THE BEHAVIORAL COMPETENCY APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE ECCLESIAL LEADERSHIP[1]

LISA R. BERLINGER

This paper complements the discussion of leadership competencies moderated by Sharon Callahan[2] in the paper that immediately precedes it in this journal. I have been working in the area of leadership competency for fifteen years, and working with religious leaders, using models developed by psychologically and some theologically educated scholars for the explicit use of religious and other leaders for ten of those years. In her study, Callahan brought together voices from her Delphi study,[3] from research conducted from 1972 through 1995 of Catholics and Protestants, from the leadership literature, and from theological and organizational consultants. Most of her "voices" comprise individuals who are educated in theology and sociology. To our astonishment, Callahan and I had very little overlap in voices-that is, the people we cited. However, the good news is that there is overlap in many outcomes. This paper is written at the request of Sharon Callahan, together with our editor Scott Cormode, describing some of the behavioral competency literature and analyzing the implications of the methodological issues handled differently by the two groups of researchers.

The voices brought into conversation by Callahan[4] are intelligent, experienced, and knowledgeable about religious leadership, religious leaders, and theological education. In short, they represent collective wisdom from theological educators and researchers regarding religious leadership. We should expect that they would give us good insight into characteristics and competencies of effective ecclesial leaders. All are educated in theology and all have expertise and

Lisa R. Berlinger is a researcher at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT.

2 Sharon Callahan, "Leadership in Ecclesial Contexts: Integration of Art and Competence," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, (2003).
3 ————, "A Delphi Study of the Competencies Needed by Leaders of Roman Catholic Faith Communities in Western Washington Through the Year 2000," (PhD diss., Seattle University, 1996).
4 Callahan, "Leadership," 2003.

experience in other areas of the humanities, sciences, and/or practice as well. Talented and effective leaders themselves, they understand a great deal about the art of integrating leadership and other competencies, faith, relationships, prayer, and structures to create synergistic processes and outcomes. In addition, Callahan has offered supportive voices from management and sociology to further bolster the competencies distilled from the research.

By bringing in the work of scholars trained in social psychological methods and organizational behavior,[5] I propose to further the understanding of how to develop and use competency models for religious leaders, focusing specifically on the biases and blind spots that social psychological methodologies uncover. These biases and blind spots could, can, and will undermine the individual conclusions and even the group consensus of the social science and theological methodologies employed. My purpose for illustrating these biases is to demonstrate the shortcomings of the methods used and then explain the methods that have been developed to mitigate these problems. Finally, I offer two concrete examples from my own development and teaching that illustrate how competencies can be better understood and developed.

Callahan Study The Delphi research, a modified brainstorming methodology, is appropriate for Callahan's goals of engaging a broad constituency, involving people in the discussion anonymously, and building consensus about leadership needs.

The questions asked were:

1. What are the competencies expected of leaders of faith communities?

---

[5] Note that the psychological models used here are from social *psychology and organizational psychology*. This means that most of the behavior being observed is outside the realm of the abnormal psychologist and outside the realm of what would be considered disease. Social and organizational psychologists are not usually trained to diagnose disease, and while some behavior may occur in the course of a work situation that is pathological and requires medical or therapeutic attention, such behavior would *not* be the focus or expertise of the social psychologist.

2. What are the most preferred competencies of leaders of faith communities?

Deleting those items agreed to by the fewest number of people further refined the set of competencies. The result, a good one given the goals of the study, is a set of leadership competencies agreeable to the group. This process and set of competencies could form the basis of curriculum development for a program, workshop, or degree plan. The participants are "on board" to use the information they have created.

What More Can Be Done? Researchers from the fields of organizational behavior and social psychology would suggest adding an additional goal: that the competencies be further refined to ensure that they differentiate effective leaders from ineffective leaders. The question is then, what competencies are essential for leaders in ministry and which are less important for effective ministry? Clergy (or any leaders) cannot do everything; one of the hallmarks of leadership is doing the leader's job and using the competencies, knowledge, and skills appropriate for that job. While the competency models that result from the voices could be the basis for an interesting curriculum, few if any leaders could or even should demonstrate all the competencies listed. My goal is to enhance religious leaders' understanding of how competency models can be and are being used in ecclesial leadership.

