

# Leadership Prescription Paradigms

By **Ernest L. Stech**, Ph.D.

Adjunct Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Arizona State University  
Principal, Chief Mountain Consulting

---

*Academic Citation:* Ernest L. Stech, "Leadership Prescription Paradigms," Kravis Leadership Institute, *Leadership Review*, Vol. 7, Winter 2007, pp. 3-13.

*About the Author:* **Ernest L. "Ernie" Stech** is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Arizona State University and Principal in Chief Mountain Consulting. He is author of *Leadership Communication* and *The Transformed Leader*. Stech is the contributor of a chapter on the psychodynamic approach in Northouse's *Leadership Theory and Practice, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.* In addition, he has published numerous articles on leadership and organizational communication. His work is cited in *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*. Stech is a member of the International Leadership Association. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Denver in organizational and small group communication. Stech is the former President and CEO of Frost Engineering Development Corporation in the Denver area, a prime contractor to the United States Air Force and U. S. Army and a subcontractor to The Boeing Commercial Aircraft Company. Stech's academic interests center around developing process models of leading and the implications of neuroscience findings on leadership studies.  
E-mail: [chfmtn@flaglink.com](mailto:chfmtn@flaglink.com)

*Keywords:* Leadership prescriptions, paradigms

---

## Abstract

Leadership prescriptions covering a span of fifty years and in a variety of forms of publication were reviewed. As a result, three overarching paradigms were identified: empirical, biographical, and ideological. Quantitative and qualitative versions of the empirical paradigm were found. In the biographical paradigm, biographies of historical figures and more current autobiographies were represented. The ideological paradigm included dogmatic and ethical system versions. For each major paradigm the assumptions, concepts, values, and methods were explicated. Overall, there was a large variation in the apparent value of the paradigms in terms of leadership development.

## Introduction

In developing, training, or instructing potential leaders or individuals desiring to improve their leadership performance, it is first necessary to establish a set of criteria representing a prescription for what represents good or effective leadership. Several sets of such

criteria have been proposed in the past. A review of those criteria suggests that three dominant paradigms have emerged: empirical, biographical, and ideological. This statement is based on a review not only of scholarly attempts at developing prescriptions but also those found in the popular literature and in proprietary systems.

Paradigm, as used here, implies a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and methods that constitute a way of viewing reality for members of the community who share them. It can also be considered a philosophical framework within which theories, laws, and generalizations are developed and methods used to verify or disprove them. Persons operating within a paradigm accept the assumptions, concepts, values, and methods yet may be unaware of them as they engage in their work. Unless made explicit, the nature of a paradigm is rarely understood or acknowledged.

## **Method**

A wide range of leadership prescriptions were examined ranging from such classics as the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (Fleishman, 1957) from the 1950s to contemporary popular works such as the assessment of leadership principles to be derived from the presidency of Abraham Lincoln (Phillips, 1992) or the precepts offered by Rudolph Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City (Giuliani & Kurson, 2002).

The popular works were included because they represent prescriptions that are widely read by persons in leadership positions or people desiring to attain such positions. Of the vast array of leadership books available through booksellers or on line, the top twenty are, with few exceptions, not scholarly. To ignore them would be to disregard their impact in terms of both numbers of persons influenced and the degree of influence.

Information on the traditional leadership prescriptions from the 1950s on was obtained from Bass & Stogdill (1990) and Northouse (2004). The remainder of the prescriptive materials were obtained from primary sources by reviewing the books available at major bookseller stores and online. The books most readily available or with the highest sales volume as reported by an online bookseller were selected. In a few cases, books were selected that, although not very popular, exemplified a particular kind of leadership prescription, as was the case with *The Tao of Leadership* Heider, 2005), although not very popular.

## **The Empirical Paradigm**

The empirical paradigm is the oldest in terms of modern leadership studies. There are two versions of this paradigm, the quantitative and the qualitative. The latter relies on the analysis of interview statement or case studies.

