From power to empowerment: A paradigm shift in leadership

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Abstract
This article argues that there has been a clear shift in leadership approaches from those where the leader is in control and commanding i.e., power-based leadership to one where there is empowerment. Here the power comes from the followers and is shared. Burns concepts of transactional and transformational leadership are used interchangeably with the concepts of power and empowerment respectively. Under power-based leadership are included great man and trait, behaviourist and contingency theories. The article argues how these theories fit under the power based paradigm. Included under empowerment-based leadership are visionary, moral, servant and cultural leadership approaches. The article argues why these theories fall under this paradigm by showing for example how power is shared through the development of followers into leaders themselves.

INTRODUCTION
From the beginning of the twentieth century, leadership theory has been dominated by power and authority of the leader. This view influenced the early theories such as trait, behavioural and contingency. Leaders in this paradigm have been associated with commanding, controlling, being authoritarian and have shown an unwillingness to share power. This view changed in 1978 when Burns triggered off the shift in thinking from leaders who were authoritarian to leaders who are willing to share power (Owens 2001). This shift can be likened to two sides of a coin. On the one side is the old thinking which Burns terms transactional leadership which in this
article is seen as power-based leadership. Whilst on the other side, he saw the new thinking as transformational leadership which in terms of this article is regarded as empowerment-based leadership.

In this article the concept of transactional leadership is seen from a power based perspective where power is strongly associated with the leader and is top-down. Some of the theories that will be included under this paradigm are: trait and contingency theories. On the other hand the concept of transformational leadership is seen from an empowerment perspective where power emanates from the followers, albeit not quite bottom-up but it is shared. Included in this paradigm are: collaborative, visionary and cultural theories. The article will begin by examining the concept of power and then discuss the two paradigms. This article will further argue that there has been a paradigm shift from power to empowerment.

THE CONCEPT OF POWER

In order to discuss the concept of power, one needs to understand what it means. Hoy and Miskel (2001, 217) give the classic definition of power which ‘is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. They further quote Weber (1947) who defines it as the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance’. Power can be seen to be coercive or non coercive. Owens (2001, 236) describes power as ‘the capacity to influence others’.

Over the years, leadership has been confused with commanding, but the difference lies in the source of power. Owens identifies fives sources of power which are briefly discussed below. Leaders, whose source of power is the official or formal position, have the legitimate right to command. This is known as legitimate or legal power. Their power is legitimizized by those higher up in the organisation.

Coercive power uses force and fear by punishing followers for undesirable behaviour forcing them to abandon it and is normally used by commanders instead of leaders. The source of this power is mainly from the leader’s ability to reprimand, deny salary increment and terminate workers. Closely related to this source of power is the reward, utilitarian or normative power which enables the leader to influence followers by rewarding desirable behaviour. Most traditional theories of leadership tend to be based on the kinds of power mentioned above. In this situation, leadership has the potential for forcible domination and coercion (Owens 2001, 235). This is more super-ordination than leadership, where power resides in the institutional role.

The other sources of power, expert and referent, are less associated with coercion and domination. Expert power is based on the leader’s specialized knowledge and skills which followers do not possess but wish to. Referent power, on the other hand, is whereby followers voluntarily accept the direction and influence of the leader mainly because they trust him/her, feel that there is mutual commitment and the leader can represent their interests. It is clear then that power can either be used to dominate, control and coerce followers, whereby there is little or no trust between
the followers and the leader, or to empower them. Having looked at the concept of power, the article now begins to discuss the power-based paradigm.

**POWER-BASED LEADERSHIP**

Transactional leadership paradigm will be used to group power-based leadership theories. These theories include the great man and trait theories, behaviourist approaches, and contingency or situational leadership theories. Transactional leaders wield a great deal of power over people. They control rewards in exchange for compliance and other favors and determine tasks in the organisation without much input from the followers. These leaders are basically commanders who control everything that goes on in the organisation (Owens 2001; Cunningham and Cordeiro 2003; Lunenburg and Ornstein 2004). Below we will discuss each of these theories in more detail and in particular show how they fit under the power based paradigm and how they focus on the power of the leader who is not willing to share it.

**The great man and trait theories**

The great man theory began in the early part of the twentieth century and was concerned with describing the lives of famous ‘military, political and industrial leaders’ (Short and Greer 2002, 24). The aim was to identify universal personal qualities which could be found in all leaders and not in followers but this was unsuccessful because the traits varied widely from leader to leader. This did not, however, discourage the search for characteristics that single out leaders. The new approach was called the trait theory and the main difference with the great man theory was in the way the validity of data gathering was improved (Hoy and Miskel 1996; Short and Greer 2002).

