Balancing the Leadership Equation:
Know Yourself and Know Your Follower – A Modern Case Study of Metacognition and Servant Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

A new start-up company developed a novel approach with implications for leaders, educators, coaches, and managers alike. This particular start-up company developed a highly advanced software to accurately assess and fully understand human behavior and learning using recent advances in cognitive neuroscience paired with modern technology. The company then applies this technology by providing assessment feedback to individuals in numerous workforce sector organizations to enhance their performance. For purposes of this scholarly work, the company is referenced under the pseudonym of "KnowCom". KnowCom supplies tangible results to the ancient desire of "know thyself" and then offering it to the modern marketplace where servant leaders desire these results to best serve and lead their followers in ways that reach them. KnowCom's approach to finding this critical intersection of knowing yourself and knowing your follower, which results in knowing how to lead these followers in the manner that is follower centric and tailored to the follower, is powerful. This particular methodology carries important and positive implications for strategic leaders everywhere; and it has the potential to spread like wildfire in our modern "me" focused society.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a case-study review of KnowCom's approach to demonstrate where a convergence of the relatively contemporary theories of metacognition (Flavell, 1976) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) are taking shape in our modern world of strategic leadership. The results of this case-study will explain KnowCom's novel approach and the implications that further build momentum for follower centric approaches to leadership; inspiring leaders or organizations to focus more deeply on their followers' cognitive, perceptual and behavioral attributes for enhanced performance. Knowing ourselves and knowing our followers to provide balanced leadership is highlighted.

BACKGROUND

The ancient adage from Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras of "know thyself" is an enduring concept and it remains relevant today. Most people agree that self-reflection is important to leader development in adults. In many leader development contexts the concept of self-awareness is a focal point. The US Army's first mass produced pamphlet on Leadership, published in 1948, offers this cardinal truth about leadership: "No man reaches his full stature unless he knows himself and works for improvement" (DA PAM 22-1, p. 29). At West Point, a place considered to be the premier leadership institution in the world, the first leadership principle ingrained into first year students is "Know Yourself and Seek Self Improvement" (Bugles Notes, 2016, p. 1). The first year is dedicated to learning about oneself as a follower before being given the honor of leading others. Clearly, individual self-awareness

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remains a critical activity for any leader. From early trait, skills and behavioral theories of leadership, we still recognize that understanding the leader can't be disregarded or abandoned.

Fortunately, rapid technological advances and globalization is creating another age of enlightenment within our culture that allows for an intense focus on the self. It is a "me centric" era. Our aging members of society and societal leaders---come from the "Me Generation," a term Tim Wolfe coined for baby boomers in 1976. Our workers are Millennials, and they've been called the "Me-Me-Me Generation" by Joel Stein in Time magazine in 2013. Additionally, the newest members of society could be considered the "Selfie Generation," as Charles Blow provides in the NY Times in 2014. With all this focus on the self, embracing self-awareness can come without hesitation for today's strategic leader—young or old. It can prove to be a positive environment for developing leaders because of a willingness and openness toward self-reflection and self-assessment.

As students learn in Algebra, balancing the equation is an important concept. Pythagoras, as a mathematician and while contemplating leadership, might have altered his quote to 'know thyself, know thy follower'; combining the equally important aspect of knowing your follower, a concept that is arguably just as important to balance the equation of leadership. In fact, at West Point, this is another leadership principle embedded into their new leaders; "know your Soldiers and look out for their well-being"" (Bugle Notes, 2016, p. 1). Certainly factors such as situation, environment, culture, group dynamics and other important factors create uniqueness in the relationship between leaders and followers, but the central factors to any leadership equation remains that of the leader and the follower. Striking the balance in the equation seems to be the challenge of the most modern leadership theories. A criticism of leadership theories is that they tend to be too leader centric and look at the influence relationship mainly from the standpoint of the leader.

Approaches to understanding leadership approaches in modern times are varied and numerous. Reviewing some popular approaches and the seminal researchers that developed these works, we see some commonalities. From the Trait Approach beginning with the Great Man Theory (Carlyle, 1849), to the Skills Approach (Katz, 1955), to the Behavioral Approach (Stogdill, 1948), to Authentic Leadership (George, 2003), to Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994), throughout all these approaches there is a heavy and concerted focus on the leader. These approaches certainly emphasize that the leader understand themselves in the leadership equation. As provided earlier, this is an easy proposition for our "me" focused culture to undertake. A leader shouldn't ignore these approaches or discredit them for their limitation because they certainly offer insights into understanding the leader in the leadership equation.

Other modern theories that evolved have explored more heavily the leader-follower relationship, including factors such as the situation, power and motivational aspects of the leadership relationship, but it could be said that the follower is often a cursory afterthought in many leadership theories. Even in the leadership theories and models that involve the follower with a more deliberate consideration or in a dyadic relationship (it can be seen that the leader remains the central figure). The most noted approaches and their early influential researchers are important to acknowledge. Approaches like those of Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), Path-Goal (Evans, 1970) (House & Dessler, 1974), Leader-Member Exchange (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), Transactional (Burns, 1978), and others approaches are influential to modern leadership studies. In these approaches, the leader continues to remains the central figure while the relationship with follower is explored further. In these theories the follower appears to be considered more a target of leadership and certainly not the overt focal point. The self-consumed nature of only worrying about what and how the leader thinks and acts to apply their influence is too often a major focus. It is also arguably too narrow and leaves an unbalanced equation of

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