

Alternative, Grassroots, And Rogue Leadership: A Case For Alternating Leaders In Organizations

Darlene Andert, Florida Gulf Coast University, USA

Alan Platt, Florida Gulf Coast University, USA

George Alexakis, Florida Gulf Coast University, USA

ABSTRACT

The article examines traditional understanding of top-down organizational leadership against spontaneous, self-initiated leadership/followership theory. It also denotes the relationship between spontaneous and self-initiated expression of alternative, grassroots, and rogue leadership as a construct of alternating leadership behaviors. The research furthers the leadership research focus that is identified as Alternating Leadership and acknowledges leader/follower dual function within each individual. The constructs are augmented by a matrix that contrasts the strength of the leadership and followership roles among traditional versus non-traditional leadership theories. Conclusions suggest a confirmation of the dual Alternating Leadership role existing within all employees or managers and the creation of worker-centered, real-time interventions to increase employee interaction and synergy. The impact of generational leadership on the Alternating Leadership Model is also examined.

Keywords: Alternating leadership; Grassroots leadership; Rogue leadership

INTRODUCTION

Grassroots leadership research studies the spontaneous reality of social movements (Osterman, 2006; Russell, 2007), citizen impact in communities (Lampe, 1994), community-building in general (Beilenson, 2005), children's mental health outcomes (Ouellette, Lazear, & Chambers, 1999), anesthesia team functioning (Kunzle et al, 2010), nonprofit leadership (Mondros, 1997) and membership organizations (Gallicano, 2009), grassroots leadership of socially-oriented student entrepreneurs (Mars, 2009), and successful leadership in task-oriented groups (Boehm & Staples, 2005). The study of grassroots leadership is important because the top-down organizational power structure that is seen in most corporations may be at odds with their central mission, vision, and purpose (de Geus & Senge, 1997; Kotter, 1996). Instead of the system encouraging behaviors for long-term organizational advancement, executives are typically contractually incented to direct their attention on short-term results (Gilley, 1998; Banham, 2009). Non-salary rewards (e.g., stock options) may change the motivation of the executive from the enduring health of the organization to more immediate gains (Braithwaite, 2009; Haleblan, Devers, McNamara, Carpenter, & Davison, 2009). Stakeholders and the workforce are usually aware of misdirected focus but are not empowered to challenge incentives or organizational direction (Kidwell & Valentine, 2008).

The most obvious incongruity between executives and employees rests in the ever-increasing disparity in compensation. A recent study reported that executives from the top 500 U.S. companies earned \$10.9 million on average (Dyck & Neubert, 2010). In one year, the CEO of Capital One Financial, received \$249.3 million in total pay, almost entirely from exercised stock options. One report asserts that CEOs of the largest U.S. corporations are paid \$364 for every \$1 paid to the average worker (a ratio of 364:1) (Sahadi, 2007; DeCarlo, 2006; Buck and Main, 2005). Some theorists explain that the substantial pay inequality is the product of excessive management power in setting compensation. The popular idea that executive pay based on performance is advantageous to the company is not borne out of research evidence (Dyck & Neubert, 2010; Bebchuk & Fried, 2004).

Money, prestige, and power may subsequently take precedence over the lasting welfare of the organization and the full development of its people. Employees take note of the apparent misaligned focus on extrinsic rewards, especially as the salary disparity continues to grow. Corporate directors should understand the dynamics of approving the use of non-salary financial inducements throughout the organization to influence firm-wide leadership and positive productivity (Andert, 2003). Boards now consider non-financial measures of corporate success as important to general oversight. In addition to shifting the focus from variable CEO incentives to base salary, boards could re-direct policy from lucrative financial executive rewards to the vast potential of non-financial intrinsic rewards as a means of leadership motivation *at all levels of the firm* (Andert, 2003). For instance, Joo and Lim (2009) found that the personal characteristics (proactive personality) and contextual characteristics (organizational learning culture and job complexity) affected employees' intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment. In Joo's study, employees were more intrinsically motivated and exhibited the greatest organizational commitment when they perceived higher learning culture and higher job complexity. Human resource scorecards also exist to help boards measure the non-financial return on investment of their organization's most important resource (Phillips, Stone, & Phillips, 2001; Kaplan & Norton, 1996).