The great man and trait theories fit under the power based/transactional paradigm because they clearly distinguish between leaders and followers. Unlike in the empowerment based/transformational paradigm where followers can also lead, under these theories, followers did not and would never possess the traits that are necessary for leadership because these were believed to be inherent and could not even be acquired through training (Short and Greer 2002).

The above theories emphasized leadership which is based on coercive or legitimate power, which is another characteristic that makes them fit within the power based/transactional paradigm. Leaders according to the great man and trait theories possessed a great deal of power, based in their position and used it to get followers to comply. The school head, for example, can control the behaviour of teachers by withholding favorable rewards. These theories also emphasize a command and control mentality, a reward system, which is entirely controlled by the leader and tasks that are carried out according to the leader’s wishes (Cunningham and Cordeiro 2003). This characteristic of controlling power can also be seen in the behaviourist theories discussed below.
Behaviourist theories

Behaviourism, according to the psychological perspective is based on the fact that behaviour is an external process rather than a mental one (Zimbardo, Weber and Johnson 2000). This view has filtered through to different disciplines such as leadership. The realization by scholars of leadership that behaviour of the leader also plays an important role in understanding leader effectiveness led to the behaviourist approach which ‘focuses on the behaviour of the leader as observed by group members’ (Short and Greer 2002, 26). This perspective began in the 1940s when John K. Hemphill and Alvin Coons developed the Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) an instrument used to collect observations of the leader’s behaviour by the subordinates. The instrument measured leadership on a two dimensional basis. The first dimension, which is named *initiating structure* includes leader behaviour which emphasizes accomplishment of task. The second dimension, *consideration* emphasizes leader behaviour which attempts to build friendship, trust, warmth and respect with the followers (Hoy and Miskel 2001; Owens 2001; Short and Greer 2002). According to this approach, leadership is a mixture of the two dimensions, and leader effectiveness is based on using the right mix (Owens 2001).

Likert (1967) further identified four leadership styles which he refers to as systems but still based on the two dimensions developed by Hemphill and Coons. System One is exploitative authoritative in which the leader exploits his or her subordinates by virtue of the power vested in the position through fear and threats. System Two, which he calls benevolent authoritative, is about the leader and the subordinate likened to the master-servant relationship in which there is slightly better communication but still with restricted freedom of the employee. The third system he refers to as consultative but which falls short of a two way process because the subordinates contributions are ignored. This is a case of *heads I win and tails you lose*. The last system is the participative group which is transparent and allows for both horizontal and vertical flows of communication and shared decision making.

The idea of the two pronged approach to leadership continued into the 1980s with the work of Robert Blake and Jane Mouton (1981; 1982) and Hersey and Blanchard (1988). The former developed a managerial grid portraying five leadership styles which consists of a horizontal axis that depicts concern for production and a vertical axis which depicts a concern for people. The grid also has a rating of 1 to 9 on each axis. The latter developed the situational leadership model which is an extension of Blake and Mouton’s ideas except that they have four leadership styles instead of five and furthermore they introduced the dimension of the maturity of the followers. Whilst Blake and Mouton; Hersey and Blanchard were operating within the behaviourist approach they were also among the forerunners of the contingency or situational approach.

The behaviourist theories clearly fall within the power-based/transactional paradigm. Whether one looks at the original theory by Hemphill and Coons or the subsequent developments by Likert and later by Blake and Mouton or Hersey and
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Blanchard, one finds that they all focus on the leader rather than the followers. Initiating structure is really about the leader being in control of defining and assigning tasks, setting deadlines and ensuring that the staff meets standards. All these activities demonstrate the authority of the leader and the limited involvement of subordinates. However, the second dimension of consideration which exhibits such characteristics as trust, respect, warmth and support may give one the impression that there is empowerment of followers but the truth of the matter is that this has existed more in theory than in practice. The behaviourist theory thus may be seen to be having a dichotomy. On the one hand it is power based in nature, that is, it is authoritative and controlling. On the other hand it has an aspect which allows for involving subordinates but as noted earlier this only acts as a smokescreen as the issues per se may not be important to the subordinates. Thus one can see that power still rests with the leader, and this key feature of the power based/transactional paradigm is also seen in the contingency theories discussed below.

