

LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SECTOR: A BRIEF APPRAISAL

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*Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.
Peter Drucker*

ABSTRACT: Leadership in public sector is accepted to be an important component of good governance in general and good public governance in particular. In this context, this article will present recent developments in leadership literature with a view to highlight significance of public leadership while also providing food for thought for public leadership in Turkey. First, an overview of how the public leadership is perceived in international organizations like OECD will be brought into perspective. Second, taking into the vast scholarly literature on leadership, recent research on the theory and practice of leadership will be highlighted. Next, public leadership will be discussed in relation to recent developments in NPA context. Then, an overview of public leadership in local government will be presented. Finally, in the light of the presented issues, the article will end with future recommendations.

Keywords: leadership, public leadership, NPA, local government

KAMUDA LİDERLİK: KISA BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

ÖZET: Kamuda liderlik genel anlamda iyi yönetişimin ve daha özele inildiğinde de kamuda iyi yönetişimin önemli bir bileşenidir. Bu çerçevede makalede liderlik literatüründeki en son çalışmalar ışığında kamuda liderliğin önemi vurgulanacak ve Türkiye’de kamuda liderlik konusunda gelecekte gerçekleşecek olan tartışmalara ışık tutacak çalışmalar sunulacaktır. İlk olarak, OECD gibi uluslararası organizasyonlarda kamuda liderliğin nasıl algılandığı ele alınacaktır. İkinci olarak, var olan geniş liderlik literatürü dikkate alınarak liderlik konusundaki yakın dönemdeki teorik ve ampirik çalışmalar sunulacaktır. Daha sonra, kamuda liderlik Yeni Kamu Yönetimi anlayışı çerçevesindeki tartışmalar kapsamında ele alınacaktır. Bunu yerel yönetimlerde kamuda liderliğe genel bir bakışın sunulması izleyecektir. Son olarak, makalede sunulan bütün bilgilerin ve tartışmaların ışığında, geleceğe yönelik bazı önermelere yer verilecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: liderlik, kamuda liderlik, Yeni Kamu Yönetimi, yerel yönetimler

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, leadership in public sector is an important component of good governance in general and good public governance in particular. This fact is also underlying the current good governance work carried out in international organizations like the OECD, while accelerating current research on leadership.

The vast literature on leadership has been growing since the past four decades exponentially, while at the same time being the focus of several empirical studies with a view to sustain the theory of leadership. However, these studies have been oriented for business organizations. Later, these developments accelerated when the New Public Administration literature, informed by neo-classical economics and with private sector practices, brought the significance of public leadership into focus in this context. Thus the public leadership has been a focus of attention and several empirical studies followed. Public leadership theory and empirical work related to the concept is relatively new and this article is meant to contribute to growing literature on public leadership both in general and also with reference to local government context, while providing food for thought for future research on the topic.

2. Public Leadership and Leadership Development in International Context: the Case of the OECD

The OECD assigns significant importance to public leadership in relation to good governance, and especially for good public governance. In this context, it is first important to see how OECD defines governance. According to OECD, the governance concept is defined as:

“the way in which the underlying values of a nation (usually articulated in some way in its Constitution) are “institutionalised”. This has formal aspects such as separated powers, checks and balances, means of transferring power, transparency, and accountability. “(OECD, 2001:7)

The definition of governance is followed by the acknowledgement of the significance of actions of public leaders and officials who would be guiding the system towards good governance. The public leaders have the responsibility to implement the good governance principles, embed the values into the system they are in. Thus good governance is only achievable through the actions of public leaders. Therefore, leadership is in essence the heart of good governance. The OECD work defines also the role of public leaders as:

“to solve the problems and challenges faced in a specific environment. When we say we want more leadership in the public sector, what we are really looking for is *people who will promote institutional adaptations in the public interest*. Leadership in this sense is not value neutral. It is a positive espousal of the need to promote certain fundamental values that can be called *public spiritedness*. “(OECD, 2001:7)

Consequently, leadership is an important and crucial component of good governance that leads to a superior management level and higher organisational performance which also integrates efficient human resources management and establishes public service ethics.

The OECD work indicates that public leadership experiences across different OECD countries are different, and also there is no uniform practice. The outlook is a mixture of different proportions of centralized and decentralized approach towards public leadership and leadership development. However, this is not to say that there are no common characteristics in the OECD member states, on the contrary. However, it is also important to emphasize that the public leadership in each OECD country is dependent on the values and principles of good governance embedded in that specific society and government.