One such organizational benefit occurs with the increase in the powerful force of *Alternating Leaders* within all levels of an organization. Boards and CEO's can contractually bestow authority of position but cannot contractually bestow leadership (O'Sullivan, 2009; Schein, 1992). Leadership in organizations continually emerges by people who do not have the corresponding *position power* (Elloy, 2008; Kidwell & Valentine, 2008; Gundlach, Zivnuska, & Stoner, 2006; Rousseau, Aubé, & André, 2006). Followership remains an under-researched source in the redefinition of leadership though individuals pragmatically exploit both leader and follower characteristics in any given social construct (Hall & Lord, 1995; Meindle, 1995). The occurrence is evident whenever there is a group of employees working toward a goal or solving a problem (Weick, 1979; Ouchi, 1981; Senge, 1990; Keelor, 1999; Dilworth, 1999; Gundlach, Zivnuska, & Stoner, 2006; Elloy, 2008). More often than not, these collaborations are the real reasons companies meet objectives.

Research supports that leadership, whether grassroots or formal, is a social process that depends heavily on delivery from both leading and following behaviors (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Holland & Offerman, 1990; Lord & Mahr, 1991; Hollander, 1992). Structurally, the essential nature of organic matter lies not in objects but in interconnections (or relationships). The essential nature of an organization is similarly, not in its structure or in its organisms (i.e., people) but in its interrelationships (Wheatley, 1992; Weick, 1979, 1969). The natural phenomenon of self-organization plays out in the corporate world several times each day. It is *self-maintaining* (depends on one's environment, but not determined by it), *self-renewing* (replacing human resources), and *self-transcending* (evolutionary change). It involves the comingling of elements of leading and following within a single worker and between and among workers.

Employees are frequently more reflective of the values espoused by the company than the executives who are officially in charge (Blanchard & O'Connor, 1997, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977; Block, 1993). The chasm is reflected in recent corporate scandals (e.g., AIG, Merrill Lynch, Lehman Brothers, General Motors, etc.). Employees seem more likely to display company core values, because their compensation is basic. The lack of incentives besides compensation makes it easier for employees to exhibit behaviors that are more closely integrated with these values. Employees do not work with the conflict of interests that challenge high-level executives. As a result, employees often have a higher level of *values alignment* than do their executives (Preziosi, 2009).

The essence of entrepreneurial leadership can be found among "intrepreneurs" (corporate managers with a flair for innovation). In recent years, there has been an increasing acceptance of the idea that leadership does not only stem from external sources in a top-down process, but can also emerge from within the team itself (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). *Alternating Leadership* (also expressed as *shared, emergent, distributed, entrepreneurial leadership, and lateral leadership*) flourishes among the ranks as employees are set up to concentrate on work and not short-term, self-enhancing incentive rewards (Elloy, 2008). Within the workforce, *Alternating Leaders* take on ad hoc leadership positions in an intreprenurial manner by temporarily and freely alternate back to being observers, followers, and so forth. The ebb and flow process is understated and usually goes undetected by senior management, corporate executives, and board of directors. Leadership that is shared in such a manner "refers to an emergent team property resulting from leadership functions being distributed across multiple

team members rather than arising from a single, formal leader” (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007, p. 1217).

More broadly, Alternating Leadership occurs in action throughout the organization although one’s formal title may not reflect these significant behaviors and subtle shifts (Service, 2006). Spontaneous leadership behavior with permeable boundaries is continuously occurring in organizations, as employees who are spontaneously associating within various networks pass leadership responsibilities to one another on an informal basis, as is deemed necessary. The concept of leadership within the framework of informal teams has many implications, primarily to the growth and success of the entire firm. The decentralized model, where employees throughout the organizations are alternating or transitioning between leader and the led, abounds. Long-held corporate practices of mutual aid and employee-level organization are in fact a typical outcome of a social dynamic within an organization (Gundlach, Zivnuska, & Stoner, 2006). Although these interconnections and practices are well within the boundaries of most corporate policies, they are dissimilar from the idea of powerful central corporate leadership driving decisions. Alternating Leadership is not the same as bestowed formal management titles.

The nature of entrepreneurial leadership sometimes contradicts the corporate culture or status quo, which is often a positive if perceived properly. Ethical dilemmas could represent a formidable constraint in the development of corporate entrepreneurship. Thought should be given to how far should employees be encouraged to "disrupt" or "subvert" established standards (Kuratko, 2007). The balancing act has to do with innovative leaders being allowed innovation without ethical standards being compromised. Without an organization providing the proper entrepreneurial environment and ethical guidance, some managers may display rogue behavior in attaining their goals (Kuratko, 2007) and what they feel is best for the organization. Thus, some firms feel that must be wary of the "rogue leader" acting under the guise of the corporate entrepreneur (Kuratko, 2007). However, the fear is probably unwarranted. Peter Senge once said that if you scratch the surface of most cynics and you find a frustrated idealist. Rogue Leadership that comes from the grass roots can be very valuable to a corporation if recognized as such by higher ups and harnessed appropriately.

