progress

Related to the compulsion to improve or transform nature is the assumption that history is a unidirectional process moving forward or upward. Civilization is seen as advancing in stages

Implications for Leadership

The challenges of the postmodern world urge leaders to adopt a postmodern sensibility. Such a sensibility is skeptical of the Utopian rhetoric of classical liberalism. The promotion of individual happiness and freedom at the expense of the environment, community, public involvement, and civic responsibility cannot be the driving ideology of leadership, specially when that happiness and freedom is equated with unbridled commodity consumption.

Options in a Postmodern World

The postmodern person is, nevertheless, left with choices. One choice is to accept the bleak conclusion that we must simply lower our sights and live in a world of competition and deception, and survive by our wits, beating the competition at their own game, because we know what the game is. Another option would be to attempt a more balanced assessment of the modern world and to adopt a more hopeful stance toward the future, to nurture what I call a postmodern sensibility

Chapter 6:

Leadership in the Social Drama

This chapter reports on the discoveries of the excursion and offers further reflections on leadership viewed within the social drama. Much of everyday life is made up of habit and routine. Those habitual or routine activities carry little or no sense of drama, for the outcome is known ahead of time. Sometimes drama intrudes on routine.

Social Life as Expressive

From a dramaturgical perspective, social interaction tends to be viewed as predominantly expressive. The action in which actors are involved tends to be communicative action, where one person communicates something considered to be important or relevant to the other.

Performers

Communicating with Other Performers

As an expressive performer, the actor wishes to communicate with another or with a group of others. The actor wants to communicate something about himself, his achievements, his abilities, his widely varied experience, his urbanity, and sophistication, sometimes even about his interest in the other person.

Roles

Performances are very much influenced by culturally grounded gender and class roles

Symbols

The dramaturgical perspective on social life points out again and again how important symbols are, whether those symbols are words, literary allusions, gestures, bodily posture, clothing, name-dropping, artifacts associated with oneself, etc. The appropriate use of symbols reveals what one thinks of oneself and what one thinks of the other.

Status and Face

In such communications, it is important for both people to know what the status relationship between them is. Being sensitive to the other person's background in order to facilitate communication is only part of the communicative problem. The trick is to make a getaway without leaving the other party aware of how uninterested the actor is.

A Closer Look at the Epistemology of Social Drama

In the drama of social life, the common and persistent problem each human faces is engagement and participation in social acts. The problem is basically to define the situation and then respond to it. This requires interpreting the symbols that are presented, coming up with a sense of the situation and of what it requires, and then engaging in responsive discourse with others. To participate in social communication is to become involved with other people, to risk making one's self public, available for another person to accept or reject.

Some General Observations on the Social Drama

Social life is *interactive*, the social drama is what we have created. Social life is dramatic in that it contains the drama of establishing, shaping, defending, and altering our very identities. Life slips away from us in triviality or it takes form and substance through involvement in something larger than ourselves.

Implications for Leadership

For those who would be leaders, the understanding of the drama of social life has many implications. One of those is that leaders should have a sense of the dramatic in their lives. That dramatic sense grows out of an awareness of involvement with other people, with their lives. Their collective actions make a difference, certainly to the members of the organization who, through their collective involvement find or fail to find meaning and fulfillment, and a difference to the client community on whom their collective action is focused. Whether in major or in minor ways, the leaders and their communities make a difference in the world. Leaders should have a sense of responsibility for the drama. With that sense of responsibility would be added a sense of how the drama is supposed to work.

Chapter 7:

The Drama of Leadership

One problem with social analysis of everyday life is that it tends to concentrate its focus on the ordinary patterns of everyday life. Introducing leadership considerations into this picture of everyday life indicates that there are other possibilities of action, not simply for the very few but for the very many.

The Larger Challenge of Leadership

Leadership appears now to involve challenges of dramatic proportions. It appears legitimate to speak of the drama of leadership, both in the sense that leadership involves dramaturgical expressive elements, and also in the sense that the exercise of leadership, both in the present and well into the foreseeable future, involves us in a drama that the postmodern world is not sure it wants to embrace.

Institutional Renewal Through Education

This new kind of leadership must emerge in institutional settings, for the task of societal renewal will come about mainly through institutional renewal. The renewal of institutions will call for a grounding of the instrumental rationality of the institution in more substantive rationality.

In this educational process, leaders will need to attend particularly to the mythic content of the organizational culture and subcultures within it.

The Leader as Player

Leaders serve a variety of functions in the drama: as players, directors, stage managers, and critics. Leaders must be players within the drama. As a player, the leader must become, as it were, all the other players in the game, as Mead suggested. The leader must know the moves and the moods of the other players in order to know when to pass the ball, take a shot, call a time-out.

Leadership Within Postmodern Sensibilities

Leadership in the postmodern world is desperately needed. It must be a new kind of leadership, however, a leadership grounded in the sober understandings and memories gained at such a cost in human lives and suffering. We need a leader, therefore, able to critique the shortcomings, and the myths that support, the *status quo*. For such broadly based leadership to develop, there will be a need for other leaders who will attend to the development of a critical mass of leadership in the population at large.

The Leader as Director

Leaders must function not only as players but also as directors. This places two obligations on the leader. First, the leader must have a large sense of the drama being played so that individual scenes and acts are integrated into a meaningful unity of purpose. Secondly the need to balance control and guidance with freedom and responsibility.

The Scripts of Leadership

Leaders need to examine the various scripts they are handed by a variety of groups. The board of directors, unions, personnel department, government regulating agencies etc all have different scripts.

The Leader as Stage Manager

When the play has gone through rehearsal and fine-tuning, the director usually leaves the managing of the daily performance in the hand of the stage manager. stage managing, of sitting in the control room with communications links to every team involved in the production.

