



Lincoln: Portrait of a Values Leader

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Abstract

Gilbert W. Fairholm's model of Values Leadership is fundamentally distinct among other leadership theories in that it is grounded chiefly in what leaders think about and value, rather than in what they do. This paper seeks to illustrate President Abraham Lincoln's adherence to three core values of union, liberty, and equality, and postulates that his actions leading up to the Civil War and during his presidency demonstrate effective Values Leadership. Fairholm's model consists of five interwoven parts: Leadership, Creating an Excellence Culture, Perfecting Excellence Technologies, Visioning, and Results. Lincoln executes, at least in part, each of these criteria. The Values Leadership model provides the framework for leadership based on universal values held by all stakeholders: values which ultimately supersede even the most virulent political beliefs. By establishing his leadership in these superior values, Abraham Lincoln was able to preserve the Union in a time of unprecedented political upheaval, and in the process, eradicate the institution of slavery.

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Introduction

President Abraham Lincoln led the United States through the most internally turbulent time in the nation's history. When he took office in March of 1861, less than one hundred years after American democracy was born, discordant values and visions for the future had long since pervaded the populace and spread like cracks throughout the country. Differences of opinion had escalated into fundamental factions among the people, and dividing lines became political parties grounded on the issues of slavery and states' rights. The emotional nature of these divergent parties ultimately led to the secession of seven southern states and the creation of what the South deemed the Confederate States of America. On Inauguration Day, the 16th President of the United States became responsible for the reconciliation of these violently opposed beliefs, as well as for the preservation of the crumbling American nation.

The following will demonstrate that Lincoln's adherence to fundamental values delineated in our founding documents had significant influence over his leadership, and postulates that a leadership grounded in such values is unique among other styles. Lincoln's value of union was his chief guide, and his unshakeable devotion to it shaped the political objectives he pursued and the policies he instituted as President of the United States. On a secondary level of influence were the values of liberty and equality. His lifelong devotion to the three values of union, liberty, and equality gave his vision for the future and his actions in time of war credibility and sustainability.

Such guiding principles form the basis of Gilbert W. Fairholm's Values Leadership model, and this paper proceeds by examining Lincoln's presidency through its distinctive lens. When considering Lincoln's leadership in terms of the Values Leadership model, one gains clearer insight into his intentions and their manifestations as policies for the nation. This paper will illustrate that Lincoln's fundamental values, derived from the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution, were his constant motivation and guide. As such, it is a paper regarding what Lincoln thought about and valued, and a description of his personal philosophy, which formed the context of all of his decisions, rather than an evaluation of the singular or disconnected events of his political life. His successes, failures, and fame are better understood as grounded in his deep-seated convictions. Fairholm's Values Leadership model provides a useful framework for this type of analysis of Lincoln's leadership, and the model's philosophy and main elements will be illustrated through a description of Lincoln's leadership. Finally, it will be argued that Lincoln's Values Leadership provided him with the means to rally the country around a common purpose at a time when that may have seemed impossible, learning him history's honor as both the "Great Emancipator" and the President who preserved the faltering Union.

FAIRHOLM'S VALUES LEADERSHIP MODEL

Gilbert W. Fairholm, in his work on Values Leadership, describes what makes Values Leadership distinctive from preceding theories: that "the central orientation is on what leaders *think about and value*" rather than who the leader is or what the leader does to influence followers (Fairholm, 1995, pg. 68) [author's italics]. Fairholm (1995) argues that previous leadership theories that ignore values are deficient. His model is based on common values, which in the United States are typically those enumerated in the founding documents such as liberty, respect for life, justice, unity, and happiness. These are not personal virtues that may guide an individual's actions such as moderation or cleanliness, but instead are the overarching moral values that help shape a community of people, and guide an individual's actions in a broader sense. Fairholm refers to these values as "philosophic principles," and believes they are an essential element of leadership because they motivate followers to rally around a common purpose, and inspire followers to devote their energy toward its realization. The task of the leader, for Fairholm, is to help align followers' behavior with followers' values.

The Values Leadership Model has two goals: better-quality performance of followers and mutual growth of all stakeholders. In short, the Values Leadership model is focused on the "bottom line" as well as producing self-led followers more aligned with their values (Fairholm, 1995). The Values Leadership model includes five necessary elements: a leader mindset of "caring and development," a values-laden culture that fosters excellence, the leader's one-on-one teaching and counseling with followers, and the leader's espousing and modeling a vision based in common values, with the results being both self-led and more productive

followers (Fairholm, 1995, pg. 71). An evaluation of Abraham Lincoln's leadership through these five criteria will be discussed below. Lincoln led based on values, and his leadership fulfills nearly all of Fairholm's requirements for a Values Leader. However where Lincoln's actions contradict the model also provide useful insight into his leadership. Thus some general conclusions regarding the application of Fairholm's model will be discussed.