ISSUES

Does the competency affect performance? Does the competency lead to high performance? In a speech quoted by Callahan, Gregory Jones,[6] from whom I have learned much about theological practice, indicates that we can learn from "excellent athletes, performers, and artists about the centrality of [their] attention to detail." I am not so certain. The questions to ask are: Does their Attention to Detail Competency distinguish high performing from low performing athletes? Is a high level of Attention to Detail a competency a winning Olympic athlete is more likely to show than a non-winning athlete? I do not know the answer to these questions, but

---

[6]   L. Gregory Jones, "Mundane Excellence," *The Christian Century* (January 2-9, 2002) : 33.

knowing the answers would be important before coaching our potential Olympic athletes to increase their Attention to Detail. Just because we observe this trait in someone does not mean it affects performance. It may be that all athletes, even mediocre athletes, demonstrate Attention to Detail, and that, while it may be a good competency to have, it may not be one that any athlete seeking to perform well needs to be reminded to practice.

Is the competency appropriate for ministry? Further, even if a competency such as Attention to Detail does affect the performance of athletes, performers, and other artists, does it follow that the relevant behavior or set of behaviors should be emulated for ministry? Competent accountants, birth registrars in hospitals, proofreaders, and people who handle insurance claims for doctors all demonstrate high levels of Attention to Detail. Are these people you would want as your pastor? Is this one of those characteristics that is desirable for the manager but not for the leader?[7] How will they ever get their work done when faced with a church full of people? The point is that we should be careful what we borrow from other types of performance, because the competencies might not be appropriate to our work or because they might not be worth making a priority.[8] To be fair to Jones, in his editorial he refers to this attention to detail as attention to the mundane and attention to ordinary things, and those sound as though they could be behaviors of a leadership competency for ministry rather than some business competency. I will address this later in the paper.

---

[7]   Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision, Team Culture, and Integrity,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

[8]   For actual competency models used in religious settings, see D. Martin Butler and Robert Herman, "Effective Ministerial Leadership," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 9(3) (Spring 1999) : 229-239; David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, "Nonprofit Executive Leadership Education Study," *Theological Education XXIX,* no. 117-131 (1992); David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis, "Future of Religious Orders in the United States," *Origins* 22, no. 15 (September 24, 1992); D. J. Nygren and M. D. Ukeritis, *The Future Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment,* (New York: Praeger, 1993); D. J. Nygren, M. D. Ukeritis, D. C. McClelland, & J. L. Hickman, "Outstanding Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: Leadership Competencies in Roman Catholic Religious Orders," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 4 (4) (Summer 1994).
      For general explanations of competency models (including some developed in religious hospitals and other faith-based organizations), see L. M. Spencer, Jr. & Signe M. Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance,* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993) and Richard E. Boyatzis, *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance,* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982).

Has the presence of an unusual talent prevented other competencies from being developed? Sometimes even a supposedly "good" competency can be detrimental to a leader.[9] I once met with someone we will call Mr. V, the CEO of a major company, who could look at any long column of three to six digit numbers and add them in his head almost instantly. This gift had undoubtedly worked to his benefit as he rose through the ranks of the company, but it did not do him much good in his job as CEO. The problem was, as happens with many people who have a particularly outstanding gift, he had not developed other leadership skills as he worked his way through the company, but relied on his talent and technical expertise. At meetings, he would find opportunities to show off his skill and even humiliate the other executives. Notice that it was not Mr. V's skill that was the problem, but the fact that he relied on it and did not develop other competencies more important to being CEO of a Fortune 500 company. This is a common problem in all areas of leadership. The great preacher or teacher who is not good with money or in relationships may leave a church or temple in financial and emotional shambles, or the business whiz whose only talent is balancing the books may be alienating the congregation in other ways.

Ecclesial Contexts: What About Religion? Because we are explicitly concerned with leadership competencies in ecclesial contexts, many of the models include an explicit theological competency. The studies done by Nygren and his colleagues[10] indicate that outstanding leaders are distinguished from their colleagues by, among other competencies, the Awareness of the Presence of God. Butler and Herman[11] discovered a similar competency in their Nazarene study. Sociologist of Religion Nancy Ammerman, in a discussion of the findings reported in her book *Congregation and Community,* hypothesized that an overarching skill or integrating competency which could be termed a "Theologically Based Understanding in Using Other Skills" was necessary for leaders of successful congregations. I believe these

---

9   Chris Argyris, "Teaching Smart People How to Learn," *Harvard Business Review,* Reprint #91301 (May-June 1991).

10   See note 8 above.

11   Butler & Herman, "Effective Ministerial Leadership."

competencies are general enough to allow religious values to be included in the model without pre-judging specific behaviors.

