CJC Publications

Department of Criminal Justice and
Criminology

8-2023

Leadership in Action: An Introspective Reflection

Natasha N. Johnson
Georgia State University, njohnson93@gsu.edu

Recommended Citation

Chapter 3
Leadership in Action:
An Introspective Reflection

Natasha N. Johnson

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8145-2153

Georgia State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights reflective practice as the core element of the ongoing art of introspective leadership. Firstly, while there is no one without the other, what does exist here is a dependent and independent variable. The independent variable, reflective practice, undeniably begins with self. Any person committed to a life of professional development must realize that one's personal development comes first. The introspection and assiduous work required is prodigious, to say the least. A practitioner understands that this work is cyclical in nature. As underlined in this chapter, it is essential to recognize the role of introspection in leadership. This work is a recurrent process; all actions, reactions, and interactions are interconnected, and it is imperative that leaders spend sufficient time analyzing, personalizing, and reinforcing these constructs.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the ability to inspire, motivate and guide a group of people toward a common goal or purpose (Heiss, 2023). To be an effective leader, one must possess certain qualities such as vision, empathy, communication, adaptability, and resilience (Tang, 2019). Good leaders must also have self-awareness and the ability to reflect on their own actions and decisions (Gill, 2002). Moreover, self-reflection is a process by which one examines one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to gain insight into oneself and improve personal and professional growth (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). By way of this process, influential leaders – and people – are able to understand their strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for improvement, and make necessary changes going (and growing) forward (Rahmani et al., 2018; Sohmen, 2013).

Combining leadership and reflection is essential for personal and organizational success (Hamilton, 2021; Nesbit, 2012). Introspective leaders possess the ability to look inward and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They are self-aware and understand the impact of their actions on others (Moldenhauer, 2019), and they use this self-awareness to guide their decisions and interactions with others (Pounder, 2001). As such, here are six defining traits and practices of a reflective leader:

1. Self-awareness: Introspective leaders are aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs. They understand how their biases and perspectives shape their thoughts, decisions, and interactions (Showry & Manasa, 2014; Watts, 2012).
2. Emotional intelligence: Introspective leaders are emotionally intelligent and can recognize and regulate their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. They use this understanding to build positive relationships with their team (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Panait, 2017; Vitello-Cicciu, 2003).
3. Reflection: Introspective leaders regularly reflect on their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They use this reflection to identify areas in need of improvement and to make better decisions in the future (Daudelin, 1996; Mitchell, 2019).
4. Humility: Introspective leaders are humble, willing to admit their mistakes, and take responsibility for their actions. They use their mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning (Maldonado et al., 2022; Mohan, 2022).
5. Active listening: Introspective leaders are good listeners and are open to feedback from others. They use this feedback to improve themselves and their leadership style (Gustafson et al., 2022; Yue et al., 2021).
6. Empathy: Introspective leaders have compassion for others and can see situations from their perspective. They use this understanding to build trust and respect with their team (Frei & Morriss, 2020; Hagman, 2021).

Underscored here, an introspective leader is self-aware, emotionally intelligent, reflective, humble, a good listener, and empathetic. These traits and practices allow influential leaders to build strong relationships with their teams and make better decisions for the betterment of their respective organizations.

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Leadership in action refers to applying leadership principles and behaviors practically in real-life situations. It involves leaders taking specific steps and demonstrating efficient leadership qualities to achieve desired outcomes. In an ever-emerging, post-pandemic environment, successful leaders recognize the need to move away from the status quo and embrace necessary transformation. They understand the expectations and nuances of their constituencies, working to lead in affirming, effective, authentic, and compassionate ways. Thus, leaders must adapt their approaches and implement strategies for success in this capacity.

Traditional command and control leadership paradigms are becoming outdated, and leaders must adapt to the current socioeconomic, technological, and cultural changes and climates. Conscious leadership, which emphasizes mindfulness, empathy, and collaboration, is gaining prominence. It involves adopting new mindsets, models, and methods to thrive in the evolving leadership landscape. Leading by example

is a decisive and intentional action pertinent to effective leadership. When those in headship demonstrate the behaviors and values they expect from their team members, it fosters trust, accountability, and a positive workplace culture. Leaders inspire and motivate their teams to perform at peak efficiency by embodying the qualities they want to see in others.

Influential, effective leaders exhibit certain behaviors that align with their team's goals and boost morale. These behaviors include effective communication, transparency, empathy, decision-making, accountability, and fostering a positive work environment. Leaders who demonstrate these behaviors create an atmosphere of trust, motivation, and efficiency. Good leadership encompasses achieving results and actively listening, being proactive, and supporting individual and company goals. Successful leaders create strategies to advance business goals, delegate responsibilities, and inspire and train their team members. Leadership in action, then, involves intentionality and setting examples that inspire and gain the trust of others.

