The Application of "The Looking Glass Self" to Leadership Development

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Abstract: **This article introduces "The Looking Glass Self" as one of the widely discussed sociological concepts in academic settings across culture. It proffers the argument that "The Looking Glass Self" could be experimented as an approach to leadership development in the formal sector or private organization. It opines that in the context of "The Looking Glass Self" followers act as the "mirror" in which a leader must imagine how he/she appears in the eyes of followers, how he/she is evaluated based on followers'' observation and perceptions, and how the feedbacks that comes from observation and perceptions can help influence the development of a leader's sense of self. It employs the competency model and the values model as the theoretical framework that guided the study.**

Regarding the methodology, the qualitative approach was used to explore this topic. Precisely, it employs content analysis of relevant document, articles, or papers as source of the data from Google search engine.

The paper concludes that although followers' perception plays one of the main roles in leadership development, it all depends on how leaders interpret their followers' perceptions.

The article recommends that as an experimental concept, "The Looking Glass Self" could be inculcated or infused into leadership development training module

I. INTRODUCTION

D oubtlessly, the urge for leadership development seems to be an endless quest researched by gurus, academicians, academic institutions, prelates, or religious scholars, etc. For example, the Harvard Business School offers Leadership Development Course designed to develop leadership style germane to effective organizational performance.

Robin Abrahams and Boris Groysberg (2021) focused their attention on listening skills as one of the templates to leadership development. For his contribution, the prominent prelate, Dr. Myles Munroe, has authored dozens of fascinating presentations and books on leadership development. One of his famous presentations widely used in both religious and academic environment is "The Ten Attitudes for Leadership Development" in which he employed the lion as an analogy to leadership with main emphasis on attitude that uniquely distinguished the loin as the king of the jungle (Munroe, 2005).

According to Colin Powell, former U.S. Secretary of State, "Leadership is all about people...and getting the most out of

people." It is about conveying a sense of purpose in a selfless manner, he said, and creating conditions of trust while displaying moral and physical courage. "Never show fear or anger," he added. "You have to have a sense of optimism." (Stanford Report, 2005).

As for their contribution, the Myers-Briggs Company has over 20 years' experience focusing their attention on helping people to develop leadership styles through diverse tools such as communication, self-awareness, conflict management, stress and resilience (Srivastava, 2016).

In her excellent program, Maggie Wooll (2021) drew attention to exposure and access to current management, individual groups for peer support and shared learning, and formalized mentorship as the foundation for developing leadership skills.

A team of experts chaired by Dr. John Kotter also focused their approach to leadership development on experiential and apprentice-style learning, team facilitation, and educational courses and program.

(https://www.kotterinc.com/services/leadership-development/)

No doubt, leadership success could point to the efficacy of the above innovations or contributions. Conversely, it is safe to imply that the indisputable leadership failures continued to be witnessed in both public administrations and society at large explains potential problem that can be addressed through a research imperative.

Against this backdrop, this article, under the lenses of sociology, explores "The Looking Glass Self" as another contribution to leadership development. It seeks to experiment how the concept could be applicable to leadership development in all walks of life. To express it in other words, this article comes as alternative solution to leadership problem.

Structurally, this article is divided into three segments. The first segment reviews leadership as a concept taking into consideration definition of leadership development and relevant theoretical framework dealing with two related models of leadership development. The second reviews "The Looking Glass Self" from a sociological perspective and applies or links it to leadership development. The third segment advances or draws logical conclusions from the first two segments.

II. METHODOLOGY

From a qualitative approach, this paper makes use of textual/document analysis to examine the application of "The Looking Glass Self" to leadership development.

Particularly, the researcher employed content analysis as one of the types of textual/document analysis. According to Luo (2019), content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e. text). Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts. The main objective of the researcher is to make inferences about the themes, or concepts analyzed (Luo 2019). By doing so, the researcher through Google search engine reviews relevant literature surrounding the concept of leadership development and "The Looking Glass Self" to arrive at logical inferences. Therefore, to establish the application of "The Looking Glass Self" to Leadership development, the use of this method in the analysis of published articles was deemed appropriate.

The Concept Leadership

As a concept applicable to formal organizations including private, public, religious, social, political, and perhaps informal organizations, leadership could possibly be defined as a process that helps a group to achieve its goals, mission, and strategic vision.

Similarly, Dr. Myles Munroe in one his famous presentations captioned "The Spirit of Leadership" conceptualized leadership as "the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by passion, generated by vision, produced by a conviction and ignited by a purpose" (Munroe, 2005).

