Faces of Leadership

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IDST 4711H Migration, Refugee Settlement, and Community-Based Research Project

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Completed for the City of Peterborough and Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough

Supervised by Dr. Paul Shafer

Coordinated by the Trent Community Research centre

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<u>Abstract</u>

Faces of Leadership is a collaborative project with the City of Peterborough and the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough. Faces of Leadership aims to create a space for nurturing and growing local leaders. This project will support the development of a new and more inclusive understanding of leadership and the many ways in which it is actioned and will also empower equity-deserving groups with the knowledge, confidence, and opportunity to see themselves as leaders and to seek opportunities for representation in spaces that have been historically and primarily occupied by white voices. This project aims to gain information through a literature review and three focus groups that will then inform the curriculum of a workshop series. The literature review looks at the strengths and weaknesses of leadership models used by marginalized communities. The three focus groups consisted of individuals from the charitable sector, elected officials, and individuals with lived experience. Four main themes were found among the focus group discussions: characteristics of a leader, support systems, collaborative leadership, and systems of power/privilege. These findings will help inform the creation of the workshop series.

<u>Acknowledgments</u>

This research project would not have been possible without the generosity of the community leaders and activists who graciously shared their stories. I cannot express my gratitude enough for their wisdom, experience, and discussion. I am honoured to be able to learn from them. In addition, I would not have had the opportunity to conduct this research without the guidance of Reem Ali, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at the City of Peterborough. Thank you, Reem, for all of your support, wisdom, and rich conversations. I would also like to greatly thank my project supervisor, Dr. Paul Shaffer, for his advice, support, and encouragement throughout this project. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Brittany Finigan at the Trent Community Research Centre for her unending support and assistance. Thank you to every person involved in this project. I genuinely appreciate your help, and I would not have been able to complete this project without you.

Introduction

Faces of Leadership is a collaborative project with the City of Peterborough and the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough. With the aim of creating a space for nurturing and growing local leaders, this project will support the development of a new and more inclusive understanding of leadership and the many ways in which it is actioned, and will also empower equity-deserving groups with the knowledge, confidence, and opportunity to see themselves as leaders and to seek opportunities for representation in spaces that have been historically and primarily occupied by white voices. This project is entirely focused on women and gender-diverse people who experience barriers to leadership opportunities due to the intersectionality of race, gender, (dis)ability, class, age, and other social factors. Faces of Leadership has two phases. The first was a research phase that was focused on gathering data to inform evidence-based activities in the second phase of the project. The second phase will use the data to create a curriculum for community-led leadership education.

This report falls within the first phase and will work to inform the creation of a workshop series in the second phase. Working alongside, Reem Ali, the City of Peterborough's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, I took notes in three focus groups. These focus groups consisted of individuals from the charitable sector, elected officials, and individuals with lived experience. With the information gathered from the focus groups, I found four common themes: characteristics that define a leader, support systems, collaborative leadership, and systems of power/privilege. The information gathered in this report will help inform the curriculum in the workshop series.

Literature Review: Inclusive Leadership Models

Introduction

Leadership is defined in many ways. From being defined by having a position of authority to being able to empower people, a leader has the ability to influence their followers and community. Traditional forms of leadership are often defined by long-standing positions of power. Those positions of power are embedded within historically oppressive systems dominated by white, cis-heterosexual, men. These systems have reinforced hierarchies of race, class, gender, (dis)ability, among many other social factors. Institutions and social structures have systematically disadvantaged groups of people based on those social factors. New leadership models that are informed by different theoretical frameworks are challenging that traditional notion of leadership. Within this literature review, I will begin by presenting two main forms of leadership that help to provide a basis for the more inclusive models of leadership that I will discuss further. These inclusive models of leadership can be used alongside different theoretical frameworks in order to create a more informed understanding of the systems of oppression within which the leader is working. The theoretical frameworks will be discussed briefly following the leadership models. The theoretical frameworks should be used in conjunction with each other in order to better understand how systems of oppression work together. It is important to note that the leadership models discussed are presented in theory and do not always translate to practice. While these models may inform leaders to be more inclusive, they do not guarantee that the leaders following these models will in fact be inclusive. The inclusive leadership models help to acknowledge systems of oppression while also providing strategies for leaders to work within those same systems to undo them.

