Intersections and Innovations

Change for Canada's Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector

The Muttart Foundation

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Acknowledgements

For far too long, Canada has lacked a comprehensive resource examining Canada's charitable sector. That has now ended.

The Muttart Foundation has spent many years focusing on building the capacity of charities in this country. The publication of this collection is another contribution to that effort. By understanding more about itself, the sector can continue to develop and find new ways to serve Canadians and those in need outside our nation.

The authors of these essays bring different perspectives on the role and inner workings of Canada's charities. Collectively, they bring an unprecedented insight into the work of organizations whose diversity is exceeded only by their desire to serve.

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The work of all of these individuals has come together in this resource which we dedicate to all of those in, or interested in, Canada's charitable sector.

Malcolm Burrows, President

Bob Wyatt, Executive Director

The Muttart Foundation

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Part II Navigating a Changing Environment

The People Environment: Leaders, Employees, and Volunteers

Chapter 15

Leadership in the Charitable Sector: A Canadian Approach?

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What is leadership? We often have an intuitive understanding of the concept, but in practice leadership can mean different things to different people. There is a powerful normative assumption that "leadership" in the charitable sector is related to notions of selflessness, inspiration, ethical behaviour, and benevolence. However, leadership is more complex than good intentions and ethics. While meaning well, leaders even in the charitable sector can engage in incredibly destructive behaviours. By reducing leadership merely to specific qualities, skills, or traits that should be emulated, we limit our understanding of what leadership is and where it can emerge. There is no consensus among scholars, practitioners, consultants, and volunteers in the sector on a universal definition. Diversity of experiences, people, best practices, challenges, and solutions make the charitable sector a fascinating incubator for the study of leadership.

While it is tempting, and would be conceptually easier, to develop a coherent and unified approach to describe the charitable sector's leadership, the leadership literature and practices are diverse and, on occasion, even contradictory. No single leadership approach can be effective in all circumstances. Indeed, we should be wary of pre-made "leadership recipes" that create the illusion that it is possible to morph into a particular type of leader at any given time if someone simply follows carefully prescribed instructions. This chapter's main lesson is a simple one: people, context, and organizations matter in shaping what leadership is and who leaders are. This lesson is particularly relevant for Canadian leaders who must navigate their organizations through crises and difficult times while continually adapting to a changing environment. Although there is no single approach to leadership, purposefully embracing a diversity of views and people makes organizations more effective in achieving a common goal with their followers, which ultimately is the fundamental goal of leaders. Canadian leaders seem particularly attuned to the ethics and values at the heart of many decisions that can push an organization's mission forward.

This chapter discusses leadership using a theoretical and an applied approach. On the theoretical side, the chapter maps many of the relevant leadership theories applicable to the charitable sector. By discussing the critical theoretical underpinnings of leadership research, the chapter offers an informed critique of one-size-fits-all leadership approaches that dominate current public discourses and training offerings. On the applied side, drawing from 30 semi-structured interviews with Canadian practitioners in the charitable sector, I explore how leaders understand leadership. These practitioners' perspectives help us assess whether there is a distinctively Canadian leadership approach. This then enables us to sort through the theoretical approaches that can best inform current Canadian practices – moving the practice of leadership forward amidst a time of great uncertainty and profound changes in the sector's landscape.

What Is Leadership?

There is no coherent and unified view of what leadership is (see Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018). In their comprehensive review of leadership research, Dionne et al. (2014) noted more than 29 different characterizations of leadership theories and models in the literature, including leadership described as authentic, charismatic, contingent, ethical, follower-centric, and transformational, to name only a few. While they probably all add to our collective understanding of what leadership can be, these labels and their proliferation also foment a general dissatisfaction with leadership studies and sustain persistent confusion about what leadership is (see Day & Antonakis, 2012).

