

Which Leadership Attributes Matter Most?:

An Entertaining and Insightful Classroom Activity in Leadership

Exercise Justification and Theoretical Foundation

It is widely recognized that leadership can be taught and developed in business schools (Crossan et al., 2013; Doh, 2003). The expectation is to invest students with leadership skills to positively change their business and social contexts. However, for students to better develop their leadership skills, they must understand the attributes associated with effective leadership and identify those attributes in others, including oneself. Without such understanding and connection, students may lose sight on what it takes to be an effective leader and possibly the motivation to pursue further leadership development.

Trait and behavioral theories of leadership, along with implicit leadership theories, are helpful in understanding “what it takes” to be an effective leader. Trait and behavioral theories of leadership postulate that one’s attributes and behaviors influence leadership effectiveness. Similarly, implicit leadership theories posit that individuals label leaders based on preconceived attributes, either positive or negative (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Shondrick et al., 2010).

Grounded on trait and behavioral theories of leadership and implicit leadership theories, we present an activity to help students in their leadership development in three main ways. First, by helping them identify essential attributes associated with effective leadership. This is important for students to recognize and prioritize a repertoire of traits associated with effective leadership. Second, by giving students an opportunity to assess how their favorite characters/personalities are associated with the selected leadership attributed. Extensive research points to the importance of connecting and applying one’s knowledge to practice and real-life

situation to enhance learning and development (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2011; Cunliffe, 2016). And third, by granting students an opportunity to appraise leadership attributes with oneself, leading to reflection on what has been learned. Reflection is important because research suggest self-awareness and reflective capabilities are part of leadership development (Crossan et al., 2013). In addition, individuals may adjust their behaviors based on feedback received through the reflection process (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998). Thus, we believe it is important for students to be self-aware of their current perceived attributes in the form of skills and behaviors, and how these are perceived by others (Hackman & Wageman, 2007).

Learning Objectives and Goals

After this activity, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify essential attributes associated with effective leadership.
- 2) Assess how different characters fit with a selected set of leadership attributes.
- 3) Appraise one' current attributes to a selected set of leadership attributes.

Bloom's Taxonomy: Apply, Analyze, Evaluate and Create

Exercise Overview

Audience and course level: undergraduate

Activity session: 45 minutes

Materials required: found in Appendices

Classroom style: face-to-face

Instructions:

1. <i>Minutes 0-5:</i>	Intro and Setup: Students are divided into teams (3-5 members per team). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chosen approach is up to the professor.
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<p>2. <i>Minutes 6-15:</i></p>	<p>Each student in the group is handed a list of the top 70 traits, skills, and behaviors (see Appendix A).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclose the list is a compilation from several reliable websites. • Groups are asked to review the list and choose the 10 they think are the most critical for effective leadership and write them on the table provided. (see Appendix B).
<p>6. <i>Minutes 16-20:</i></p>	<p>Groups then choose 3 people from the provided list (Appendix C) to rate on their leadership scale (Appendix D). Students are welcome to choose a character on their own. It is important that everyone in the group is familiar with the characters so they can all participate in the discussion.</p>
<p>7. <i>Minutes 21-30.</i></p>	<p>Groups then fill in their scales by first writing the ten traits at the top of the scale (Appendix D) then reviewing how each person would rate on a 1-10 scale for each trait. Example would be provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the discussion, students should be applying the traits by analyzing the signs of leadership behavior. • For example, how do you know Sponge Bob is a leader that cares? Students discuss and site examples that show caring leadership behaviors. Also, this gets students to talk about characters they care about and see frequently and relate them to leadership.
<p>8. <i>Minutes 31-35:</i></p>	<p>Finally, tell students the last line on the score card is for them. Students are instructed to rate themselves based on the traits their group decided were the top 10 most important.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now they're reflecting on their own leadership journey, applying what they've reviewed and creating a development plan for continual improvement
<p>9. <i>Minutes 35-40:</i></p>	<p>Wrap up and Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A final message is to ask them to look at their scores and see how they're doing. • Highlight that none of them are at zero. In other words, in their list of the top 10 traits, behaviors, and skills, every student is on the path to being an ideal leader, showing them that they all have potential to be great.

Session Description

The session will follow the activity instructions outlines in the exercise overview, where participants will serve as the students. However, we will allocate the last 5 minutes to obtain feedback and new ideas from the participants.

(NOTES TO CONSIDER ADDING IF SUBMITTED FOR PUBLICATION)

We propose that, in addition to identifying and connecting with leadership attributes, educators may complement the learned knowledge to develop, or encourage the development of, students' leadership "identities" (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019) and "character" (Crossan et al., 2013). As exemplified by Clapp-Smith et al (2019), leadership identity is a reflexive method that helps students make sense of "who they are as a leader" and "what effective leadership looks like for them." Leadership character involves the development of virtues, values, and traits to help leaders deal with situational pressures and complexity of the workplace. Importantly, it is critical to highlight leadership development is an ongoing process, which requires learning, reflection, practice, and ongoing academic and social support (Doh, 2003; Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Crossan et al., 2013). Our proposed activity is an initial approach for student learning and reflection, opening the door for future practice.