LEADER MIND-SET

Fairholm's (1995) first criterion for Values Leadership is the leader mindset, which he calls simply "Leadership" (pg. 71). It is the distinguishing factor between Values Leadership and other leadership theories, because it involves how the leader fundamentally views the world, and what values motivate him to lead the organization. Absolutely essential to a would-be Values Leader is a focus on "helping others become their best self" (pg. 72). Values leaders must have a concern for the development of others, as well as the overall organization.

When analyzing Abraham Lincoln's mindset, several aspects of his personality and character warrant explanation. Lincoln was born in 1809 to a poor family in Kentucky. He spent his childhood being uprooted from place to place so that his father could find work. As soon as he could himself, Lincoln sought and maintained employment in odd jobs around his home. Biographer David H. Donald provides an explanation for Lincoln's capacity and desire for hard work. Donald (1995) depicts Lincoln, even as a young boy, as a believer in fatalism, who instead of being lulled into complacency with his idea of predestination, "worked indefatigably for a better world—for himself, for his family, and for his nation" (pg.15). Indeed, despite his rocky childhood, Lincoln had an insatiable desire to learn and to improve himself and the world around him, with his lifelong ambition being awakened at a young age. By the time Lincoln was a young man, he saw himself as destined to occupy a heroic role (Wilson, 1962).

The three most significant values in Lincoln's life were union, liberty, and equality, in that order of importance. All were derivatives of the Declaration of Independence and the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, the ideas of which Lincoln came to see as more reliable and meaningful than the law or the powers of the government. Lincoln routinely looked to these values for guidance, referred to them in orations and debate, and as his life went on, refined their meaning and importance until they became the bedrock of his personal philosophy.

It is important to note that while Lincoln may have focused more consistently on unity and freedom, he believed that the Declaration's promise that "all men are created equal" was the presupposition for our endowment with unalienable rights. Thus, the notion of equality among men in terms of basic human worth is something that Lincoln recognized. This conviction generally translated into a political platform of support for equality under law, but not equality in all respects. This issue was particularly relevant in Lincoln's complex beliefs and political stance regarding the institution of slavery. When running for Senate, Lincoln famously defended himself from Stephen Douglass's attack that Lincoln was a radical abolitionist, arguing that to be antislavery did not mean he believed in racial equality. However, he said, "There is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Horton, 2006, pg. 70).

Unity took precedence over his other principles precisely because Lincoln knew that without a Union the values of our founding documents could not be secure. By the time he reached the Presidency in 1861 (when seven southern states had already seceded), Lincoln was driven above all else to preserve the union, and his devotion to this principle became the singular premise that shaped all of his political decisions (Donald, 1995). In a letter during the war which clearly indicates this posture, Lincoln wrote:

My paramount objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union (Basler, 1939, pg. 168).

By making the continued Union his chief priority, Lincoln was able to wade through the conflicting demands by various parties in the war and maintain a steady, clear goal.

Lincoln's value of freedom became combined with that of equality under the law, as secondary influencers. The two helped shape his lifelong aversion to the institution of slavery. Unlike traditional abolitionists, however, Lincoln saw that slavery was wholly embedded in the fabric of Southern society and did not at first advocate emancipation. Rather, Lincoln firmly opposed the extension of slavery into new territories. Slavery, he considered, needed to constantly expand or it would die, because soil eventually became useless and farmers would have to find new land. If they could not bring slaves with them, Lincoln thought that the institution as a whole would inevitably end. Eventually, though, Lincoln began to realize that slavery would not end peacefully. It was upon this recognition that after his first defeat for the Senate in 1855, he asked, "Can we, as a nation, continue together *permanently—forever* half slave and half free?" (Donald, 1995, pg. 207) [author's italics]. His connection between the values of freedom and equality under the law came to characterize much of his subsequent political beliefs, and eventually the reputation of his presidency.

In his final speech before his assassination, Lincoln told the audience in Washington that public policy ought to reflect an ethical purpose, which should be treated as superior to common political posturing (Fehrenbacher, 1960). "Important principles" said Lincoln, "may, and must, be inflexible" (pg. 168). Lincoln's demonstrated leader mindset is parallel to the requirements of Fairholm's (1995) first criterion for Values Leadership. He is concerned for the development of others in terms of their unalienable rights, concerned for the country's preservation, and driven by fundamental values.