The first purpose of this paper is to refocus the definition of leadership or leading behaviors as an ad hoc and voluntary relationship or linkage between two or more individuals resulting in synergistic outcomes. With an informal orientation, leadership and leading behaviors exist at all levels of the organization and transcend the traditional hierarchical and mechanistic managerial roles. Alternating Leadership emerges from the interconnections of employees’ collective knowledge, skills, and abilities (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). Equally important is the mutual self-selection to actively engage in the leader or follower role as desired (Kragness, 1994).

The second purpose of this paper is to address the distinctive differences between Alternating Leadership and formal management. The final purpose of this paper is to address the need for administrative acknowledgement and attentiveness surrounding Alternating Leadership. By understanding the positive impact of Alternating Leadership within the organization, boards can transform pay packages leading to much needed and long overdue reforms in a way that minimize the unsightly blemishes of corporate scandals.

LEADERSHIP AND THE ORGANIZATION

While research on leadership proliferates, it remains in its infancy stage (Bass, 1981; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Bryman, 1992; Block, 1993; Zigarmi, Blanchard, O’Connor, & Edeburn, 2000; Northouse, 2001; Yu & Liang, 2004; Zigarmi, Blanchard, O’Connor, & Edeburn, 2005). A recent look at the offerings on the Amazon.com corporate website located 66,232 leadership book titles offered for sale, yet none of these books provides the reader a singular formula for the creation of a leader (Amazon.com, Inc., 2010). Though decades of studies, casework, descriptive articles, and relational research exist, there is no known recipe for the creation of a leader according to the experts (Bass, 1981; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Bryman, 1992; Block, 1993; Zigarmi, Blanchard, O’Connor, & Edeburn, 2000; Northouse, 2001; Yu & Liang, 2004; Zigarmi, Blanchard, O’Connor, & Edeburn, 2005). It is self-evident that leadership behaviors are present in virtually any random grouping of individuals. Equally, leadership behaviors transcend hierarchical limitations and are expressed dynamically throughout any organization.

There is no known universal formula for eliciting on-command leadership behavior from an individual (Bass, 1981; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Bryman, 1992; Block, 1993; Zigarmi, Blanchard, O’Connor & Edeburn, 2000; Northouse, 2001; Yu & Liang, 2004; Zigarmi, Blanchard, O’Connor, & Edeburn, 2005). There are only relational elements that indicate a higher probability of seeing leadership displayed when certain behavior and other traits, situations, environmental supports, or mutual exchanges (perceived or real) are present. More importantly, one cannot restrain leadership from spontaneously occurring. Leading and following behaviors are the spontaneous domain of every individual. The matter is worthy of academic discussion.

Organizations count on their workers to express leadership behaviors as the mechanism for success and succession—a way to earn promotions to the upper level of the organization. Although the procedures vary from company to company, most corporations have formal promotion systems of which everyone employed is aware. The question is why do so many managers, administrators, and corporate boards associate leadership as a skill exclusive to upper management?

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Fayol’s original research is distilled to identify the *management process* as planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling. It is common practice in the business disciplines to associate the “motivating” element of Fayol’s work with corporate leadership (Schermerhorn, 2008). Although linking motivation to leadership is very common, in reality organizations are able to effect motivation through mechanistic elements that include pay, performance reviews, promotions, and discipline practices to gain adherence to organizational policies and procedures. Mechanistic management realities can even coerce compliance and desired behaviors into existence through threats, punishments, and reward (or bribes). Yet, even in down economic times when financial rewards may be limited, workforce leadership remains in constant abundance for organizations and unreservedly offered by workers. It must be noted, though, that the most productive people may seek firms offering the highest extrinsic rewards (Kazenbach, 2003).

The *management* approach of motivation begins with established norms as spelled out in corporate policies and procedures; and reinforced as outlined in the humans resource handbook. Leadership transcends as an organic component of any organization and is spontaneously present throughout the organization—it cannot be effectively codified into a corporate handbook. Alternating Leadership is the organic, synergistic, and voluntary exchange among all people in the organization. The management process is the frame or the setting in which Alternating Leadership tends to voluntarily flourish.