TABLE 1

Skills for Congregational Leaders[12]	Leadership Competencies[13]

Understanding the Environment
      Thriving congregations could to describe the
      environment they were facing.
	Information Seeking

Organizational Self-Assessment/Awareness
      Understanding what buildings, membership,
      traditions imply.
	Conceptual Thinking,
	Mission Orientation

Creative Use of Resources
      Thinking outside the box about resources.
      Scouring environment for resources.
      Mobilizing resources in creative ways.
	Achievement Orientation
	Initiative, Planning
	Flexibility (Adaptability)
	Relationship Building

Innovation
      Thinking creatively about new ways to
      carry out activities.
	Initiative, Planning, Adaptability

Use of Stories, Symbols, Rituals, Myths
      Doesn't matter what symbols,
      but whether used.
	Conceptual Thinking,
	Persuasiveness

Intentional Training of Outsiders to Become Members—Skilled leader helps less skilled gain skills they need for full participation in org.	Developing Others, Persuasiveness, Interpersonal Understanding

Conflict Management
      Because all organizations undergoing change
      have conflict.
	Flexibility, Persuasiveness
	Negotiation, Relationship Building,
	Interpersonal Understanding,
	Teamwork & Cooperation

OVERARCHING SKILL **Theologically-based Understanding in Using** **All of the Above Skills.**	**Awareness of the Presence of God**

---

[12] These are adapted from my notes taken during a discussion with Nancy Ammerman and others at the Program on Non-Profit Organizations National Seminar on Religious Leadership Meeting in January 1999. We were discussing the implications of the findings of Ammerman's research in *Congregation and Community* for theological education. Specifically, what skills did successful congregational leaders need to deal with the conditions Ammerman and her research team found that clergy encounter in the church today?

[13] These competencies are adapted from Nygren and Ukeritis, "Nonprofit,"; Nygren and Ukeritis, "Future,"; Nygren and Ukeritis, *The Future;* Nygren and others,

In fact, Nygren, et al.'s studies, which were done with Roman Catholic priests and sisters, found that the sisters expressed their Awareness of the Presence of God in different behaviors than the priests. The study's authors concluded that the very different education, training, socialization, and life experience of Catholic priests and sisters after Vatican II was the reason that the same competency was expressed in the two groups by different behaviors.

What About Inclusiveness? "Awareness of the Presence of God" or a "Theologically Based Understanding in Using Other Skills" involve values, but they are probably values that are stated in general enough terms to include at least most Christian leaders. One of the themes in the Callahan study, a theme that she cites as emerging in a number of voices, is Inclusive[ness]/Hospitality (Theme 4). Although this is often cited as a value of Christian churches, churches are, by definition, inclusive on some dimensions and exclusive on others, and I believe it would be difficult to come to agreement on what inclusiveness means. This is a cluster/competency where work on specific behaviors would clarify the competency and increase its usefulness. Competencies such as this one that include specific values that are themselves the focus of controversy in many churches will be more difficult to apply generally.

BEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPETENCIES FOR LEADERSHIP

This section of the paper is devoted to guiding the theologian, researcher, student, and pastor in reflecting on the biases and blind spots regarding studying leadership. The next step is constructive: As I point out biases, I will give a concrete presentation of the "behavioral competency method" from psychology focusing on how it systematically works to overcome the biases inherent in people's perceptions. My purpose here is to demonstrate to you how these natural biases operate and what methodological techniques we can use from social psychology to overcome them. I do not present a full competency model here, but draw from some I have used and reference several sources such as Nygren, Spencer, Boyatzis, and others cited in the footnotes. These should be consulted by anyone proposing to develop competency models.

At the level of the individual leader within the organization, psychological researchers ask, what learned behaviors are indicative of successful leadership?[14] At the organizational and sociological level, researchers examining what is happening in society and in religious organizations in particular ask questions such as: What factors in the organization's structure and/or culture are affecting the people? What factors in the environment are affecting (religious) organizations?[15] Given what we now know from our research about the environment our churches and other religious organizations are facing, what kinds of competencies, expertise, and knowledge should the outstanding leader have? Each voice represents expertise in more than one area related to what competencies are needed to lead faith-based organizations.

