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PAPA 5315 Government Administration I: Behavioral Skills
Midterm Essay Examination

The following is my response to the question:

Provide a detailed description of someone you consider to be a “good leader.” Use three different approaches to leadership study (i.e., choose from those provided in the textbook) to justify your description. Articulate how your chosen example fits into each approach and what conclusions you might draw from leadership theory about how they might behave as a leader in the future. Note: your “good leader” should not be yourself, nor anyone associated with our class.

The literature I used to answer this question was *Managing Human Behavior in Public and Nonprofit Organizations* and quotes from Leslie Knope of *Parks and Recreation*. This work highlights my ability to reflect on leadership styles and the qualities that are important for good leadership.

A Good Leader

Leadership is “one or more members of a group [who] stimulate others to more clearly recognize their previously latent needs, desires, and potentialities, and to work together toward their fulfillment,” (Denhardt, et al., 2019). Leadership is a necessary component of every organization, and the difference between “good” or “bad” leadership can be quite apparent. A bad leader can damage an organization’s reputation, break trust, and create an unpleasant work environment. A good leader uplifts their peers, builds positive relationships, and exemplifies character. They have strong moral values and strive to do the right thing. They make decisions “about the direction they want to take” and these decisions require “careful balancing of human values and ethical considerations,” (Denhardt, et al., 2019).

Someone I consider to be a good leader is Leslie Knope, the fictional Deputy Director of the Pawnee Parks & Recreation Department in the NBC show, *Parks & Recreation*. While she may be fictional, she is an integral part of the Pawnee government and is responsible for the Parks & Recreation department’s success. To me, she is the Public Administrator role model in

popular culture. Leslie Knope's leadership and character can be evaluated by looking at 3 different approaches to leadership: Trait, Style, and Situational.

Trait Approach to Leadership

In the trait approach to leadership, an individual's character is studied to determine if and how they will present themselves as a leader. Ralph Stogdill's 1974 study found that leaders "have a strong capacity for organizing and generating cooperative behavior," (Denhardt, et al., 2019). Evaluating Leslie Knope, while it may be somewhat unrealistic, she keeps "200-page binders for every project" with "special tabs imported from Mexico," (Quednau, 2016) (Accion Opportunity Fund, n.d.). She is incredibly detail-oriented and organized. Other leadership traits Stogdill reported are a "strong drive for responsibility and task completion, persistence in the pursuit of goals, creativity, self-confidence, and a capacity for absorbing stress," (Denhardt, et al., 2019). Leslie Knope exemplifies these characteristics throughout the show, but especially in raising money for her department. She "resurrects the...annual 'Harvest Festival,' and gathers hundreds of local vendors to put on an incredible event that brings the community together," (Quednau, 2016). Her commitment to her department's goals and serving the community creatively highlights her strong character and leadership capabilities.

Style Approach to Leadership

The style approach to leadership focuses on an individual's behavior. A key aspect of leadership style is "consideration and initiation of structure," (Denhardt, et al., 2019). Consideration is "the extent in which the leader is concerned for the welfare of its group," while initiation of structure is "the extent in which the leader initiates activity in the group, organizes the group, and defines the way work should be done," (Denhardt, et al., 2019). When leading her team in *Parks & Recreation*, Leslie Knope is very considerate. A running theme throughout the

show is her dedication to her friends and coworkers, uplifting them to be the best versions of themselves. Leslie can often be found giving nice but odd compliments like, “Ann, you beautiful and poetic land mermaid,” to her best friend throughout challenging projects (Daniels & Poehler, 2015). She emphasizes consideration in her style as a leader.

Situational Approach to Leadership

The situational approach to leadership is the context in which a leader’s character and behavior are applied. Situational leadership is the idea that “different situations require different styles of leadership” and leaders should be able to adapt themselves to these varying situations (Denhardt, et al., 2019). Leslie Knope displays situational leadership in her role as Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation by adjusting her priorities and even tone when leading different projects. *Parks & Recreation* often depicts local government as chaotic, but Leslie Knope tackles real local government issues like “budget cuts, [negotiating] a city merger, [dealing] with small-town scandals...and [wading] through red tape,” (Quednau, 2016). Leslie adapts her leadership style to address every hurdle she encounters in Pawnee.

Leslie’s Future of Leadership

Parks & Recreation concluded after 7 seasons on NBC with Leslie Knope becoming the governor of Indiana (*Parks & Recreation*, Season 7, Episode 12). By utilizing the trait, style, and situational approach to leadership, Leslie served both her peers and her community.

References

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