Elaine Brown and Russell Eugene Tranbarger:
A Comparison of Leadership Styles
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A Comparison of Leadership Styles 

Leadership is a multifaceted term that attributes to specific qualities, behaviors, and actions. It can be presented in many forms and defined in many ways. Elaine Brown, the first and only female leader of the Black Panther Party, and Russell Eugene Tranbarger, a male nurse leader that tackled obstacles of being a male in a profession coined as being female exclusive, are both prominent leaders that have very different leadership styles. This essay discusses several definitions of leadership and examines the leadership styles of Elaine Brown and Russell Tranbarger. It also considers the differences in their leadership styles and evaluates their strengths and weaknesses.

Definition of Leadership 

What is leadership? This question is one that does not have a simple answer. According to dictionary.com, leadership is defined as “a person who guides or directs a group” (Dictionary.com, 2018). A leader can be any age, nationality, or gender. There are many styles of leadership exhibited depending on the environment, previous life experiences, and even mentors that may have inspired them. An essential trait in a successful leader is to have adequate communication. If a leader can develop creative ideas for progression and initiate the plans but cannot communicate effectively, then team goals will not be met. Another definition of leadership focuses on influence. Per bible.org, leadership is “the ability of one person to influence others” (Bible.org, 2018). This definition also coincides with a definition stated in Essentials of Nursing Leadership Management. If a leader can influence others, then that person must also encompass “integrity, courage, positive attitude, initiative, energy, optimism, perseverance, generosity, balance, ability to handle stress, and self-awareness” (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). Influence is significant when sharing a vision for change and procuring a team that can fulfill those goals. Anyone can be appointed to a position, but to be an effective leader, you must have the ability to influence individuals willing to follow your lead (Tranbarger, 2013).
Weiss & Tappen (2015) even went further in describing leadership by dividing it into three distinctive styles, which are autocratic, laissez faire, and democratic. Persons with an autocratic leadership style tend to like control of various situations. They make decisions for the group without taking the group’s ideas into consideration. This leadership style can be effective, but stifles creativity and group morale. The next leadership style discussed was laissez faire. This style is the opposite of an authoritarian. A person of this leadership style is very permissive, fails to plan accordingly, and does not encourage the group (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). Many times, the group is left to make decisions with no guidance. Although some individuals do well with this leadership style, many become disappointed and befuddled. Lastly, the democratic leadership style is a combination of authoritarian and laissez faire styles. This type of leader meets the needs of the group members in a fair, flexible manner. Group members have room to be creative, become involved, and are more positive workers (Weiss & Tappen, 2015).

Non-Nurse Leader

Elaine Brown, having many leadership roles in her life, is most known in her role as chairwoman of the Black Panther Party from 1974-1977. She was not only the first female leader of the Black Panther’s, but the only one to date. This made her roles as a leader more challenging than most. During the four years, she was in this leadership position, Brown exhibited her autocratic and servant leadership styles. She met many obstacles from those in opposition of the Black Panther Party and some of the members of the party. The difficulties she faced did not waiver what she had planned and where she saw the future of the party.

One of Ms. Brown’s leadership styles that she exhibited when she assumed the role of chairwoman of the Black Panthers was autocratic. She developed her own ideas for the group, made the decisions, and gave orders as to what would be done (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). Brown
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left no topic up to interpretation or debate. This was likely because she was a female leading a
male-dominated group, and her new position was opposed by many of them (Gale, 2005). The
male members of the party believed that a woman should not be in power. Brown made sure to
surround herself with people whom she could trust, was extremely loyal to the Black Panther
movement, and gave little room for the opinions of its members (Gale, 2005). With their
protection and assistance, she pushed the agenda of the party by assisting the black community
with growth. She also used her autocratic leadership style by using the group to fulfill her goals
of having the black female take on more social responsibility and authoritative roles (Walton,
n.d.; Weiss & Tappen, 2015)

Another leadership style Elaine Brown exhibited was a servant leader. Although she had
to be an autocratic leader when managing the Black Panthers, her real vision was to make
positive changes in the African American community. She made sure that no matter the struggles
she experienced as a leader in the party, her want to give back came to fruition. As the leader, she
managed to expand the community services offered by the Panthers. Ms. Brown was the founder
or co-founder of many non-profit organizations that advocated for education, food security,
justice, and assisted with imprisoned individuals (About Elaine , n.d.; Gale, 2005). Her
leadership in helping others in need exemplifies the servant leadership style in that the needs of
the people she was serving was put above the power struggle she was experiencing (Weiss &
Tappen, 2015).

Though Brown was an autocratic leader that desired little input in how she would manage
the Black Panthers, she still had the desire to place others above this. This is very reminiscent of
the situational theory that highlights the leader’s ability to adapt their leadership style to various
environments (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). As leader of the Panther Party, Ms. Brown quickly
developed confidence and courage because she had to lead a group that did not approve of her position. She took initiative when creating nonprofit organizations to benefit others, and handled stress gracefully as opposition struck her in many forms. These characteristics made her an effective leader.

**Nurse Leader**

No one would ever consider a white male to be a minority in the United States, but in the field of nursing, that’s exactly what Russell Eugene Tranbarger was considered. Mr. Tranbarger began his nursing career during a time when being a male nurse was deemed to be taboo. He even had difficulty finding a nursing school that would accept him, because men were barred from the profession. Being a male in a female-dominated career made school, seeking employment, and even gaining respect difficult for Mr. Tranbarger. While in nursing school, Tranbarger fought for equality for men in the nursing field and began his first of many leadership positions. During the 1950s, he may have been young, but he started to establish a leadership style that emanated from equality and respect.

