

DEFINING PASSIONATE LEADERSHIP: AN ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS

by

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Abstract

Leadership is a widely studied discipline, with various styles and theories recognized and their efficacy argued. Currently, transformational leadership is often viewed as a positive impact leaving theory. Researchers such as Robert Vallerand have also ventured to explore passion and break down what makes passion a positive or negative factor in a person's life. However, little scholarly research discusses the cross-section of passion and leadership and how this could be an effective leadership style. This research aims to define passionate leadership, create a theory based on current research on these two subjects, and expand on the rare passionate leadership studies that exist. It also seeks to determine if passionate leaders effectively impact followers and, potentially, the workplace. This research required closely evaluating previous scholarly leadership and passion research through grounded theory. Grounded theory is used to tie together secondary research by creating common themes or codes to determine overall significance. The codes used in this research were basic leadership information, effective leadership, passion definitions, and fields and careers. Through the review of data, conclusions were found when codes overlapped and information became repetitive. For example, preliminary research showed that harmonious passion, as opposed to obsessive, is the target passion leaders should desire to embody to experience success. Overall, creating a definition can expand the leadership studies field and thus improve the workplace. Many people have passion for what they do, have the opportunity to lead, and can leave positive impacts because of it. If employers can understand the benefits of passionate leadership and in which career fields these leaders are most important, they can build training that improves culture and employee wellbeing.

Keywords: passion, passionate leadership, leadership, career

Introduction

The goal of this research is to define passionate leadership. Doing this effectively requires closely evaluating previous leadership and passion research and determining if this research will significantly acknowledge how these concepts could impact different fields. Defining leadership has been done through many lenses over time. Stogdill (1974) says, “There are almost as many definitions of leadership as those who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 7). While many have tried, and there are many definitions and outlooks, this research only helps the field and ways to interpret leadership expand.

The following sections will provide insights into the literature on leadership overall, including transformational leadership, passion studies, and how this could be connected to work passion.

Literature Review

Leadership

Leadership, in its most basic form, is socially constructed through interaction. More specifically, it derives from interactions of at least two entities, for example, leaders and followers (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Haslam and Reicher (2016), explain that leadership is a verb not a noun and a process not a property. Furthermore, "Leadership is usually defined in terms of people who are in charge of organizations and their units" (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005, p. 171). It is important to note that leadership varies from the idea of management. Leadership is often defined as the opposite of management (Grint et al., 2016). Carroll and Levy (2008) explain that managers are often told to lead more or acquire leadership abilities. Whethersby

(1999) explains that management allocates resources, sets priorities, and designs work to achieve results. However, leadership is the creation of a shared vision. He explains that management is about controlling, and leadership is about motivating. Grint et al. (2016) also explain that leadership is about direction setting. A further explanation is that managers are expected to have "seen it all before," and leaders have "never seen anything like it before" and are in charge of creating the vision. Hogan and Kaiser (2005) additionally explain that definitions of leadership are created through a leader's ability to maintain positive group performance in coordination with others, which is considered competition. However, this insinuates that leaders can not be ineffective.

Leadership has been noted since the 1300s, but it formally existed for the first time in the 1700s, and proper research began in the 20th century (King, 1990). King (1990) proves that the study of leadership has evolved. Around the 1840s, leaders were believed to be born, not trained. This led to trait-focused theories explaining how leaders possess certain traits that allow them to succeed in these elevated positions. Leadership evolved from these traits and behaviors to how the situational factors impact the ability to lead. By the late 1990s to early 2000s, research addressed the possibility that leadership might be two-dimensional. More specifically, there can be a level of transaction between leader and follower where the leader relies on authority as a motivator. Like previous advances, this led to the study of transformational leadership, in which leaders "encourage, inspire and motivate followers" (Benmira & Moyosulu, 2021, p.4).

In addition to the evolution, it is essential to understand how scholars define an effective leader to advance from a basic understanding of leadership. In general, "Effective leadership is recognized as a key to the success of any organization" (Benmira & Moyosulu, 2021, p.3).

Serigovanni (1996) says that leadership is generally the process of getting people to take action on the leader's goals. Similarly, Winston and Patterson (2006) define a leader as "one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted, coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives" (p.7). Kotter (1988) adds that moving a group forward must be done without coercive means, which means that a leader must have good intentions and thoughtful tactics. Haslam and Reicher (2016) say that effective leadership is the ability to influence people to contribute to group goals.