In his "21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership", John Maxwell, defined the concept of leadership as "influence – nothing more, nothing less" (Maxwell, 2007).

And finally, William Alan Cohen defined leadership as "the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective or project."

In the words of John Kotter, "leadership is about setting a direction. It's about creating a vision, empowering and inspiring people to want to achieve the vision, and enabling them to do so with energy and speed through an effective strategy. In its most basic sense, leadership is about mobilizing a group of people to jump into a better future" (https://www.kotterinc.com/who-we-are/#meet-us).

From careful analysis, all of the definitions of leadership mentioned above borders on influence. In other words, it takes a person with extraordinary influence to help a group to achieve its tasks, objectives, goals, mission, strategic vision, etc. That person in the words of Peter Northouse (2013) must be a leader with influence. What is this influence? And where does it comes from? The Merriam Webster dictionary defines influence as "the power to change or affect someone or something: the power to cause changes without directly forcing them to happen." Significantly, this eliminates the element of force or compulsion from leadership qualities. This is why Dr. Myles Munroe include in his definition "motivation" or "inspiration" meaning, followers are motivated to act. They are not manipulated which could imply the implication of psychological force. For this to happen, the group or followers must see confidence, commitment, honesty, integrity, trust, hope, and son on, all of which constitute key qualities of a good leader. In short, followers are influenced by these qualities in a leader.

From a sociological perspective, it is important to also look at social influence. On the premise that leadership impacts social environment which also incorporates formal organizations, a leader should strive for social influence. According to (Kelman,1958), social influence applicable to leadership, comprises the ways in which individuals change their behavior to meet the demands of a social environment. For the purpose of clarity, meeting demands can be equated to the expectations of the people that cannot be isolated from social environment. In other words, leaders should take cognizance of meeting the demands of their followers.

In sociology, a social environment connotes the people and institutions with whom they interact (Barnett, 2001). Note that institutions are synonymous with formal organizations.

Arguably, in order for leaders to influence their followers, their behavior pattern should meet the expectations of their social environment. For example, if followers' demands are based on trait such as on confidence, commitment, honesty, integrity, trust, hope, it means the behavior of leaders should change to reflect these qualities.

Definition of Leadership Development

Bordering on the same goal as the commonality, leadership development has attracted copious definitions. For example, Bhasin (2021) defined "leadership development as a type of strategic planning that organizations use for improving the leadership skills and abilities of employees so they can be well-trained for the management and leadership roles within the organization".

The Gartner Glossary defined "leadership development as a set of activities that prepare current and future leaders to perform effectively in their roles".

For Adl (2013), "leadership development is the process which helps expand the capacity of individuals to perform in leadership roles within organizations".

From all of the definitions, it is cleared that the performance of roles is strategically crucial to leadership development, and it is the main point of commonality that connects the three definitions. The first definition captures the phrase "well-trained" that cannot be aloof from the last two definitions. As mentioned in these two definitions above, "well-trained" is

one of the main activities or process employed by society to develop leadership.

Although not explicit in all of the definitions of leadership development, however, it is errorless or faultless to attach influencing followers as one of the roles ascribe to leadership development. In other words, for a leader to perform well in his roles, influence to some extent is important.

Leadership development training encompasses programs or activities that vary among organizations depending on the context. It could range from coaching to improve employee performance, building trust and respect, problem solving, dealing with change, leading innovation, team-building, planning and delegation, etc. It can also include on the job training as well.

Theoretical Framework on Leadership Development

In the opinion of (Tyler, 2017), "a leadership model is a theoretical framework for how best to manage employees. It typically suggests a corresponding response style to employee and organizational needs that has proven useful in that model".

Similarly, the Indeed Editorial Team (2021) postulate that a leadership model consists of the theory and ideas for how to become a more effective leader. From this two ideas, it can be inferred that although a leadership model may not be the best, however, it provides practices on how to influence or impact the lives of followers. Reliance on research established the difficulty of separating leadership model from leadership style. Certain style of leadership derives from a leadership model. For instance, having a coach-style leadership style would fall under the broader model of team-orientated leadership (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021)

In other words, Tanya Robertson posit that leadership model serves as the conceptual structure to explain what makes a leader great that cannot be pursuit without the style representing the pattern of leadership behaviors reflecting greatness.

No doubt about the definition of leadership model inherently speaks to its essential. It explains a reciprocal relation that directly impact followers and how they respond to leadership approach.