Contingency/situational leadership theories

These theories merged ideas from behaviourists with those from personality traits (Short and Greer 2002). The contingency approach which is based on the work of such people as Fiedler (1967); Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973); House and Mitchell (1974) and Hersey and Blanchard (1977) is anchored on the idea that there is no one best approach to leadership. Effectiveness in leadership depends on the fit between the leadership style and the variables within the situation, such as competence and maturity levels of the followers, leader’s authority level and the need for involvement (Short and Greer 2002; Cunningham and Cordeiro 2003). Although leadership theorists such as Fiedler and Chemers (1974) believe that leadership style is a fixed personality trait which cannot be changed through training, others, such as Hersey and Blanchard (1977) do not support this view. They believe a leader’s style can be modified to fit a particular situation.

As with the behaviourist theories, the contingency theories also focus more on the leader than the followers. There is no mention of developing the followers. On the other hand, the leader has the power to choose a particular style for a given situation but this style may be inherent in the leader him/herself.

Summary of power based leadership

One common thread which seems to be found in all the early leadership theories is power. In fact, according to Owens (2001), leadership and power are inseparable concepts. To understand one you need to understand the other. Evidence of their affinity is also found in their definitions. Owens (2001, 234) following the review of over 350 definitions of leadership found that many generally agree that ‘leaders intentionally seek to influence the behaviour of other people’. Similarly, Owens (2001) and Hoy and Miskel (2001) agree that power is the ability to influence the behaviour of other people or to get others to comply with directives or commands.
It is important, however, to understand that the leader can influence behaviour of followers through different kinds of power as noted earlier (Etzioni 1975; Owens 2001; Hoy and Miskel 2001; Lunenburg and Ornstein 2004). These early leadership theories have tended to emphasize a command and control mentality, a reward system which is entirely controlled by the leader and tasks that are carried out according to the leader’s directives (Cunningham and Cordeiro 2003). Clearly the power based/transactional leaders, possessed a great deal of power, based in their position, and used it to get followers to comply. Having discussed the power based/transactional paradigm, the next part of this article will address the empowerment based/transformational paradigm.

**THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT**

Empowerment as a concept emerged around the 1940s and 1950s through ‘systematized approach to participative decision making’ (Short and Greer 2001, 12) such as Scanlon Plan and the Japanese quality circles. It however only became popular in educational circles in the 1980s. In order to understand the concept one needs to first look at its meaning. Empowerment is not a simple construct. It has several meanings, but for the purpose of this article we will only consider two versions. The first version is where power is thought of as a finite commodity where empowerment of one person automatically means the loss of power for the other person. The second version, which is based on the participative decision making tradition, believes that power is an infinite commodity which means that involving other people in the decision making process does not exhaust the power source, in fact, the leader gains more power by giving it away. A more comprehensive meaning of empowerment can be summarized as the ability to take care of one’s own growth, to solve one’s own problems and to believe that they possess skills and knowledge necessary to improve their own situation (Short and Greer 2001).

**EMPOWERMENT BASED LEADERSHIP**

For the purpose of this article, empowerment-based leadership which is equated with transformational leadership will be regarded as an umbrella term which groups together a number of theories namely: visionary leadership, moral/ethical leadership, servant leadership, cultural leadership and collaborative/group leadership. This grouping is based on some commonalities found in the concept of transformational leadership and the theories mentioned above. These commonalities include: developing the followers, raising the moral standards of leaders, working collaboratively or in teams and the sharing of power and responsibility. The section below first examines the concept of transformational leadership and then discusses these theories in more detail and particularly addresses how they fit under the empowerment based paradigm.
Transformational leadership
Transformational leadership was first conceptualized by Burns (1978) and became the landmark for the shift from the old to the new paradigm, that is, from power-based to empowerment-based leadership. Transformational leadership has been associated with certain key features which include developing the followers into leaders and raising the moral standards of leaders (Owens 2001); collaborative goal setting; shared power and responsibility; teamwork and regular reflection (file://E:\Transformational and Lunenburg and Ornstein 2004) Having looked at what transformational leadership is, we now begin to examine the various theories associated with it starting with visionary leadership.

Visionary leadership
In order to talk about visionary leadership it may be necessary to begin by examining the concept of a vision. According to Campbell, Devine and Young (1990) a vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible and attractive future state of the organisation, that is, a condition that is better than what exists now. Furthermore a vision is not a one time event but an evolutionary process. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004), note that vision has become a buzz word in educational circles, but clearly it is popular in almost all organisations. The authors further define vision as ‘the act of seeing, anticipating and imagining’ (2004, 355).