Leadership can be broadly defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2016). This definition is helpful, as it does not ascribe preferred qualities, values, or skills. Instead, it focuses on the process of influencing followers, which raises important questions about power and relationships in which all individuals are embedded. This definition highlights essential questions that need to be considered in our discussions about leadership: Who becomes the leader and why? Who is under the authority of the leader? How does the leader's influence operate? How is the common goal determined, and how do we know we achieved it? Whether it focuses on the personalities, skills, traits, competencies, or context of operation, each leadership perspective offers diverse answers to these important and fundamental questions. Perhaps the most frequently asked questions (Jackson & Parry, 2011) in the literature about leadership are:

- Are leaders born or made?
- What makes an effective leader?
- What's the difference between leadership and management?

Individual-Oriented Perspectives

The answers to these will vary depending on the perspective considered. On the first question above, some proponents of what I label "individual" perspectives are generally more interested in the intrinsic nature of leadership, emphasizing the inherent traits and qualities that leaders possess and how they enable or constrain leadership development. Proponents of individual approaches argue that personality matters tremendously. While leadership skills can be improved, many view leadership as an innate quality that some possess, a *je ne sais quoi* that makes some individuals stand out and emerge as natural leaders. This approach, also historically referred to as the "Great Man theory," proposed by Carlyle (1840), contends that people (of the male kind, more specifically) affect the course of history because of their heroic qualities.

Individual approaches to leadership are perhaps the most written about. A simple Google Books search of the term "leadership" yields more than 140 million results. Both the academic and popular books stress the importance of the individual characteristics of the leader and highlight tales of extraordinary leadership to reinforce their ideas. Leaders' identities, actions, and skills define what leadership is. Individual approaches will often rely on charismatic and influential leaders throughout history as guidelines to achieve effective leadership. The assumption is that if we learn from great leaders in our fields, past or present, we can derive leadership's best practices and train current and future leaders.

The emphasis on best practices has the unfortunate drawback of minimizing stories of failures from which we often learn the most. The selection bias toward positive leadership stories, despite the immense benefits of the hard lessons learned from destructive leadership and "bad" leaders, makes such approaches overly prescriptive and can over-attribute the successes and failures to individual leaders within organizations. While single leaders – often the executive director (ED) – can influence their organizations, no one can confidently attribute an organization's successes or failures to only one individual.

What, then, is "destructive" leadership? It can be defined as volitional behaviour by a leader that can harm, or intends to harm, a leader's organization or followers by a) encouraging followers to pursue goals that contravene the legitimate interests of the organization or b) employing a leadership style that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers, regardless of justifications for such behaviour (Krasikova et al., 2013: 1,310). Most of us have learned a great deal from bad leadership through personal experience, yet the literature has under-explored this critical aspect of leadership (see Silard, 2018). (Understandably, there is a moral reluctance to learn from despots, dictators, or terrorists despite the important, albeit negative, influence they have had throughout history and over their followers.)

These individual-oriented approaches still dominate leadership discussions today, particularly in the consulting world. While helpful to develop some of the crucial aspects of leadership, the over-emphasis on the individual traits, personality, and skills needed to be "a good leader" can obscure the importance of other vital elements such as followership and dynamic leadership *relationships*, as well as the context in which leaders operate and how it influences their behaviours.

A variant within this group of individual-oriented approaches is interested in how leaders are made, and the learning aspects of leadership, acknowledging that some skills aimed at promoting "good leadership" can be acquired through experience and training. Several important initiatives have focused on building leadership "capabilities" (Bish & Becker, 2016; Clutterbuck & Arundel, 2017). For example, the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) initiative Leading Our Future describes the need for nonprofit leaders to demonstrate their leadership through seven essential competencies:

- *builder*: building of internal capacity and relationships with stakeholders;
- *thinker*: demonstrating strategic thinking, agility, and analytical capacity;
- *mentor*: leading by example with empathy and authenticity;

- *storyteller*: communicating effectively to various audiences;
- *innovator*: encouraging experimentation, risk-taking, and learning;
- *connector*: promoting sharing resources and developing relationships; and
- *steward*: protecting the resources (financial and human) of the organization.

Approaches promoting the learning and training of current and future leaders are crucial to fostering positive leadership practices for individual leaders. They are also helpful in promoting robust leadership training in the sector. However, it is essential to remember that these approaches can potentially underestimate the considerable influence and constraints that the operational environment exerts on leadership decisions.

