



Selected Proceedings from the 2002 annual conference of  
the International Leadership Association,  
November 14-16, Seattle, Washington USA

"Leadership: In Their Own Image and Likeness"  
By Bruce Murphy and Jeanne Picariello

**Abstract**

This paper describes a highly interactive workshop based on an exercise from the opening session of "Leadership Theory and Practice," and "Leadership in Organizations," taught at several colleges and universities in the United States and presented at the ILA annual conference in Seattle in November, 2002. Guided by the facilitator, workshop participants tackled the sense of organizational leadership head on in an attempt to find common ground for those who study, teach, or practice leadership. At the individual, group, and large group levels, participants experienced leadership through the lens of community art as they forge common meaning out of disparate perspectives. They had the opportunity to challenge their assumptions about organizational leadership and will be encouraged to assess their own leadership prejudices and practices.

**"Leadership: In Their Own Image and Likeness"**

It is hard to overestimate the value of a good definition. How one defines leadership to large degree predetermines one's whole approach to the subject. Is leadership a process? Is it

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ability? Does it require interpersonal interaction? Is "good" leadership the only kind worthy of study? These questions and others have been batted about for years and until an individual answers them, the study of leadership can be problematic. International Leadership Association (ILA) members conducted a lively debate about the definition of leadership on the organization's list serve over a period of several month's last year. The workshop, "Leadership: In Their Own Image and Likeness," was presented at the ILA Conference in Seattle and took a bold and creative step toward addressing these questions and advancing the field of leadership.

In Leading With Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit, Bolman and Deal argue, "We need a revolution in how we think about leadership and how we develop leaders. Most management and leadership development programs ignore or demean spirit. They desperately need an infusion of poetry, literature, music, art, theater, history, philosophy, dance and other forms that are full of spirit. Even that would still leave us far short of the cadre of leaders of spirit that we require." (Bolman and Deal 1994)

In the spirit of Bolman and Deal, this highly interactive session demonstrated ways universities and other leadership development programs are infusing learner-created, spontaneous art into the understanding and practice of both leadership and followership. The workshop is based on an exercise from the opening session of "Leadership Theory and Practice," and "Leadership in Organizations," facilitated by the authors recently at Mercyhurst College and Vanderbilt University in the United States and at the University of Essex in London, UK. Through the workshop, participants sought to develop a personal definition of organizational leadership, engage others in a dialogue about leadership, and express notions about the meaning and practice of leadership using images, art, and symbols that go beyond words.

### **The Workshop**

The workshop began by asking participants to define organizational leadership in their own words on a piece of paper. The participants were then broken down into groups of four or five participants per group. At this time the group is asked to discuss their individual definitions of organizational leadership with the goal of arriving at a consensus definition of organizational leadership as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Instructions to Groups, Part 1**

- Discuss your definition of organizational leadership with the other members of your group
- Develop a group consensus definition of organizational leadership
- Write your group definition on a piece of paper
- Select a group leader

All of the participants engaged in a dialogue about leadership in organizations until the groups developed a definition that all group members felt represented their collective viewpoints. Each group was asked to select a group leader. Typically, groups infer that this means pick somebody merely to read their definition to the larger audience, thus they expended little energy on the selection process.

The workshop facilitator then took the group leaders outside the room for their next task while the assistant facilitator worked with the remaining participants to pick up any loose ends from

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the initial discussion and reorient the physical layout of the room for the next phase of the workshop. Outside the workshop room, the group leaders, in rotation, selected one can of colored modeling clay at a time from a bag until each leader had selected four cans. Leaders were not able to see the cans prior to drawing them from the bag. The leaders then returned to their groups and were given the instructions shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 1. Instructions to Groups, Part 2**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using the materials provided, create a three dimensional representation of your definition of organizational leadership</li><li>• Be prepared to present your artwork to the other workshop participants</li></ul> |
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The groups spent some time discussing how to approach this problem and, as with most workshops, began opening their cans of PlayDoh™ and working the clay; patting, pounding, rolling, and squeezing. After some initial play activity and adjustment to the novel situation, group members discovered that the group's written definition of organizational leadership was inadequate for their task. Words are hard to shape and mold. Participants began to question each other about how leadership could be represented visually. As a result they reformed and molded their original verbal discussion of leadership into three-dimensional representations. During this time there were frequently restarts as one or another group member stumbled onto a great idea to capture the group sense of organizational leadership in clay. Participants reported that this challenged them to step outside conventional ways of expressing their ideas about leadership and that they experience leadership in a new way.

Upon completion of the group sculptures, a representative from each group was asked to read the group's written definition and then to explain or describe their sculpture to the entire workshop. During this part of the workshop, participants questioned presenters and pointed out similarities and differences between the written words and the physical representations presented by each group.