Transformational Leadership and Transactional Leadership

The transformational and transactional leadership models are the two prominent models found in mainstream leadership discourse. Transactional leadership refers to how leaders work with their followers to satisfy their own interests (Bass 1999, 10). In the transactional leadership model, leaders are only interested in making the followers perform in a certain way and, in turn, the followers only want to do what they will be rewarded for (Bass 1999, 11). There is only a self-interest-based exchange between the leader and follower (Bass 1999, 11). While the transactional model is useful for a very limited account of leadership, it often does not encourage followers to go above what is the bare minimum or connect to their organization.

The transformational leadership model goes beyond the transactional leadership model. Transformational leadership refers to leadership strategies that move "...the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealised influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualised consideration" (Bass 1999, 11). Within institutions, transformational leadership goes beyond the mission of the institution and tries to fully engage with the higher needs of the followers (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 3). Transformational leaders recognize the potential of their followers (Jogulu & Wood 2006, 243). Recognizing the potential of their followers allows leaders to empower their followers. Transformational leadership models are often more morally driven than transactional models. The transformational leadership model provides a base of understanding potential and works to empower followers. While these leadership models are not focused specifically on inclusive leadership, the transformational leadership model often provides the basis for other, more inclusive leadership models.

Applied Critical Leadership

The Applied Critical Leadership Model (ACL) recognizes the complexities that arise for leaders "...as they toggle between the reality of being members of historically underrepresented and often disenfranchised social groups, while at the same time providing effective leadership…" (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, xii). This leadership model works to incorporate the perspectives and experiences of marginalized peoples into leadership strategies used within historically oppressive systems (Santamaria & Santamaria 2015, 26). This model was developed for educators, but the principles and framework could be applied to other leadership positions.

Applied critical leadership uses important principles from transformational leadership, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 2). In ACL, transformational leadership is about principles, critical pedagogy is about how they are practiced, and critical race theory is the lens that is used (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 8). As discussed above, transformational leadership is often used with other theoretical frameworks. In this understanding of transformational leadership, leaders "...aim to destroy old ways of life to make way for new ways of life…wherein leaders share leadership responsibilities collaboratively…" (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 3). Transformational leaders recognize their capacity to shape their communities in new ways. In ACL, transformational leaders use critical pedagogy in practice. Critical pedagogy acknowledges the need for new structures in learning with the goal of producing new knowledge through dialogue (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 4). Critical pedagogy understands the power that education has to enable people to understand the social contexts and oppressive structures in which they live (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 4). Education is understood as a means of personal and collective liberation (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 4). Education is an important tool in understanding how oppressive systems work. In ACL, critical pedagogy needs to be understood through a Critical Race Theory lens.

Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework that understands how racial inequality is embedded within the foundations of society (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 4). ACL using critical race theory as a lens helps to recognize the racial discrimination embedded within education systems. It also recognizes how people of colour have unique experiences that provide important perspectives needed to inform education.

With these principles, applied critical leadership is "...a strengths-based model of leadership practice where educational leaders consider the social context of their educational communities and empower individual members of these communities based on the educational leaders' identities (i.e., subjectivity, biases, assumptions, race, class, gender, and traditions) as perceived through a CRT lens" (Santamaria & Santamaria 2013, 5). While this model provides strategies for addressing oppressive systems, leaders using this model can face opposition from others in positions of authority since it challenges the status quo. This leadership model may also be prone to burnout. As leaders using this model come from marginalized communities themselves, they are navigating, not only how to exist but also how to lead within oppressive institutions. These leaders are using their own experiences and perspectives to inform their work which can take a toll on their mental health. This inclusive leadership model acknowledges the complexities that leaders from marginalized communities face while teaching in oppressive systems as well as understands how these leaders can transform their communities using education and their own perspectives.