Transformational leaders have proven to engage in more positive activities generally (Men, 2014). Further, Brandt and Uusi-Kakkuri (2016) explain that transformational leaders tend to be more effective communicators than other types of leaders. In fields such as public relations, transformational leadership is preferred over transactional leadership (Men, 2014). The conversation around transformational leadership has led to its relevance as a highly effective strategy.

Passion

It is essential to this research to define passion independently before connecting it to leadership. As early as Aristotle, there has been an argument that passion is positive if it underlies behavior and thus is required to advance (Mageau et al., 2009). Vallerand et al. (2003), the leader in passionate leadership research, defines passion as "a strong inclination toward an activity that one likes, finds important, and in which one invests time and energy" (p.175). Such passion becomes a large part of an individual's identity. As referenced by Day (2007), the Oxford

Dictionary defines passion as 'any kind of feeling by which the mind is powerfully affected or moved' (p. 427). Specifically, "Being passionate generates energy, determination, conviction, commitment and even obsession in people" (Day, 2007, p. 427). Individuals can additionally develop a passion for people, activities, and causes (Bronk & McLean, 2016).

Vallerand et al. (2003) also propose a Dualistic Model of Passion, which defines four elements of passion, including valuation, liking, time spent, and internalization process. The model additionally defines two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive. Individuals with obsessive passion become self-obsessed and have rigid persistence in such passionate activity. This further causes their efficiency levels to drop and creates an environment where the person is less likely to focus (Vallerand et al., 2007). Obsessive passion is associated with having a lack of control over the activity (Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008). In contrast, the individual freely accepts harmonious passion as important to them (Vallerand et al., 2007). More specifically, "Individuals are not compelled to do the enjoyable activity; rather, they freely choose to do so." (Vallerand et al., 2007, p.509). Rather than monopolizing life, if someone can internalize harmonious passion, an activity coincides and remains important alongside other passions and essential aspects of a person's life. Regarding efficiency, Vallerand et al. (2003) found harmonious passion to be linked to a positive impact on task engagement. However, Vallerand et al. (2007) determined that both harmonious and obsessive passion leads to a long-term commitment with the goal of high-performance attainment. This proves they both can lead to success but take different avenues to achieve it. Furthermore, Mageu et al. (2009) explain that, as long as reason is involved in passions, they are particularly positive. They go further to say, "Passion is perceived as a necessary ingredient for higher achievements (Mageu et al. 2009, p. 602).

Work Passion

An important subset of passion research is work passion. Work passion is defined as “one’s strong inclination towards work that the individual loves and that is part of one’s identity (Vallerand et al., 2014). It is additionally viewed as extremely important for talent development. (Hagel et al. 2014). Furthermore, having the ability to cultivate work passion is considered necessary for talent development in the workplace (Hagel et al., 2014). However, Ho and Astakhova (2020) highlight the lack of research regarding work passion in the workplace. In the existing data, there are repetitive mentions of work passion in fields such as entrepreneurship and education. Perrewé et al. (2014) explain that work passion can become obsessive and thus be incredibly negative.

Entrepreneurial passion is “intensive positive feelings and central identity towards a specific activity of entrepreneurs such as developing, inventing and founding” (Lee et al., 2021, p.2). More specifically, passion in this field can make the difference between a successful business creation, which requires passion and leadership (Lee et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship also requires persistence, and Cardon et al. (2009) believe there is a connection between entrepreneurial passion and persistence.

It is also argued that passion is also the driving force of the success of educators. Davies and Brighthouse (2010) claim that passion is the force that ensures that children reach their full potential. Teaching is a complex and vital profession, meaning that some may stray away due to the potential fear. However, passion for work can draw people to the field. Furthermore, Day (2004) argues that “headteachers” or principals have a passion for their schools and pupils and that their jobs can have an even more significant impact on all of them.

Passionate Leadership

Few scholars have focused their research on the field of passionate leadership, causing the need for this research and its questions. Davies and Brighthouse (2010) break passionate leadership into six main categories. They believe that passionate leaders should articulate a vision, share values, set possible examples and standards, be committed for the long term, care, and celebrate. Bronk and McLean (2016) argue that “passion is a central component of leader developmental readiness” (p. 30). They illustrate the connection between leadership and passion by explaining that individuals can have something they are passionate about and realize that to really make a difference, they must learn how to lead. Thus, passion motivates leadership (Bronk and McLean, 2016).

In the context of school teachers, Day (2004) explains that passion is not a luxury and is essential to effective leadership (p.427). They also explain that passion is associated with positive attributes such as understanding and fairness, leading to the idea that passion and passionate leadership on some level could be construed as positive (Day, 2004). Smircich and Morgan (1982) explain that leadership roles are taken due to personal desire or others' expectations. On the other hand, personal desire could be correlated with passion.