Two problems consistently occur when people are asked to choose leaders and the characteristics, knowledge, traits, abilities, and competencies necessary to lead. These two biases can be *decreased* using some systematic, social psychological (scientific) methodology specifically designed to counter the presence of these natural biases.[16]

CONCRETENESS IS GOOD, BUT NOT MISPLACED CONCRETENESS

In many studies of leadership, the respondents are asked to think about some person they know who is a good leader. It is likely that each respondent had a particular person in mind. If so, this is good methodologically because having an actual person to think about makes the evaluation concrete, and concrete evaluations are more accurate than global evaluations. However, once a particular person is in mind, what traits of that person distinguish him or her as a good

---

"Outstanding Leadership,"; and Spencer, Jr. and Spencer, "Competence at Work." I have matched the leadership competencies I believe needed for each of Ammerman's skills.

[14] See note 7 above.

[15] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation & Community,* (New Brunswick, NJ: 1997); Bob Wineburg, *A Limited Partnership: The Politics of Religion, Welfare, and Social Service,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[16] Notice that I said the biases are decreased; in our post-positivist view of science, we understand that the biases are never fully countered, but we try to the best of our tools and abilities.

leader?   Here is where we can get into the problem of misplaced concreteness.

One consistent bias involves image and appearance.[17] People have prejudices about what leaders should "look like." One of the most common prejudices, researched during the middle of the twentieth century, was that taller men made better leaders. Indeed, taller men were more likely to be promoted because they "looked more like a leader should." Although this perception is likely due to Hollywood movies and television portrayals of "leaders," and we counter it in many of our classes, the myth seems ingrained. The following incident comes from the early 1990s.

The members of the congregation liked the new young pastor well enough, but were concerned that he could never fill the shoes of the previous pastor. When members of the congregation were asked during a phone survey about their concerns, some actually said, "The new pastor is kind of young, and he should be tall and have a long beard like our former pastor." These congregation members were picking *salient but irrelevant cues* and relating them to leadership ability. Once the members had said the words out loud on the phone, most of them were embarrassed. To the members, the former pastor's beard, age, and height (and the current pastor's lack of all three) were symbols that represented his essence and thus his leadership. Most respondents immediately reflected on their answers: "Of course it is really not that..." but their biases had been betrayed. If they had had the opportunity of choosing the new pastor (they had not) there is a good chance they would have rejected this man because he did not fit their *image* of what a leader should look like. The situation is familiar to female clergy going into congregations that have always been led by male clergy or to any person seeking to lead a congregation where they are not of the dominant ethnic group or color. In fact, you may have fallen into this trap if you have heard yourself saying that the candidate "just doesn't look like a dean [pastor, president, board member]."

---

17 See Thomas Edward Frank, "The Discourse of Leadership Practice and the Practice of Administration," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1(1) (2002) : 10-12 for a discussion of the problems with trait theories in leadership.

The management and psychological research literature show that people frequently choose leaders using traits that are unrelated to leadership, such as height, and when they do, they often get ineffective leaders. The point is that we must distinguish (1) which characteristics or competencies are related to leadership on the job and (2) which capture our attention but are irrelevant. The studies done and reported by Callahan do not have a comparison group. While it is true that the theologians and researchers may be comparing good or outstanding leaders in their heads, they are each using a different small sample and are thus not likely to catch subtle differences or inadvertent biases that are obvious with the larger sample available when all the data are analyzed as psychologists do.

In summary, it is good to have specific people in mind because analyses involving specific targets tend to be more accurate. On the other hand, since the comparison group is particular to each individual in the Delphi group, each person is dealing with a very small sample and the group is unlikely to benefit from the knowledge of good/outstanding leaders across the sample.