A visionary leader is one who forges a new pathway whenever an organisation reaches a cul-de-sac, that is, a stage of no growth or stagnation with a view to take the organisation to higher levels of achieving its goals. The visionary leader is also one who answers the questions of where we are and where we are going (Owens 2001). In so doing he/she brings the followers in line with the vision but at the same time also allowing them to revise the vision according to their understanding so that it becomes a shared one (Starratt 1995; Lunenburg and Ornstein 2004). Thus it is quite clear that there is a shift from the previous paradigm where the leaders did not want to involve the subordinates to a situation where they are now willing to share and involve the follower ship. This then clearly puts the visionary leader into the empowerment based/transformational paradigm. This is supported by Owens who includes visionary and moral leadership under the heading of transformational leadership. The article now proceeds to discuss moral/ethical leadership and shows how it also fits under the empowerment paradigm.

Moral/ethical leadership
Leadership according to this approach creates a supportive environment where people grow and thrive, care for each other and share responsibility. One of the most important features of a moral leader is to constantly assess ones intentions and actions in relation to certain values and beliefs in order to ascertain whether these were done for selfless or selfish reasons. In essence, a moral leader is bound by certain ethics namely the ethic of caring in which he/she demonstrates the care through action rather
than just saying it (Gamage and Sun-keung Pang 2003). For example when one of
the staff members in a school has a bereavement, the school head can first encourage
other teachers to help in whichever way they can and second by taking the initiative.
Other important aspects of care include attentive listening and bringing out the best
in others. A moral leader is also bound by the ethic of justice, which is anchored on
equity and fairness (Lunenburg and Ornstein 2004). This can be demonstrated by a
school head who has to take a decision on two teachers who were absent from work
without valid reasons. The decision should not favor one over the other. The ethic
of critique is also very crucial to the moral and ethical leader. This ethic promotes a
culture of debate where people in the organisation can ask what is happening. How
it is happening? Why it is happening? These questions are being asked with a view
to change the status quo if necessary.

It is clear from the above descriptions of moral/ethical leadership that it can be
logically placed within the empowerment based/transformational paradigm. As
noted earlier, the most important characteristic of transformational leadership is that
it allows followers to feel that they are important players in the organisation by being
given the opportunity to grow. In order to grow, the followers need a supportive
environment which is a key concern for the moral leader. According to Leithwood
and Duke in Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, 136) ‘transforming leadership ultimately
becomes moral in that it raises the level of ethical aspiration of both leader and led,
and thus has a transforming effect on both’. Furthermore, Burns (1978) reiterates
this view by stating that ‘leadership is a process of morality because leaders and
followers have shared motives and goals’. This is what makes both the leader and the
followers accountable for the achievements or failures of the organisation.

The moral leadership characteristic of being critical, empowers the followers
to question the raison d’ etre of the organisation. By virtue of this exercise, they
are involved in the process of changing or transforming the organisation. Some of
the issues contained in moral/ethical leadership can be also found in the servant
leadership model which follows.

**Servant leadership**

This leadership approach was introduced by Robert Greenleaf (1970) in Sergiovanni
(1992) and in Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) who note that some leaders have
a natural feeling to serve others. This teaches the leader the qualities of politeness
and humility, brought about by putting the followers needs first. Greenleaf further
notes that the followers should be allowed to define their own needs according to the
way they want to. Some of the salient features associated with this approach include
the leader’s commitment to the growth of the followers spiritually, personally and
professionally until they themselves become servant leaders. Listening is another
crucial characteristic of servant leadership. It is important for a leader to listen
receptively to those around him/her by being present in body, spirit and mind. This
can help the leader to become more aware of the followers needs. Servant leadership
also builds trust between the leaders and the followers to such a level that they choose freely to work with each other instead of being forced to do so.

Servant leadership falls under the empowerment based/transformational paradigm firstly because they promote the growth of the followers. Secondly, servant leadership puts the needs of the followers first which demonstrates selflessness as a moral ethic. Transformational leadership also encourages followers to go beyond their own self interest for the sake of the group or organisation. Having discussed servant leadership, the article now moves on to discuss cultural leadership.

Cultural leadership

Successful organisations are those that develop a shared culture which in turn leads to commitment by all members. But what is culture? The concept was first coined by anthropologists to explain ‘differences among … life patterns of tribes, societies, national or ethnic groups’ (Deal and Peterson 1999, 3). Later it was used to distinguish behaviour patterns among organisations. Culture also uses shared beliefs, norms and values to bond organisations together. Bower (1966) in Deal and Peterson (1999) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) in Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) simply define culture as ‘the way we do things around here’. Culture has been found to be the key ingredient in determining performance and any organisation wishing to change or improve cannot succeed unless it familiarises itself with the culture that forms the bases of its operations (Cunningham and Cordeiro 2003).