It is important to note some scholars believe that leadership has nothing to do with personal attributes. Furthermore, this means that charisma and passion do not impact the ability to lead. Haslam and Reicher (2016) say, “Leadership is found not within leaders—neither their character, their vision, nor even their actions—but in the followership of those they influence” (p.23) This proves that individuals do not have to exemplify a certain trait to lead. For example, not all leaders are extroverted or loud, but rather there are other contributing factors. Additionally, compassionate leadership is connected to passionate leadership through various

shared traits and ideas but will not be considered similar to passionate leadership for this research (Harris & Jones, 2023).

Rationale/Methodology

As stated, there have been few previous scholarly and informal uses of passion in coordination with leadership. Passionate leadership is not a defined area of leadership studies that exists as a body of research. Leadership is difficult because it can be evaluated through many different lenses. Kempster and Parry (2011) argue that leadership has an elusive quality, making it necessary to define (Kempster & Parry, 2011).

To achieve the goals of this research, grounded theory will be utilized. Over time, leadership research has changed to necessitate context involvement, lending itself to grounded theory. This methodology involves looking at data and creating a new theory. Dunne (2011) explains, “This implies that in grounded theory the researcher is *not* focused on testing hypotheses taken from existing theoretical frameworks, but rather develops a new ‘theory’ grounded in empirical data collected in the field.” Further connecting to the research goal is to create a universal and informed definition.

Grounded Theory

Something unique to the grounded theory used within this research is that no initial limits are placed on source numbers. For example, researchers aim to research until the content becomes redundant (Cutcliffe, 2000). In this context, the stopping place was defined when it hit the repetitive discussion of harmonious and obsessive passion, specifically from the scholar Vallerand. When sources began repeating the same information or primary source, the next code was evaluated. This is important in the context of this research because it creates a new theory

based on segments of previous research. If the body of scholarly research reaches a maximum point, then the researcher has done all that is possible. Grounded theory further assists the reputation of qualitative research by using rigorous amounts of research until a conclusion is made (Kempster & Parry, 2011).

Grounded theory has become increasingly utilized in the field of leadership studies. In 2011, Kempster and Parry argued that grounded theory and leadership were in their infancy. Furthermore, leadership is a subjective social science that lends itself to qualitative research (Kempster and Parry, 2011). It allows for the evaluation of nuances. They explain that the structure of grounded theory “suggest causal explanations of the leadership manifestation in particular contexts and across contexts through levels of abstraction related to levels of analysis” (Kempster & Parry, 2011, p. 109). Allowing this research to systematically and scientifically compare leadership and passion.

This research relies on open coding to determine the patterns between different articles and thus create a new theory, “Passionate Leadership.” Open coding involves highlighting line by line for key phrases and ideas and then creating categories. This research identified codes utilizing key research questions. The highlighted coding terms are

- fields/careers
- passion/passionate leadership definitions
- effective leadership
- basic leadership information

Since these codes are interconnected, but the topic does not exist officially, most sources were about one code, with a few having rich information that reached every code. As discussed previously, leadership has evolved dramatically, and it is important to evaluate through the

mindset of current opinions and vantage points. That is why passion, at the forefront of the connection of leadership, could be crucial to the field.

Research Questions

1. How is passionate leadership defined?
2. Are passionate leaders effective leaders?
3. Are certain fields more susceptible to passionate leaders?

Results/Discussion

Defining Passion

It is imperative to make sense of passion independently in order to truly delve into the definition of passionate leadership. While there are various differences, the main components appear time after time, including strong feelings, activity importance, and emotions.

Strong Feelings

A core tenet of passion is that it involves strong feelings. Scholars used various different wording arrangements to exude this image. Suchy (1999) used the phrase “deeply connected”. Multiple scholars use the term “strong inclination” (Li et al. 2017, Vallerand 2007). Philip (2010) differs in the way that he describes being passionate about something as “unchanging,” and similarly, Lee et al. (2021) explain them simply as intensive positive feelings. Additionally, Vallerand (2012) says that passionate activities are undeniably meaningful and long-lasting. Because people feel strongly about it, they are willing to commit much time.