Context-Oriented Approaches

Context-oriented approaches emphasize that leaders are neither born nor made, but that the expression of their leadership is contingent on operational and cultural contexts. This set of approaches highlights the interplay between leaders and their operational environment and cultural and legal contexts. How is context constraining or enabling particular types of leadership? Fundamentally, it challenges the idea that personality and skills will predict the kind of leadership that will be most effective. Instead, proponents of context-oriented approaches posit that the context in which people operate matters and shapes leadership practice. It is not so much what leaders bring to the "table" but how the leaders' choices and situational variables affect their practices and ability to influence others. Some variants, particularly in the contingency theory models, consider leaders' behaviours or personalities and focus on their effect on leadership and organizational effectiveness. Yukl (2011) describes the situational variables as "conditions the leader cannot change in the short term, including characteristics of the work (e.g., task structure, role interdependence), characteristics of subordinates (e.g., needs, values), characteristics of the leader (expertise, interpersonal stress), and characteristics of the leadership position (leader authority, formal policies)." Another related variant called the situational approach (see Blanchard et al., 1993) asks whether leaders behave similarly in all situations and how their leadership style adapts. It recognizes that the same people will act differently depending on the problem they are facing.

More critical leadership approaches such as feminist leadership theories also reject the premise of "born or made," especially as the discipline has historically developed its core leadership concepts on the experiences of white males, thus reaffirming a particularly racialized and patriarchal form of leadership (see Suyemoto & Ballou, 2008; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; & Vetter, 2010). Feminist scholarship often emphasizes the legal and cultural contexts that inhibit women-centred leadership and reminds us that there is nothing intrinsic about being a woman that prevents her from being a leader. Rather, systemic deterrents such as childcare policies, cultural practices, or skills seen as preferable that have been historically associated with male-oriented leadership are key factors. More broadly, contextual approaches acknowledge that leadership outcomes are dependent on the context and push back against the over-attribution of successes and failures to the individual leaders. Contextual approaches remind us that the culture of organizations, processes, and policies are important considerations for determining whether leadership can be successful. These approaches are particularly relevant in times of significant turbulence that require leaders to adapt and shift their practices.

Relationship-Oriented Approaches

On the question of leadership effectiveness, contextual and relationship-oriented approaches differ from individual-oriented approaches in their views of what makes a leader effective. Individual approaches will tend to focus on the behaviours of the leader and their personal characteristics, whereas relational approaches will consider a group's perspective, dynamics, and goals. Proponents of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, perhaps the dominant relational approach, concentrate on the quality of interactions and whether the exchanges between a leader and members of a group facilitate common goals. LMX theory highlights realities of workplace settings such as in-groups, out-groups, and other important dynamics that can enable or constrain leadership in organizations (see Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Relationship-oriented approaches pay attention to the interactions between leaders and followers. Such leadership theories ask the critical question: why do followers follow leaders? Bligh (2011: 426) notes in discussing Weick (2007) that "follower-centred approaches deepen almost any leader-centric analysis: when we shift questions of perception and attention from leaders to followers, then inevitably new issues arise and new questions are raised." If we emphasize only the leader's characteristics or skills, we are left with an incomplete understanding of leadership, because without followers there would be no leaders. Leadership is a process because it is a relationship-building endeavour between leaders and followers. Learning and building trust and legitimacy based on the interactions of leaders and followers go beyond a leader imposing their will on a group but are affirmed when followers accept a leader's authority and they jointly move toward a common goal.

The related notion of transactional leadership (Bass, 1985) is based on the exchange of rewards and benefits between leaders and followers to achieve a goal set forth by the leader. Despite the perception that transactional leadership is a cold and calculated approach to leadership, in reality we learn how effective transactional leadership is when time is of the essence or when trust is nascent or fragile. Often discussed in parallel to transactional leadership, transformational leadership is perhaps the best-known relational approach (Bass & Avolio, 1993). This approach is relationship-oriented because it is the process of interaction between a leader and followers that is transformational: followers and leaders create a positive organizational culture and change the people involved in the relationship. Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991) note that transformational leaders often display the characteristics known as "the four Is":

1. idealized influence;
2. inspirational motivation;
3. intellectual stimulation; and
4. individualized considerations.