**Quantitative Models.** The earliest version of the empirical paradigm consisted of the efforts of some scholars to list the traits of leaders. This "trait approach" is of limited use in developing leadership prescriptions because at least some of the traits may be inborn or

developed very early in life and not subject to training or additional development (Northouse, 2004, 24). After the trait approach came studies of behaviors exemplified by The Ohio State University (Fleishman, 1951, 1953, 1957; Halpin et. al., 1957; Hemphill, 1959) and University of Michigan studies (Likert, 1961, 1967). In those efforts academicians made an effort to record, assess, and systematize the behavior of persons in leadership positions. The findings were reduced to two key factors: an orientation toward goal or task and an orientation toward persons or process. Eventually the results of those studies were developed in the Managerial Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1985) and then the Leadership Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1991) in which the two dimensions of leadership formed the grid. The ideal leader was one who combined an orientation toward goal or task as well as towards persons.

Some work has been done using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1995) assessment instrument which is based on the personality typology of the psychologist Carl Jung (1993, 230-357). In a reversal of the usual process, the instrument was developed first and subsequently applied to leadership studies (Berens et. al., 2001; Kroger & Theusen, 2002). The limited empirical data show some relationship of several personality types to vocation and leadership. Research has also been done on social skills as they relate to leadership (Riggio, 1986). However the findings have not been converted into prescriptions or assessment instruments.

**Qualitative Models.** On the qualitative side, Kouzes and Posner (2002) used an interview and questionnaire methodology with a large sample of persons who had successfully engaged in a leadership effort. As a result, Kouzes and Posner developed a model consisting of five practices and ten commitments, two for each practice. The sample used to create this model ranged across a wide variety of organizational types, including both women and men, and the subjects were at various levels in their organizations. The team of Kouzes and Posner also developed a Leadership Practices Inventory (2005).

Stanford-Blair and Dickmann (2005) interviewed thirty-six exemplary leaders who were diverse in gender, culture, and experience. The subjects came from government, nonprofit organizations, K-12 education, public health, foreign service, the justice system, hospitality industry, higher education, business, and fine and applied arts. Nations represented in the sample were Australia, Belgium, Ghana, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, New Zealand, Thailand, Singapore, and the United States. Twenty-two men and fourteen women were in the sample. Each participant was asked how did you come to, how do you conduct, and how do you sustain your leadership? The resulting model, the leadership coherence model, presented four points: coherence of value and purposes; coherence of congruent character and behavior; coherence of sustained capacity, and coherence of conduct.

**The Paradigm.** An underlying assumption of the empirical paradigm is that data on behaviors, skills, styles, or practices can be acquired and systematized either by quantitative means or qualitatively through questionnaires or interviews. Statistical analysis can be used on quantitative data. The focus is on the leader as an individual

within a particular context. However, the results are often generalized to a wider range of situations.

An important feature of the empirical paradigm is that the findings can be converted into instruments to assess the states of students or trainees, and the results of such an evaluation can be compared to the ideal as developed from the data. Thus, individuals are provided with specific information on behaviors, skills, or principles they need to learn or acquire.

This paradigm is scientific in the sense of the hard sciences such as physics and chemistry. It assumes a linear and causal relationship between leader behaviors, styles, or practices and follower responses. It is clearly reductionistic in that it analyzes leadership into small distinct units such as behaviors or practices and assumes that re-assembling those behaviors or practices in a person will result in leadership. It is based on a method that attempts to transfer the methods of the hard sciences to human and social sciences. That includes quantified measurement or qualitative analysis and development of a system or model. Reality, in the empirical model, is objective and "out there" and thus only needs to be observed and measured.

In brief, the empirical paradigm prescriptions, whether based on quantitative or qualitative methods, can be generalized to: "Do as other or previous leaders have done and you will be successful."

### **The Biographical Paradigm**

The biographical paradigm occurs most often in the widely read popular literature and is extremely influential in terms of dissemination to persons who are in positions of leadership or moving toward such positions, particularly in the corporate and business worlds. In this approach to developing criteria for leadership the focus is on the behaviors, activities, practices, and beliefs of a single individual. There are two versions of this paradigm: historical biography and autobiography.

**Historical Biography.** Of the recent biographical sort, the most popular has been *Lincoln on Leadership* (Phillips, 1992), but there are others such as *John Kennedy on Leadership* (Barnes, 2005), *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way* (Gerber, 2003), and *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* (Roberts, 1987). Biographical prescriptions can be reduced to, "Do as this exemplar has done and you will be successful."