Since Russell Tranbarger’s graduated from nursing school, he has served as a leader in many organizations, schools, hospitals, and even the military. In almost all of these instances, he was the first male that had ever been appointed to these positions. Mr. Tranbarger used his time as a democratic leader to push for acceptance of the male nurse and eliminate the belief that nursing was solely for females (American Nurses Association, 2012; Minority Nurse, 2013). As a democratic leader, Tranbarger ensured that the team he was working on had a common goal and they moved toward this goal as a group (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). Even in instances where he had to fight for respect as a male nurse, Tranbarger insisted on leading in a democratic sense. He demonstrated what it meant to be an excellent nurse, gave public praise to boost morale and
productivity, and corrected infractions in a private setting (Tranbarger, 2013). His want to motivate his team through creativity and flexibility was the embodiment of a democratic leader.

Mr. Tranbarger was not only a dedicated democratic leader, but he also was a transformational leader that inspired his team, produced a trusting environment, and lead by example (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). As a transformational leader, Tranbarger lead in an exciting way that reduced negativity, rewarded his team, and shared his vision of a progressive nursing community. As Mr. Tranbarger stated, “Your vision for your organization must be articulated, shared, and give stakeholders belief that adopting the vision will be beneficial” (Tranbarger, 2013).

Emotional intelligence also proved to be one of Russell Tranbarger’s leadership assets. He was able to recognize his own emotions about being a minority who was not treated equally in a job that he loved. Mr. Tranbarger did not use this as an excuse, he fought for respect of the male nurse while becoming an esteemed nurse leader himself. His understand of his own emotions allowed him to be more cognizant of the emotions of those around him. He used this in a constructive manner and brought “…people together in an atmosphere of respect, cooperation, collegiality, and helpfulness…” so his team could work effectively to achieve their common goals (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). Tranbarger also recognized that in order to be an effective leader, he had to have mentors and colleagues that shared the same struggles and victories (Tranbarger, 2013). Being in tune with his emotional intelligence helped Tranbarger to seek assistance when needed, be an effective leader, and encouraged optimism and perseverance.

**Brown and Tranbarger Compared**

Elaine Brown and Russell Tranbarger are both dynamic leaders that have proven to be successful in their positions. They both display leadership strengths, which is defined by
Essentials of Nursing Leadership Management as confidence, the ability to constructively handle stress, and to be active problem solvers (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). Ms. Brown and Mr. Tranbarger are people who pushed for equality and desired change that reflected egalitarianism. Both are goal oriented leaders that encountered challenges while in their leadership positions. Elaine Brown and Russell Tranbarger are leaders that continue to advocate for change.

Though both exhibit similar characteristic of being effective leaders, Brown and Tranbarger both differ in the way in which they lead. Elain Brown is more of a structured leader. She led by giving the members of the Black Panther Party little say in the direction of the organization. There was no room for suggestions and the members had little freedom in decision making. Ms. Brown made all the decisions. This proved to be extremely efficient and she accomplished a lot, but the group morale was very low.

On the contrary, Tranbarger is more of a moderate leader. He shared his vision with his team and allowed them to have a part in the decision-making process. Tranbarger understood the purpose of sharing responsibility as a group. This style of leading did not detract from his leadership qualities or ability to guide people, but instead added value to his democratic leadership style. Due to this, Mr. Tranbarger needed to be a skillful communicator that showed value in the suggestions provided by his workers.

Self-Analysis of Leadership Potential

The author has been in several leadership positions in the past as well as current leadership positions. In past positions, she has maintained integrity, energy, and generosity as effective qualities. She was very young in these position, so she lacked emotional intelligence. This proved to be challenging and made her more of an autocratic leader. She insisted on having control of all situation, but this caused her to be ineffective in handling stressful situations. As
she grew and encounter more leadership positions, she began to develop new ways of approaching situations.

Since those past positions, the author has grown in the way she delivers her leadership style and has become more aware of her emotional intelligence. She still encompasses integrity, energy, and generosity, but she has also incorporated optimism and skillful communication to her qualities. The author believes in listening to others ideas and pushing the group toward its creative potential. Being a democratic leader allows the author to handle stressful situations in a productive manner because responsibilities and decisions are shared. Though this may be viewed as less efficient, the author’s leadership style proves higher satisfaction for the individuals she leads.

As the author continues to evaluate her leadership style, there is room for more growth and improvement. She needs to work toward being more assertive and adapting her leadership style to various situations. Becoming more flexible and exhibiting a more dynamic approach to leadership can help the author move toward her goal of being more effective leader. Developing skills through consulting mentors and becoming a mentor would prove to be beneficial in her growth (Tranbarger, 2013). By recognizing her weaknesses and being willing to develop them, the author is making strides to being a better leader in the future.

Summary

Leadership is an important position taken on by individuals that are willing to advise and motivate others. It is a noble task that is meant to be dynamic and ever changing. Leaders can differ greatly in their leadership style, but prove to be effective in accomplishing goals. Though styles may differ, many leaders possess common characteristics such as confidence, integrity,
and initiative. It is foundational features such as these that can make a leader effective in at moving a team to desired goals and aspirations.
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