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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

than consistency and order. “Throughout the ages, individuals who have been seen as leaders have created change,” Kotter says.

In his “Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?” Abraham Zaleznik answers his title question with a big yes. He argues that managers and leaders differ in motivation, personal history, and how they think and act. Zaleznik sees the manager as a problem solver, oriented to achieving organizational results, and the leader as a risk and opportunity seeker driven by broader purposes that may not be in line with those of the organization. His leaders may do things that force managers to react.

Although leading comes off as more glamorous than managing, there is not a clean split between the two. Both the leader and the manager assess situations, influence people, and pursue goals. Agricultural businesses depend on the functions associated with both if they are to endure. Farms and ranches need to meet schedules and stay within budgets, as well as to create useful change and adapt over time. If leadership at the top does not, in Drucker’s terms (Chapter 2), continually rethink “the theory of the business” – i.e., pay attention to where the organization is today and where it needs to be tomorrow – the business can slip out of tune with markets, technology, and regulations. But if the farm cannot manage its human and other resources well enough to bring quality goods to market at competitive price, the business is bound to fail before adaptive strategic planning is relevant.

In practice, many people play managerial and leadership roles at once. By virtue of their positions in agricultural businesses, supervisors and other managers are expected to cover the classic functions of management. They may use leadership qualities in fulfilling their managerial responsibilities. Leadership by non-managers is not so reliably exercised to serve the business.

Leaders Influence People

Whatever else they may do and for whatever purposes, leaders influence other people, and they appear to do so at a deeper, more personal level than garden variety managers. In *On Leadership*, John Gardner stresses the closeness and interdependence of the leader and the led. “Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers. [Leaders] are integral parts of the system . . . They perform certain tasks or functions that are essential if the group is to accomplish its purposes. All that we know about leaders and their constituents or followers tells us that communication and influence flow in both directions. Leaders shape and are shaped, even in systems that appear to be run in authoritative fashion.”