### **Processing the Experience**

Most participants reported experiencing a creative rush not normally associated with the world of the classroom and the lexis of leadership. As they moved beyond verbal language to express their conceptions of leadership, the participants' visual definitions take on lives of their own. Many participants claimed that the ability to express themselves in an artistic way caused them to develop new perspectives on the process of leadership. Participants also related past leadership experiences to the workshop, enriching the activity for all.

It is typical in this workshop that groups spend very little time in selecting a leader. In fact, it appears that nobody wants to be the leader. Group members perceive the job of group leader as a relatively trivial and unimportant housekeeping task. Accordingly, they allow leadership selection to fall to anyone assuming that the leader's only duty will be to read the group's consensus definition. Even among ILA participants, there was a general reluctance to assume the leader's role for the exercise. The facilitator engaged groups by developing themes about the leader selection process. How are leaders selected in your organization? How does leadership occur in leaderless groups? What questions should groups ask prior to leadership selection?

The role of the leaders was also explored. Of particular relevance to the workshop exercise, participants described the role of their leaders in securing resources for the group task. Frequently group leaders will select only one or two colors of clay from the facilitator's

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enigmatic bag. For example, they may draw three cans of blue clay and one can of white instead of one can of each of the four colors. What most groups tend to do is to construct their sculptures using the materials that they drew by chance without trying to negotiate with the facilitator or other groups for a better mix of materials. This leads to a discussion of the leader as resource provider. The ILA Conference workshop went counter to trend. Two of the four groups that did not receive their desired mix of colors did in fact negotiate with other groups without prompting from the facilitator to obtain a more robust supply of materials. Additionally, one group seized the opportunity to create their own additional colors-yellow mixed with blue to make green and red mixed with blue to make purple. These activities typically do not take place in the workshop and perhaps reflect a greater repertoire of leadership behaviors among ILA members.

Participants were asked to reflect upon the role of their group leader throughout the process. Since most group members did not perceive a qualitative difference in the leadership skill of their selected "leader," leadership truly became a shared task during the construction of the sculpture. The leader faded into the background. Leaders may have started by saying "This is the task we've been given, how do you think we should approach it?" Then all members participated on a relatively equal basis. It is quite unusual for someone who has been designated a "leader" in this manner to take over and dictate how the group should go about the task. Inevitably, we see a team approach to solving the problem. All potential contributions seem to be considered, some are acted upon and some are not. Once a basic tactic was determined fairly early in the sculpture production process, the group seemed to develop a group sense of task contribution that energized all participants.

Another question that the facilitator asked was, "How does this process that you just went through relate to your own work or social environment?" Participants were very quick to make connections between this exercise and their own lives. They talked about shared leadership, the notion of individual contributions toward a group goal, respect for the ideas of all members and other leadership themes. Then they placed their observations within a personal framework by observing that the practice either does or does not occur in their work or social environment. Most participants came to the conclusion that they would like to have a work environment that operates in this way.

The final question that the facilitator asked during the processing, and one that usually takes up any remaining time in the workshop was, "How has this exercise contributed to your understanding of leadership?" The responses were enlightening. Most participants reported new insights on leadership. This, we believe, comes from two sources. First, the opportunity to discuss leadership with other individuals who are interested in the topic provides a valuable forum for exploring and validating one's own notions about leadership. It also provides discussants with a chance to expand their understanding by hearing the views of others. Secondly, and unique to an experience such as the workshop, is a more profound understanding of leadership than can be put in words. By putting their ideas into physical representations intended for public presentation, participants gained deeper understanding of leadership and how they and their group mates related to leadership. They were able to visualize connections, use metaphor, and introduce concrete ideas from their own experience in order to make real the concept of leadership. Finally, they could literally put their hands on leadership.

Toward the conclusion of the workshop, short video clips featuring the work of previous groups were shown to workshop participants. These showed the similarities and differences among students of leadership in terms of defining the field. ILA participants saw the products of graduate and undergraduate workshops explained by the participants in their own words.

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The leadership artwork created during the workshop, was displayed in a common conference area as conversation starters for the remainder of the ILA conference.