Cultural leadership is based on certain key elements namely: collegial relationship, values and interest, access to quality information, individual empowerment, trust and vision, broad participation and lifelong growth (Cunningham and Gresso 1993). For the purpose of this article however we will focus only on two of them, trust and vision.

According to Tschannen-Moran (2004, 17) trust is a complex construct and therefore difficult to define. However, she defines trust as the ability to be vulnerable or to accept criticism knowing that the other person is honest, open, reliable and competent. She also regards it as a glue which binds the leader and the followers. Trust is a value which assists the leader to support the followers’ efforts and allow them to take calculated risks. Valuing other people’s opinions is another way of promoting trust in an organisation (Smialek 2001). A vision is also an important element within the organisational culture but it can only succeed when all the people share the vision.

It is interesting to note that visioning and trust are key characteristics of both cultural and transformational leadership approaches and therefore falls within the empowerment paradigm. In fact Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) argue that a vision provides a basis for transforming an organisation. Collective trust enables people to work together to achieve desired changes which can benefit the organisation. This then leads us smoothly into collaborative leadership which emphasises the need to work together.
Collaborative or group leadership

Rubin (2000, 11) defines collaboration as ‘creating a context and decision in which others choose to work with you towards a shared goal’. It is a relationship whose purpose is to cooperate with each other in order to achieve a goal. In this relationship, the role of the leader is crucial in building and maintaining working relations that lead to success.

Collaborative leadership builds bridges that people are willing to cross to work together to achieve the same goal. It uses participative decision making and develops followers into leaders by ‘flattening the hierarchy’ (Koehler and Baxter 1997, 61). School Management Teams (SMTs) are an example of sharing leadership. This concept of leadership is similar to Snowden and Gorton’s (1998) group leadership and Spillane’s (2006) distributed leadership where leading is shared among the organisational members. Collaborative leadership is based on a set of values and beliefs enshrined within the culture of the organisation and found in its vision and mission.

It is quite clear that collaborative leadership falls within the empowerment based/ transformational paradigm because the leader is willing to share power and decision making. Furthermore the leader also develops followers into leaders themselves.

Summary of empowerment based leadership

The key characteristic demonstrated in the theories above is a genuineness to share power and involve the followership as demonstrated in the visionary and collaborative approaches. According to the visionary approach, every leader should have a vision, but should allow input from the followers with a view to revise it so that it becomes their own. In the moral/ethical approach, the leader is bound by certain ethical and moral standards such as the ethics of caring, justice and critique. This demonstrates that the leader does things for the benefit of the followers. It also shows that the leader is fair and just and allows followers to question and be critical of whatever he/she does.

Servant leadership shows the willingness to be a servant first and then be a leader. Listening is also an important characteristic of this approach. Cultural leadership emphasises trust and vision. Trust is an important value for the leader which binds him/her with the followers. The collaborative approach speaks about the ability to share power which as mentioned above is the crux of empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of this article was to discuss the paradigm shift from power to empowerment. It begins by discussing the concept of power which is about the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. It then notes that there are different sources of power such as coercive, legal, reward, expert and referent. The first three are associated with the earlier power based theories namely, great
man, trait, behaviourist and contingency, whilst the later two are associated with empowerment.

The next section lumps together all the power based/transactional theories and tries to show how they all fit in this paradigm. The key characteristics in all these theories are that the leaders have a lot of power based on the position and have a command and control mentality. There is also a limited involvement of subordinates and a lack of will to share power.

The article then discusses the concept of empowerment noting that it can be either finite or infinite. It further notes that empowerment is about providing knowledge and skills in order for the subordinates to develop themselves.

Finally, the article brings together visionary, moral/ethical, cultural, servant and collaborative leadership theories and argues how they fit under the empowerment/ transformational paradigm. The main features of these theories are that leaders are willing to share power and decision making particularly in matters which affect the followers. These theories allow for shared ownership, vision and transparency. They also encourage growth thus enabling followers to develop themselves. They further emphasize a moral basis for leadership which encourages selflessness, trust and sharing. On the contrary, the world is full of the selfish, non-transparent and greedy leaders.

Thus the article argues that in the early leadership theories, power and authority were vested in the leader and not in the followers. This gave a lot of power to the leader who became very authoritarian and commandeering. The turning point in leadership came about when Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership with the sharing of power, collaboration and teamwork and the introduction of moral and ethical standards for leaders which made them more accountable to their followers. Subsequently, other theories emerged which broadened the concepts of power sharing, collaboration and morality in leadership. However, this turnaround is more in theory than practice because leaders do not really want to let go of power. There is still a lack of genuineness and trust in order to achieve true empowerment.

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