Leaders prioritize others, have a clear vision or goal, practice gratitude, show up and actively engage with their team, provide feedback, foster collaboration, and lead with integrity. As such, leadership in action entails adapting to changing circumstances and embracing new leadership paradigms. This work involves leading by example, prioritizing individual and organizational development, exhibiting effective leadership behaviors, and achieving results while supporting and empowering others. By implementing these principles and taking appropriate actions, the effective leader continually works to create positive and impactful leadership experiences.

A LOOK AT THREE INTROSPECTIVE LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Introspective leadership theories are based on the idea that effective leadership requires a deep understanding of one's own personality, values, beliefs, and motivations. These theories suggest that introspective leaders are better equipped to make decisions, motivate and inspire their team, and create a positive organizational culture. One example of an introspective leadership theory is Transformational Leadership Theory (see Sashkin, 2004). It suggests that efficacious leaders inspire and motivate their followers by being positive role models and creating a vision for the future. Transformational leaders are self-aware, authentic, and emotionally intelligent, using these qualities to build strong relationships with their constituents (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

A second example of introspective leadership-in-action is Authentic Leadership Theory (see Avolio & Gardner, 2005), emphasizing the importance of leaders being true to themselves and their values. Authentic leaders are introspective, transparent, and ethical, inspiring trust and respect from their followers by demonstrating integrity and consistency (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2014). Servant Leadership Theory is a third introspective approach that underlines the importance of putting the needs of others first. Servant leaders are reflective, empathetic, and compassionate, prioritizing their people's well-being and development over their own personal interests (Cooper et al., 2005).

Thirdly, action-centered leadership (John Adair) focuses on balancing three primary responsibilities: (1) achieving the task, (2) developing the team as a whole, and (3) nurturing constituents on an individual level. This leadership model helps streamline the management and governance processes, enabling leaders to handle different individuals, teams, and tasks simultaneously. It is especially beneficial relative to complex organizational environments. Organizational leadership in action involves prioritizing individual development, implementing professional development programs, and leveraging coaching

to enhance skills and competitiveness. By investing in their employees' growth, leaders build stronger teams, identify internal talent, and create a continuous learning and improvement culture.

Together, these and other introspective leadership theories point to the significance of self-reflection and the need for self-awareness in efficacious leadership. In this way, effective leaders are keen on understanding themselves, their limits, and their own biases, values, and motivations. From there, they can create a vision for the future, build strong relationships with their community members, and create positive organizational cultures promoting growth, collaboration, and success. In the sections below, I underscore the necessity of reflective leadership, as highlighted via the journeys of two action-centered school principals.

HIGHLIGHTING THREE REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS

Participant Selection

In addition to my own educational leadership journey, working on an undertaking of this nature gave me a unique opportunity to connect with, observe, evaluate, and learn from two very different Principals in two varying school systems. The first Principal, referred to hereafter as Principal A, is a middle-aged white woman who took headship over an elementary school in the Southeast region of the United States roughly ten years ago. Since then, she has worked relentlessly and tirelessly to positively change this school's culture. My relationship with her stemmed from my time serving as a community member on this school's Leadership Team. Then, I worked with this Principal to analyze the School Intervention Plan (based on school data dating from 2013-14 to present) and conduct a Readiness for Change analysis using this same institution as a prototype.

The second Principal I collaborated with – Principal B – is a younger African American woman. Her career path began as a teacher turned assistant Principal before working her way up to her current role as Principal. She is a founding Principal; the elementary school she runs is located in the Northeast region of the United States. I met her while we were both in graduate school back in 2005. Since then, we have remained friends, peers, and active educators in our respective fields. For the purpose of this piece, I had a chance to interview Principal B via Skype. In addition, I analyzed the effectiveness of her school based on the ten most commonly agreed-upon characteristics of effective schools (Hoyle, 1985; Hoyle et al., 2005; Langely & Jacobs, 2014).

Data Collection

My involvement with both of these leaders-in-practice allowed me to see school management not simply through the lens of an administrator but explicitly through the lens of the commander-in-charge. In this way, I collected first-hand data via interviews, using this information as an applicable platform to reinforce and strengthen my capabilities as a teacher-counselor-practitioner-reflective leader. This paper highlights two perspectives: Principal A's path as she took over an existing institution and worked to promote change, and Principal B, as she moved up through the ranks at her current location and launched her own school when the opportunity presented itself.

While both stories differ, this remains the same: a leader's interchangeable role as decision maker, effective communicator, authority figure, manager of conflict, executor of vision, and agent of change

is never *truly* done. I have acquired much knowledge through this process, and in the sections below, I merged our accounts, experiences, insights, and notes for continued progress moving forward. As such, what follows is an account of our primary takeaways from this impactful and rewarding experience.

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: FIVE PRIMARY TAKEAWAYS

In alignment with my own growth, development, and reflection as a leader, in the following sections, I highlight the following five primary takeaways, gathered from both Principals' vast and varying experiences: (1) the role of the leader as an effective decision-maker, (2) the importance of being a good communicator, (3) the ability to successfully balance and implement one's authority, power, and influence, (4) the leader as a capable and consistent manager of conflict, and (5) the responsibility of the leader as creator and advancer of a tangible vision.

