In his article “Lessons from Leadership Theory and the Contemporary Challenges of Leaders,” Montgomery Van Wart provides public administration scholars and practitioners with a comprehensive review of leadership styles and the situations that are best suited for each.

As I read Van Wart’s article, I thought about the many truly effective and committed federal leaders whom I have had the good fortune to know and work with. Federal agency leaders effectively apply the five leadership theories reviewed, and depending on the mission of the agency, they apply one style more than others, and sometimes all five are applied at the same time.

Public Administration Review has published articles on the Senior Executive Service (SES), which was established as the keystone of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. The SES was designed to be a corps of executives selected for their leadership qualifications who could lead any federal agency. The SES Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) are Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions. These ECQs are present in the leadership styles reviewed by Van Wart. Federal employees lead at every level of their organizations. Federal leaders are found not only in the SES ranks; the ECQs are the foundation for most federal leadership development programs.

Horizontal and Collaborative Leadership
The Federal Executive Board (FEB) National Network is a little-known yet highly effective case study in horizontal and collaborative leadership; FEB programs demonstrate all five theories reviewed by Van Wart.

Although the term “collaborative leadership” was not in practice until the mid-1990s, in 1961, President
John F. Kennedy created FEBs to offer just that. In the president’s letter establishing FEBs, he instructed federal officials to create an interagency working group for closer coordination across departmental and agency lines in key centers of federal activity outside Washington, D.C.

Currently, there are 28 FEBs nationwide. FEBs were created to foster communication, coordination, and collaboration among federal agencies within their jurisdiction. FEBs build interagency partnerships and promote community involvement to create and nurture working relationships addressing issues of shared interest. FEBs provide a forum for federal leaders to connect across agencies to discuss management challenges and strategies. FEBs facilitate collaboration on agency missions and goals, common issues, and special initiatives. FEBs help agencies address challenges such as emergency preparedness, human capital management, and intergovernmental collaboration.

The FEBs’ connection to the local community assists agencies in fostering relationships with state, local, and nongovernmental organizations. FEBs help agencies pinpoint local priorities and needs and then work together to design strategies to tackle them. Through active membership and coordination by federal leaders, agencies are able to reduce duplicative efforts, achieve increased efficiencies, and share best practices.

**Ethical and Critical Leadership**

Ethical leadership is at the heart of everything that federal leaders do. As I read Van Wart’s description of ethical leadership, I realized that it goes beyond being ethical. The requirement that good, ethical leaders promote service, spirit, and sustainability caused me to reflect on the federal commitment to the National Combined Federal Campaign, which is our annual workplace giving campaign. Each year, federal employees nationwide donate $281 million to charitable organizations because ethical leaders promote altruism.

**Transformational Leadership**

In 1996, the board of directors of the Greater Los Angeles Federal Executive Board practiced transformational leadership by creating a local and affordable mid-career leadership development program to prepare current federal employees (GS 9–12) to become tomorrow’s federal leaders. This program has become a hallmark of the Los Angeles FEB’s service offerings, and it boasts 418 alumni from 70 different agencies. A true testament to the program is that many alumnae have become senior leaders in their agencies and are now sending their employees to the Leadership Associates Program as part of their succession plan. With federal employee retirements exceeding projections, it is nice to know that in Los Angeles, we have a strong bench to draw from.

**Transactional Leadership**

Van Wart states that good transactional leaders need to make sure that followers have what they need to do the job. The FEB leadership consistently reviews, modifies, and adds programs to ensure that the needs of the L.A. federal workforce are being met. This is evidenced by our strong commitment to emergency preparedness and recovery—the FEB conducts an annual interagency exercise using a different disaster scenario each year. The recent redesign of our Public Service Award Program is another example: FEB leadership found a way to reduce the program’s cost without sacrificing the significance of the honor.

Also of note is the SoCal FedsGetFit Program, which encourages employees to get fit as a way to manage stress and contain agency health care costs. And the annual review and modification of the FEB leadership development program ensures that the needs of the current cohort are met and that real-life challenges facing federal agencies are considered in the curriculum.

**Classical Management and Role Theory Leadership**

Federal leaders practice management theory every day; the complexities of leading an organization with multiple layers of oversight and lack of control over resources is truly an art. Once again, the FEB creates a vehicle to help leaders meet these demands and stretch their scarce resources by providing local and affordable training options, offering free mediation services, facilitating resource sharing, and minimizing duplication of effort.

With the wide range of federal government agency missions, there clearly is not one style that would work best for all. The comprehensive review of leadership theories organized in a very usable format as presented by Van Wart is an excellent way to consider the myriad leadership theories and styles and when to apply them.