The following are the common defined characteristics regarding leadership and leadership development in OECD member states;

- Developing comprehensive strategies
- Setting up new institutions for public leadership development
- Linking the existing management training to leadership development

Overall OECD country experiences indicate that there are three main issues to be taken into account in every system regarding the approach taken towards public leadership or while defining its contours towards sustaining good governance. First, creating an elite core of public leadership, which has also evident advantages, carries the potential danger of creation of a group of public leaders who can pursue their own self-interest in public governance. This, in return, would be a danger to the overall system in a democratic society. Second, creating public leaders in line with the public policy challenges of a specific country can be good but this can go wrong if the diagnosis of public challenges is not made properly. Finally, creating public leaders also mean change and change management in a society.

On the overall, experiences from OECD member states indicate that public leadership is an important component of good public governance, when the public leadership is defined in line with the values and public challenges of the country in question. So far, the experiences point to mixed results. This is partially because there is not one definition of leadership as well as public leadership but many. Moreover, there are different theories of leadership and those also evolved through time in different contexts and with reference to also empirical studies conducted by researchers. The next section, therefore, will present a survey of leadership theories in a concise way before proceeding further with discussion of public leadership

2. Leadership theories in context

When examined closely, the scholarly literature on leadership has been a focus of attention for approximately three decades and even more. This is partially because the definition and theory of leadership has been a focus point in different contexts through time. Thus there is not one definition of leadership but many. This is also true for theoretical underpinnings of the concept through time.

The development of mainstream leadership theories have been generally weak up until the end of 1970s when Burns' well-known book came out with the emphasis that so far transactional leadership was taken as the core understanding in leadership research while transformational leadership was largely ignored (Van Mart, 2003:217). This also meant that leadership should be seen beyond traditional view and that leaders can facilitate dramatic changes by energizing their followers beyond conventional exchange theory or what is known as charismatic leadership.

The development of leadership theory also informed a variety of different schools with this context. Although there is a vast literature on the topic, it would still be possible to identify three schools within the leadership theory. First school are those who advocate the transactional leadership where individual *characteristics of the leader can inspire the followers* (House, 1977; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Meindl, 1990). Second school, is the entrepreneurial school, which claims that leaders, in order to increase productivity and improve quality of processes, should carry out *effective practical processes and cultural changes*. What is advocated by the second school can also be considered as a hybrid theory between transactional and transformational leadership theories (Peters and Austin, 1985; Hammer and Champy, 1993; Champy, 1995). This is because it emphasizes *change* like the transformational leadership school and it has an *internal focus* like the transactional leadership school. Indeed, the third school, the transformational leadership school emphasizes *vision and organizational change* (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Tichy and Devanna, 1986).

After a period of confusion in leadership theory with the incorporation of transformational leadership, as of middle 1980s, there have been attempts to bring in characteristics of different leadership schools into one theoretical model. Since then, it is possible to identify the mainstream leadership theory as multifaceted. One of these attempts was made by Bass who merged transformational and transactional elements of leadership theory.

Bass, in his infamous work on leadership, describes this as;

“The earlier definitions identified leadership as a focus of group process and movement, personality in action. The next type considered it as the art of inducing compliance. The more recent definitions conceive leadership in terms of influence relationships, power differentials, persuasion, influence on goal achievement, role differentiation, reinforcement, initiation of structure, and perceived attributions of behaviour that are consistent with what the perceivers believe leadership to be. Leadership may involve all these things.” (Bass, 1990:19)

These contextual discrepancies also led to a paradoxical situation between broader and more specific operational definitions of leadership. Therefore, expanding more on operational definitions, Bass defined the following eight operational leadership types:

- laissez-faire, passive
- management by exception,
- active management by
- exception,
- contingent reward,
- individualized consideration,
- idealized influence,
- intellectual stimulation,
- inspirational motivation (Bass, 1996)