Activity Importance

Through coding, it is evident that the idea of consistency is imperative to passion. An individual must dedicate a large amount of time and energy to something in order to be passionate about it. Perrewé et al. (2014) uses the word persistent. Li et al. (2021) say an activity that someone invests time and energy into. Damon et al. (2004) explain that one works extremely hard to gain expertise in their passion. Vallerand (2012) identifies that other scholars have proposed that “People will spend large amounts of time and effort to reach their passionate goals.” (p.2). Davies and Brighthouse (2010) use commitment as their way to describe this ongoing connection to a passionate activity. They even go far enough to say that passionate leaders are “Committed for the long term” (Davies & Brighthouse, 2010, p, 5). Furthermore, individuals would not say they volunteer but rather are a volunteer (Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008). Their passion becomes so central to the way that a person sees themselves.

Emotions

When Vallerand (2012) explains that people often put time and energy into passionate activities, he couples this with the idea that these goals could be an activity they love. That proves that passion is unequivocally linked with emotions. Overall, the emotion is positive, and the most recurring emotions can be coupled with care and excitement. Perrewé et al. (2014) directly define passion as something that is inherently emotional. Other interpretations include someone being deeply connected or having intensive positive feelings (Suchy, 1999 & Cardon et al., 2009).

Mageu et al. (2009) quote Waterman (1990), who proposes the idea of personal expressiveness, which allows a person to have a special feeling that they are meshing with an activity. This expressiveness is believed to be parallel to harmonious passion (Mageu et al. 2009). Damon et al. (2004) call passion a heartfelt engagement. Philip (2010) correlates passion with a sense of purpose and destiny, which can be assumed as a positive engagement.

Duecase (2004) says that passion is correlated with natural excitement. Grieser (2022) says passion contains energy, excitement, and enthusiasm. He further elaborates by saying that when you are passionate about something, you are excited about it (Grieser, 2022). However, Vallerand (2012) explains excitement with the idea of obsessive passion and how this emotion could become uncontrollable and no longer be a positive engagement.

Defining Passionate Leadership

Understanding passion is necessary to connect it to passionate leadership and evaluate how passion affects a leader. Subsequently, the three core tenets of positive, harmonious passion, strong feelings, activity importance, and emotion must be present in an individual to consider them a passionate leader. This makes up only part of the definition of passionate leadership. The other main elements are the ability to motivate, encourage, or leave a positive impact on followers. This drive also produces increased productivity. In other words, to define a passionate leader, it is essential to look at who they are and what they accomplish.

Definition of passionate leadership:

An effective, passionate leader is someone who is **deeply connected** to an activity that is important to them. They care enough to make a difference and inspire

followers unselfishly. The inspiration happens through a share of emotional appeal through feelings such as **hope, optimism, and accomplishment**. They additionally have an **impressive output level**.

Core Components of the Definition:

- Emotional
- Activity Importance
- Strong Feelings
- Impact on Followers
- High Output Level

Impact on followers coins passionate leadership as far from a transactional leadership style. It is an important part of what makes an effective leader and correlates directly with the positive words to describe passion. Even if an individual is experiencing obsessive passion, they likely still want to see followers succeed; they have just lost a sense of their purpose in this leadership position.

Moreover, it's crucial to recognize that passionate leaders achieve their goals and foster a high level of productivity within their organization. Caldwell and Okpala (2022) aptly state, "The true power of leading with passion lies in its ability to align an individual's commitment to achieving an outcome with their empathy towards others who contribute to success" (p. 7). Passion catalyzes productivity, manifesting within the individual and inspiring followers to contribute to their fullest potential.

Passionate Leadership Effectiveness

The definition of passionate leadership only evaluates harmonious passion and an effective leader. However, through study, it is evident that obsessive passion can occur in leaders, making them ineffective. Saying this, Passionate leadership is a highly effective theory. However, it is less effective than transformational leadership due to the possibility a leader's passion could turn from harmonious to obsessive at any time. Harmonious passion is linked to better interpersonal relationships and higher positive emotions, two useful skills when internalizing leadership (Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008).

Furthermore, Davies and Brighthouse (2010) say, "It is the passion to make a difference that turns beliefs into reality and is the mark of deep leadership." Deep leadership proves that it is a theory that goes beyond the ordinary to make a noticeable impact. Additionally, passion can positively impact other parts of an individual's life, which is a unique benefit of this form of leadership. For example, Caldwell & Okpala (2022) explain, "Leading with passion leads those who lead to be able to enhance their self-control and focus as they demonstrate their dedication to accomplishing their goal." The overall ability to take passion and put it into creating a difference.

Passionate Leadership vs. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is considered extremely positive, in contrast to transactional styles (Bass, 1985). Transactional styles are more closely related to bureaucracy and managerial efforts, whereas transformational styles focus more on motivation and positive attributes. Transformational leadership has even been defined as "a leader of innovation" (Tucker &

Russell, 2004, p. 103). Passionate leadership is considered much more than transactional and has various factors in common, such as having a vision that inspires followers and innovating above and beyond.