Different Models of Leadership

Bearing in mind the caption of this paper, it is imperative to review the different models of leadership widely discussed across academic settings. The models are also crucial to influencing and motivating followers to act without being manipulated or coerced. Each of these models is unique in its own template for effective leadership development. Below are couple of few:

Competency Model

According to Talent Institute (TI), the competency model defines characteristics that individuals have and use in appropriate, consistent ways to achieve desired performance. These characteristics include knowledge, skills, personal attributes, and ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

Similarly, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) describes competency model as an amalgamation of skills, knowledge, attributes and behaviours that enables an individual to perform a task or an activity successfully within a given job.

In consonance with TI and IAEA, the Indeed Editorial Team (2021) argued that all of the above characteristics of competency model may inform leadership styles such as autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, bureaucratic, charismatic, affiliative, transformational, transactional, and on. These characteristics vary among organizations and are tied to their core values that influence the action of leader and followers. For example, integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity are general core values of the United Nations. This would mean, people in leadership positions must be able to align or fashion their skills, knowledge, attributes and behaviours to the UN core values.

On the flip side of the same coin, the competency model has its own weakness or shortcomings. Research shows that the model may not be suitable in an organization or institution that continually changes and redefines itself. For instance, a leader as an accounting manager uses extensive financial background to keep the company finances in order and expertly defines and supervises the roles of her staff. But may not possess the people skills needed to pull off a team-building exercise to motivate the department to work more effectively with the sales staff (Ray, 2021).

In summation, the central argument proffered by the competency model is that successful leadership is contingent upon certain traits or characteristics. However, it can be argued that it is not a one size fits all model. It varies especially in institution that continually changes and redefines itself.

Value Model

Similar to the competency model, the value model that also inform leadership style, builds itself on the values of both the leader and their team. It is based on the assumption that people motivate themselves through the implementation of their personal values in their daily lives. (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Organizations that follow a shared set of beliefs have employees who are more likely to work together, which can increase productivity (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Almost in similar tone, Gleeson (2021), in his eloquent contribution argued that the values of a leader often encourage employees to follow their instruction, increasing the chance of success with every goal. For Gleeson, values enhance engagement, performance, and even retention – all which foster growth and profitability.

Hilvert (2020) argues that at its core, the values-based leadership model asserts that people are mostly motivated by

values and live according to these beliefs. Put in other words, followers are motivated or influenced by the values projected by a leader. These values include but not limited to honesty, integrity, resilience, empathy, humility, positive influence, respect, etc. In one of its widely read articles, Indeed Editorial Team (2021) emphasized the importance of leadership value. In paraphrase, the team argues that having a strong set of core values as a leader helps build respect, trust and creates the foundation for leaders to influence their team in a positive way that encourages high performance and excellence. Similarly, Jansen Kraemer (2011) identified four principles associated with values model leadership.

- The self-reflection. The leader must have the ability to identify and reflect on what s/he stands for, what her / his values are, and what matters most to the leader. To be a values based leader, s/he must be willing to look within her / himself through regular self-reflection and strive for greater self-awareness.
- The balance. It means the ability to see situations from multiple perspectives and differing viewpoints to gain a much fuller understanding. Balance means that the leader considers all sides and opinions with an open mind.
- The true self-confidence. It means that the leader accepts her / himself as s/he is. The leader recognizes personal strengths and weaknesses, and strives for continuous improvement. With true self-confidence the leader knows that there will always be people who are more gifted, accomplished, successful and so on than s/he (the leader), but the leader accepts the self as s/he is.
- The genuine humility. The leader should not forget who s/he is or where s/he came from. Genuine humility keeps life in perspective, particularly as the leader experiences success in her / his career. In addition, it helps the leader value each person s/he encounters and treats everyone respectfully.

Just like the competency model, the value model also has its own shortcomings or weakness. Research revealed that the tendency for potential value conflict or clash is one of the obvious weaknesses or shortcomings associated with the value model of leadership. In paraphrase, Rose (2020) maintains a leader whose values don't align with the work they're responsible for will experience stress, resentment, and overall suffering that can create conflict vulnerabilities. Similarly, (Dean, 2008) also argues that within the work environment, an individual employee may encounter managers who possess principles and values that seem substantively divergent.

In the author's opinion of this article, to prevent this potential conflict that has implications for influencing followers, it will require some sustained leadership efforts to change followers' behavior repugnant to organizational values.