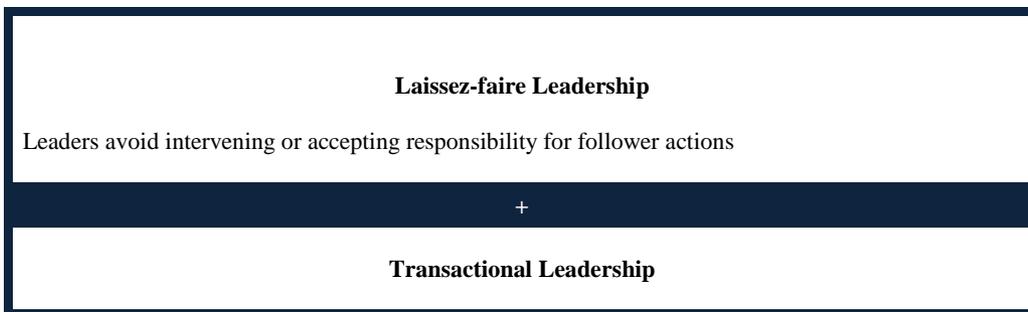
According to operational definition of leadership by Bass, the leaders are central actors of processes where their personality is also pronounced around the four “I”s:

- individual consideration
- idealized influence
- inspirational motivation
- intellectual stimulation

Lane and Wallis (2009) comment on these four “I”s defined by Bass as:

“influence and persuasion processes are explicit and vary from sanctions (management by exception) to rewards (contingent reward) to inspiration (inspirational motivation); goal achievement is especially explicit in his outcome interest (performance beyond expectations); initiation of structure is explicit in his transactional leadership elements (particularly management by exception and individualized consideration); and follower perceptions are implicit in the effectiveness that leaders must demonstrate in a number of styles (Lane and Wallis, 2009:107).

These on the overall informed Bass’s *full range leadership model* as shown in the figure below:



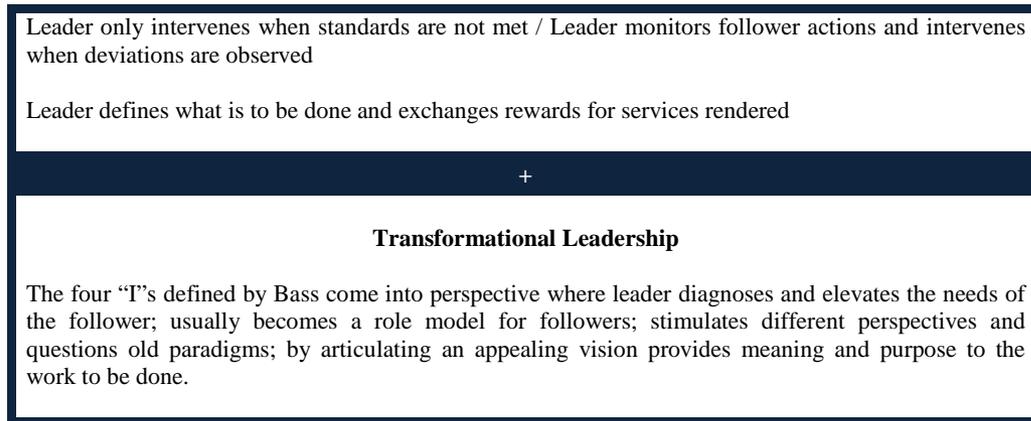


Figure 1: *Full Range Leadership* (source: Bass,1996)

The full leadership model essentially reflects the continuous trade off between the two ends of the main spectrum on leadership research: that of transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership is about *management orientation*, while transformational is about *change orientation*.

3. Development of Public Leadership Theories and NPA Approach to Public Leadership

While the leadership theory was more focused on private sector, it was not significant up until 1980s and 1990s that the public leadership literature gained prominence excluding some retrospective and good contributions such as Selznick’s work back in 1957 which is considered as a timeless book. This is also related to the global environment and increased emphasis on public sector reform which came into agenda of both developed and developing countries.

Indeed, public leadership is associated with public sector reform and good governance as it has been pointed out in the previous section. From 1930s to 1990s there were studies on administrative leadership which provides reference for the current public leadership literature and theory. However, it is argued that it was only after the incorporation of transformational leadership into leadership theory that public leadership gained momentum as a mirror image of global developments (Van Wart, 2003:219).

In this context, Van Wart distinguishes five possible definitions for public leadership:

1. as the process of providing results required by authorized processes in an efficient, effective and legal manner
2. as the process of supporting followers who provide results
3. as the process of aligning the organization with its environment, especially the macro level changes necessary, and realigning the culture as appropriate
4. as the service focus
5. as a composite of providing technical performance, internal direction to followers, external organizational direction –all with a public service orientation. (Van Wart, 2003:221)

The most recent public leadership mainstream literature and modelling is informed by the global environment and the forceful trends on public sector reform and good governance. In this context, two basic questions regarding reform -*what to reform and how to reform it*- shaped also the public leadership models and theories. Creative usage of discretion and diffusion of authority among different stakeholders is one the recent models as such. This again brings into focus the transactional versus transformational leadership issue, or in other words, *management orientation versus change orientation*.