Bass (1985) claims that the ethical transformational leader aims to make change. Furthermore, they take a vision and put it into action. Bowcutt (2014) says leaders must be willing to have a shared vision rather than just be competent. Various leadership styles involve being simply competent. Steinwart and Ziegler (2014) additionally speak to transformational leaders and their ability to not only have a shared vision but also explain it. What transformational and passionate leaders have in common is the ability to go above and beyond to make a positive impact. Day (2009) claims that passion can lead to an enhanced vision that can better those around them.

Additionally, leadership varies from management, so it involves impacting followers rather than just directing them. Transactional and passionate leaders aim to have a positive relationship with followers and inspire them. Inspiration creates the basis of transformational leadership, and similarly, Diao et al. (2019) explain that if a leader can work more passionately and humbly, followers will want to work and give the same amount of impact and productivity. Transformational leaders are characterized as having the ability to move followers forward. They commonly associate charisma as the factor that leaders have to make this impact. Passionate leaders use passion as their primary mechanism to do this work, and passionate leadership does not revolve around charisma.

While these forms are similar in many aspects, to be considered in a similar light, passion must remain harmonious rather than becoming obsessive. Ho and Astakhova (2020) highlight

that harmoniously passionate leaders often experience more positive emotions. With transformational leadership deemed generally producing positive outcomes, it is important to compare passionate leadership needs to have harmonious passion.

Important Fields

When looking at the scope of passion research, work passion is highly studied and a large body of research currently exists about the subject. However, Vallerand (2014) emphasizes that work is not the only thing that can be considered a passionate activity. Meaning that while research should touch on it because passionate leadership can blossom there, it should not be the main focus.

Leadership is connected to any workplace due to the nature of hierarchy. This paper aimed to determine if passionate leaders would be more effective in certain fields than others. Saying this, the research has concluded that on a basic level, any field that aims to make a difference in the world most often should utilize passionate leadership. This is knowingly broad, meaning passionate leaders can appear in the unlikeliest places. However, research shows that these leaders thrive most often in the fields of education and entrepreneurship.

Parents and school systems alike are constantly searching for leadership within their teachers and administrators. Additionally, educators aim to shape the minds and lives of young adults. In order to do this to the best of their ability, passion can be of great assistance. As defined in the key parts of passion, students universally choose teachers as people who care (Day, 2009). They use this caring spirit to drive them through a mentally and physically draining job.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs tend to act in order to better the community through their services, products, or businesses. Having passion and a drive to make their idea work regardless of business letdowns, means that they will go farther. Entrepreneurs also have to lead their projects. Additional fields could include nursing (Lim, 2022). Lee et al. (2021) quote Cardon et al. 2009 saying, “Entrepreneurial passion refers to intensive positive feelings and central identity toward a specific activity of entrepreneurs such as developing, inventing, and founding” (para.4). This passion then lends itself to leadership being connected to succeed.

Limitations

There is very little research today regarding passionate leadership as a theory. The research aims to add to the field, but this research involves subjectivity in combining passion and leadership into a cohesive definition. As demonstrated through this paper, the entities are linked, but it was necessary to come to personal conclusions due to the fact that few scholars have touched on the subject. This is unsurprising in the way that leadership research is highly regarded as subjective in nature. Furthermore, the lack of scholars discussing passionate leadership narrows the research scope. However, the fields of passion and leadership are wide, further proving the importance of combining this research. Additionally, this research does not include the impacts of charisma (Bass, 1985).

Future Directions

In the future, this research could evaluate a few more factors in depth to determine if they have a sizable impact. For example, looking at charisma, more specifically, could be worthwhile as an influence for passionate leaders. Additionally, there was a low level of overlap between

passionate leadership and compassionate leadership. This could be an extension of the definition or a completely separate theory, but this determination could be made through future research. Passionate leaders are complex but not unheard of. They hold similarities to other theories and fall nicely into various areas of leadership, such as transformational leadership, meaning that there is reason to continue to study this theory and expand the body of research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, passionate leaders are individuals who find their passion important and feel emotionally connected to it, use this emotion to make a difference leave a positive impact on followers unselfishly, and see impressive output results. In the future, passionate leaders should be considered in the same realm as transformational leaders regarding effectiveness. As passionate leadership becomes more well-known, it should be considered when evaluating the most positively powerful leaders. However, to do so, more scholars must continue to evaluate the connection between passion and leadership and what these leaders bring to the table, which differs from other theories.

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