Key Theme #1: Decision Making

During her tenure as an assistant Principal, Principal B was assigned the unique task of creating a program in which struggling students' test scores, at one time in the 20th percentile, would be raised to at least the 50th percentile. Given only three years to implement this undertaking efficaciously, the average person would easily have buckled under the magnitude alone. Being the leader that she is, Principal B not only embraced the challenge head-on, but she succeeded with flying colors. At that time, she was the assistant Principal, and everyone knew that her future goal of leading her own school depended on how she would carry out this charge. At the onset, Principal B gathered her team of associates and began to break things down. According to Gorton and Alston (2012), "the initial question that an administrator must ask is, 'To what extent do I possess the competency, resources, personal influence, or power necessary to implement this alternative'?" (p. 43). Given this situation, the only real alternative was taking on a system that obviously was not working and figuring out how to make it work.

I have had ample practice making decisions as a referent leader. As a referent leader, my ability to draw conclusions, make assessments, and render verdicts did not necessarily impact a large number of people. As a "titled" leader, however, managing my constituency quickly became top priority. The Principal's role as decision maker is magnified simply because of the great responsibility that lies therein. Yet, as I reflect on the responsibility of an administrator as decision-maker through these collective experiences, I have come to understand that "experience in making decisions is not, in itself, a sufficient basis for improvement without reflection upon and assessment of that experience" (Gorton & Alston, 2012, p. 64). With that said, I am more aware now than ever before of the enormity of the leader's role as the ultimate decision-maker. There is no getting around it; the effective leader can logically make consistently good decisions that positively influence an entire school culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

Key Theme #2: Communication

At Principal A's school, the consensus is this: keep the lines of communication open so that even when there is discord, it is not covert. There are few things worse in a school culture than negative, ineffective communication. Gorton and Alston (2012) shine a light on the extreme importance of effective communication:

More frequently than not, failures in communication lie at the heart of problems in organization, goal setting, productivity, and evaluation…No one can manage a modern organization who is not knowledge-able in communication principles and techniques and skilled in their use. (p. 101)

My time spent at this school brought me back to a period in which I received my first taste of leadership. Then, it was the 2004-2005 school year, I was a 4th-year teacher, and I was tasked with coordinating, managing, and overseeing events, meetings, and activities within the grade I was teaching at the time. My official title was "9th-grade team leader." In addition, I was a member of the School Leadership Team, and it was also the year I began working on my M.S.Ed in School Counseling. As busy as I was, I always made myself available to and for my students, and it was something I was very proud of. The problem I created was that I made no time for my colleagues; I did not communicate with them as I should have. This behavior affected our meetings, cross-curricular planning time, and overall interactions. Something certainly had to give.

Scheffer et al. (2012) make it unequivocally clear that communication is much more than one party interacting with another. Instead, it depends "as much on what leaders believe or don't believe about their employees as it does on what they say or don't say. It depends as much on values, beliefs, and attitudes as it does on structures, systems and approaches" (pp. 100-101). As a reflective leader in this context, I am paying attention; I see where I went wrong in the past, and I relish the opportunity to be the effective communicator I know I should and must continue to be.

Key Theme #3: Authority, Power, and Influence

Principal A is all of five feet, three inches tall, weighing roughly 100 pounds on her heaviest day. However, her constituents refer to her as "the ninja." I chuckled when I first heard a teacher refer to her in this manner. It was immediately evident that despite her petite physical stature, she is absolutely a force to be reckoned with. As I mentioned earlier, she became the head of this school roughly ten years ago. Since then, she has earned the respect of all staff members under her guidance and leadership. When I inquired about what it was, specifically, that made Principal A a "ninja," the response was overwhelmingly the same: she pulls no punches and plays no games. As an insider, I learned that several leaders passed through this particular school within a short amount of time. The culture became one in which employees learned not to stay too committed to any specific leader because, in one teacher's words, "they were bound to leave anyway." I have had some experience entering a school mid-year; how does an administrator take the reins and demand the required respect? Gorton and Alston (2012) make it quite evident that "the use of authority is an inescapable part of an administrator's job. The important question, then, is not *whether* authority should be exercised, but *how* and *in what circumstances*" (p. 82).

Under extenuating circumstances, as with this case, Principal A, by her own account, "did what she had to do." She continues to receive high marks among her staff, which is clearly because she understands that "authority is what makes individuals leaders, but reflection – ongoing, honest, and objective reflection – is what makes them effective leaders" (Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 5). As a practitioner-turned-specialist-turned-leader, I fully appreciated what I witnessed – a manager who entered under less than stellar circumstances and quickly and efficiently used her authority, power, and influence to positively impact the school's culture.

