**Leadership Lessons from History**

Threat of nuclear war, incredible natural disasters, expectations of increased transparency, and unique mistakes, e.g. a false warning of an impending missile attack have placed leaders in 2018 in extremely tough situations. This active conference session compares the concerns of current leadership to those of historical leaders through engaging classroom activities and considers the needs of future leadership. Participant will leave the room with new classroom ready ideas for teaching effective leadership. This session fits the conference theme by examining historical and contemporary leadership as a means to prepare for future leadership challenges.

**Keywords**: Historical leadership, Decision-making, Theory

**Introduction**

Seldom do students view general history classes as a study of leadership. Especially historical leadership style that parallels that of leaders in 2018. In this session, participants will consider the challenges of contemporary leaders and with the help of peers and the facilitator look for similar examples in history. By incorporating theory and the lessons of history, session participants and eventually their students will try to forecast the leadership needs of the future. This session is intended to be fun and provide for some “ah hah” or surprising moments.

There is great pressure on current leaders to be ethical and willing to make tough decisions. For example, the threat of nuclear war, dealing with wild fires and floods, increasing stakeholder expectations of transparency and unique situations like a false warning of a missile attack have left many leaders in crisis mode. Today’s problems seem unique, yet leaders have always dealt with difficult decisions. As educators, we can use the successes and failures of the past to challenge students in problem solving the challenges of the future. It is my belief that the legacy of past leaders and use of storytelling makes for fascinating classroom activities and retention of concepts.

An example comes to mind of World War II, and Winston Churchill’s difficult charge as the new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom dealing with German troops invading parts of Europe. His leadership is the storyline in the current feature film, “The Deadly Hour” and “Dunkirk”. Churchill’s speech dubbed “Fight on the Beaches” was known for its motivational rhetoric. “We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be” (Churchill, 1940). His words inspired a nation to defend themselves against invading German forces.

In the OB or management classroom, excerpts from his speech, video clips from the feature films, and a brief explanation of the setting and intriguing circumstances should interest students. Students can utilize their knowledge of leadership theory to determine the kind of leader needed at the time and determine whether Churchill easily assumed a transformational leadership role. Their next challenge is to look at current leaders and determine who utilizes such complex rhetoric, gathers suggestions from “civilians” and uses a consultative decision making style in pressure-filled, stressful situations. After students share their thoughts, they will consider how likely it is that a leader like Churchill could succeed in future politics or the future military.

This active workshop will have participants working in small groups to create curriculum using leadership practice over time. Through facilitated activities, every participant will leave the room with classroom-ready ideas to utilize leadership (and possibly decision-making) theory, historical stories, engaging activities, and contemporary examples of managerial and organizational leadership. This session will fit the conference theme by using both historical leadership and contemporary leadership lessons to look at leadership challenges of the future.

The intended audience for this activity-based session is instructors of undergraduate OB or management students but can also be graduate students or students in other related fields of study.

Some proposed historical leaders and their well-known traits for this session include Abraham Lincoln (persistence), Justice Sandra Day O’Connor (courage), Nelson Mandela (sacrifice), Eleanor Roosevelt (innovation), Rosa Parks (determination), Oprah Winfrey (networking), Winston Churchill (communication), and President John F. Kennedy (listening) (Toussaint, 2017). In addition, leaders who have failed or struggled could be included like, Joseph Stalin (stubbornness) and Richard Nixon (power trap) (MacMillan, 2017). There are many possibilities for contemporary leaders. I suggest Malala Yousafzai, Bono, Steve Cook, Richard Branson, Bill and Melinda Gates, Geoffrey Canada, Jack Ma, and Mike Krzyzewski. It would also be interesting to include community leaders in the group.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

Participants in this conference session could use any leadership theory to describe a leader and define their style of leadership. The most likely theories used include path goal theory, any of the contingency leadership theories, (e.g. Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory), and the behavioral theories. Transformational and transactional leadership could be used to distinguish specific leadership style, as could servant leadership. Instructors could decide how big of a role they would like theory to play in this leadership activity.

Using historical leaders as a one-on-one comparison to a contemporary leader should be interesting but may need some instructor guidance. I recall a student group strongly requesting to use Adele for a leadership exploration and they were unable to find any helpful information on her. This activity promises to be enjoyable and engaging, especially if storytelling is used with the historical leader. The results of a study by Eck (2006) indicate strong support for the use of storytelling as a teaching tool. Her research on storytelling with adult students found that adult learners are more engaged, can transfer information from stories and then apply the information to the workplace better when the information is conveyed through storytelling (Eck, 2006).

**Learning Objectives**

The specific objectives of the Leadership Lessons from History session are:

1. Identify five challenges of contemporary leaders (with peers).
2. Use materials provided by the facilitator to select three historical leaders who faced somewhat similar challenges as the contemporary leaders.
3. Build a leadership classroom activity utilizing resources on at least one of the historical leaders. The activity will include application of leadership theory.
4. Identify the needs of future leadership using the traits of past leadership.
5. Share the challenges of the contemporary leaders, historical leaders, the classroom activity and use of leadership theory.

**Exercise Overview**

In the university classroom, the activity will work best when students do a pre-reading of leadership theory. In the conference session, I propose to begin with a purpose statement, a presentation of the activity objectives and a brief overview of the activity. I will give a short example and make handouts on the listed historical leaders. Students will be place into groups of 3 or 4 depending on the number who attend the session. Once they have completed their simulated exploration of leaders (simulated in part because they will not have access to the internet), we will discuss their findings. The value of this session becomes apparent as they share their ideas with the full group. A discussion of the possible historical, contemporary, and future leader comparisons will close the session.

**Session Description**

In the proposed MOBTS session, I will provide the participants with an overview of the activity, a handout of historical leaders with a brief bio. They will then be divided into groups of three or four. Depending on the room, they will either record their ideas of leaders to compare, theory that applies, and lessons from the two leaders that can be of value to future leaders. In this session, we will not run a typical class as the value is more from the ideas of leaders and theories that are generated. The session schedule is:

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| 10 Minutes | Explanation of activity, sample leader description, dissemination of handouts, partnering |
| 10 Minutes | Groups discuss similar leadership styles of a historical leader and a similar contemporary leader. They include a discussion of engaging tools such as videos, speech transcripts, and stories. They consider applicable leadership theory in discussion the leader’s success in a given environment. They will also predict what type of future leader would utilize similar leadership. |
| 2 Minutes | Groups record their information on white boards or flip charts |
| 8 Minutes | The facilitator pulls the group together for discussion of results. We will compare similarities and differences among groups and look at other applications of classroom possibilities. |

I will bring handouts for the participants and products for the stations in the room.

**References**

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