In summation, the value model focuses on the values and behaviours of leaders that have implications for organization success and failure.

Finally, both the competency and value models may not be the best prescription for leadership development, but they are definitely good place to start. Influencing followers based on these models could be the best way to builds a high-performance culture in any formal organization.

Brief Review of the Concept "The Looking Glass Self"

As part of his contribution to symbolic interactionism paradigm or perspective in sociology, Professor Charles Horton Cooley in one of his famous works, "Human Nature and the Order", introduced the concept of "The Looking Glass Self" in 1902.

Widely discussed across culture in academic settings, "The Looking Glass Self" describes the process wherein individuals base their sense of self on how they believe others view them. In other words, Cooley (1902) opined that individuals develop their concept of self by observing how they are perceived by others. "The Looking Glass Self" is a micro-sociological concept directly confined to everyday lives and experiences of people on smaller scale. That is to say, doing social interaction, the people we often interact with act as the mirror that provides us feedbacks.

Building on the Cooley's concept, (Chandler and Munday, 2011), postulated that the ideas and feelings that people have about themselves — their self-concept or self-image — are developed in response to their perception and internalization of how others perceive and evaluate them.

Simply put, "The Looking Glass Self" is a mirror that helps individuals see their reflection from other individuals doing social interaction. Put differently, social interaction acts as a mirror that helps individuals to measure their worth, values, and behavior. For this to happen, Cooley (1902) based his argument on three highly interrelated core assumptions. They are:

1. One must imagine how he/she appears to others, be it family, friends, or any random person being encountered.
2. One imagines how he/she must be evaluated based on the way one is observed or perceived by others. For instance, a person might be evaluated or perceived as being trustworthy, or maybe as a beacon of hope.
3. The development of the sense of self, based on one's impressions of these evaluations, feedbacks or judgments of others. This would simply mean that you try as much as you can to develop your behavior or character based on how you think people see you. For instance, if the impression you get as feedback is based on trust, it means that you develop your behavior in that manner.

Shortcomings of "The Looking Glass Self"

In academic settings, concepts or theories are not entirely perfect or immune from weaknesses or shortcomings. This is due to the fact that scholars look at concepts or theories from different lenses and dispositions. So, "The Looking Glass Self" cannot be an exception. In the opinion of the author of this article, the inherent shortcoming of this concept lies in the fact that as a micro-sociological concept deeply rooted in the symbolic interactionist theory, it is confined to small group of people, precisely primary group interacting daily. Or applicable to small-scale social structures. This would imply that the concept should have nothing to do with secondary group, a relatively larger group composed of impersonal and goal-oriented relationships, which are often temporary established to perform functions and achieve common purpose (Cooley 1909). The reason is very simple. Leadership from all walks of life is confined to secondary group. If not daily, social interaction is also frequent among secondary group in which "The Looking Glass Self" cannot be ignored for leadership development that also involves frequent social interaction between followers and leaders.

Application of "The Looking Glass Self" to Leadership Development

Despite its demerits or shortcomings which is obvious for every concept or theory introduced, "The Looking Glass Self" concept seems to be another powerful tool for leadership development. Here is the argument.

To begin with, even though the concept is confined to primary group that may question its application to leadership development that involves secondary group as in formal organization. However, what makes this concept applicable to leadership development stems from unquestionable fact leaders in all walks of life interact with followers frequently if not daily in which perception is formed. As such, "The Looking Glass Self" could be helpful in developing leadership. Take for instance, under the values model, one of Jansen Kraemer (2011) four principles title "The Self-Reflection" can be likened to "The Looking Glass Self". In a nutshell, it explains that leaders must be willing to look within her / himself through regular self-reflection and strive for greater self-awareness. Arguably, one of the essences for self-reflection and self-awareness in leadership is to determine followers' perception critical to self-improvement.