Key Theme #4: Conflict Management

Conflict management has long been an area of weakness for me, both personally and professionally. In the past, I believe the one barrier to reaching the other side of the "glass ceiling" has been my inefficiency in handling and managing conflict. Thankfully, as I continued to rise through the ranks as an individual and an educator, I learned – oftentimes the hard way – that conflict does not simply dissipate into thin air; left unaddressed, it does not automatically resolve itself.

I am Caribbean-American and have encountered more than my share of instances in which I assumed "cultural differences" was the culprit. While this may be true, it is not an excuse for not comprehensively addressing areas of conflict. Gorton and Alston (2012) note…"conflict is often inevitable in an educational organization, and to some extent, it may indicate that important changes are being proposed, considered, or implemented" (p.150). On several occasions, I had the opportunity to witness Principal A as an effective manager of conflict. I watched while numerous teachers, on the brink of disaster, were soothed entirely by the sound of her voice alone. Each instance concluded with the same twofold result: investigate the root of the problem and actively work to seek resolutions.

Even in my earlier years as a teacher, I found that if I could squelch the minor problems, they never festered and grew into big problems. I quickly learned then that "an important first step in conflict resolution is to identify potential or minor problems at an early stage before they further deteriorate and become unmanageable" (Gorton & Alston, 2012, p. 144). This rule continues to ring true today and permeates my personal and professional lives. The general rule of thumb is that one must address situations while they are still minuscule, and they will not end up becoming unmanageable, thorn-in-the-side problems down the line.

Key Theme #5: Vision

A "leader's understanding of the need for power and the approach to its use is essential to progress. The leader must also have the organizational vision necessary to direct the organization into the future and the ability to articulate this vision" (Gorton & Alston, 2012, p. 8). I have long admired Principal B's tenacity and commitment to her vision. Very early in her years as an educator, she knew she would one day be the person in charge. By the time we met in 2005, she was already working on her licensure in school leadership. I began working on my advanced certificate in school administration in 2008, and one month later, I met my husband on a cruise. Five months later, I moved from my home state to his, and the idea of earning my advanced certificate fell by the wayside.

Everything truly happens as it should because then, I did not have the vision I have now. As a matter of fact, the primary reason I decided to become a school administrator at the time was because of the exponential pay increase. That alone is never a reason to become a school leader, and I acknowledge that. How would things have been different had I continued through the program then? Scheffer et al. (2012) note, "A vibrant and meaningful vision starts with leadership, but vision is effective only to the extent that it is communicated and collectively owned throughout an organization" (p. 63). At that time, I possessed a plan; while it was a good plan, it was in no way a meaningful, longitudinal, culture-impacting vision.

It goes without saying that I am in a different place now than I was at that time. As a leader, I now know that the "vision tends to set [our] horizons. Once we recognize [this], we can take [it] into account as we make decisions and manage the everyday routine… It (the vision) becomes crucially important as we seek to implement change" (Whitaker, 2010, p. 33). My scope is different now than it was then.

After making that (first of many) major move in 2008, I spent ample time prioritizing my own personal development. Much time has transpired since then; I have grown tremendously in many ways. Now, I no longer have a "plan;" I am proud to say that I possess a real, tangible, and executable vision for reform.

REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE, REFLECTIVE LIFE

Reflective practice is the core element comprising the ongoing art of thoughtful leadership. Firstly, while there is no one without the other, what does exist here is a dependent and independent variable. The independent variable, reflective practice, undeniably begins with self. Any person committed to a life of professional development must realize that one's personal development comes first. The introspection and assiduous work required is, at minimum, prodigious. A practitioner understands that this work is cyclical, for "reflection tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action" (Schön, 1983, p. 56). This work is recurrent in nature; all actions, reactions, and interactions are interconnected, and sufficient time must be spent analyzing and personalizing these constructs. If this system is not adhered to, there will be failure because "when a practitioner does not reflect on his own inquiry, he keeps his intuitive understandings tacit and is inattentive to the limits of his scope of reflective attention" (Schön, 1983, p. 282).

My Own Reflection: Moving the Needle Forward

Reflective leadership can only be implemented once a person can honestly face self, understanding that "reflective leadership is a process of taking stock of ourselves, of objectively looking at our actions, our beliefs, and our espoused theories and theories-in-use. Knowledge, choice, and perception, taken collectively, constitute the mirror by which this takes place" (Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 42). Through my own leadership journey, I have come to understand that a reflective leader is constantly growing, building, and inquiring. "When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context… because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry" (Schön, 1983, p. 68). While the job of the truly contemplative practitioner is never complete, the remuneration is the emergence of a holistic person, one whose reward is the fulfillment of a contemplative life.

