

**The Theory of Attentional Leadership and the
Governing Values of Emerging Leaders**

**Reflecting on the Structure and Future for Researching, Teaching, and Practicing
Leadership Development**

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Spring, 2013

Introduction

There is no country, state, village, or community in the world where leadership and influence is not exercised, where higher levels of performance is not sought after—at every level, from youth to adult. Yet what exactly constitutes leadership, influence—even peak performance, remains in debate.

Many theories, models, principles, methods, strategies, and tools are offered to help understand, explain, and even train high performing, influential leaders—yet most provide a limited angle of vision from which to view a more broad theoretical picture.

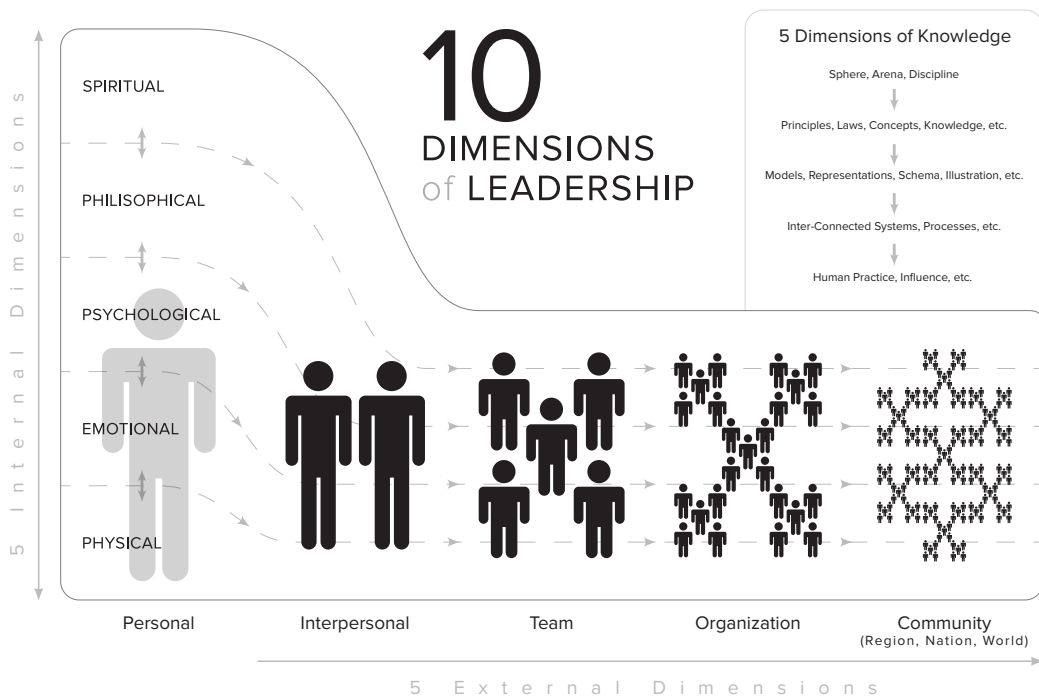
Clarifying what leadership is, the theoretical frameworks it includes, and how to “become” a leader, influencer, or peak performer, continues to evolve. While a plethora

of academic and practical models abound, many with a growing empirical research base, the science and practice of leadership remains in its infancy—often compared to “civil war surgery.”

