A "Theory" of Good Leadership
Resting on Three Pillars[1]

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1. Introduction

Numerous books and articles have been written on effective leadership, Google lists a very large number of contributions and when using the ISI Web, over 60,000 entries are obtained on the topic "leadership". These books and articles focus on practically all aspects of good leadership, hence there must be the question "How can this short note still add anything to the available literature?"

Not having surveyed the voluminous data available on leadership, the objective of this note is to simply give the idea of a "theory" of good leadership and an abstract picture thereof. Perhaps this idea has already been published in the literature.

Good leadership is seen when an organization is successfully managed, when people are well led. Such leadership requires skills in various areas, including good oral and written communication, planning, team building, motivation, decision making, taking advantage of change, to name a few, and strong ethical values.

With many desirable qualities to be present, it is of interest to establish some structure to the required quality ingredients of good leadership. This structure would ideally be based on only a few concepts and a "picture" that includes an understanding of the interplay and the synergy of the qualities of good leadership.

In the following, we present such a structure in a "theory" of good leadership. We use the word "theory" here rather loosely when compared, for example, to a theory in fluid mechanics, but wish to emphasize the underlying simple abstract concepts.

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[1] The contents of this article were presented at a dinner meeting of the
KJ Bathe Leadership Fellows of the University of Cape Town, on Feb. 19, 2015, see
http://www.kjbatheleadership.uct.ac.za/

2. The "Theory"

The qualities of good leadership can be thought of as resting on three pillars as shown in figure 1 which support in a stable manner a horizontal plate. Since the sides are of equal length, the plate is of an equilateral triangular geometry. Also, since there are three pillars, one at each corner, the plate is stable, it cannot move into any direction and cannot rotate about any direction.

In our theory, we think of each pillar representing universal categories of good leadership qualities, and each of these categories starts with the letter "p" (like pillar).

As shown in the figure, the pillars stand for the categories of ***passion***, ***people***, and ***principles***.

Passion
A very important quality for an effective leader is to have and exhibit Passion. To lead any organization, or country, the leader needs to be passionate about the tasks at hand, to build the organization, and work hard towards specific goals.

Without a good amount of deeply engrained passion, naturally exercised and shown in the behavior of the leader, success will hardly be forthcoming.

People
The most important asset and resource of any organization are its People. Without "good" people -- here "good" is meant of steady harmonious value for the organization considered -- it is hardly possible to succeed. A good leader needs to humbly recognize the value of the people in the organization.

In particular, a good leader should recognize the intellectual and physical limitations of every individual in the organization, and only challenge an employee with reasonable tasks. These duties should be chosen to give value to the organization while, as well, giving fulfillment to the employee. When making decisions, a good leader will always ask how any decision will affect the people in the organization, their enthusiasm for the tasks at hand and in general their quality of work and life. A good leader brings out the best in people while they hardly notice their efforts made.

Principles
The third important pillar without which good leadership cannot exist are Principles. Strong moral and ethical values are "a must". Patience, discipline, temperance,

humbleness, and hard work are very important for a leader. With these qualities, a leader can make effective decisions, based on and drawn from the opinions of the people in the organization and also from outside sources, and follow through with these decisions.

The Leader on the Triangular Plate

Returning to figure 1, a leader is in effect continuously moving on that plate, the location being different depending on the challenge at hand. For example, if a person in the organization needs specific attention, the leader will be located closer to the pillar of *people*, whereas, if a speech is to be given with passion, the leader may have to be closer to the pillar of *passion*.
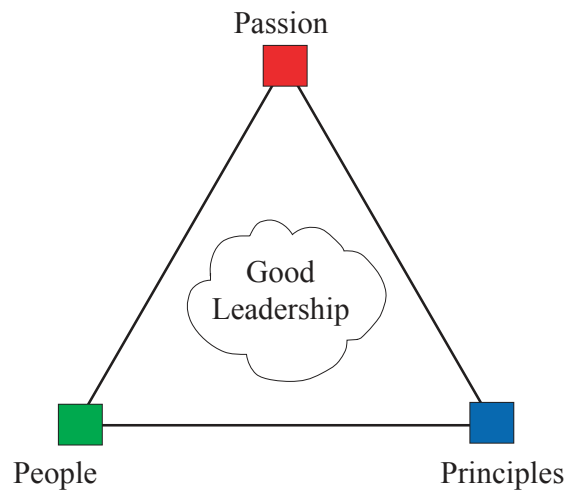
With all three pillars firmly in place, the plate is supported in a stable manner, hence a leader can move on it. However, if any one of the three pillars is not present or not strong enough, the plate is no longer well supported, unstable and, correspondingly, the leadership will fail.
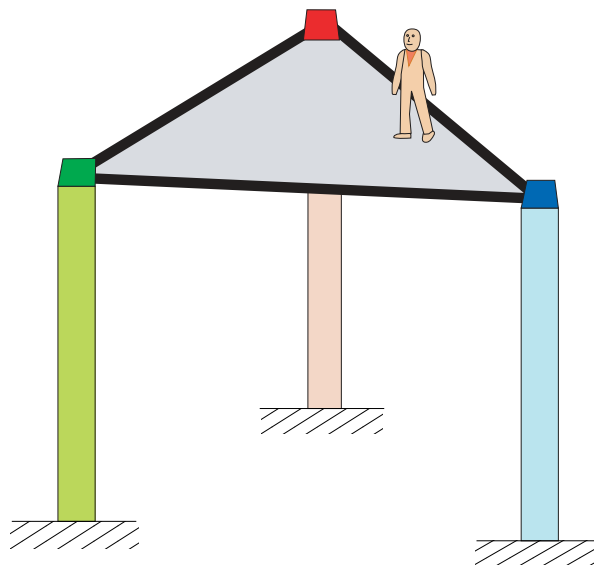

The P^3 Effect

Finally, for good leadership, the enumerated good qualities when used in leading people should have a strong positive synergistic effect. Considering the three pillars, representing Passion, People, Principles with each pillar strength given a value greater than 1, the actions should not just add but should multiply in their positive effects, hence give $P \times P \times P$. The synergy between the good qualities is very important. With P greater than 1, clearly the multiplication can give a much larger number than a mere addition.

3. Concluding Remark

Much has been written about effective leadership, the literature shows many contributions and gives numerous ideas. Nevertheless, we hope that this short note will be of interest and spur further thoughts and discussions.

Passion

Good
Leadership

People   Principles

(a) View of triangular plate from top

(b) The leader moving on the triangular plate

Figure 1 The three pillars supporting the plate in the "theory"
of good leadership