Idealized influence manifests itself by focusing on an organization's values, ethics, and morals to (hopefully) create a sense of belonging and shared vision within the organization. Inspirational motivation enables transformational leaders to inspire their followers to work toward common goals beyond self-interest. Transformational leaders foster intellectual stimulation by channelling and encouraging innovation and creative thinking and by adapting solutions to new and emerging problems. Lastly, individualized considerations allow the leader to develop and foster unique relationships with followers based on their needs and individual strengths.

There are simply too many leadership approaches to provide an exhaustive overview. When conceptualizing what leadership and leaders are, it is important to remember that people, relationships, and contexts matter. There is no single recipe to concoct the perfect leader. There are only people who can recognize, listen, and learn from others about how to lead an organization toward its goals, small or large.

Leaders and Managers: An Important Distinction

The academic and practitioner literatures have been inconsistent in distinguishing between a leader and a manager, often conflating them. While both leaders and managers work toward common goals of the organization, managers are not always the leaders an organization needs, and leaders are not always in management positions, conferring them the authority to enact meaningful change. This highlights the difference between emergent and assigned leadership. In other words, a leader is not always determined by their rank in the organization. Managers typically focus on tasks, control, and hierarchies and value order, consistency, and predictability. Leaders foster strategic directions, inspire their followers, and create a shared vision within the organization and beyond (Northouse, 2016). Management or leadership activities happen at various levels of the organization, whether at the staff level or, in the case of nonprofit and charitable organizations, within the board of directors (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). Context and outside forces also play an essential role in determining what is needed – more management or more leadership relative to particular circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique situation in which both leaders and managers have had to act to fulfill the organization's mission to ensure its long-term survival. Understanding that managers are not always leaders and that leaders are not always in a position of authority allows us to appreciate how leadership can emerge in unexpected places if the conditions are ripe.

In contrast, management is often aligned with a title or a pre-determined role. The unfulfilled expectations of leadership toward a manager can lead to disappointment and conflicts. Ultimately, ignoring the fundamental differences between leadership and management can produce very destructive outcomes for an organization. It undermines trust, motivation, and cohesion, which are key elements of positive leadership relationships. Organizations need leaders *and* managers to achieve their missions; training managers in fulfilling their leadership potential is vital to ensure a vibrant and modern organization. Notably and at the heart of the distinction between leadership and management is the notion of power and the capacity to influence others' behaviours without overt coercion.

Paths to Influence: Power and Leadership

Any discussion of leadership would be incomplete if we didn't reflect the notion of power. Throughout history, the association between power and leadership has been consistent. It has spurred entire subfields devoted to understanding how people in positions of authority (legitimate or not) exert influence (overtly or covertly) on others. Lukes ([1974] 2005) describes three fundamental dimensions of power:

- decision-making (direct and open);
- agenda-setting (controlling issues); and
- ideological (overt or covert influence).

These different dimensions illustrate the need to go beyond the traditional idea that power resides in the formal position one holds. Hence, it is essential to distinguish between a manager (formal position) and a leader (both formal and informal positions). For instance, managers have the decision-making power. Yet leaders who are not in assigned positions with designated titles of direct authority over others can work behind the scenes to influence the type of issues addressed within the organization, thereby relying on agenda-setting power. In other words, they can influence the vision of the organization. Leaders can influence their followers to do things they would otherwise not do on their own, despite not always possessing direct decision-making power like managers. People could have or exert power from six different sources (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008; Northouse, 2010):

- *Referent power*: Followers positively identify with the leader. For example, a well-liked teacher can exert influence over their students (Northouse, 2010).
- *Expert power*: Followers perceive the leader to be competent and knowledgeable. Someone with a Ph.D. would be likely to be considered an expert in their field of study and credible in their recommendations for action.
- *Legitimate power*: Someone possesses a formal and recognized authority, such as a democratically elected member of parliament.
- *Reward power*: A person can provide benefits to someone. For instance, a philanthropist acts as a patron to a charity.
- *Coercive power*: People can punish others to influence their behaviours. Parents can have coercive power over a child when they misbehave by taking away toys.
- *Information power*: A person has knowledge that could be valuable to others. For instance, the "office gossip" might possess this type of power if they have valuable information about an organization's culture that would allow newcomers to navigate the office politics.