New Public Management theory, however, has a different focus vis-a-vis public leadership which is attributed to the public leadership debates of the 1980s. This follows the idea that public leaders are qualified to play a larger role, and an otherwise situation would cause a critical vacuum in terms of leadership.

The main contours of NPA, an offspring of neo-classical economics, provide also points of reflection in terms of changes in public leadership in line with global developments as of end of 1970s. The NPA introduced modelling of private sector management for public sector, while policy implementation was being distanced from policy makers with emphasis on performance appraisal and management audits. In this context the type of public leadership was also ideally required to be “an entrepreneurial leadership within public organizations” (Osborne, 2006:379).

Arguably, a challenge in public sector research, thus in public leadership research is the trade off between politics and administration, which is the separation between political leaders and non-political leaders (Lane and Wallis, 2009:107).

The discussions around public leadership and the NPA approach go further and intersect even with the field of strategic management as it is crucial to take into account in terms of public sector reform and its immediate direction in a given country. Normatively, strategic management is relevant to post-Weberian organization, and is complementary to conventional focus of public administration and therefore of public leadership. In this context, strategic management has a strong emphasis on realization of objectives of public sector through organizational design and this also remedies the rigid constraints stemming from the handling of contracts while respecting the rule of law.

It is also possible to analyze the public leadership and discuss it by using a different approach. One way of doing that would be to discuss public leadership with reference to direct appraisal of public leaders. Regardless of the theoretical framework or paradigm the public leadership is analyzed or argued to be superior, however, the current requirements of good governance principles as well as the scholarship outreach of the leadership itself increasingly point to the need for evaluation of public leaders. In this context, a recent appraisal by Paul Hart, taking into account various perspectives such as *leader-centric*, *follower-centric*, and *institutional centric* approaches, provides a triangular evaluation framework made up of *impact*, *support* and *trustworthiness* (Hart, 2011:325) which is worth outlining.

Hart defines the triangle of evaluation as follows:

- *impact* as “the value of the community and / or organizational outcomes that can be attributed to leader’s postures, decisions, and actions”
- *support* as “responses leaders evoke in both their authorizing and network environments”
- *trustworthiness* as “the degree to which leaders can be said to respect the responsibilities attached to their roles, including observing the institutional limitations placed upon their exercise of their roles” (Hart, 2011:325)

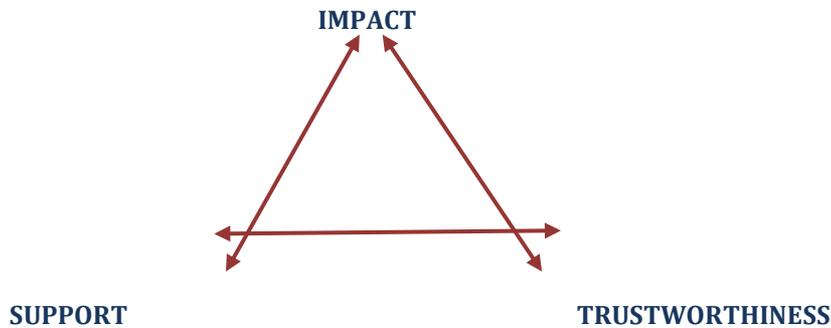


Figure 2: *Leadership Assessment Triangle* (source: self-made)

When these concepts highlighted by Hart (2011) are translated into leadership types, the assessment of public leadership can be overviewed as follows:

IMPACT	CONSEQUENTIAL LEADERSHIP
Has its roots in Plato – ensuring that leaders govern wisely. Public leader needs to address the challenges through enabling the community he/she leads as a whole through mobilization of collective wisdom	
SUPPORT	ACCEPTED LEADERSHIP
Has its roots in Weber and Rousseau– delegation, principal-agent model. Balancing of authority and collaboration as the optimum outcome in leadership	
TRUSTWORTHINESS	ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP
Leadership ethics – balancing and control of excess power	

Figure 3: *Leadership Assessment* (source: self-made)

This assessment naturally has the operational markers and outcomes for further appraisal. However, for the purposes of this paper, presentation of this model is an attempt to think out of the box, and to consider existing paradigms of public leadership from a different angle, that is through possible appraisal criteria towards a policy as well as taking a pragmatic view of the public leaders and public leadership. The next section further provides a concise presentation of public leadership in local government context.