CREATING AN EXCELLENCE CULTURE

The second task for Fairholm's (1995) Values Leader is the creation of an excellence culture. This entails molding the surrounding culture of the organization with a foundation of values held by all stakeholders. An excellence culture should contain expectations for the future and values that condition behavior. The culture will provide legitimacy to the cause, and will serve as a constant reinforcement mechanism for commonly shared values. It must set standards and explain positions (Fairholm, 1995). Also, Fairholm cautions, "Without general agreement on acceptable behavior and the value context within which they will operate, organization members are free to follow divergent paths. Coherent, cooperative action is impossible where common agreement- at least implicitly- is missing" (Fairholm, 1995, pg. 72). Abraham Lincoln attempted to create a culture based upon fundamental values, but he did not entirely succeed. To be sure, a large segment of his followers had such divergent beliefs that they had seceded from the country entirely. Still, Lincoln led on the founding values that he believed all could see as legitimate, and he worked to shape the values of all Americans without being deterred by disagreement.

Throughout his political life, Lincoln took to the podium to communicate his values of union, liberty, and equality and to mold public opinion toward them. Lincoln's speeches are famous for his eloquent articulation of our founding values and their importance. For example, when the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed in 1854, it reversed the major provision of the Missouri Compromise that slavery would be banned in the Louisiana Purchase territory. As a result, free and slave states became more polarized than ever before. The law incited years of civil war in Kansas, gave birth to the Republican party, and provided the impetus for Lincoln to give more than 175 speeches of which the main theme was the necessity to exclude slavery from the territories as a first step toward the institution's extinction everywhere (McPherson, 2009). After the Kansas - Nebraska Act, Lincoln's rhetoric on the issue of slavery escalated. Of the law, he said, "Our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it... Let us readopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it" (McPherson, 2009, pg. 17). After this time, Lincoln increasingly attacked the institution of slavery as a "monstrous injustice," and declared, "There can be no moral right in connection with one man's making a slave of another" (Donald, 1995, pg. 176).

These speeches were intended to set standards for the American people by appealing to their common, founding values. His law partner noted after one such oration, "His speech was full of fire and energy and force; it was logic; it was pathos; it was enthusiasm; it was justice, equity, truth, and right set ablaze by the

divine fires of a soul maddened by the wrong; it was hard, heavy, knotty, gnarly, backed with wrath” (Donald, 1995, pg. 192). Moreover, the *New York Tribune* commented, “Mr. Lincoln is one of Nature’s orators, using his rare powers solely and effectively to elucidate and to convince, though their inevitable effect is to delight and electrify as well” (Donald, 1995, pg. 240).

Lincoln was successful in creating a vehicle out of the political culture in America to espouse his values, which could then be internalized by followers. However, while Lincoln set standards using these values, not all followers internalized them, and it cannot be said that his speeches settled the slavery issue or created a culture of acceptance toward blacks in America. Even after the Emancipation Proclamation, which was the height of Lincoln’s influence over the matter, severe differences of opinion continued. Recall that Fairholm (1995) suggests that without agreement on acceptable behavior, “coherent, cooperative action” is impossible. It must be conceded that Lincoln did not succeed in making the entire populace cooperate. However, making an entire country of people cooperate may be impossible even under the very best of political circumstances. Despite Lincoln’s presidency beginning with war and ending with an assassination, he at least attempted to energize the culture of the United States toward a realization of their founding values. Even with immense challenges, Abraham Lincoln worked to create a culture of excellence conducive to his Values Leadership.

VISIONING

The third element of Fairholm’s Values Leadership model is visioning, which Fairholm argues is the “most critical leadership role” (1995, pg. 72). The vision defines who the group desires to become and for what they desire to be known. Fairholm specifically cites the founding documents, such as the Declaration and U.S. Constitution, as sources for our most powerful values. The vision inspires action, and encourages stakeholders to align with the leader’s values and thereby realize their greatest potential, all while expounding the common purpose. Fairholm (1995) writes that visioning impacts all of the other elements of the Values Leadership model. For this reason, it is not surprising that in many of the speeches wherein Lincoln was setting standards for a Values Leadership culture (as discussed in the previous section) he was also illustrating his vision for the United States’ potential future.