The Reflective Practitioner

Schön, throughout his text, offers the reader a broad scope of what it means to be a reflective practitioner, highlighting the importance of continual questioning, revisiting, and managing on a sizeable organizational scale. Schön (1983) provides us with much of the "what" reflective conversations look like, what effective top-to-bottom structures look like, and what limitations and implications exist for practitioners in the field. He tells us that "it is our capacity to see unfamiliar situations as familiar ones, and to do in the former as we have done in the latter, which enables us to bring our past experience to bear on the unique case" (p. 140). It is inevitable - we bring ourselves, our past experiences, and our beliefs into every current and future situation we encounter. Elaborating even further, he adds that "it is our capacity to *see-as* and *do-as* that allows us to have a feel for problems that do not fit existing rules" (1983, p. 140). This aptitude we possess serves as a precursor to our effective handling of subsequent

circumstances that are bound to arise. The reflective practitioner, then, is one who, over time, continually builds a repertoire, one in which a variety of tools are amassed for productive, diligent, operational use.

Regarding conflict, "the expectation is that 'legitimate conflicts' will surface…a manager's task is to ensure that such conflicts are neither suppressed nor circumvented. Organizational learning…depends on the 'working out' of such conflicts" (Schön, 1983, p. 254). This journey leads to the debunking of numerous implications, and there are no Band-Aid fixes to managing conflict. The contemplative leader and practitioner knows that early identification is imperative, for "clearly an important first step in conflict resolution is to identify potential or minor problems at an early stage before they further deteriorate and become unmanageable" (Gorton & Alston, 2012, p. 144). Conflict is unavoidable; nevertheless, it presents ample opportunity for reflective practitioners to bring unity to their constituency as leaders; to build competency and credibility to their craft.

Hanging the Mirror

Inasmuch as Schön provides us with the "what," Scheffer et al. provide us with the "whom." The tone in *Hanging the Mirror* is consistently one in which all related elements of reflective, effective leadership are directly connected to one's employees. Communication, recognition, involvement, and capturing the human spirit are just an iota of the many responsibilities and accountabilities underscored in the role of the reflective leader. The "who," of course, is the commander-in-charge, tasked with building a culture that directly connects to one's personnel. These are the people who, ultimately, are directly impacted by their leader's vision or the lack thereof.

It is a well-known fact that communication is a fundamental aspect of building a well-run organization, but do we realize how significant this notion truly is? One of the many roles of the reflective practitioner and leader is to create a communication-rich culture. Scheffer et al. (2012) make it clear that communication is much more than one party interacting with another. In fact, it depends "as much on what leaders believe or don't believe about their employees as it does on what they say or don't say. It depends as much on values, beliefs, and attitudes as it does on structures, systems and approaches" (pp. 100-101). Productive, industrious personnel can only exist when they are aligned with a motivational, reflective, communicative leader who executes a clear and consistent vision (Gorton & Alston, 2012).

Leadership: Title vs. Practice

I initially began working on my advanced certificate in school leadership and administration in March of 2008. At that time, I was educated, experienced, knowledgeable, and zealous and held referent, informal leadership among my coworkers and peers. Yet, what I know now, unbeknownst to me then, is that I was far from ready for a life of formal headship. While I possessed many formidable qualities at the time, I was not genuinely committed to ongoing, reflective practice. I was a leader by title, but there was a missing element – "authority is what makes individuals leaders, but reflection – ongoing, honest, and objective reflection – is what makes them effective leaders" (Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 5). Despite my zeal as a teacher and guidance counselor, I lacked effectiveness because I tended to be emotionally turbulent, did not open the lines of communication with my coworkers, and was reluctant to share newfound knowledge with others. My espoused theories conflicted with my theories-in-use; I knew, theoretically, that "only by a searching reexamination of ongoing patterns of behavior can we begin assembling a picture of the values, paradigms, and assumptions that give impetus to our actions and form to our decisions"

(Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 28). However, I did not put what I believed I knew into my own daily practice. I was not nearly as trusting as I should have been. I was mildly interested in the input of others, and I made little effort to recognize work that I believed to be "part of the job."

Change

I, myself, am no stranger to change. I have lived in two countries, three states, and more cities than I can count; I know from my own experience how taxing and overwhelming the prospect of change can be. Change allows for setting a system of perpetual alterations, adjustments, and variations in motion. Simply put, change can be challenging, particularly for the unaccustomed. It is human nature to seek comfort and, with that, a residual state of homeostasis. The problem in most instances is that comfort quickly turns into complacency, which can eventually turn into entitlement. When people reach this state, expecting them to actively and willingly support a climate of change is seemingly impossible. According to Whitaker (2010), "One essential component of leading change is to support and reinforce any attempts to move in the right direction – and to do so promptly, as they occur" (p. 101).

Managerial support for attempts of this nature is significant. When people see that their efforts are supported, they will be more inclined to continue to seek change. The role of the leader, then, is "trying to develop an understanding of the [system change] and people's concerns about it. To accomplish these objectives, the administrator needs to create a climate or atmosphere conducive to objectivity, trust, and confidence" (Gorton & Alston, 2012, pp. 198-199). The truly reflective leader understands the significance of cultivating a culture of respect; in doing so, one's constituency can "buy-in" to change, simply because they trust their leader's ability to impart this change.