In all walks of life, leadership as mentioned earlier is about influencing followers to act on their own will, based on motivation or inspiration. Now, in the context of "The Looking Glass Self" followers act as the "mirror" in which a leader must imagine how he/she appears to the followers, or how perception is formed about him/her. In other words, if you are a leader, it is important to imagine yourself in the eyes of the people you are leading. That is to say, for every time a leader stands before his/her followers doing social interaction, what reflection comes as a feedback? Moreover, how do the followers see their leader? Do they see the characteristics of

the values model leadership such as honest, trustworthy, respectful, benevolence, congenial, self-confidence, honorable character, or a beacon of hope? Or do they see a narcissist, arrogant, betrayer, egotistic leader? Do followers also see the characteristics of the competency model such as knowledge, courage, articulation, intelligence, conceptual skills, team building spirit, commitment, abilities in their leaders? Both the competency model and values models are capable of influence followers willingly. Also, a leader must be able to imagine how he/she is often evaluated based on the observation from followers. This is important for developing leadership qualities. For example, a bishop, pastor, imam or clergyman is a leader that should influence followers to comply with religious precepts or principles. No doubt, the congregation or followers being aware that there is no perfection in humanity see their clergyman to be honest, trustworthy or beacon of trust. That's the impression that comes from the congregation or followers for their clergyman. In other words, a clergyman must be able to imagine how he/she appears in the eyes of congregation or followers. In short, what are the followers' expectations from their clergyman? Ideally, it means that in order to influence followers, a clergyman must meet the demands or expectations of their followers. Meeting the demands or expectations of followers requires development of the leader's sense of self that also derives from followers' feedbacks.

In summation, the church or mosque is the "mirror" or "The Looking Glass Self" in which the behavior and self-esteem of the clergyman can be developed by the impression he/she gets as feedback from the followers. Simply put different, metaphorically, the concept is a mirror in which a leader's self-concepts are influenced by their imputations of how they are perceived by their followers.

Similarly, "The Looking Glass Self" could also be used for leadership development in politics, corporate environment. Politicians, activists, business or corporate executives, occupy leadership positions that do not in any way guarantee leadership development until it is refined or acquired through the learning curve process. Without this development, it would be difficult to influence the people under their supervision or their followers.

Politicians, activists, business or corporate executives that want to influence their followers by motivation must imagine how they appear in the eyes of their followers. By doing so, it could help to develop a sense of self, based on the impressions symbolically communicated by followers, and people being supervised. Put in other words, when a political leader stands before his/her followers, he/she, through imagination, must get feedback from the interaction. Arguably, this is typical of charismatic leaders. They are mindful of how their followers see them or how they appear in the eyes of their followers. Their confidence is a radiation that influence followers to act without being manipulated in any form or manner.

In African politics, "The Looking Glass Self" could be important. Political leaders need to learn that their followers

are the "mirror" that provides feedback from the interaction. In other words, they must imagine how they appear in the eyes of their followers or how their followers see them. It can be argued that politicians who are labelled disdainfully by society stems from their lack of knowledge about their followers as the "Looking Glass" or "mirror". Put it differently, the society acts as the "mirror", or "Looking Glass" for political leaders. In this "mirror", politicians or political leaders should be able to interpret what they see from their followers. For example, do they see from their follower as a beacon of hope, messiah, trustworthy despite the fact there is no perfection in humanity? Their failure to meet this expectation through their behavior patterns could diminish the confidence of their followers. Consequently, a high degree of skepticism of trust in politicians continues to permeate African politics.

Reflecting on the definitions of leadership development referenced in this article, it is also safe to connect it to "The Looking Glass Self". Here is the argument. Leadership development is also about training or activities embarked upon to empower leaders succeed in their roles and responsibilities. In this case, "The Looking Glass Self" as an experimental concept could be inculcated or infused into leadership development training module. This is simply because it describes how leaders from all walks of life will create their own self-image critical to influencing their followers. It will help leaders use the judgments they receive from followers to measure their own worth, values, and behavior.

III. CONCLUSION

Based upon the continuous attentions the topic of leadership development received from academic community, it is say to make the inference that none of these attentions in terms of models has been successful in producing a clear profile for perfect leadership development. The reason is that leaders are appointed, elected or called to influence individuals with complex plethora of life experiences, characteristics, and mindsets in a world highly dynamic and uncertain. Therefore, "The Looking Glass Self" as a concept could be experimented as another model for leadership development in every formal sector or organization or all walks of life.

It can be concluded that although followers' perception plays one of the main roles in leadership development, it all depends on how leaders interpret their followers' perceptions. Or how leaders see themselves from the outside or from their followers' perspective could help to develop their ability to influence followers.

If leaders cannot see and use the judgments they receive from the mirror to measure their own worth, values, and behavior, the possibility of influencing followers could be slim.

Finally, this paper recommends that the best way to experiment the concept is to incorporate or inculcate it into leadership development training package or module as one of the thematic areas. As one of the expected outcomes, the concept could help leaders judge themselves by looking in the mirror that metaphorically equated to their followers.

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