Interactive Leadership Model

The interactive leadership model works to "...encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people's self-worth, and get others excited about work" (Rosener 2011, 21). It builds off of the transformational leadership model as well as a participatory form

of management (Rosener 2011, 21). This form of leadership helps to gain insight from everyone in the organization in order to make decisions that will collectively benefit all.

The interactive leadership model has four underlying aspects: encourage participation, share power and information, enhance the self-worth of others, and energize others (Rosener 2011, 21-25). Through encouraging participation, these leaders work to create a group identity (Rosener 2011, 22). Through this participation, the leaders can make decisions that are well-informed and supported by the team members (Rosener 2011, 22). Mechanisms to ensure that the decisions that the leaders make are well-informed include the sharing of power and information (Rosener 2011, 23). While this form of leadership still exists within a power hierarchy, sharing power allows followers to feel as though their input is useful to the overall mission of the organisation (Rosener 2011, 23). A major part of encouraging participation and sharing power is enhancing the self-worth of their followers (Rosener 2011, 24). Interactive leaders try to make their community view them on the same level (Rosener 2011, 24). Since interactive leaders do not over-exert their power, they often connect with their followers in personal ways. This personalization of the relationship between the leader and their followers helps to create more inclusive environments. Interactive leaders are also quite enthusiastic about their organisation which is often translated into their leadership role (Rosener 2011, 24).

While this form of leadership helps to empower all members of the organisation, leaders using this model can, at times, be undermined or overlooked since they do not over-exert their power, especially in institutions where traditional forms of power are found. This leadership model also assumes that followers want to actively participate and be included in decision-making when that may not always be the case (Rosener 2011, 22). Despite the weaknesses, the interactive leadership model is useful overall for inclusive leadership as it facilitates consensus

building around organizational decisions and includes the perspectives of members from

marginalized communities.

Grassroots Leadership Model

The grassroots leadership model presents an alternative to the formal understanding of

leadership based on power hierarchies. This leadership model "...emphasises the actions of those

who wish to create change or challenge the status quo but are not in positions or roles that have

the power to easily and directly create change" (Kezar et al. 2011, 132). This leadership model

understands the power structures that work between dominant and subdominant groups in society

(Davidson & Hughes 2021, 4). Grassroots leaders work with others in the community as well as

the people in positions of power in order to create change usually involving an injustice or

specific cause (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 4). This leadership model is quite useful for

marginalized groups as this model challenges traditional notions of power that are found in

oppressive institutions.

The grassroots leadership model is often moulded to fit the cause or injustice in question

but there are general characteristics that define grassroots leadership. Grassroots leaders are

deeply passionate about their role and hold the cause for which they are advocating very closely

to their hearts (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 5). This leadership characteristic helps these leaders

engage with their community and helps them build relationships with the people that they will

lead. While these characteristics can be found in other forms of leadership, grassroots leaders are

often seen as using 'bottom-up' efforts (Kezar et al. 2011, 132). A crucial difference between

this and other leadership models relates to how the leader gains the trust of their community

(Davidson & Hughes 2021, 3). Those in positions of power tend to gain the trust of their

community after assuming the position while grassroots leaders gain the trust of their community

before having a position as a leader (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 3). Grassroots leaders also view addressing conflict differently than traditional leaders (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 7). While traditional forms of leadership are worried about losing their position of power when they address conflict, grassroots leaders want to see change and, therefore, feel it is necessary to address conflict (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 7). Another distinction between this model and traditional forms of leadership is how these leaders view leadership. Leaders, in the traditional understanding of leadership, view their position more authoritatively and "...overvalue their expertise" (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 7). On the other hand, grassroots leaders often understand their leadership more collectively (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 7). Grassroots leaders tend to view their position as equal to that of others in their movement as their position as a leader grew from the same movement (Davidson & Hughes 2021, 7).