In *Lincoln on Leadership* (Phillips, 1992), the author divided the work into four sections: people, character, endeavor, and communication. Some of the prescriptions refer to management techniques, others to leadership. The section on character represented what appear to be distinctly leadership principles: honesty and integrity are the best policies, never act out of vengeance or spite, have the courage to handle unjust criticism, and be a master of paradox. The second and third principles, representing true maturity, are applicable to any human being in any kind of situation and need no further explanation as is also true for the prescription to be honest and have integrity. The final principle, be

master of paradox, is exemplified in Phillips' description of Lincoln as charismatic but unassuming, consistent yet flexible, trusting and compassionate yet demanding and tough, and risk-taking and innovative yet patient and calculating. A leader, in this model, must not only be charismatic, consistent, demanding, and risk-taking but also at times the opposite.

**Autobiography.** Such relatively recent works as *Leadership* by Rudolph Giuliani (2002) *Wooden on Leadership* (Wooden & Jamison, 2005) and *Leading with the Heart* (Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2005), the latter two being well known and successful basketball coaches, represent autobiographical versions of this paradigm. The Wooden and Krzyzewski books deal, in fact, more with being a head basketball coach, yet publisher marketing efforts attempt to broaden the prescriptions to leadership in general and particularly to the corporate world.

Giuliani (2002) provided a list of thirteen practices or values. Of those several are directed at managerial practices, for example, "organize around a purpose." However, he did include such prescriptions as: develop and communicate strong beliefs, be your own person, and an interesting "weddings are discretionary but funerals are mandatory." Giuliani referred to going to funerals of subordinates (and their family members) as "the tough stuff," but insisted that such actions are extremely important in creating a cohesive team.

**The Paradigm.** As with the empirical descriptions, the directives in the biographical paradigm, whether autobiographical or historical biographies, come from persons already in positions of authority and also well known and perceived as successful. The method is to list the ways in which the exemplar, the valued leader, acted, thought, and believed in his or her practice as a leader. An autobiography allows a person to describe the acts, thoughts, and beliefs directly. A biography requires the historian to examine the life of the exemplar to produce the prescriptions.

The fundamental assumption in the biographical paradigm is that the experience of exemplars is of value to others. This general notion is the basis for numerous books in other fields such as athletics where the advice of successful coaches or players is codified and published. Success, however defined, is the dominant value in the exemplar paradigm; those persons who have in some way succeeded have valuable advice to give to others.

Major concepts are practices, beliefs, values, and virtues. In the two examples provided above, Rudolph Giuliani and Abraham Lincoln, virtues included character, loyalty, honest, and integrity. A model in the biographical paradigm consists of a list of practices, beliefs, values, and virtues demonstrated in the life of the exemplar. Thus, an examination of the leadership of each exemplar produces a unique set of practices, beliefs, values, and virtues.

Reality in the biographical paradigm is in the lives and experiences of exemplary leaders. It is the way those persons lived their lives, and the way they conducted themselves.

However, these prescriptions fail to note that the recommendations come from operating in particular kinds of contexts or situations such as the presidency of the United States, the mayoral office of New York City, or the head basketball coach at a major university.

It is interesting to note that the biographical paradigm represents one of the oldest forms of creating leadership prescriptions: the "great man" theory of leadership which was the basis of some of the early leadership trait work. The contemporary versions of that paradigm focus not on traits but on the items listed earlier: practices, beliefs, values, and virtues.

Prescriptions arising out of the autobiographical and biographical versions of this paradigm can be reduced to, respectively, "Do what this exemplar has done and you will be a good leader" and, "Do what I have done and you will be a good leader."

### **The Ideological Paradigm**

In the ideological paradigm, leadership prescriptions are developed neither from observation of leaders nor from individual exemplars. Instead, the prescriptions are based on a set of values. There are two versions of the ideological paradigm: one based on dogma and the other on an ethical system.

**Dogmatic.** The term dogma is not used here pejoratively but in the sense of a set of principles, religious or spiritual, from which prescriptions can be developed. Examples come from authors who refer to religious or spiritual texts such as the Christian Bible and the Tao Te Ching.

Sanders (1987) produced prescriptions based on Christian principles and doctrine and intended, appropriately, for use by missionaries. Sanders regularly cited passages from the Christian Bible as support for and illustration of leadership principles. Based on I Timothy 3:2-10 Sanders (1987, 51-77) provided a list of sixteen essential leadership qualities; in effect a virtues approach to spiritual leadership. The sixteen qualities were discipline, vision, wisdom, decisiveness, courage, humility, integrity and sincerity, humor, anger, patience, friendship, tact, and diplomacy. The inclusion of anger was done with reference to righteous anger at the wrongs of the world.