The methodology of what we will call here the <u>behavioral competency approach</u> addresses the small sample shortcoming. In creating leadership competencies, the researcher asks those at all levels of the organization to <u>nominate</u> people he or she considers to be outstanding leaders and to nominate others as average. The researcher collects these nominations and then chooses, as outstanding leaders, only those who have received multiple nominations from multiple levels (subordinates, superiors, and peers and possibly others such as members or volunteers). An advantage of this method is that the nominator is thinking about a concrete, specific person as an outstanding leader, not an abstraction. When people at any level, from entry level to the top of the organization, are asked to nominate people who are outstanding, researchers have obtained excellent (reliable and valid) results. The behavioral competency approach has another advantage in that after the nominations are in, the researchers choose as outstanding leaders only those who received multiple nominations as outstanding leaders, thus ensuring a conservative measure-everyone who

made the cut was nominated by lots of people. There may be some good leaders who were not selected for the group of outstanding leaders, but we can be certain that everyone in the group of outstanding leaders is outstanding. This group of outstanding leaders, together with "typical leaders"-either those rated average or those not nominated—are then studied by researchers who do not know their group labels. Finally, the research team sorts out what behaviors distinguish outstanding from typical leaders.[18]

Uses of Competency Models

Once a competency model has been developed and is ready for use, we can ask: How will it be used? Competency models are often used in selection of leaders such as hiring a dean, president or other executive. Other factors (e.g., knowledge, experience) are also used, but a well-developed competency model can help avoid one of the most common problems in hiring, what I call boomeranging, or hiring to compensate for your last mistake. For example, our last associate was not organized, so we hire the most organized person we find without regard for any other characteristics.

Competency models are often used in education and training for both teaching and development of individuals and group. In most cases I am familiar with, people who want to use competency models to change develop plans with goals and specific actions. This works best when others with experience can give feedback.

OTHER COMPETENCY DETAILS

Threshold Competencies. Having a comparison group of typical performers to match to the average performers yields interesting information about the distinction between what competencies contribute to someone being an outstanding performer and what competencies are basic skills needed for the job. For example, if we were studying singing teachers, we would expect that having good pitch would be common to all of the singing teachers. Someone who is tone deaf would not even make it into the average category. Good pitch is a competency that does not distinguish outstanding from average performers. A person who cannot distinguish pitch

---

[18] The example provided above is a simplified description.

cannot even be a singing teacher. Therefore, good pitch is a threshold competency for a singing teacher. While threshold competencies are important to develop, especially for new students or those advancing in a field, it is important to distinguish threshold competencies from those that lead to superior performance. Jones might argue that Attention to Detail is a threshold competency for ministry.

Self-control is a threshold competency for most leadership positions. Leaders who rise to the top having managed to escape the consequences of a lack of self-control often set themselves up for spectacular public failures as they get further on in their careers. Ministry and politics are two jobs where this is particularly true.

Behavioral. Another point about these competencies, although they are based on traits and attitudes,[19] they are expressed as *behaviors that are observable.* This makes it easier for the researcher of course, but it also makes it easier to work across theological, research, social science, and practitioner groups because the specific behavior is used as a method of indicating whether a competency is demonstrated or not. This greatly reduces the problem of different groups having different meanings for the same competency. When Jones and I talk about paying attention to the mundane, I will understand that what he said had nothing to do with the accountant's Attention to Detail, but to behaviors that are transformed in a religious person to a *spiritual practice.* The point is that if we are going to use religious competencies for selection, education, and development, we need to work to make certain we are talking about the same thing when our voices seem to converge.

The next section is intended to be practical. I describe four of the competencies I have used in teaching and development and how I used them.

---

[19] Boyatzis, *The Competent Manager;* Spencer, Jr. and Spencer, *Competence at Work.*

Teaching Leadership Competencies: Revealing the Blind Spots

Blind spots are a real barrier to identifying competency weaknesses.[20]   One reason for this is that if we do not demonstrate a competency, we are often not aware of other people demonstrating it. We do not catch the subtle or not so subtle differences of behavior between doing things one way and doing them another, perhaps more effective way. All of us have blind spots, and accomplished people have (often unknowingly) developed routines, behavior, or even competencies to cover or compensate for their blind spots. Substituting one competency for another may work for a person as she or he moves through early challenges of a job or graduate school, but this strategy gets much more difficult to execute as more complex challenges and situations are faced and the "substitution" is no longer adequate.

The example below describes a graduate student's transition to her first faculty job. She unknowingly substituted the Planning Competency for Flexibility.[21] This is a common trap for a conscientious student, but a person called to ministry who falls into this trap is in for some rough times.