### Observations worth a Thousand Words

**Figure 3. Leadership as the Bread Making Process**

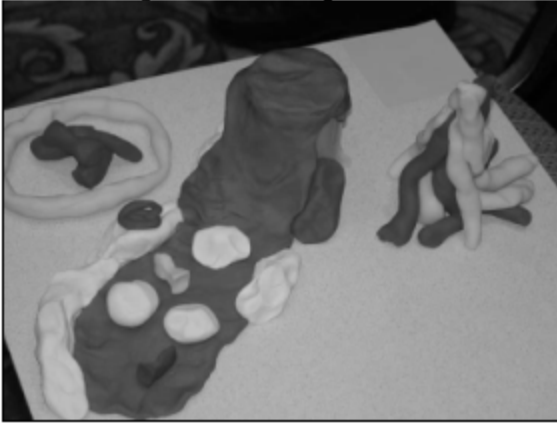


**Figure 4. Leadership as a Lighthouse**

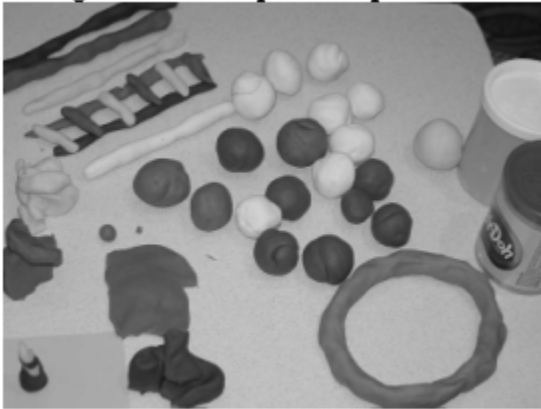


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**Figure 5. Leadership as a River**



**Figure 6. Leadership as a Complex Process**



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**Figure 7. Building Consensus on Leadership**



**Figure 8. Solving the Leadership Problem**



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**Figure 9. Hands-on Leadership**



### **Bridges and Boundaries**

At the end of the workshop, one participant asked for *our* definition of leadership. Reluctant at first to answer, since we knew that a return to the linearity of written language could negate the whole message of the workshop, we gave in and wrote the definition shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10. A Definition of Organizational Leadership**

Organizational leadership is the process of influencing human behavior so as to accomplish the goals of the organizationally prescribed leader

First of all, leadership in organizations is a *process*. It is not something done once and then forgotten. It is ongoing, continuous, flowing. Leadership involves *influence*. The leader acts, changes, moves. The leader influences *human behavior* as a primary component of leadership. The interaction with others sustains the leader and the follower as well. The leader motivates, inspires, stimulates, induces. The process is directed to *accomplish goals*. Leadership has a purpose, a direction, a reason. The goals are determined by the *organizationally prescribed leader*. The leader, who knows the requirements of the organization as well as the capabilities of the group, develops a vision that fits both and takes action to communicate that vision.

This is not a perfect definition but it suits our needs as we teach leadership primarily to graduate and undergraduate college students. This definition provides us a framework for the analysis of all aspects of leadership. It allows us to study leaders as diverse as Hitler and Gandhi or Carnegie and Welch without methodological bias.

This definition also provides us with a handy tool in the debate between leadership and management. By changing *one word* in this definition of leadership, we can produce a useful definition of management. That word, of course, is *human*. While the leader is all about *people*, the manager is all about things. The manager influences *non-human behavior* such as inventories, production schedules, and calendars.

The good news is that most leaders are also managers and most managers are also leaders.

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The manager side of me determines exactly the precise number of employees I need to run the operation effectively. However, when I have to call that one excess employee into my office and explain that they will not be working for us any longer in a way that makes them feel alright about themselves and the organization, I am using my leader side.

The workshop allows participants to play with definitions of leadership in order to determine what aspects are relevant to their own study, teaching, or practice of leadership. The workshop reinforces the idea that each of us brings our own preconceptions into our work and that others have ideas that may have equal merit for them.

As the ILA conference's *Scholarship Roundtable: Toward a General Theory of Leadership* sought to "contribute to the cutting-edge thinking by joining James MacGregor Burns and a group of prominent scholars working to develop a general theory of leadership," several of the participants were at odds with each other because they approached the effort clinging to different and unexplored definitions of leadership. Some of these participants were also in the workshop and had the opportunity to find a common ground for dialogue on leadership.

### **About the authors**

Bruce Murphy is Dean, School of Business, Point Park College in Pittsburgh, PA. He has previously taught Leadership and Organization Development at West Point and Vanderbilt University and was the founding director of the Graduate Program in Organizational Leadership at Mercyhurst College. Bruce develops and conducts training with business, educational, civic, and government organizations worldwide. He holds a doctorate in Human Resource Development from Vanderbilt University.

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**Jeanne M. Picariello** is on the Board of Directors of the United States Olympic Committee where she is the chair of the Community Based Organizations and Armed Forces Council. Colonel (retired) Picariello spent ten years as an Army nurse in burn care, ICU and CCU. She later spearheaded Army health and wellness programs in the Pentagon, Germany, and Panama, and served as Director of Soldier and Family Support and Commandant of the U.S. Army Physical Fitness School. She holds a Masters Degree from the University of Washington in cardiovascular nursing and exercise physiology. Jeanne was the first recipient of the Margaret Cochran Corbin Award for Distinguished Military Service from the Daughters of the American Revolution. She was the first woman ever selected to the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Team in 1975 and participated in the Pentathlon World Cup in 1977.

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