

COM 315 Communication in Groups and Organizations

Handout – Leadership Definition

Leadership has been defined by scholars in diverse fields [ie: art, business, communication, ethicists, history, philosophy, government and politics, psychology, science, sociology, and theology]. These definitions are diverse; however, there are a few common threads across fields. These field independent characteristics of leadership are what this handout addresses.

Leaders in all fields have to be able to and willing to make decisions. Even the most egalitarian group or organization has, from time to time, decisions that have to be made; for not making such decisions harms or threatens the group's or organization's health or existence. There are many decision-making models and strategies available; however, leadership is tied to decision-making.

Leaders are the individuals who coordinate ideas, people, and activities. Totally disjointed thoughts and actions beget chaos. Again, there are many models and techniques for coordination; however, leaders are the ones who take responsibility for coordination in a group or organization.

Leaders, to be fully useful and helpful, must develop strategies for being informed, being up-to-date, and being "in the loop." Uninformed, out-of-date, and isolated "leaders" are leaders in name only. Leadership is an active role, requiring proactive behavior when possible and reactive behavior when necessary. The most valuable resource for any leader is information.

One can only truly be a leader when there are others who are followers. The role of leader is not an entitlement, it is a legitimate role/status conferred on an individual by those who follow. There are many models for leaders to adopt; the most effective choice is the one that simultaneously is comfortable for the would be leader, is acceptable for that leader's would be followers, and that produces useful and desirable results.

As you will come to understand in the course, group/organizational leadership is sometimes vested in one individual and at other times is dispersed among several people. Some leadership is static over long time periods while other leadership rotates among several members and lasts shorter time periods. Some leadership demands general abilities while other leadership requires specialized talents.