The existence of multiple sources of power reinforces the idea that power is most often informal and depends on the context of the relationships at play. An effective leader will identify various potential sources of power and yield that influence multiple ways to achieve the organization's goals. An effective leader is also a strategic one who recognizes informal sources of power within the organization and channels these for the organization's greater mission.

Leadership in the Nonprofit and Charitable Sectors

Leadership in the charitable and nonprofit sectors is often associated with the activities and relationships of the board of directors and senior executives. While the nonprofit literature is not as expansive as that of the private sector, it is strongly influenced by skill-oriented approaches (Kearns et al., 2015). There is no consensus on what distinguishes leadership in the nonprofit sector from other industries, but some have suggested that common differences include "1) governance and the role and relations of boards and executives; 2) sources and mix of revenues; and 3) extent of reliance on volunteers for program delivery" (Herman & Heimovics, 1989, as cited in Herman & Heimovics, 1990:167). Hoefer (2010: 431) notes that in the sector, "leadership, in its essence, is not about commanding but about influencing others." A key fundamental difference is the special relationship between executives and their boards, thus explaining why the literature has emphasized the skills and responsibilities of executives (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012; Kearns et al., 2015; Herman, 2016). Jaskyte (2012: 440) highlights this peculiarity of nonprofit leadership: "The board of directors and the ED form the leadership core and are critical components of governance in nonprofit organizations." For instance, Harrison et al. (2013) show how positive perceptions of board leadership and quality relationships are positively associated with the effectiveness of the board.

The work on executive leadership (Hoefer, 1993, 2003; Herman & Heimovics, 1990, 2005; Menefee & Thompson, 1994) has focused mainly on the practical skills needed in nonprofits, such as relationship-building with the board of directors and developing the organization's priorities and relationships with all its stakeholders. Such practical emphasis on "what leaders do" is a fundamental component of any nonprofit leadership discussion.

While there is much practical emphasis on "what leaders do," discussions on "who leaders are" will often characterize leaders in nonprofit organizations as possessing exceptional qualities and leadership styles that align with charitable organizations' benevolent nature. Leadership in the sector is often described as "ethical," "authentic," or "spiritual."

The most popular characterization applied to the sector is undoubtedly the "servant leadership" model, which explicitly links ethics, morals, and values (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The term "servant leadership" was coined by Greenleaf (1970), who argued that such leadership is a "way of life" rather than merely a management approach. Servant leaders are said to possess 10 fundamental traits (Greenleaf, 1991; Spears, 2004): listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and community-building. These attributes apply well to the charitable sector because servant leaders aim to help others and inspire people to go beyond their self-interest for the community's good (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). This has resonated well with practitioners in the sector, particularly in light of the increasing perceptions of corporate greed (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Followership is an essential element of servant leadership because it creates the right work environment, enhancing followers' well-being (Parris & Peachey, 2013). While often focusing on the leaders' characteristics, this approach also stresses the importance of the relationship with followers and the intangible links, such as trust and legitimacy, between them. Such approaches and labels can idealize practitioners in the sector and assume that they do well because leaders mean well. The relationship between servant leadership and organizational outcomes beyond focusing on employee satisfaction needs to be further investigated.

In sum, the leadership literature in the nonprofit sector has focused disproportionately on EDs' skills and relationships with boards. It tends to treat leadership in highly normative and moralistic terms. More comparative research is needed to understand how organizational cultures in nonprofits foster or inhibit some approaches to leadership. In addition, the nonprofit literature should expand its view of leadership beyond the study of those in formal positions of power and pay more attention to emergent sources of leadership. Future research must also take more seriously issues of power, diversity, and gender within the sector's leadership.