The first two sentences, below, define the intent of the person with regard to Planning. Indicators A-E are the behavioral indicators of planning. Each indicator was coded as to whether the person did it never, rarely, sometimes, or frequently and consistently.

Planning is the ability to identify and organize future, or intended actions with a result or direction.   It is indicated when a person:

---

20 These examples have resonated with past students, including Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students (some of whom were sent by their churches and others of whom were business people in leadership positions and on boards in their church, temple, mosque), Masters of Divinity (MDiv) students, and Doctor of Ministry (DMin.) students. The particular motivations present in most of us who seek higher education in the service of ministry makes these examples particularly relevant.

21 For the four competencies described below, I have used the wording developed by Professor Richard E. Boyatzis, together with the Faculty of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University, for the Managerial Assessment and Development class since this was the model on which I was trained in leadership competencies.

A. Sets goals or objectives in measurable terms;

B. Outlines a series of actions, at least three actions,
    toward achieving a goal (the link to the
    goal must be clear, if not explicit) or overcoming a
    stated obstacle to achievement of a goal;

C. Organizes materials or activities to accomplish a task
    or reach a goal;

D. Takes calculated risks, evident in assessing and
    moderating risks in a situation prior to
    taking action; or

E. Anticipates obstacles to a course of action and
    describes what to do to overcome them,
    should they occur (i.e., contingency planning).

I always thought that as long as I planned and did my homework, I could perform well. I knew I was a good planner. My planning ability was the reason I had consistently received top teaching ratings every semester while in graduate school in the large undergraduate classes I taught. Furthermore, my talks were not only rehearsed, but rehearsed with multiple critical, questioning audiences. During the time I was in graduate school, I kept a file of every question ever asked to any presenter at any seminar in our department (or outside the department, if I attended), and I could answer every one of those questions for my own research. I did all five planning behaviors frequently and consistently, but behavior E was what put me ahead of other people. I always anticipated problems and thought about alternatives. I also identified a number of solutions to any problem so that if one solution did not work, I had a second and third to pull out of my back pocket.

I knew as soon as I saw Flexibility, another competency, that it was not my strongest area. **Flexibility** is the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, or alter one's behavior to better fit the situation. It is often associated with a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. It is indicated when a person:

A.   Changes a plan, behavior, or approach to one that is more appropriate in response to a major change in a situation or changing circumstances; or

B.   Changes a plan, behavior, or approach to a situation to one perceived to be more appropriate when the desired impact is not occurring.

I always had a plan, and I always had a back-up plan (or two). It is painful to remember the times that my plans and back-up plans failed: I was paralyzed. I could not change my plan, behavior, or approach unless I had *anticipated* the change. Unless I knew the next step to take, I could not take any step.

During my first year on the job, I knew my colleagues were disappointed in me. I was so frustrated: Their expectations of me seemed to be so much higher than they were of my colleagues, and everyone seemed angry that I was somehow "not doing so well." One day, after I had learned the definitions above of Planning and Flexibility, my senior colleague on the competency project said to me, "You know, you are the only junior faculty I have ever seen demonstrate Flexibility during her interview." Knowing this was impossible, I asked him to recount when he had seen me demonstrate Flexibility. He gave an example from the job talk I had given. I stood up, and said, "I rehearsed the following with notes in front of a mirror: If any student asks me X (any of the following types of questions), pause, deep breath, look down, count to 3, look up, then say, "Let me try a personal example...." I then launched into a rehearsed example. What I had done was substituted Planning for Flexibility (and Planned to demonstrate Empathy). The faculty, believing my gestures and example spontaneous, had been impressed, but later they wondered why I did not match up to their expectations. They overloaded me with work, new teaching methods, new learning models, two dozen people to coordinate with on a daily basis, and told me I was "rigid." The day I realized they believed I demonstrated Flexibility when I knew I did not was redemptive for me. Yes, I had finally been unmasked as incompetent, but on this day, I knew what competency I lacked and could begin to address the deficit (with a plan—of course).