In the same vein, a direct citation from I Timothy 3:2 in the King James version of the New Testament provided the following prescription for an overseer or leader: "...the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money."

On an entirely different basis, Heider (2005) developed a set of prescriptions for group leaders using the Tao Te Ching and the principles of Taoism. Using the Tao Te Ching as a template, Heider reworded the statements from the original into guidance for the leaders of small groups. He maintained the overall structure of the Tao Te Ching, a necessity since the advice in the Tao Te Ching is nebulous and difficult to state as simple principles. Advice in the Tao Te Ching is presented in the form of metaphor.

**Ethical Systems.** Some very popular leadership prescriptions arise through the ideological paradigm. There are leadership bestsellers from John Maxwell (Maxwell & Zigler, 1998; Maxwell, 1999), Maxwell, 2002) based heavily on Christian theology but not on biblical citations. Both principle-centered leadership (Covey, 1992) and authentic leadership (George 2003) have been popular although not as widely read as the Maxwell books. There appear to be a number of adherents to the practice of authentic leadership among leadership development practitioners. The principles of humanistic psychology were the basis of the work of Maslow (1998) which has been revived recently.

Covey (1992, 27-39) to cite one example, listed the following characteristics of principle-centered leaders: continually learning, service oriented, radiate positive energy, believe in other people, lead balanced lives, see life as an adventure, are synergistic, and engage in self-renewal. At the end of the chapter presenting those characteristics, Covey shifted and termed them principles. He then revisited his work on the seven habits of highly effective people converting the original statements into the endowments of those individuals. The seven endowments embody the following values: responsibility, conscientiousness, discipline, sharing, courage, consideration, creativity, and self-renewal. The list of seven habits was developed out of Covey's personal and qualitative assessment of highly effective individuals with whom he was able to interact and interview.

**The Paradigm.** A basic assumption in the ideological paradigm is that there are right and wrong ways to behave. Values are primary in this paradigm. Prescriptions instruct followers "Do the right thing and you will lead successfully."

The source of the values may be a revered document such as the Christian Bible or the Tao Te Ching which, some believe, are obtained from extra-human sources: God or the Tao. The basis for developing a list of values, as done by Covey, comes from an examination of human life, particularly the good, full, and exemplary life.

The tenets of the revered document or the examination of the lives of good people are accepted on faith. It is a matter of belief and not subject to empirical confirmation or rational development.

In the case of dogmatic prescriptions, the method is straightforward. The revered document is consulted for counsel, and the resulting advice is stated in terms of leadership or management. For the ethical system prescriptions, there are several possible methods. One is to examine the lives of "good people," as was done by Covey. Another is to take a single overarching value such as authenticity and develop the implications for leadership.

A theory or model in the ideological paradigm is a set of consistent statements of values representing a code of conduct. That code is believed to apply to all human beings although only a limited number may adopt it. In practice, the prescriptions in the ideological paradigm apply to those who "believe."

## Summary

A review of the major kinds of leadership prescriptions resulted in the identification of three paradigms: the empirical, biographical, and ideological. Each, in turn, was subdivided into two versions. Quantitative and qualitative empirical prescriptions exist and are in use. Biographical prescriptions are obtained from biographies of historical exemplars but also from autobiographical works. The ideological paradigm was found to have two versions: the dogmatic and ethic system.

The empirical paradigm is scientific in the sense of the hard sciences and emphasizes the measurement of leadership traits, behaviors, skill, styles, or practices and creating a benchmark model from those measurements. Biographical prescriptions, on the other hand, focus on the leadership exhibited by one individual and consist of a listing of the positive actions or values of that person. Ideological prescriptions arise from a revered religious or spiritual document or through the creation of an ethical system.

The prescriptions from each paradigm can be summarized as: "Do as others have done and you will be a good leader" from the empirical type; from the biographical paradigm it is "Do as I have done and you will be a good leader" or "Do as this esteemed leader has done and you will be a good leader;" and "Do what is right and you will be a good leader" from the ideological perspective.