4. Public Leadership in Local Government Context

Public leadership in local government is also increasingly researched. One aspect of such acceleration is attributed to focus on decentralization. Accordingly, decentralization can be effective, for example, in the absence of formal changes in management structure or policies, with a public leader with strong personality can make a difference in decentralized local governance processes. Such a leadership type can be considered as “integrative and situational” (Dubois and Fattore, 2009:718).

As in the previous section, it is also possible to address the public leadership in local government through appraisal of leaders. This pragmatic approach bridges in itself the actual practice with that of theory in public leadership in general and in local government in particular. In this context, for example, Kanji (2008) argues for a necessity of creating a Leadership Excellence Index and supports the argument with reference to empirical study of Portuguese municipalities. In this context, Kanji introduces Total Quality Management model to appraisal of public leaders’ performance and their relative excellence

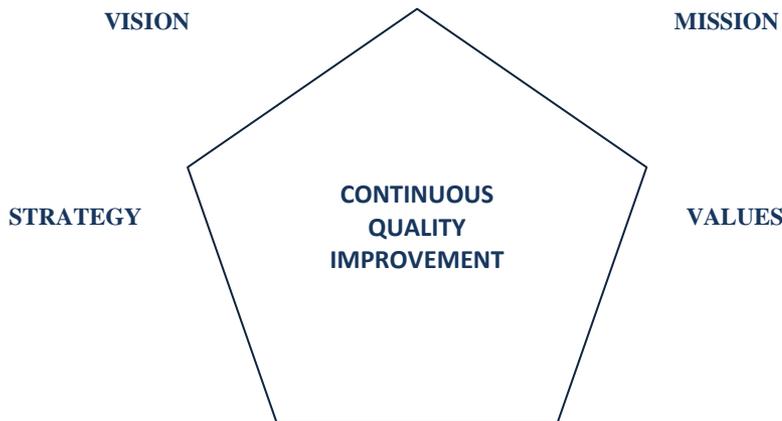


Figure 4: *TQM* (source: Kanji, 2008: 421)

This model was applied to Portuguese municipalities through empirical study and as it can also be seen from the figure above it also relates to the previous public leadership appraisal, enforcing the argument towards pragmatic approaches to understanding of the significance of public leadership in general as well as in the local government context. Kanji found as a result of the empirical studies in the first half of 2000s using the TQM model that leadership is the most critical factor in success of local government.

There are also several empirical studies conducted in examining the role of public leaders in local government, appraisals of local public leaders, with a view to align theoretical assumptions with that of reality. In this context, Joyce (2010) holds the view that in the UK, Kotter’s 2001 view of leadership action is confirmed via the empirical

studies and leaders have the vision and strategies, and they communicate their vision while mobilizing them and empowering people. But they are also exceeding this, they on the overall manage, and also handle conflicts along the way.

Another recent empirical study on local government and public leadership through interviews of 50 senior civil servants and local government leaders in UK, and with more participating from the USA and Canada by Leslie and Canwell (2010) found that dealing with the problems and/or challenges of financial turnaround of governments which directly affects also local governments require exercising of effective leadership through activities and decisions rather than positional power of public leaders. This finding is especially significant at an age when the governments are increasingly trying to cut public spending.

The empirical approaches to local government are not limited to these examples given above. What is clear however is that an effective public leadership to be pursued in local governments depend on a variety of parameters and the leadership function neither in a vacuum nor it is independent of societal influences.

5. Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to provide a survey of recent research in public leadership. In this context, beginning from the international context, which is the OECD, the paper presented the mainstream discussions within the public leadership theory, towards public leadership in local government. At all levels, be it international, national or local government contexts, public leadership is a complex issue, and there is not one definition or assessment of it but many.

However, empirical studies are paving the way for a more comprehensive attempt to align the existing vast corpus of theoretical literature with that of practice of public leadership. In this context, this paper has also attempted to provide a different perspective by providing two brief examples of public leadership appraisal and how these can possible translate into thinking different public leadership models in different contexts.

To conclude, it is possible to say that public leadership, whether it is considered at different international, national or local contexts or not, has its roots in the public sector management culture and societal culture in a given country or region. It also depends how and to what degree public leaders are exposed to different management styles, experiences, and management cultures next to their character traits and their educational backgrounds. As a result, there is not one definition or understanding regarding public leadership. Future research on the topic requires further empirical studies, and also requires objective and innovative appraisal models for public sector leaders in order to be able to have viable conclusions on public leadership research.

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