Potential Modifications

Transformational Leadership:

Our activity can also help connect with the three main characteristics of transformational leadership: charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. After students have chosen their top 10 attributes, they can assess whether any of those attributes are related to either of the three transformational leadership characteristics. For example, individual consideration would be associated with the attributes of “builds up those around him/her,” “caring,” “coach,” and “develops others.” Students then would realize which of the three transformational characteristics then tend to emphasize based on their selected attributes.

Non-leadership Roles

This is an excellent exercise to use for teachers, parents, musicians, treasure hunters, author, etc. as well. Simply replace leadership traits with traits, skills and behaviors of an excellent [insert role here i.e. teacher], have participants review other great people in that role, then self-reflection on their journey on being a better teacher noting that every person is on their way in their journey as no one scored themselves as a zero.

References

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Appendix A

Top 70 Qualities of a Leader

Traits, Skills, and Behaviors gathered from dozens of websites

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|--|--|
| 1. Accountability | 39 . 37 . Integrity |
| 2. Active Listener | 40 . Judgement |
| 3. Adaptability | 41 . 38 . Justice |
| 4. Assertive | 42 . 39 . Knowledge <u>of job domain</u> |
| 5. Attention to Detail | 43 . 40 . Learner |
| 6. Bearing | 44 . 41 . Loyalty |
| 7. Builds up those around him/her | 45 . 42 . Openness |
| 8. Caring | 46 . 43 . Organized |
| 9. Coach | 47 . 44 . Passionate |
| 10. Collaborator | 48 . 45 . Persistent |
| 11. Communicator | 49 . 46 . Planner |
| 12. Community Builder | 50 . 47 . Positivity |
| 13. Composed | 51 . 48 . Prioritizer |
| 14. Confidence | 52 . 49 . Proactive |
| 15 . Courage | 53 . 50 . Problem Solver |
| 16 . 15 . Courageous | 54 . 51 . Promotes Psychological
Safety |
| 17 . 16 . Creativity | 55 . 52 . Promotes Safety |
| 18 . 17 . Current | 56 . 53 . Punctual |
| 19 . 18 . Decisiveness | 57 . 54 . Purpose-driven |
| 20 . 19 . Delegates | 58 . 55 . Relationship Builder |
| 21 . 20 . Dependability | 59 . 56 . Resilient |
| 22 . 21 . Develops others | 60 . 57 . Respectable |
| 23 . 22 . Driven | 61 . 58 . Respectful |
| 24 . 23 . Emotionally Intelligent | 62 . 59 . Responsible |
| 25 . Empathy | 63 . 60 . Risk-taking |
| 26 . 24 . Empathetic | 64 . 61 . Self-Aware |
| 27 . 25 . Empowering | 65 . Self Managing |
| 28 . 26 . Endurance | 66 . 62 . Stability |
| 29 . 27 . Enthusiasm | 67 . 63 . Strategic |
| 30 . 28 . Ethical | 68 . Tact |
| 31 . 29 . Focus | 69 . 64 . Teacher |
| 32 . 30 . Holds others accountable | 70 . 65 . Team Builder |
| 33 . 31 . Honest | 71 . 66 . Thinker |
| 34 . 32 . Humble | 72 . 67 . Time Manager |
| 35 . 33 . Influential | 73 . 68 . Trustworthy |
| 36 . 34 . Initiative | 74 . 69 . Unselfishness |
| 37 . 35 . Innovative | 75 . 70 . Visionary |
| 38 . 36 . Inspiring | |

Appendix B

Top 10 Qualities of a Leader

Chosen from the 70 top qualities of a leader gathered from dozens of websites

1 _____

6 _____

2 _____

7 _____

3 _____

8 _____

4 _____

9 _____

5 _____

10 _____

Appendix C

Suggestions of People to Rank

The follow list is compiled of famous characters in TV and Movies. It is not exhaustive.
If your group knows a character really well, you all are welcome to choose your own.

Character	TV Show	Character	TV Show
Jack Bauer	24	Dr. House	House
Iron Man	Avengers	Ghimli	Lord of the Rings
Hawkeye	Avengers	Samwise	Lord of the Rings
Loki	Avengers	Leslie Knope	Parks and Rec
Batman	Batman, all of them	Ron Swanson	Parks and Rec
Joker	Batman, all of them	April Ludgate	Parks and Rec
Tina Belcher	Bob's Burgers	Jack Sparrow	Pirates of the Caribbean
Gene Belcher	Bob's Burgers	Moira Rose	Schitt's Creek
Gina Linetti	Brooklyn 99	David Rose	Schitt's Creek
Charles Boyle	Brooklyn 99	Alexis Rose	Schitt's Creek
Dowager Countess	Downton Abbey	Kramer	Seinfeld
Lady Mary Crawley	Downton Abbey	George	Seinfeld
Ferris	Ferris Bueller's Day Off	Sherlock Holmes	Sherlock Holmes
Cameron	Ferris Bueller's Day Off	Homer Simpson	Simpsons
Chandler	Friends	Marge	Simpsons
Phoebe	Friends	Lisa	Simpsons
Monica	Friends	Bart	Simpsons
Lorelai Gilmore	Gilmore's Girls	Han Solo	Star Wars
Rocket Raccoon	Guardians of the Galaxy	C3PO	Star Wars
Drax the Destroyer	Guardians of the Galaxy	Michael Scott	The Office
Thanos	Guardians of the Galaxy	Dwight Schrute	The Office
Fred and George	Harry Potter	Angela	The Office
Ron Weasley	Harry Potter		