Leadership in Practice: Canadian Perspectives

What do leaders of Canadian charities and nonprofits think about leadership? What are the important leadership lessons we can learn from these practitioners? This final section draws from 30 semi-structured interviews from 2015 to 2017 with Canadian practitioners identified by their peers as leaders in their respective fields. The interviewees included EDs, program managers, and other people identified as having innovative leadership practices in the sector, with the open-ended interview style fostering a grounded understanding of leadership in a Canadian context.

What Does Leadership Mean to You?

When Canadian sector leaders were asked what good leadership means to them, they consistently provided a view of leadership as a set of relationships while also emphasizing the moral character and ethical foundations needed to achieve their own organizations' missions. These views differ from the findings of my previous research on US-based leaders of international NGOs, who described leadership as a strategic and efficient way to achieve an organization's goals (Raggo, 2014). In contrast, the Canadian leaders highlighted the values at the core of their leadership practices. Whether in their discussions about the need for greater trust or transparency, Canadian leaders of charities discussed their moral and ethical obligations to those affected by their actions. While we cannot make a definitive case for a specific and unique Canadian leadership style in charitable organizations, the Canadian leaders reminded us that leadership is first and foremost about people: who they are and what they do. This emphasis on people rather than outcomes warrants further investigation to understand how Canadian charity leaders are different from their peers in other countries and enable us to better appreciate how culture, institutions, and policies shape our ideas about leadership. Through the interviews, four key lessons emerged to help us understand leadership in a Canadian context.

Lesson 1: Leadership as Building Trusting Relationships

Canadian leaders focused the most attention on the people within their organizations and the relationships among them. The core concepts of trust, accountability, authenticity, and empowerment cement these relationships. A community philanthropist and leader in a civic association discussed leadership as a function of trust: "Trust is paramount. You have to develop trust, whether it's with recipients or with your donors. It is equally important at both ends."

This comment highlights the intangibles of leadership as well as the centrality of stakeholder relationships. Another leader from a large service-delivery organization discussed how the concept of leadership was rooted in the idea of social justice and the belief in people, yet again emphasizing the importance of relationships: "If we don't believe in people, and we don't genuinely practise that as leaders, and it's the people we serve and the people we work with; if we don't believe in them, then that shows. Then you just have an assembly line of social services rather than a heart-driven sector." The ED of a large volunteer organization noted, "When I think of people who are great leaders, I think of people who in quiet ways figure out ways to connect people, organizations, and ideas. They focus on the best in people and focus on mobilizing those assets and attributes and making them part of the bigger picture." This comment reinforces the idea that leaders work with others to achieve common goals and that organizations can accomplish their goals by harnessing people's identities and linking them to the organization's purpose. Another leader of a service-delivery charity discussed the importance of transparency as a driver of trust. By being transparent about all aspects of the organization, leaders build trust with stakeholders and foster continued engagement with them.

Lesson 2: Leadership as Moral Character

A leader in fundraising focused her discussion on leaders and their character. She used the example of a leader who was widely perceived to be honest, caring, and authentic. The notable factor in making this leader outstanding is an ability to be vulnerable and discuss their strengths and weaknesses openly. The deep commitment to a cause is also important: "A positive leader is someone who is not afraid to have a conviction about something. I have seen leaders just kind of spew out catchy buzzwords, rhetoric. But it's flat, it's not meaningful." Another well-established fundraising professional noted that intimidation tactics and strong-armed leadership tactics do not lead to long-term success in his experience. Rather, leadership is about the ability to inspire and motivate your followers, not intimidate them into doing what you need. This is an important reminder, and a recurrent theme in the interviews: effective and successful leadership centres on integrity, openness, and honesty. Discussions on personal ethics and values (individual characteristics) generally outweighed mentions of strategic thinking, decision-making, and vision (skills). This emphasis on personal moral character is symptomatic of a sector seeking to build its identity on achieving social change. While leaders might be strategic in their daily practice, interviewees interpreted leadership as a deeply personal endeavour. This challenges us to rethink whether all aspects of leadership can be learned and asks us to consider whether those with strong personal ethics have a better chance at long-term success in the Canadian charitable sector.