What changed for me between then and now? After meeting my husband on a cruise and relocating my home city and state to his, three months thereafter, we were wed. We spent the next fifteen years to date traveling, collectively living in two countries, three states, and more cities than I can count; throughout this time, we continue expanding our scopes, visions, and levels of communication. We challenge each other daily in our pursuit of more. There is no more significant motivator than regular, ongoing accountability in one's quest to improve. Just as iron sharpens iron, so "knowing-in-practice consists of a self-reinforcing system in which role frame, strategies of action, relevant facts, and interpersonal theories of action are bound up together" (Schon, 1983, p. 234). I also became an educator in another country for some time, an experience that indelibly proliferated my worldview.

Today, I finally understand that "if determination is critical to a reflective discipline, patience, and perseverance are its twin sisters. Reflective leadership – indeed a reflective practice of any kind – is less about growing by leaps and bounds than pursuing a steady process of little-by-little, day-by-day" (Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 158). Now, through my daily commitment to being better, do I fully understand that "the work of reflection is largely internal, but not until it becomes manifested in our daily choices does it impact those around us" (Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 128). This work never ends, and yet, while my achievements still matter a great deal to me, my legacy now matters even more.

THE MIRROR WITHIN

Gorton and Alston (2012) revealingly note, "Most individuals not only lack awareness of their values, attitudes, and how they are affected by them but also lack criteria and standards for evaluation" (p. 50).

While the reflective leader's job is to impact and impart change, how can this be done without first having an authentic sense of self? The more I looked within, the uglier things became. I was a master teacher but a not-so-nice person. I hoarded information, was minimally willing to communicate with my colleagues, and was known for setting expectations – for both parents and students – that were too high. I needed a change, which would only come once I admitted it had to start with me.

Whitaker (2010) articulated it best: "Change is inevitable; growth is optional… In a rapidly changing world, [educational] leaders must choose growth – for themselves personally and for the organizations they serve – and determine how to achieve that growth" (p. 1). I needed to learn, and I have, that I am not managing organizations, structures, and institutions. I am leading people, and this concept alone is what makes all the difference. People are not robots programmed to do whatever they are told to do. Instead, people require interaction, communication, feedback, reinforcement, and consistency. I was proud to have acquired many of these elements as a master educator, but I had not quite mastered them all.

When I became a college counselor and instructor in the Fall of 2008, I knew that being a leader in higher academia was where I belonged. It allowed me to evolve as a frontrunner, a leader of children and adults, and a coordinator of various services. From there, I earned my Ed.S. in Instructional Leadership (2015) and my Ed.D. in Educational Leadership (2019). I continue to relish the opportunity I now have to serve as a leader in higher education. I have been granted a chance to face myself in the mirror and to realize that "the work of reflection is largely internal, but not until it becomes manifested in our daily choices does it impact those around us" (Scheffer et al., 2012, p. 128). This is what separates true leaders from the fold and what I continually strive for, the ability to serve unremittingly as a reflective leader-practitioner in life first and subsequently in practice (Patterson, 2015).

This piece highlights that combining leadership and self-reflection is essential for personal and organizational success (Nesbit, 2012). Introspective leaders are able to look inward and reflect on their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They are self-aware and understand the impact of their actions on others (Moldenhauer, 2019), and they use this self-awareness to guide their decisions and interactions with others (Pounder, 2001). In tandem with the five primary takeaways outlined above, the reflective leader is a strong communicator and effective decision-maker, able to balance and implement authority, power, and influence, a capable conflict manager, and a palpable vision advancer (Day et al., 2020; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Huguet, 2017).

CONCLUSION

To move this needle forward, I conclude this chapter by emphasizing the following five essential practices of the effective leader, one who understands the relevance and importance of ongoing introspection:

1. Setting aside time for reflection: Creating a space to reflect on one's thoughts and actions without distractions is necessary. This space could be a quiet room, a journal, or a daily meditation practice (Johns, 2009; Mitchell, 2019). Regardless of the method, consistency is key.
2. Asking for (and accepting) feedback: Seeking feedback from one's peers, subordinates, or mentors shows inclusivity. Doing so can help leaders gain different perspectives and identify blind spots (McCauley, 2001; Moldenhauer, 2019).
3. Challenging one's assumptions: Examining one's beliefs and assumptions about oneself and others exhibits transparency. Are one's opinions based on facts or perceptions? Challenging preconceived

notions allows one to better understand one's organizational culture and climate (Hamilton, 2021; Raber Hedberg, 2009).

4. Celebrating successes and failures: Dually acknowledging one's successes and failures and learning from them is essential for the visible leader. Using one's successes to build confidence and failures to identify improvement areas allows one's team to move and grow as a collective (Maldonado et al., 2018; Pittman, 2020).