The Leader as Educator

The postmodern leader will spend much of the time involved in educating relationships with others. This does not mean that the leader will become an expert lecturer, handing out wisdom at the morning staff conferences. Rather it means that the leader sees his or her primary task as influencing the way people in the institution *see themselves* and *see what they have to do*. Leaders need to reflect on the scripts that are currently available. They need to critique their shortcomings, look for usable language and imagery, and fashion a new script that offers a vision of greatness

Chapter 8:

The Education of Leaders

In *The Republic*, Socrates addresses the question of how a society should carry out the education of its leaders. He proposes that they will never understand justice until they see it manifested in its ideal form, in the just state.

Unless societies produce leaders, who promote the continuous regeneration of societal values and ideals, complacency with the *status quo* eventually brings about the crisis which, in turn, calls for the emergence of leadership—the leadership it had been smothering up to that point in its assurance that everything was fine.

Focus on Continuing Education

The most important place to develop leadership is with people who have already been promoted to positions of leadership. One place to begin such leadership development is in a university with one or more programs in leadership development

The Duality of Structure and Action

Participants should be exposed to the challenge of structuration theory. That theory exposes them to the 'bad news' that they reproduce the condition in which they find themselves; it also brings the 'good news' that they reproduce the conditions in which they find themselves.

Charismatic Centers

Participants should be brought more directly into contact with their core values and beliefs, and with the core values and beliefs of the institution in which they work. They need to make contact with the institutions and their own charismatic centers and explore how those centers interface or work against each other. Through extended discussion, argument, and debate, they can be challenged to come up with a well-articulated statement of their institution's vision, mission, or purpose, which might provide the foundation for institutional renewal.

Critique

If leaders are to be concerned with institutional renewal, they must be encouraged to critique their institutions from top to bottom.

A Postmodern Sensibility

Those aspiring to leadership need to go through an intense disenchantment with their institution, their society, and with themselves.

Leadership of the Social Drama

With that clearer sense of what is at stake, the new leaders will be ready to take up the analysis of public life as social drama. The analysis of institutional scripts will reveal how the human purposes of the drama are subverted. Institutional roles must be recast and new ones devised.

Who Will Be the Faculty?

This kind of program in continuing education requires a special faculty. Even in universities whose intellectual climate is relatively open to alternative approaches to leadership education, it is difficult to bring individual faculty members to a group consensus on the basic issues and to a level of commitment to this approach to leadership development. What matters, of course, is that university administrators and faculty take a new look at the preparation of leaders. There is a continuing need for in-house programs within institutions to carry on the development of the next generation.

Earlier Forms of Leadership Education

Again, the literature on leadership development in college and secondary school is extensive. Suffice it to say that schools and colleges need to attend to developing *leadership predispositions* in their curricula. Those predispositions would include, among other things, a mastery of the spoken word, a facility in debate and discussion, an openness to a variety of points of view, a facility with and commitment to teamwork, a view of one's lifework as service, a strong belief in oneself coupled with a willingness to seek evaluation, a quest for some form of the heroic, and an ability to build consensus and coalitions.

Reflection



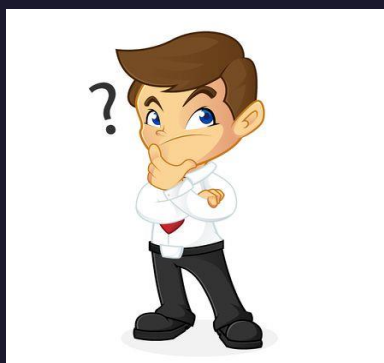
I find it interesting that from the beginning of this book, the author acknowledged that he did not have a monopoly of intellectual knowledge on the best way to educate leaders and so was also in a quest to know more. He was however able to pool his experience and other well-researched literature on the subject to aid in presenting proposals that would be beneficial in developing the current and the next generation of leaders. The leadership journey was likened to being involved in a drama that had uncertain and unknown outcomes. There are a lot of events that present themselves which were not part of the original plot and script. This book, therefore, described the leader as being a playwright, a lead actor, a stage director, a drama critic, and a director all in one.

The author was able to advance the role of leaders by referencing historical perspectives and projecting the challenges that current and future leaders will have to contend with. Because of the very important role leaders play in organizations and society in general, it is important the type and content of education leaders are equipped with. The importance of being charismatic as a leader is something that resonates in many circles even though it is often said that charismatic persons are seen as threats to institutions, legitimate authority, and the prescribed order because of the influence they wield, this trait is a strength for leaders who must succeed.

In the drama of leadership, the leader interfaces with different stakeholders, and this book captured the different roles of the leader as a player, director, stage manager, and educator. This is very instructive and underscores the fact that leaders must be highly knowledgeable and equipped with the intellectual acumen to be able to interact with the different stakeholders.

This book is an educative, informative, and enlightening read and will help leaders understand more about their roles and the actions they need to take to equip themselves to handle this highly sensitive role. This book will also help those who are saddled with the task of educating leaders to know the implication of the kinds of knowledge they impart to leaders. Followers will also benefit from this book as it will give them more understanding of the kind of support leaders need to be able to succeed.

Leaders, prospective leaders, educators, and anyone interested in having more understanding of the task of leadership is encouraged to read this book



Questions for Consideration

- ✓ Does academic curriculum alone have the capability to give leaders the education they need?
- ✓ Is a charismatic leadership style a guarantee for success as a leader?
- ✓ Can leaders succeed without the support of their followers?

About the author:

Robert J. Starratt is a professor of educational administration at Lynch School of Education, Boston College. He has taught over 11 courses in his career including Theories of leadership, HR Administration, and Organizational Theory

