

My Emerging Leadership Philosophy: A Work in Progress

This course has given me the opportunity to further develop my ever-evolving leadership philosophy. The references and resources used throughout the course have allowed me to broaden my understanding through reading, discussion, and reflection. Much like this course was a broad overview of leadership concepts, this reflective essay will serve as an overview of what I have come to understand and how it applies to my current role as a first-year principal.

Our first discussion for this course revolved around two videos. In the first video, Scott Williams presented a brief T-Chart-style look at the difference between what it means to be a manager versus a leader.

I found this resource to be helpful in narrowing the focus of my leadership efforts. While a high school principal often wears the hat of a manager those types of interactions with staff come more naturally. Managing the day to day operations of a building, its staff, and its budget is a fairly cut and dry affair. But leading an organization, planning and initiating change within that organization requires a wholly different level of commitment.

As John Maxwell told is in the second video, leadership is a verb. Leadership must be exercised and practiced. It is not a static achievement but a constant progress. In his video, Maxwell set up a pyramid by which leadership can be charted as one progresses toward reaching the Pinnacle level of leadership.

Another video shared for class discussion was John Wooden's "Leadership Discussion. While many things Mr. Wooden said resonated with me, I identified immediately with his advice to worry only about the things within your control. This is a concept that has served me well thus far in my personal journey as an emerging leader in education.

Looking at planning and organizational change through the four lenses or frameworks presented in our next video resources and examined by Boyd Bradbury in his essay, "Authority and Leadership via a Multiple Frames Approach school, it is easy to see examples of all four lenses at work in my small learning community.

Structural: Much of the focus as we closed out the school year last year was dedicated to setting parameters and publishing policies. Most of the directives we received from the school board remained focused on the bureaucracy of managing the school.

Human Resources: With the dawn of the new school year, having secured the 7-12 principal position in our three-person admin team, our decision-making model shifted to a much more "human resources" focus. This is due, in my

opinion, in large part to the school board putting trust in the new admin team to establish the climate within the school. They have stepped back this year and allowed us to assess the needs of the school, develop the skills necessary to address those needs as a learning community, and build relationships between the admin and faculty/staff.

Political: None of the decisions or discussions above were without the ever-present political undercurrent that permeates any organization. Under this framework our administrative team has worked diligently on what Bradbury (2011) refers to as “building power bases, coalition-building, negotiating conflicts over limited resources, and creating compromises”

Symbolic: I have made a conscious effort to focus planning efforts in our school through the symbolic lens. Our small learning community is firmly rooted in tradition and community. I have worked to incorporate a true understanding of those values while still striving to move the organization forward. It’s a fine line to walk between honoring tradition and changing the status quo for the good of the school.

The final piece of the planning and organizational change puzzle in this course was our investigation into the strategic planning process. It is a process that I am familiar with having had the opportunity to be a part in the beginning stages of a formal strategic planning initiative at our school.

I have found Lewin’s (1951) concept of Force Field Change as outlined in Lunenberg’s (2010) article, “Forces for and Resistance to Organizational Change” particularly helpful in articulating the process of change to my teachers. I have found myself using the terms mentioned in that article as we discuss where we are, and where we want to be as a learning community. We talk about “unfreezing” the status quo and then “moving” in a better direction. I began, as suggested in the article, with first addressing perceived pockets of resistance in the staff and then moved to shift our collective weight to the positive side of the scale.

This course has allowed me to add new understandings and new terminology to my leadership philosophy. It has been an excellent capstone course in my pursuit of an Education Leadership degree. It is a process; an ever-changing work in progress.