5. Practicing empathy: Attempting to see situations from other people's perspectives undoubtedly goes a long way. Exhibiting compassion allows the leader to build stronger relationships with one's team and make better, more informed decisions (Arnold, 2005; Hagman, 2021).

In sum, it is necessary to remember that leadership and introspective reflection are ongoing processes (Branson, 2007; Nesbit, 2012). An efficacious and contemplative leader is committed to learning, reflecting, and continuously striving to improve while executing a mission-minded vision that all constituency members can believe in (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Johnson, 2016, 2017).

REFERENCES

Amanchukwu, R. N., Stanley, G. J., & Ololube, N. P. (2015). A review of leadership theories, principles and styles and their relevance to educational management. *Management*, *5*(1), 6–14.

Anand, R., & UdayaSuriyan, G. (2010). Emotional intelligence and its relationship with leadership practices. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *5*(2), 65.

Arnold, R. (2005). *Empathic intelligence: Teaching, learning, relating*. UNSW Press.

Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *16*(3), 315–338. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001

Avolio, B. J., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2014). *Authentic leadership theory, research and practice: Steps taken and steps that remain*. Academic Press.

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership*. Academic Press.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Branson, C. M. (2007). Improving leadership by nurturing moral consciousness through structured self-reflection. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *45*(4), 471–495. doi:10.1108/09578230710762463

Cooper, C. D., Scandura, T. A., & Schriesheim, C. A. (2005). Looking forward but learning from our past: Potential challenges to developing authentic leadership theory and authentic leaders. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *16*(3), 475–493. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.008

Daudelin, M. W. (1996). Learning from experience through reflection. *Organizational Dynamics*, *24*(3), 36–48. doi:10.1016/S0090-2616(96)90004-2

Day, C., Sammons, P., & Gorgen, K. (2020). *Successful School Leadership*. Education Development Trust.

Frei, F. X., & Morriss, A. (2020). Begin with trust. *Harvard Business Review*, *98*(3), 112–121.

Gill, R. (2002). Change management—Or change leadership? *Journal of Change Management*, *3*(4), 307–318. doi:10.1080/714023845

Gorton, R. A., & Alston, J. A. (2012). *School leadership and administration: Important concepts, case studies, & simulations* (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Gustafson, L. P., Short, A. K., & Hamilton, N. W. (2022). Teaching and Assessing Active Listening as a Foundational Skill for Lawyers as Leaders, Counselors, Negotiators, and Advocates. *Santa Clara Law Review*, *62*, 1.

Hagman, G. (2021). Empathy: Expanding the Capacity for Humanness and Freedom. *Psychoanalytic Review*, *108*(2), 155–168. doi:10.1521/prev.2021.108.2.155 PMID:33999701

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. (1999). Can leadership enhance school effectiveness. *Educational management: Redefining theory, policy and practice, 178*, 190.

Hamilton, M. K. (2021). Introspective faculty assessment of self leadership. *SAGE Open*, *11*(3). doi:10.1177/21582440211031902

Heiss, K. (2023). *Introduction to leadership*. Kenneth Heiss.

Hoyle, J. R. (1985). *Skills for successful school leaders*. Academic Press.

Hoyle, J. R., English, F., & Steffy, B. (2005). *Skills for successful 21st century school leaders*. R&L Education.

Huguet, B. C. S. (2017). Effective leadership can positively impact school performance. *On the Horizon*, *25*(2), 96–102. doi:10.1108/OTH-07-2016-0044

Johns, C. (2009). *Becoming a reflective practitioner*. John Wiley & Sons.

Johnson, N. N. (2016). *10 Skills for Successful School Leaders* [Conference session]. 2016 American Association of School Personnel Administrators Annual Conference, Orlando, FL. 10.13140/RG.2.2.15691.80169

Johnson, N. N. (2017). *Bolman & Deal's Four-Frame Model of Successful Organizational Leadership* [Conference session]. 2017 American Association of School Personnel Administrators Annual Conference, Chandler, AZ. 10.13140/RG.2.2.31126.45121

Langely, N., & Jacobs, M. M. (2014). *5 Essential Skills for Successful School Leaders: Moving from Good to Great*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1990). Transformational leadership: How principals can help reform school cultures. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *1*(4), 249–280. doi:10.1080/0924345900010402

Maldonado, T., Vera, D., & Ramos, N. (2018). How humble is your company culture? And, why does it matter? *Business Horizons*, *61*(5), 745–753. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2018.05.005

Maldonado, T., Vera, D., & Spangler, W. D. (2022). Unpacking humility: Leader humility, leader personality, and why they matter. *Business Horizons*, *65*(2), 125–137. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.032

McCauley, C. D. (2001). Leader training and development. *The nature of organizational leadership: Understanding the performance imperatives confronting today's leaders*, 347-383.

Mitchell, K. (2019). Reflection on Leadership. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, *16*(2), 4–6.