Although I once thought I wanted all my ministry students to be as "conscientious" as I was—to always have a couple of "back pockets zingers" to pull out to impress every crowd. I now realize that when life gets busy and stressful and they are working on more than one sermon or talk a semester, teaching more than one class, writing more than one paper, have family needing attention, or trying to lead the church, temple, synagogue, seminary, divinity school, classroom, DMin or MDiv Program, Faculty Meeting, Bible Study, Finance Meeting, or get twin three year olds and a five year old to bed, a little Flexibility, *the ability to change a behavior, plan or approach in response to a change in the situation or circumstance or when the desired impact is not occurring* is worth all the Planning in the world. I had always (usually) been able to get by without demonstrating Flexibility before, but when the situation became really challenging for me, I could not get by substituting Planning for Flexibility. This is a situation faced by everyone in ministry, everyone with children or extended family, everyone who engages life.

Until I looked at the behavioral indicators, I had not realized that Flexibility was a competency that I never demonstrated. The changes in teaching and research methods over the past two decades in my field have meant I had to develop Flexibility, but it was certainly not something I learned in graduate school. Most of us who are good in school learn to "do our homework," and doing our homework means planning. Good planning and a couple of contingency plans meant you never had to adapt. What I have seen of theological education in the past seven years indicates that similar changes are taking place, and that the need for Flexibility-that is, having a plan, but being able to adapt when the situation changes in unexpected ways, is crucial.

ANOTHER BLIND SPOT

The difference between the competencies Persuasiveness and Negotiating illustrates another blind spot that may, for many of us, stem from our education. Persuasiveness is one of the most important competencies to ministry in teaching and preaching. Negotiating is also important. Here is Negotiating:

Negotiating is the ability to stimulate individuals or groups toward resolution of a conflict. This ability may be demonstrated in situations in which the person is one of the parties in the conflict or merely a third party. It is indicated when a person:

A.   Involves all parties in openly discussing the conflict with the intent of resolving the conflict;

B.   Identifies areas of mutual interest or benefit, often an objective to which all parties can aspire; or

C.   Determines the concerns, or positions of each of the parties and communicates them to all involved as an initial step toward open discussion of the conflict.

When I first looked at Persuasiveness and Negotiating, I did not see much difference, but I knew I did not demonstrate Negotiating, even though some of my colleagues thought I did. Almost all work, including teaching, was done in groups (of advanced doctoral students and faculty) in my department. Whenever a group would face a decision, I would listen carefully to everyone's ideas and reasoning, determine for myself the best strategy, and then convince the others by appealing to their self-interest, using questions to help them take ownership of ideas, and anticipating what arguments and comments would appeal to them at the time. The fact that most of my colleagues (advanced doctoral students and faculty) thought I was negotiating merely meant I had learned "the demeanor" of negotiating. Once I realized I never demonstrated Negotiating, I showed my students, and some of them were able to see that they also substituted Persuasiveness for Negotiating. We had becomes so good at indicators C, D, and E of Persuasiveness (below), our own colleagues believed they were being negotiated with instead of persuaded.

Persuasiveness is the ability to convince another person, or persons of the merits of, or to adopt, an attitude, opinion, or position (i.e., getting others to do or think what you want them to do or think). It is indicated when a person:

A. Gives directions or orders based on the rules, procedures, government regulations, authority of their position in the organization, or personal authority without soliciting the input of others;

B. Explicitly expresses a need or desire to persuade others;

C. Attempts to convince others by appealing to their interests (i.e., pointing out what each will gain personally);

D. Attempts to convince others by anticipating how people will react to an argument, appeal, or situation and develops the communication to their level of understanding or emotional condition at that time;

E. Uses questions or other techniques explicitly intended to result in the audience feeling and accepting ownership of the ideas, projects, or activities; or

F. Explicitly expresses concern with his/her image and reputation, the image or reputation of his/her organization, or its products and services.

So what's wrong with substituting Persuasiveness for Negotiation if you are really good at it (besides that it annoys your colleagues when they find out how arrogant you are)? As a new junior faculty member, I was in a much more challenging position than I had ever been in before, one where I needed skills I did not have. Some people sensed my attempts to convince them rather than to come to group consensus and considered my persuasive behavior to be manipulative, and this made it more difficult to get work done.

While my MBA and law students preferred persuasion, my psychologically oriented colleagues preferred negotiating. I had to be able to do both, and I also realized why I had to be able to teach my MBA and law students to do both: because

after they graduated they would work in their communities and need both competencies. I also teach both competencies to ministry students, because they will be working in the same communities with business people, lawyers, social, workers, and psychologists, and they will need both. This view that leaders must move beyond relying on a single competency or single sets of competencies is reinforced by Cormode's[22] work on multi-layered leadership.