The utility value of the prescriptions seem to be quite varied. Empirical findings, as noted, have been converted readily into evaluation instruments by means of which an individual's leadership behaviors, styles, or practices can be assessed. This procedure has been used most commonly in leadership workshops and seminars and adopted by organizational training departments. The biographical paradigm, on the other hand, results in exhortations from persons in positions of authority or from their biographers to adopt certain practices or beliefs. For the most part these occur in books intended to be read by individuals, and the efficacy depends entirely upon the willingness of individuals to adopt the methods or behaviors prescribed. The actual impact of the books on practice is unknown and may be minimal. Finally, the ideological paradigm produces works that are aimed at individuals who are adherents to a particular spiritual or ethical view of the world. Interestingly, the resulting books are often highly useful and have been incorporated into training and development programs as evidenced by the Covey seminars and many authentic leadership workshops.

## References

Barnes, J. A. (2005) *John F. Kennedy on leadership*. NY: Amacom.

Bass, B. M. (1990) *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial Applications, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* New York: The Free Press.

Berens, L. V., Cooper, S. A., Ernst, L. K.; Martin, C. R.; Myers, S.; Nardi, D.; Pearman, R.; Segal, M.; and Smith, M. A. (2001) *Quick guide to the 16 personality types in organizations*. Telos: Huntington Beach, CA.

Blake, R. R. & Mouton, J. S. (1985) *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf.

Blake, R.R. & Mouton, J. S. (1991) *Leadership dilemmas - Grid solutions*. Houston, TX; Gulf.

Covey, S. (1992) *Principle centered leadership*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

Fleishman, E. A. (1951) *Leadership climate and supervisory behavior*. Personnel Research Board. Columbus: Ohio State University.

Fleishman, E. A. (1953) The description of supervisory behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 37, 153-158.

Fleishman, E. A. (1957) A leader behavior description for industry. In R. M. Stogdill & C. L. Shartle (Eds.) *Patterns of administrative performance*. Columbus: Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research.

George, B. (2003) *Authentic leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gerber, R. (2003) *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt way*. Toronto, Canada: Penguin Group.

Giuliani, R. with K. Kurson.(2002) *Leadership*. New York: Hyperion.

Halpin, A. W. and Winer, B. J. (1957) A factorial study of the leader behavior descriptions. In R. M. Stogdill & A. E. Combs (Eds.) *Leader behavior: Its description and measurement*. Columbus: Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research.

Heider, J. (2005) *The Tao of leadership*. Lake Worth, FL: Humanics Publishing Group.

Hemphill, J. K. (1959) *Leader behavior description*. Columbus: Ohio State Leadership Studies.

Jung, C. G. (1993) Psychological types in *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*. V. D. Laszlo (Ed.) Modern Library, New York.

Kouzes, J. S. and Posner, B. Z. (2002) *The leadership challenge, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kouzes, J. S. and Posner, B. Z. (2005) *The leadership challenge, guide to research*. Leadershipchallenge.com.

- Krizezewski, M. with Phillips, D. T. (2002) *Leading with heart*. New York: Warner Books.
- Likert, R. (1961) *New patterns of management*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Likert, R. (1967) *The human organization: its management and value*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Maslow, A. H. (1998) *Maslow on management*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Maxwell, J. C. and Ziglar, Z. (1998) *21 Irrefutable laws of leadership*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Maxwell, J. C. (1999) *The 21 indispensable qualities of a leader: Becoming the person others will want to follow*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Maxwell, J. C. (2002) *Leadership 1010: What every leader needs to know*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Myers, I. M. and Myers, P. B. (1995) *Gifts differing: Understanding personality types*. Mountain View, CAS: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Northouse, P. G. (2004) *Leadership theory and practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Phillips, D. T. (1992) *Lincoln on leadership*. New York: Warner Books.
- Riggio, R. (1986) Assessment of basic social skills. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 649-660.
- Roberts, W. (1987) *Leadership secrets of Attila the Hun*. New York: Warner Books.
- Sanders, J. O. (1987) *Spiritual leadership: principles of excellence for every believer*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.
- Stanford-Blair, N. and Dickmann, M. H. (2005) Leadership coherence: An emerging model from interviews with leaders from around the world. In N. S. Huber and M. C. Walder (Eds.) *Emergent models of global leadership* (pp. 50-66). College Park, MD: The International Leadership Association.
- Wooden, J. with S. Jamison. (2005) *Wooden on leadership*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