Since grassroots leaders do not hold traditional positions of power, they often have to work harder and are often taken less seriously than people in traditional forms of authority. This form of leadership takes more work and in many cases is not a paid form of leadership. Since it is often volunteer-based, these leaders cannot focus all their time on this specific role which can take away from creating change. Despite this, the grassroots leadership model presents an alternative leadership model to models that already exist within established institutions. This, in turn, presents a way to challenge existing power hierarchies embedded in those institutions.

Theoretical Frameworks

The leadership models presented above can be informed by other theoretical frameworks in order to address more specific inclusivity issues. As discussed with the applied critical leadership model, Critical Race Theory helps to acknowledge the systemic racism within traditional institutions and how to work to undo those systems of oppression. Critical Race

Theory also acknowledges the importance of including people of colours' perspectives and knowledge (Parker & Villalpando 2007, 520). Feminist theory is often used to inform leadership models in order to address the dynamics of gender within relations of power (Venegas-Garcia 2013, 691). Feminist theory can be narrowed to specific forms of feminism but ultimately works to acknowledge how gender is often used as a form of oppression (Venegas-Garcia 2013, 691). Understanding how gender has been used within systems of power helps to develop knowledge on how leaders can both empower women or non-binary people as well as hold those positions themselves. Queer theory helps to inform leadership models by understanding the need for "...a disruption of heterosexist and cissexist culture embedded in institutional leadership and practice" (Pryor 2021, 305). Queer theory helps to ensure that leaders are questioning traditional norms. These frameworks should not be used by themselves but rather in addition to each other. In order to create inclusive leadership, it is important to note how forms of oppression work alongside each other. Intersectionality needs to play a key role in informing leadership models as different forms of oppression can be felt in different ways. While these theoretical frameworks are not exhaustive, they provide an understanding of how the leadership models above can be used to better include traditionally marginalized peoples.

Conclusion

In order to best challenge systems of oppression within institutions, inclusive leadership models used alongside intersectional theoretical frameworks have the potential to inform leaders to empower marginalized voices. New leadership models need to be adapted both within and outside systematically oppressive systems. By providing strategies for including marginalized voices and strategies for leaders who are members of marginalized groups, the inclusive leadership models help to challenge spaces dominated by white, heterosexual, cis-gender men.

These leadership models need to be used more frequently in different organizations, especially in educational and political environments. Educational and political organizations provide the best environments for creating systemic change. The inclusive leadership models, informed by intersectional theoretical frameworks, and should be used by leaders to challenge traditional forms of power.

Methodology

Faces of Leadership is focused on women and gender-diverse people who experience barriers to leadership opportunities due to the intersectionality of race, gender, (dis)ability, class, age, and other social factors. Faces of Leadership has two phases. The first phase was a research phase that was focused on gathering data to inform evidence-based activities in the second phase of the project. The second phase will use the data to create a curriculum for community-led leadership education. This report falls within the first phase and will work to inform the creation of a workshop series in the second phase.

Prior to gathering information, I conducted a literature review on the strengths and weaknesses of leadership models involving marginalized communities presented in the previous section. Following the literature review, the Faces of Leadership team set up three focus groups. Reem Ali, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusions Officer from the City of Peterborough, conducted the focus groups while I took notes of the discussions which I subsequently transcribed and analysed for key themes. The focus groups took place over Microsoft Teams and lasted for two hours each. Prior to the focus groups, the Faces of Leadership team created eleven questions. The questions are as follows:

Focus Group Questions:

1. What do you feel when you hear the word 'leader'?

2. Is it a positive or negative word?

3. How does power fit into this word/concept?

4. Do other words come to mind when you think of the word 'leader'?

5. Who would you identify as a leader? If you're comfortable sharing, who is your role model as a leader? Do they know that this is how you see them?