Donald (1995) writes that Abraham Lincoln foresaw a world wherein “no majority should have the power to limit the most fundamental rights of a minority to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (pg. 227). In the hopes of awakening a common bond among the populace, Lincoln often stressed that the United States was and should be more than just a political union; he saw the U.S. as a nation. Almost always, Lincoln’s speeches looked forward into the future, asking and inspiring the American people to take action toward his goals of unity, freedom and equality. In one such address, he said, “Let us have faith that right makes might, and in faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it” (McPherson, 2009, pg. 23). In the face of repeated defeats in civil war battles, as well as in attempts to reconcile the opinions of opposite political parties, Lincoln relied on his vision to “energize individual effort and sustain commitment over time” as Fairholm suggests is necessary for success (1995, pg. 74). By giving hundreds of speeches, debating, writing letters to newspapers, and role modeling his beliefs, Abraham Lincoln communicated constantly with the American people. In such communications, he consistently illustrated the meaning of unity, liberty, and equality, and the potential greatness that a future based on them would be.

Richard N. Current (1977) provides sharp criticism of commonly held beliefs regarding Lincoln, especially in this area of his connection with the people. In fact, he argues that Lincoln did not have much real effect on popular opinion of issues. While Lincoln had a gift of “holding together antagonistic elements,” he did not succeed in molding public opinion (Current, 1977, pg. 147). Historian Richard Hofstadter (1948) goes further, arguing that Lincoln was simply a follower of public opinion. Current (1977) writes, “His strengths seem to have been those of a politician’s politician, a manager of the party machine, a wire puller—in short, such a ‘contriver’ as he professed not to be” (pg. 147). Rather than attempting to convince the public, like Presidents Andrew Jackson and Franklin Roosevelt, Lincoln did not commit to positions and would avoid issues whenever possible. Current argues that “his aim simply to save the union” meant that Lincoln sacrificed other important goals for the nation (Current, 1977, pg. 147).

Taking this criticism into account, it must be conceded that at least during his time, Lincoln did not entice all of his followers into his vision for America's future. If just 80,000 more people had voted for his democratic challenger, Lincoln would have lost his reelection bid. Current (1977) argues that while he won reelection and saved the union, he did not succeed in achieving other governmental aims, and thus he cannot be credited as having had an effective relationship with the people. When evaluating Lincoln through Fairholm's (1995) model, we see that Fairholm expects a vision based in shared values to incite a response in "most" people (Fairholm, 1995, pg. 73). Lincoln won a comfortable majority in his reelection, and while not all were adherents to his vision for America, it is reasonable to assume that his supporters in the election were.

PERFECTING EXCELLENCE TECHNOLOGIES

The fourth requirement of Fairholm's (1995) Values Leadership model is "perfecting excellence technologies" and it describes the importance of "face to face leadership" (pg. 74). In this leadership technologies component, the leader actively seeks to individually share with followers the decision making, planning, and shaping of organizational goals or policies. This practice also allows the leader to further develop the vision based on the values of all members. By providing opportunities for the follower to become individually involved in the leadership process, the follower may become increasingly self-confident and self-led, as well as more completely aligned with the leader's vision (Fairholm, 1995).

Because it is more difficult for a President to carry out this element with his principle followers (the American people) due to their sheer number and geographic limitations, the clearest example of Abraham Lincoln's use of this element was among his cabinet members. Lincoln purposefully set out to create "a compound cabinet," comprised of secretaries of both geographical and partisan diversity (Donald, 1995, pg. 282). Knowing that the country was falling apart, Lincoln intended for his cabinet to quarrel and represent the various views of the American people: to act as a microcosm for the country (Donald, 1995).

Lincoln actively sought his cabinet's input in his decisions and their advice in shaping his policy. Goodwin (2005) writes that in defending Lincoln's choice of juxtaposing political opposites in his cabinet, Secretary of State William Seward said, "a Cabinet which should agree at once on every such question would be no better or safer than one counselor" (Goodwin, 2005, pg. 746). Goodwin (2005) herself concludes that Lincoln afforded his advisors the opportunity to take part in "the labor and glory of the struggle that would reunite and transform their country and secure their own places in posterity" (pg. 747). The President's relationship with his cabinet is an apt demonstration of Fairholm's "council-with" criteria for Values Leadership. Lincoln routinely considered his cabinet members' opinions while formulating his vision for the future and making his most significant decisions. In doing so, as Goodwin (2005) argues, he allowed them the opportunity to align with their shared values and become a part of the leadership process.

RESULTS

The final element of the Values Leadership model is the results. Fairholm (1995) describes the results of this style of leadership as both the development of self-led followers, and the increased performance of the organization as a whole. A successful values leader "maximizes follower talents for the sake of both the bottom line and the individual" (Fairholm, 1995, pg. 75).