Associating workers who participate in informal teamwork provide examples of how spontaneously roles can alternate. During the work process, group members may shift leading and following behaviors and thus roles, as needed (Rousseau, Aubé, & Savoie, 2006; Tan, Wei, & Lee-Partridge, 1999). The differences separate the formal management process and structures from leadership and leading behaviors.

The mechanistic elements of management are dissimilar to the spontaneity of Alternating Leadership behaviors that can and do emerge at all levels. Few argue the strength that the combination of management and leadership skills offers. Managers who possess well developed leading and managing behaviors are valued and still considered distinct in the contemporary organization. The difference between these labels and actions are outlined below (see Table 1.).

Table 1.
Management Versus Leadership Definitions

<i>Collective noun</i>	Management	Leadership or Followership
<i>Individual noun</i>	Manager	Leader or Follower
<i>Verb</i>	Managing	Leading or Following

LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWERSHIP

Traditional leadership theories and research have placed primary foci upon several elements: (a) *individual leader traits* (e.g., intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, sociability) (Morrison, 1992; Northouse, 2001); (b) *environmental rearing* (Psychodynamic Approach) (Northouse, 2001); (c) *situational opportunity* (leadership styles and developmental levels); (d) *style* approach (The Ohio State Studies, The Michigan State Studies, Blake and Mouton’s Managerial leadership Grid); and (e) even *management outcomes* (Path-Goal Theory). Some leadership research concentrates on the glorification of the *leader’s influence* (i.e., Charismatic Leadership and Transformational Leadership). Traditional leadership roles rely heavily on position power. Followers sensitized to such power relationships are often conditioned (by the organization and mainstream media) to perceive authority figures as strong leaders who may appear to provide order, security, and direction in an otherwise chaotic and threatening world. As a result, followers may trust a charismatic leader whose attributes they associate with a beloved authority figure from childhood and regress accordingly (Alexakis, 2009).

Leadership research continues to focus upon the individual leaders in process (Leader-Member Exchange Theory and team leadership theories) (Fisher, 1993). Other researchers have turned the traditional pyramid structure upside down, and looked at leadership as an obligation to *serve others* (Stewardship and Servant leadership) (Greenleaf, 1977; Block, 1993). Research foci also include *values-based* human phenomena (Blanchard & O’Connor, 1997, 2003). Other noteworthy research examines leadership using *quantum physics*, *self-organizing systems*, and *chaos theory* (Wheatley, 1992; Weick, 1979, 1969). It is in the latter studies that leadership emerges as a Social Exchange Theory and upon which this paper expands. The phenomenon is the action of the individual as both leader *and* follower in spontaneous synergy with other individuals who express both leader/follower behaviors at will.

The leader and follower is the same person interacting with other leader/followers, each dynamically and spontaneously emerging, fading, and re-emerging at all organizational levels. The definition grows from singular, well-defined hierarchical roles and formal power to an inter-relationship with self and others to the dynamic nature of the role of alternating leading/following. Formal organizations and informal groups are seen in the same light—offering leadership and followership opportunities equally to all members for their self-selection. If one views the concept of Alternating Leadership to known leadership theories, it is evident that the void in the focus on dual roles is the missing development to leadership theory. Figure 1 illustrates using “leader and leaders’ role foci” on the “x” axis and “follower and followers’ role foci” on the “y” axis. It divides the various research paradigms taking into account the level of leadership participation among followers. It indicates that the literature is replete with theories that have far less of a focus on the dynamic nature of the dual role of the individual as leader and follower with the synergy of spontaneous exchange (i.e., Alternating Leadership).

Figure 1.
The Placement of Alternating Leadership in Research Progress

L E A D E R S R O L E	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Machiavellian Leadership ● Charismatic Leadership ● Transactional Theories ● Psychodynamic Approach ● Style Theories ● Trait Theories ● Contingency Theories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alternating Leadership ● Social Exchange Theories ● Team Leadership 	
	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leader-Member Exchange Theory ● Situational Leadership Theories ● Laissez-faire Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Goal Path Leadership Model ● Servant Leadership Model ● Stewardship Model 	
		<i>Strength of</i>	FOLLOWERS’ ROLE	High

CONCLUSIONS

Traditional top-down roles defy empowerment and innovation. An organization’s ability to generate products and services is strongly based on the work efforts of the front-line professionals. The “inverted pyramid” represents a different look at the role of management: placing the CEO and senior management in a support role to front-line professionals, thus opening the environment to *Alternating Leader/Follower* behaviors. These individuals can increase value through the spontaneous behaviors of Alternating Leadership within and among the ranks. Yet, most organizations place limited value on the ad hoc leader-follower relationship. There is less compensation and other rewards among the rank and file compared to senior administration.