6. Do you see yourself as a leader?

7. What are the characteristics of a leader?

8. How do you grow or cultivate these characteristics? What other skills come up for you when you think about this?

9. As a leader, which of these skills do you feel you have to tap into the most?

10. Are you a leader if you don't have followers? What about bravery and confidence?

11. How can we help build capacity for you as a leader?

12. What would be needed if we were to create a city where all forms of leadership can survive?

The first focus group consisted of women and gender-diverse individuals who hold positions of leadership within Peterborough's charitable sector. The second focus group consisted of women and gender-diverse individuals who held/hold elected official positions. The last focus group consisted of women and gender-diverse individuals whom the Faces of Leadership team considered community leaders. The people who participated in the third focus group may not have held traditional leadership positions but could be considered leaders within the community through their activism or community work.

The focus group discussions included personal reflections, discussions around power and broader structures of privilege. Following the focus groups, the participants were sent a survey where they could offer any lasting thoughts or answer questions that were unable to be asked due to time constraints.

<div align="center">**<u>Findings</u>**</div>

The focus groups' discussions, while differing in many ways from each other, focused on four common themes. The four themes prevalent throughout the discussions were characteristics of leaders, support systems leaders require, collaborative and distributive leadership styles, and systems of power and privilege. These themes are overlapping in many ways and often, go hand in hand with the other themes. While these themes were discussed throughout all the focus groups, the conclusions one can draw from these discussions differ in very interesting ways.

Characteristics

One of the major themes throughout all of the focus was the discussion of what characteristics define a leader. The discussion ranged from what characteristics a leader should have to the characteristics of people in traditional forms of leadership. Within the charitable sector focus group, participants identified that leaders should actively work to include the ideas of the people they oversee. True leaders are people who empower others, share knowledge as well as reflect on themselves. A good leader needs to have a clear understanding of their values in order to make decisions that reflect them. These values often challenge common narratives surrounding power structures such as racism, class, and other social factors. By challenging these narratives, they make space for people of diverse backgrounds to be included in decision-making. Being open-minded as a leader is also important for including those diverse ideas. Good leaders also are continual learners that acknowledge what has not worked in the past in order to

inform the next steps. While leaders should have these characteristics, people who hold conventional forms of leadership do not always have them. The charitable sector focus group acknowledged how people in leadership positions "can be corrupted" and, in turn, not listen to or include the people whom they are leading.

For the elected officials focus group, leaders are people who step up and take the initiative in difficult situations. They are "anti-oppression fighters". Leaders are strong and passionate, so their values inform their decisions, making them able to stand up for what they believe is right. Good leaders can be quiet and lead from behind which allows them to listen to whom they are leading. Their experience within their community helps to inform their leadership. Another important characteristic that leaders have is being able to admit that they have made a mistake or that they do not know something. Being able to admit they do not know something allows leaders to appoint the right people to resolve the situation. For this focus group, leaders are visionaries who can see leadership qualities in others. Self-doubt is another characteristic of leaders. Having self-doubt and, in turn, reflection, helps leaders build confidence in their decisions.

For the lived experience focus group, people who are leaders have integrity and authenticity that allows them to gently guide the people they lead. Leaders share wisdom and knowledge while respecting everyone they encounter. True leaders are community-selected rather than self-appointed. The community recognizes who should lead and feels that when someone self-appoints it is often for selfish reasons. This focus group recognizes that leadership is not genuine when it becomes an identity rather than a description. Leaders are often the most listened to, but leaders should be the most likely to listen to other voices so that their followers are truly heard. They have experience in their communities and a moral compass that allows

them to work towards a goal without being influenced by outside interests. People who are true leaders recognize their own limitations while also caring for and nurturing others. Leaders are people who have quiet voices and lead from behind. They also should have unconditional leadership in which they make rationalized sacrifices that are not influenced by social or economic gain. Leadership, as seen by this group, should be invisible. Otherwise stated, leaders should lead without wanting recognition or gain but for the overall benefit of the community.