Mohan, S. (2022). The hidden powers of vulnerability and humility. *Leader to Leader*, *2022*(105), 40–45. doi:10.1002/ltl.20649

Moldenhauer, E. (2019). Leadership Development: Introspective Foundations. *Leadership As We Know It*, 119.

Nesbit, P. L. (2012). The role of self-reflection, emotional management of feedback, and self-regulation processes in self-directed leadership development. *Human Resource Development Review*, *11*(2), 203–226. doi:10.1177/1534484312439196

Panait, C. (2017). Emotional intelligence in leadership. *Sci. Res. Educ. Air Force*, *19*(2), 133–138.

Patterson, E. (2015). 'What are leaders' experiences of reflection?' What leaders and leadership developers need to know from the findings of an exploratory research study. *Reflective Practice*, *16*(5), 636–651. doi:10.1080/14623943.2015.1064386

Pittman, A. (2020). Leadership rebooted: Cultivating trust with the brain in mind. *Human Service Organizations, Management, Leadership & Governance*, *44*(2), 127–143. doi:10.1080/23303131.2019.1696910

Pounder, J. S. (2001). "New leadership" and university organisational effectiveness: Exploring the relationship. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *22*(6), 281–290. doi:10.1108/EUM0000000005827

Raber Hedberg, P. (2009). Learning through reflective classroom practice: Applications to educate the reflective manager. *Journal of Management Education*, *33*(1), 10–36. doi:10.1177/1052562908316714

Rahmani, M., Roels, G., & Karmarkar, U. S. (2018). Team leadership and performance: Combining the roles of direction and contribution. *Management Science*, *64*(11), 5234–5249. doi:10.1287/mnsc.2017.2911

Sashkin, M. (2004). Transformational leadership approaches. *Revue de Synthese*.

Scheffer, A., Braun, N., & Scheffer, M. (2012). *Hanging the mirror: The discipline of reflective leadership*. Wasteland Press.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books, Inc.

Showry, M., & Manasa, K. V. L. (2014). Self-Awareness-Key to Effective Leadership. *The IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, *8*(1).

Sohmen, V. S. (2013). Leadership and teamwork: Two sides of the same coin. *Journal of IT and Economic Development*, *4*(2), 1–18.

Tang, K. N. (2019). *Leadership and Change management*. Springer Singapore. doi:10.1007/978-981-13-8902-3

Vitello-Cicciu, J. M. (2003). Innovative leadership through emotional intelligence. *Nursing Management*, *34*(10), 28–32. doi:10.1097/00006247-200310000-00010 PMID:14557778

Watts, G. W. (2012). The power of introspection for executive development. *The Psychologist Manager Journal*, *15*(3), 149–157. doi:10.1080/10887156.2012.701136

Whitaker, T. (2010). *Leading school change: 9 strategies to bring everybody on board*. Eye on Education, Inc.

Yue, C. A., Men, L. R., & Berger, B. K. (2021). Leaders as communication agents. *Current trends and issues in internal communication*. *Theory into Practice*, 19–38.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Authentic Leadership: Is a management style that emphasizes leaders' alignment with their personal core values and beliefs. It involves leading in a genuine, ethical, and transparent way. Authentic leaders are true to themselves and act in a manner that reflects their internal values and beliefs. They are characterized by qualities such as humility, transparency, vulnerability, purposefulness, self-awareness, and a focus on building relationships.

Effective Leadership: Is the ability to guide, inspire, and manage a group of people in a way that achieves desired goals and outcomes. Various leadership styles and characteristics contribute to and underscore effective leadership.

Introspective Leadership: Refers to a leadership approach that involves looking inward and examining one's own thoughts, emotions, judgments, and perceptions to enhance self-awareness and personal growth as a leader. By engaging in introspection, leaders gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their values, strengths, weaknesses, and motivations, which can then inform their decision-making, interactions with others, and overall leadership style.

Leadership: Is a crucial aspect of management and the success of an organization. It involves guiding and influencing a group to work together to achieve common goals. Effective leadership skills are essential for individuals in influential roles to direct and complete tasks, support initiatives, create a sense of unity within a team, and empower others.

Leadership-in-Action: Refers to the practical application of leadership principles and behaviors in real-world situations. It involves taking specific actions and demonstrating leadership qualities to effectively guide and influence others toward achieving common goals. Leadership-in-action encompasses various aspects and strategies leaders can employ to drive organizational success, inspire their teams, and address societal challenges.

Reflective Leadership: Is a practice that involves self-reflection, contemplation, and learning in the context of leadership development. It emphasizes thinking about oneself as a leader, gaining self-awareness, and aligning one's values, goals, and ambitions. Reflective leadership is recognized as a critical part of learning from experience and professional development.

Transformational Leadership: This leadership style focuses on inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve positive changes and accomplish common goals. It involves leaders who are energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate about their work, and they can convey a clear vision to their team members. Transformational leaders aim to bring about meaningful transformations in their organizations and create a positive impact on their constituencies and society as a whole.