Lesson 3: Leadership as a Personal Mission

As many practitioners in the sector will know, keeping staff and stakeholders engaged with the organization's mission is critical for the organization's survival and success. Leaders must engage those around them to achieve common goals. However, in practice, goals need to be translated into tangible outcomes. A national leader in donor development noted that "positive leadership in this sector really needs to be about showing the team, the employees, and the volunteers the impact they are having because it is not an easy sector to work in, and we rely very heavily on volunteers. And we need to retain these good people, people who believe in the mission; we need to show the impact we are having. It does come down to that at the end of the day." Interviewees discussed the need to develop concrete implementation strategies and capacity-building to promote a meaningful leadership relationship within the organization. Others stressed the importance of making evidence-based claims in order to foster trust and transparency among all the stakeholders.

Lesson 4: Leadership as Focused Accountability

A leader with more than 30 years of experience in the charitable sector, particularly in healthcare and education, notes that a leader must understand that "they cannot be all things to everyone." Instead, a leader must find areas of excellence within the organization and steer people toward these niches to create positive outcomes. This leader also reminds us that no one leader can satisfy all stakeholders. Instead, they should strive to foster a better alignment between the organization's goal, capacity, and, ultimately, outcomes. Accepting that no one can satisfy all their stakeholders will make leadership practices and expectations more realistic and achievable. Leaders hold substantial power within their organizations but cannot possibly be responsible for everything all the time. The practice of focused accountability can help develop and nurture environments where leaders respond to reasonable expectations and create positive outcomes for everyone involved in the leadership relationship.

Conclusion: Future Research and Learning Opportunities

This chapter presented a brief overview of leadership in the charitable and nonprofit sector. Instead of focusing on the skills and traits that leaders must possess, I aimed to provide a broader understanding of what leadership is or can be. Too often, the emphasis is on leaders' exceptional character, and too little attention is put on their relationships with their staff and stakeholders. The nonprofit literature tends to equate leaders with EDs or board presidents, but in practice leaders are people who can work with others to achieve things, both small and big. Focusing excessively on the specific skills and traits that leaders should have inhibits discussions about who leaders are, their personalities, interests, experiences, and the relationships they seek to build. Leadership is more than a title; leadership can emerge in every corner of an organization. By recognizing the diversity in leadership approaches, we can create a diverse environment where innovative ideas, sustainable practices, and social change can flourish.

While it is not advisable to generalize overly from the group of Canadian practitioners asked about leadership for this chapter, some critical observations can be made. Leaders in this group unequivocally focused most of their leadership discussions on the people around them. Repeatedly, they mentioned the need to foster trust, authenticity, and empowerment. Ultimately, many viewed positive leadership as being accountable to the people they serve. This is perhaps why the label of "servant" leadership is so persistent in the sector. Although the use of labels to characterize types of leadership can help develop an intuitive sense of the concept, it also detracts from its broader purpose: bringing people together toward a common goal. How we achieve this depends on context, personalities, and relationships. One leader in the fundraising field described this intersection best in her comments: "Positive leadership is marked by people who create organizations that are innovative and open to change, both in terms of how they do their own business and how they see the wider context in which they operate. They can identify a problem and will work and reach out to others to find a solution."

Is there a distinctive Canadian leadership model? It is unclear, as there are no comprehensive studies thus far on Canadian leadership, particularly in the nonprofit sector. ONN recently carried out an exhaustive review of the leadership landscape and reported that several key competencies are needed in the sector (Clutterbuck & Arundel, 2017). Further research should continue to investigate leadership by asking the leaders themselves to define the concept and study the conditions under which leadership can emerge. There is still missing information about how gender, age, subsector, or previous professional experience affect how leadership is enacted within the charitable sector. Understanding the constraints and drivers of leadership, however one decides to define it, will enable executives and boards to better align their work with their organizations' missions; improve hiring, retention, and inclusion practices; and, ultimately, foster a more impactful sector in a post-COVID world.

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Biography

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