Support Systems

Another major theme throughout the focus groups was the support systems that leaders need in order to be successful as well as the support systems needed to cultivate new leadership. In the charitable sector focus group, participants voiced a need for more community encouragement for leaders. By encouraging leaders, the work that they are putting into the community is being seen and valued. Especially for leaders who challenge traditional notions around leadership or oppressive structures, having support from the community is important in order to unpack these complex issues. Leaders are often responsible for the emotions of their team so access to mental health support in order to both support themselves and the people they lead is vital. When it comes to support systems that are needed to cultivate leadership, this focus group recognizes that for the types of leaders that are needed within the Peterborough community, support systems are integral. By creating inviting spaces, more leaders would be encouraged to lead as they know they will not be alone. The skills and knowledge needed for new leaders are often cultivated by other leaders. Leaders appoint and support new people for leadership roles and help them cultivate the skills and knowledge needed to play a role in the community.

The focus group with elected officials acknowledged that being a leader can be a thankless job and emotionally taxing. Leaders need support systems in order to best represent their community. This focus group discusses how a simple acknowledgment of a leader's work can be enough to let them know they are seen. In addition, support systems are a way for people with common values as leaders to show their support as well as be encouraged to get involved within their community. Cultivating support systems in a political environment can pose challenges but when leaders are able to work with others that share common values and aspirations, more work is able to be done. In addition, new leaders can be cultivated by encouraging people with leadership qualities. Leaders can even be strengthened by support systems by providing feedback to the leaders.

The lived experience focus group discussed support systems as being integral to their identity. As one participant beautifully put, "I'm not a self-made individual." Everyone has been influenced and taught by their ancestors and mentors. Leaders are created out of the teachings and wisdom of their ancestors and past leaders. Leaders are able to honour those teachings and wisdom by knowing that they will support future generations as their ancestors did. In one metaphor, leaders stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people who made them who they are. In addition, support systems help to transform the definition of traditional leadership. By creating spaces to have discussions surrounding leadership, leaders can work together to shift the narrative. Support systems also allow for the cultivation of new leaders by building leaders with similar qualities.

Collaborative Leadership

Discussions surrounding collaborative or distributive leadership are found throughout all of the focus groups. Collaborative leadership challenges the traditional understanding of having

one leader holding all of the power. Similarly, distributive leadership places different responsibilities on all team members to ensure one leader is not holding all of the power. In the charitable sector focus group, participants discuss how people can have different leadership positions depending on the context. Someone can shift from being a leader in one context to supporting another leader in a different context. This focus group understood distributive leadership as each person within the team having certain responsibilities. One person is not solely responsible for everything. All the people on the team must collaborate. Themes of collaborative leadership could also be seen when creating space for everyone to be actively engaged. Sharing resources as well as working closely with other people allows leaders to redistribute power to the whole group rather than retain it for themselves. By challenging traditional narratives of leadership, these leaders work to pave a way for the people who follow. One important aspect of collaborative leadership is the leader having trust in other people. The leader has to trust that other people on the team will complete their tasks.

The focus group with elected officials discusses collaborative leadership as a way to empower voices that are often missing. Many participants within this group aligned themselves with the title of elected official rather than that of 'politician'. The participants recognized that they represent their communities rather than hold this position for their own interests. This group discusses how everyone has certain forms of power within their own networks and communities. Once people recognize that true power is collective and begin working together, they can enact change and succeed together toward a common goal. Every person plays a role in change. Many people are supporting the community through programs and social services and are often not recognized as leaders as they are not in the spotlight, but the leaders would not be possible without them. A leader recognizes that everyone has a specific skill or knowledge that can be

used and applied in ways that will collectively benefit the whole team. An important aspect of collaborative leadership is acknowledging that people have different perspectives. Being able to recognize those different perspectives can inform the decision-making process. This focus group acknowledged how being a leader often comes with a lot of pressure as they are the ones looked to for answers, but collaborative leadership takes away that pressure as a whole team works together to solve problems.

