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Leadership and Power in Supervision

“We need better leadership around here!” You may hear it at a farm, a feedlot, a packing shed, a corporation yard, a board room, a team clubhouse, a hospital, a school, a civic meeting, a legislature, or just about anywhere else that people work together to accomplish goals. Leadership is high on the list of factors credited or blamed for operational results. But for all the importance attached to it, there is a lot of fuzziness around what many people, including management scholars, mean when they refer to leadership.

The concept of leadership is often used interchangeably with those of management, supervision, direction, delegation, and decision making. Elements of all these are reflected in published theories, as well as casual one-liners. Napoleon called leadership “dealing in hope.” For Harry Truman, leadership was “making people do what they don’t want to and liking it.” The chairman of a major farm machinery corporation said that “leadership is demonstrated when the ability to inflict pain is confirmed.” Management practitioner Casey Stengel explained that leadership is “being able to keep the guys who hate my guts away from those who aren’t sure yet.”

Leaders and Managers

Much research addresses the connection between leadership and management. If a predominant distinction runs through the various maxims and classification schemes, it is that the functions of management and leadership relate differently to what is and what might be. Management is oriented to order and control in an existing system, whereas leadership is about recognizing and realizing potential, in or out of the system. Managers allocate resources, design policies and procedures, measure outcomes, and solve problems to make operations efficient and consistent. Leaders envision opportunities for personal and organizational gain in the future and find ways of getting people to go after them.

In *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*, John Kotter notes that modern management bears the legacy of its pioneers in the early 20th century who wanted to keep their complex industrial organizations on time and on budget. He sees leadership as very different: it produces movement, rather