The point of walking the reader through these two examples is to show you some of the nuances of learning competencies. You can have eyes but not see; that is, if you do not have the competency, it will be difficult for you to see it. I had been working with the material for a few months, trying to learn to identify the behaviors in others, when I realized, "I never do that!" A supportive, knowledgeable community or even a supportive knowledgeable person can be helpful when trying to learn new things. Many of my students (of all ages) have someone close to them give them a signal to indicate "practice your new behavior" (e.g., in my case negotiating; in another case, demonstrating empathy).

How Do We Learn?

Even if we know what competencies are needed for a religious leader to be effective, do we know how to develop those competencies? The answer is yes. I know this because of my experience: teaching, consulting, and personal work. The competency studies cited in this document are by researchers and consultants much more experienced than I who facilitate leadership competency acquisition. Competency acquisition is a process that involves change. Change requires understanding yourself as you are, envisioning a self or situation to which you aspire, and committing to working for a period of time with outside feedback to change some behaviors.[23]

So what's the conclusion regarding competency models and performance? As difficult as performance is to understand, conceptualize, and to measure in ministry, even a crude

---

22 Scott Cormode, "Multi-Layered Leadership: The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd, and Gardener," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2002).

23 I have found Argyris's "Teaching Smart People to Learn" particularly helpful. See note 9 above.

measure is better than no measure if you want to develop competencies for effective leadership. In asking the participants in her Delphi study to answer, "What competencies are expected of leaders of faith communities?" Callahan probably expected them to choose effective leaders, and most of the participants probably did. However, there was probably ambivalence about how to define an effective leader. Some people might have thought that Pastor A is not very successful because he is in a difficult situation but he is certainly the most effective person the congregation has had.

In some of the studies that interview pastors and their congregations about their situations, we are missing important information when there is no information on performance. Effectiveness or performance information is difficult to get, and I am not criticizing large studies that do not measure this variable; I have been in the same boat. However, different conclusions can be drawn from the information if we know which data is from effective graduates or clergy and which is from less effective respondents. More researchers should follow the lead set by Ammerman, Nygren and Ukeritis, Butler and Herman, and their colleagues who measure performance: theological educators would have more useful data to consider if there were more studies that considered effectiveness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Congregation and Community.*

Argyris, Chris. "Teaching Smart People How to Learn." *Harvard Business Review,* Reprint #91301 (May-June 1991).

Boyatzis, Richard E. *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982.

Butler, D. Martin and Robert Herman. "Effective Ministerial Leadership." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 9(3)m (Spring 1999) : 229-239.

Callahan, Sharon. "A Delphi Study of the Competencies Needed by Leaders of Roman Catholic Faith Communities in Western Washington Through the Year 2000." PhD diss., Seattle University, 1996.

————. "Leadership in Ecclesial Contexts: Integration of Art and Competence." *Journal of Religious Leadership* (2003).

Cormode, Scott. "Multi-Layered Leadership: The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd, and Gardener." *Journal of Religious Leadership 1,* no. 2 (Fall 2002).

Frank, Thomas Edward. "The Discourse of Leadership Practice and the Practice of Administration." *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1(1) (2002) : 10-12.

Jones, L. Gregory. "Mundane Excellence." The Christian Century (January 2-9, 2002) : 33.

Nygren, David and Miriam Ukeritis. "Future of Religious Orders in the United States." Origins 22, no. 15 (September 24, 1992).

————. *The Future Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment.* New York: Praeger, 1993.

————. "Nonprofit Executive Leadership Education Study." *Theological Education XXIX,* no. 117-131 (1992).

Nygren, D. J., M. D. Ukeritis, D. C. McClelland, & J. L. Hickman.
    "Outstanding Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations:
    Leadership Competencies in Roman Catholic Religious
    Orders." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 4(4)m
    (Summer 1994).

Spencer, L. M., Jr. & Signe M. Spencer. *Competence at Work:
    Models for Superior Performance.* New York: John Wiley &
    Sons, 1993.

Weems, Lovett H., Jr. *Church Leadership: Vision, Team Culture,
    and Integrity.* Nashville: Abingdon
    Press, 1993.

Wineburg, Bob. *A Limited Partnership: The Politics of Religion,
    Welfare, and Social Service.* New York:
    Columbia University Press, 2001.