In the lived experience focus group, the role of leader is not more important than any other role but plays one piece of the puzzle. The person who is the leader has the correct skill at the right time and depending on what skill is needed and who has the skill, the leader will change. Everyone plays an important role and contributes to the overall team. One participant used the analogy of a wolf pack to describe this. The way a wolf pack travels shows how every wolf has an important role to play in the overall order of the pack. For example, the participant described how the older and sick wolves travel at the front so they will set the pace for the rest of the pack. In case the pack was attacked, the older and sick wolves would be sacrificed. Every member of the wolf pack has an important role to play as does every member of a team. People who are true leaders work within the community for the betterment of everyone and not for personal recognition. An important part of collaborative leadership for this group was the inter-generational knowledge-sharing aspect. There is a duty for generations to keep the wisdom within the community and work alongside their ancestors and community members to ensure that future generations will continue to collectively share that knowledge.

Systems of Power/Privilege

One of the most common themes for all three focus groups was the discussion of how systems of power and privilege play into leadership. The charitable sector focus group argues

that leadership and power are inherently connected. Leaders have the ability to influence due to their position. People who are in leadership positions have access to resources and have the capacity to mobilize people to act in ways that the leader values. Leadership positions are often gained through privilege. Since leadership is often legitimized through education and experience, the leader is in a position to gain such education and experience. Voices that are not legitimized in that way are often ignored. A leader needs to recognize the current capitalist and colonialist systems in which they are operating in order to include more marginalized voices in leadership. Many skills that are associated with leadership are only useful within these oppressive systems. As more leaders with intersecting identities join the table, they bring in new perspectives that challenge the narratives around traditional understandings of leadership. One participant discussed how women are considered more emotional than men. When leaders who identify as women bring their emotions to their role, they are challenging the notion that leaders cannot show emotion. One participant acknowledged that the reason many marginalized peoples are in leadership positions is because they are fighting for their lives. They are putting themselves in harm's way in order to make the necessary changes for marginalized communities. This participant also noted how even when leaders from marginalized communities are present during discussions, there is still a power imbalance. These leaders are often ignored despite being present during those discussions. Additionally, leaders need to acknowledge the power that they hold in order to redistribute it to marginalized voices.

The focus group with elected officials discussed power in relation to how it can be abused depending on the reasons for running for office. Leadership positions can be corrupted when the leaders' self-interests guide their decision-making. This focus group also acknowledged how power should be with the people and, in turn, the people should have the

power to choose and support good leaders. Participants noted that it is a privilege to not be involved in politics. When someone is able to be apolitical, they are privileged enough to not have to worry about how politics will impact their rights. As more and more people from marginalized communities are holding leadership positions, the discussion around how these leaders navigate spaces that are dominated by traditional notions of leadership. People from marginalized communities are often forced to become spokesperson for their communities. Leaders coming from marginalized communities often face oppressive environments. Navigating these challenging spaces leads to self-doubt and self-reflection. This self-doubt is often coupled with needing to present oneself in a specific manner in order to be taken seriously. One participant argues that while new voices need to continue to be added to the table, leaders who are already at the table and advocating for marginalized communities need support as well.

Within the lived experience focus group, the notion of leadership as connected to power was inherent. Leadership's role in a colonial, capitalist system built on the exploitation of many groups of people is historically connected to power and dominance. The notions of leadership are historical and contextual. The 'ideal' characteristics of what society views as a leader reflect a heterosexual, cis-gender, white man. These characteristics are connected to historically oppressive structures. Those who are in power are not impacted by issues while those who are most impacted do not have power. Leadership is often tied to greed and personal gain as influence over others can lead to an abuse of power. While some leaders can be good, there is still a structural power component to leadership. In addition, good leaders can become corrupt within systems that are surrounded by greed and personal gain.

Discussion

Background

The three focus groups' discussions all brought up intriguing information. The participants' backgrounds can shed light on what was discussed and what was not. The charitable focus group consisted of individuals who work directly with social service programs in the community. The charitable sector often consists of organizations that are non-profit meaning there are often compelling moral standards to abide by. In addition, individual organizations allow for more autonomy within their own spaces and allow for different forms of leadership and organizing that tend to be more inclusive.