Lincoln's "bottom line" as president was the preservation of the Union, and it has been illustrated that he saw it as his "Paramount object" (McPherson, 2009, pg. 46). It is reasonable to argue that in Lincoln's specific case, the great majority of his focus had to be given to this organizational goal, leaving less for the development of his followers. Still, Lincoln's Values Leadership definitely attempted to improve the alignment between his followers' behavior and their values, especially in regards to the issue of slavery.

As was stated above, Lincoln's rhetoric on slavery, over time, became more and more of a focal point in his personal beliefs and administration. Recall that Lincoln saw equality in terms of the Declaration of Independence's illustration that all men are created equal, and that when the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed, Lincoln made many speeches condemning the extension of the institution of slavery, arguing that it tarnished the principles of the American republic. Historian James Oliver Horton (2006) explains that the institution

appalled Lincoln, but initially he felt constrained by the U.S. Constitution's protection of property, including human property, "placing it beyond the reach of his personal morality" (pg. 63). While Lincoln was outspokenly antislavery, his beliefs never translated into policies until, after a string of defeats, and with the prospects of saving the Union appearing quite bleak, Lincoln reformed his slavery position and made it the centerpiece of his strategy and sole hope of victory.

McPherson (2009) explains that Lincoln saw an Emancipation Proclamation as a war-time strategy that would severely weaken the Confederacy by robbing them of their principal labor force. Slaves had been escaping over the borders into union states throughout the war, and an Emancipation Proclamation would "accelerate that process" (pg. 47). Concluding that "we must free the slaves or ourselves be subdued," Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 as a political maneuver to save the Union (Donald, 1995, pg. 362). On January 1, 1863, all slaves would be "then, thenceforward, and forever, free" (Donald, 1995, pg. 375). When it was decreed, the *Chicago Tribune* dubbed it, "the greatest proclamation ever issued by a man" (Donald, 1995, pg. 377).

While it was unquestionably a strategic decision, Donald (1995) argues that in time, Lincoln saw his Emancipation Proclamation as "the crowning achievement of his administration" because it linked his "name with something that would resound to the interest of his fellow man" (pg. 377). The proclamation was in the interest of his fellow man because Lincoln grounded it in his overarching value of union, which in turn would ensure that liberty and equality could also exist. After the Proclamation, Lincoln actively campaigned for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which when passed, eradicated slavery forever.

In terms of Fairholm's model, while Lincoln succeeded in saving the union and therefore, "the bottom line," if he helped followers become more self-led and in tune with their values, he did so after his time as leader and unintentionally through the Emancipation Proclamation. McPherson (2009) writes that Lincoln was scorned and ridiculed during his presidency, but that his words and actions have come to be highly revered by those who followed him. It is reasonable to argue that Lincoln helped develop self-led followers grounded in his core values long after his death. In addition, McPherson (2009) writes that Lincoln resolved "two fundamental, festering problems" that had been left by the Revolution in 1776 and the U.S. Constitution in 1787: first, the survival of the republic as one nation, and second, the issue of slavery. During the war, President Lincoln said to Congress: "We cannot escape history... we know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it... In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve... We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth" (Donald, 1995, pg. 398). With the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln put Americans on the path to living up to their professed belief that all men are created equal (McPherson, 2009). In doing so, he can be said to have integrated behavior with values, which is Fairholm's (1995) professed task of the leader.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, President Abraham Lincoln preserved the Union, ended slavery, and cleared the path for his followers to become more highly developed in their alignment of behavior with their founding values. He meets most of the requirements of Fairholm's (1995) model. Where he does not meet the requirements lead us to examine a difficulty with the model itself. Lincoln's leadership was certainly based upon what he thought about and valued, but his actions do not fit into the model entirely because many of his followers did not subscribe to his core values of union, liberty, and equality (or at least not how he defined them). Lincoln was forced to work diligently in shaping the values of his followers, rather than exploiting existing common values to which the populace already adhered. Fairholm (1995) assumes that most people hold the same values as significant, and vacillates in his description between requiring the leader to teach values or to use existing values as fuel for his or her leadership. As McPherson (2009) said, Lincoln essentially corrected the behavior of Americans so that it would be aligned with their founding values. Fairholm (1995) does not explicitly allow for this type of correction, and as such his requirements may be too idealistic.

Lincoln centered himself on his core values, worked to create a culture which legitimized them for all, cooperated individually with some of his most influential followers toward those values, and maintained an ideal vision of an America flourishing by means of its founding principles. In doing so, Lincoln's

accomplishments of preserving the Union and eradicating slavery fit with the results of Fairholm's model. He improved the organization of his followers as well as the followers themselves, by leading them to operate with a greater degree of alignment between their behavior and their values. Lincoln can and should be viewed as an effective Values Leader.

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