Great outcomes within organizations are usually not the result of someone working alone but the synergy of inter-relationships with the thoughts, ideas, and actions of many. Making celebrities out of highly compensated administrators and CEOs has not typically served the whole organization in the long term. Much leadership research seems to have gone astray in leader glorification, as in the case of Charismatic Leadership and Transformational Leadership models, and the role and power of the leader over the follower. Alternating Leadership challenges the outdated understandings of leadership and replaces them with inclusive, interactive, and synergistic workforce utilization. Recent developments have shown the importance of measured, reasoned, and principled long-term organizational administrative strategies. The lack of such combinations has not only led to notable organizational strife but of late, international economic upheaval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although researchers have identified several precursors to shared leadership (e.g., self-directed work teams), relatively little research has been done in the area of unprompted leadership (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007). Traditional research remains focused on the leader and the leader’s role within the hierarchical structure of the corporate firm. More emphasis is needed on the spontaneous synergy among the rank and file. Attention needs to be paid to the ability of these workers to freely play out alternating leader/follower roles, as needed, when needed. One way for this to be realized is for organizations to spend more time on being employee focused by encouraging project-centered activities. *Alternating Leadership* may best flourish in organizational environments in which *formal and self-directed* training events are augmented with *facilitated* action learning activities. Simple formal training interventions are not enough. However, on the job group experiences complete the learning cycle and the interactivity supplies fertile ground for Alternating Leadership to flourish. The model is best understood through the matrix offered below (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Andert Training Matrix

Formal Training	Facilitated Training	Self-Directed Training	Cultural Activities
Classroom Training Events	On-the-job Training Events	Desktop Module Training	Rewards
Workshops	Mentoring Programs	Corporate Library Material	Corporate Newsletter
Conferences	Special Project Assignments	Self Observation	Posters
Retreats	Committee Work	CD-Rom Training	Town Hall Meetings
Lecture Presentation	Identity Group Meetings	Distance Learning Programs	Expert Directories
Morning Meetings	Work-out Sessions	Simulation Programs	Folklore Stories
Apprenticeships	Group Work	Tuition Reimbursement Programs	Suggestion Boxes

By definition, “Formal Training” includes interventions that are structured, contain specific learning objects, timeframes, and controlled activities. “Facilitated Training” interventions are real-time, action-oriented activities that may or may not involve management supervision. *Facilitated Training* events may result in management serving only as the recipient of the group’s finished product. “Self-Directed” interventions are by title and practice, individual learning events. Finally, “Cultural Activities” serve to reinforce cultural norms throughout the organization.

The Alternating Leadership principle always exists when one or more workers gather and interact. It is ever present, dynamic, and self-initiating. It captures and expands the individual talents among group members. Its importance stems from the classroom dynamic, which holds that interaction among class participants is more than just the sum of its parts. The serendipitous aspects of the interactions in the workplace at the grassroots level similarly transfer and exploit materials presented in the classroom or independent learning.

The missing element may be the limited fertile environment and rewards that make the most of this reality. The management elements of planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling should include employee-centered activities that expand leadership-follower synergies and increase opportunities for workers to interact, share, and clarify new roles, and increase the resultant velocities of Alternating Leadership. The next generation of leadership paradigms points to the duality of the leader-follower dynamic and should be inclusive of Rogue Leadership contributions at the grassroots level. Finally, the Alternating Leadership model readily lends itself to a seamlessly segue for future research that analyzes grassroots or rogue leadership methods that spontaneously occur in all areas of the greater society. Such research can offer and expand the list of Alternating Leadership interventions that corporate firms can access, which will further develop and embed Alternating Leadership principles.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Darlene Andert is on the faculty of the College of Business at Florida Gulf Coast University. She is the director of the International Center for Responsible Corporate Governance (ICRCG). She developed a prescriptive model for corporate governance. Dr. Andert research interests include corporate governance, group dynamics, and organizational development with a focus on human resource development.

Dr. Alan Platt is an Assistant Professor with the College of Business at Florida Gulf Coast University where he teaches business and sport management courses. His background includes administrative positions with academic institutions and corporate organizations, including Athletic Director at leading schools of higher learning.

Dr. George Alexakis is an Associate Professor of at Florida Gulf Coast University's College of Professional Studies. His background includes administrative, consulting, and operations. Dr. Alexakis is conducts research in the areas of leadership, organizational dynamics theory, and socio-political issues as they relate to the business disciplines.

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