Alternatively, the focus group of elected officials consisted of individuals who were a member of spaces dominated by heterosexual, cis-gender, white men. As elected officials, these participants are placed in the spotlight and receive direct criticism from the communities they represent. Due to this, the individuals in the elected official focus group have more pressure to act and align their values in specific ways.

The lived experience focus group brings together individuals who work closely in their communities and many who have not held a formal leadership role. Many individuals within the lived experience focus group consider themselves community activists and organizers. The backgrounds of the participants in each focus group help frame the way that each group discusses leadership. The elected official focus group mainly discusses leadership in the conventional understanding of leadership. The lived experience focus group, on the other hand, completely rejects the conventional form of leadership that is often laced with power and greed. The charitable sector focus group combines these two understandings. This focus group

challenged the notions of power being connected to leadership while still working within

systems routed in hierarchical structures. The background of these focus groups can shed light on

the direction in which each discussion went.

Similarities

Throughout the focus groups, there were many similarities between the discussions. An

interesting similarity was description of a leader as quiet. A 'quiet leader', as defined by the

focus groups, is someone who leads by taking initiative without needing to be front and centre.

These types of leaders lead from behind. In other words, the quiet leader listens to their team

members and takes action for the overall betterment of the team. Good leaders do not use their

position for selfish reasons. Additionally, all of the focus groups agreed that support systems are

integral for fostering new leaders. The support systems will create the space needed to cultivate

the skills necessary for leaders. All three focus groups also understood the need for more

collaborative leadership. All of the focus groups acknowledged how every member of a team

plays an important role. The team would not be able to function without all of its parts. The focus

groups also noted that good leaders need to listen to their team and the people they are

representing to inform their decisions. As discussions around leadership often coincide with

discussions of power, these focus groups noted how conflicting identities and marginalized

communities face barriers to leadership. Leaders from marginalized communities challenge

conventional understandings of leadership and, therefore, pose a threat to the current hierarchical

system.

Differences

While there are many commonalities found between these three focus groups, there are also many differences. An interesting difference within the characteristics theme came through the discussion on how individuals should become leaders. The elected official focus group argued that leaders were individuals who took the initiative and stepped up when they were needed. The lived experience focus group, on the other hand, argued that leaders should be community appointed rather than self-appointed. When an individual appoints themselves as the leader, the lived experience focus group saw them as individuals who are usually looking to fulfill their self-interests. Additionally, another difference came out during the discussions on support systems, the charitable sector and elected official focus groups focused on how people can and should support leaders in order to foster leadership around common values. The lived experience focus group, on the other hand, discussed support systems as an integral part of their identity. The knowledge that individuals gain through their support systems works to inform the decisions leaders make. While all of the focus groups discussed the need for collaborative leadership, the lived experience focus group highlighted the importance of wisdom sharing. The lived experience focus group noted that knowledge and wisdom from past leaders in the community should be passed down to the next leaders and it is their duty to continue to share wisdom. One of the interesting differences that came out in the discussions involved the current colonialist and capitalist structures upon which Canada is built. The charitable sector and lived experience focus group acknowledged the need to challenge these existing structures while the elected official focus group did not discuss the structures themselves. The elected official focus group alluded to the impacts of such structures that create challenges for marginalized individuals but did not discuss the structures per se.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Leaders can be found in all contexts from both inspiring to corrupt. Building leaders to prioritize the enrichment of their community over the enrichment of their pockets is vital for the community's well-being. Gaining knowledge from individuals who share intersecting identities and have experience working within their communities, works to inform the curriculum that will help build a new generation of leaders. Such leaders will challenge the conventional understanding of what constitutes a leader. Within the three focus groups, four common themes were identified: characteristics, support systems, collaborative leadership, and systems of power/privilege. The information gained in these discussions helps to create space for more leadership opportunities for marginalized communities and will help to empower voices that are often ignored in leadership spaces.

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