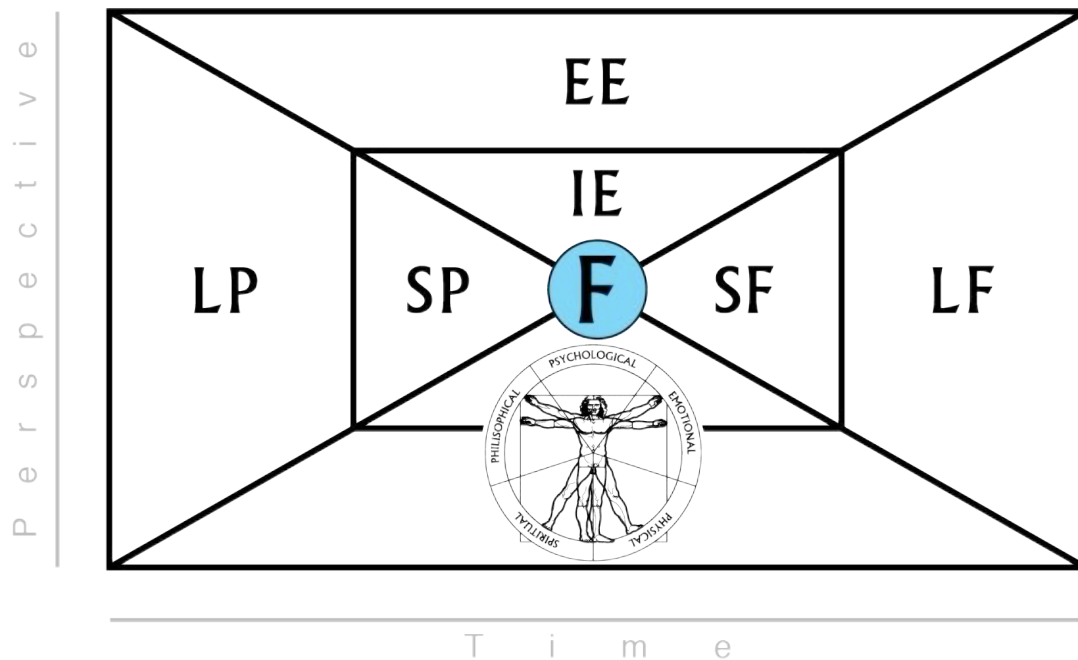
In this working paper I seek to address two main topics. First I seek to add a new, more holistic perspective on the study and practice of leadership—what I call the theory of “Attentional Leadership” (TAL), with the primary purpose of framing leadership, influence, and peak performance theories and practices into one high level yet comprehensive framework based on where, when and for what duration attention is placed within the 10, 12, the 15 dimensions models introduced here.

To frame the theory of “Attentional Leadership”, the author proposes 3 evolving frameworks to describe leadership, influence, peak performance theories and practices.

The first is a 10-Dimension static model that identifies 5 internal dimensions and 5 external dimensions—framing leadership, influence and peak performance theories and practices without consideration to time or space. See 10-Dimensions of Leadership model below:



The second is the 12-Dimension dynamic model that includes the dimensions of time and space but frames leadership, influence, and peak performance only at the individual level. This model draws upon the theory of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998, 2008), peak performance (Garfield, 1987; Orlick, 2007), and positive psychology literatures (Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 2003, 2006), which offer a broader theoretical framework for understanding the inter-connected systems of personal leadership (Neck & Manz, 2012). This model introduced the theory of “Attentional Leadership” by demonstrating when, where, and for what duration an individual influences him or herself within the 12 dimensions at the personal level. See 12-Dimensions of Personal Leadership model below:

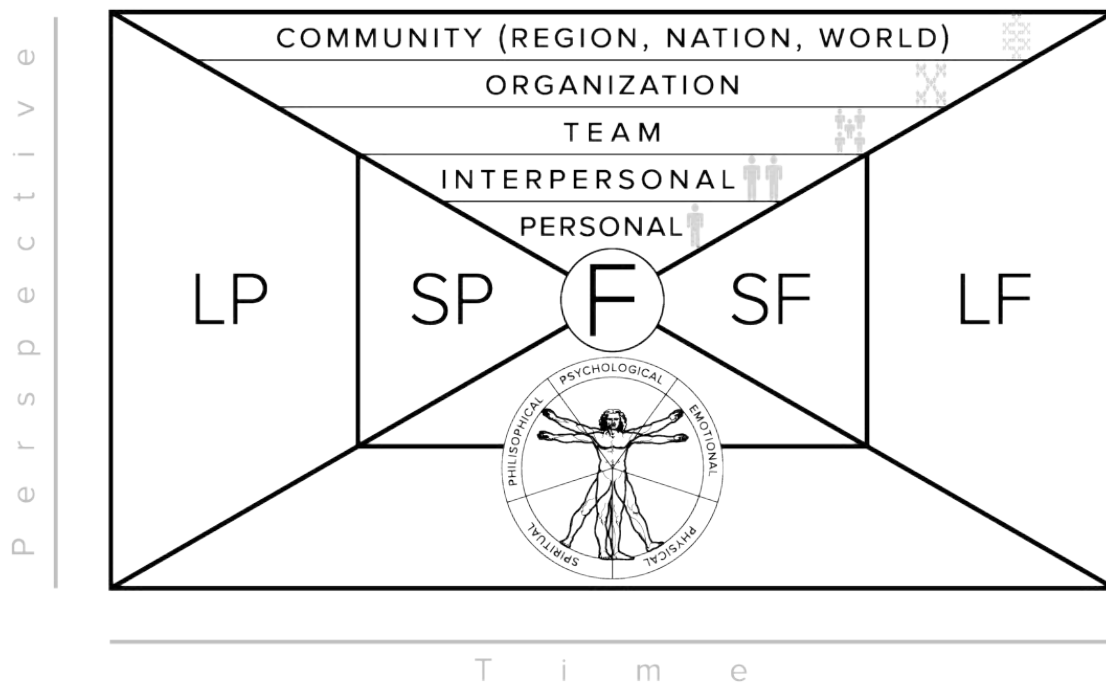


Lastly, the author will aggregate the 10 and 12-Dimension models together into one comprehensive 15-Dimension model called the theory of “Attentional Leadership”. This model is offered to help frame leadership, influence, and peak performance theories and practices within any “Meaningful Life Arena.”

The 15-Dimension theory of “Attentional Leadership” begins inside the self (5 internal dimensions)—including the physical, emotional, psychological, philosophical, spiritual), then extends outside the self (5 external dimensions)—including the personal, interpersonal, team, organization, community/community, etc...). It then expands by adding four dimensions of time. (i.e., Long Future, Short Future, Long Past, Short Past). At the center (F) represents the placement of attention, focus, what Csikszentmihalyi calls Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) or what Heifetz and Williams might call “the work at the center” (R. A. Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009, Williams, 2005). In either example, it is where attention and resources are being targeted at any moment in time to influence

or achieve higher levels of performance. It is also where meditative practice and mindfulness occur (Langer, 1990).

Before arriving at the aggregated 15-Dimension model, the author temporarily replaces the 5 external dimensions within the 10-dimension model and replaces them with 2 external dimensions (Immediate Environment and Extended Environment) to focus first on personal leadership practice before returning the 5 external dimensions in order to include the practice of leadership, influence, or peak performance beyond the self and into broader human contexts. When aggregated the 15-Dimension model includes all previous dimensions from both models. See below:



In sum: the theory of “Attentional Leadership” is designed to aggregate many theoretical elements within a variety of literatures to better understand leadership through the lens of influence and peak performance within any “Meaningful Life Arena” (Jackson, 2003).

A second goal of this paper is to drill deeper and magnify one of the fifteen dimensions of this new theory (the “Philosophical” dimension), in order to better understand the core values and philosophies of leaders. I call this building one’s “Philosophy of Engagement”. The philosophical dimension in this case constitutes four core themes. The first includes “ways of knowing” (internalized beliefs and/or principles). The second includes “ways of seeing” (internalized attitudes and/or perspectives). The third includes “ways of being” (internalized qualities and/or virtues). And the fourth, “ways of acting” (internalized rules and/or standards) practiced by leaders, influencers, and peak performers.

To accomplish this second goal, the author surveyed the Harvard Kennedy School’s Mid-Career Master of Public Administration class of 2013 (N=96) to identify their core values, beliefs, and leadership philosophies based on the four core themes above.

Finally, this paper comments on the application of this new theoretical model for the purpose of framing the research and practice of leadership, influence, and peak performance development within multiple professional, educational, civic, and other developmental spaces. The author suggests that this model may provide a general framework from which to view other theories, models and practices—even a model that helps emerging leadership programs identify the various theoretical and practical elements that will be used in building their leadership development programs.