

Franklin d. roosevelt: creative leadership in a lifetime of public service

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



Franklin D. Roosevelt: Creative Leadership in a Lifetime of Public Service

Leading the United States of America through an economic crisis and a world war, Franklin Delano Roosevelt demonstrated the traits of a creative leader not only in his policy-making, but also in the way he carried his image. From State Senator of New York to 32nd President of the United States, Roosevelt epitomised resourcefulness in his steady ascent of the political ladder, culminating with taking charge of the country during one of the toughest times it had ever experienced.

Over the course of his leadership, Roosevelt certainly gained – if not already possessed – the domain knowledge required to generate creativity in his field of politics. In fact, he was primed for a career in public service even since his early education. Roosevelt first entered the face of American politics in the State Election of 1910, running for the New York State Senate. In his second term, he served as chairman of the Agriculture Committee, passing effective farm and labour bills.

This success was to some extent a precursor of his New Deal policies (to be discussed in greater detail later), which despite imperfections were reflective of creative leadership in the aspect of Dr Ronald Heifetz's "adaptive work". Following this, in 1913, Roosevelt was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy – a role from which he gained experience that would prove relevant in his later years as Commander-in-Chief during World War II. Although traditionally the prerogative of the Secretary rather than the Assistant Secretary, he worked on the general development of U.

S. naval policy, and his advocacy for a “ big navy” earned him support from Navy personnel. As State Senator, Roosevelt openly opposed the Tammany Hall political machine; as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he opposed Frederick Taylor’s “ stopwatch” system towards industrial efficiency. In both positions, his stand inevitably favoured certain stakeholders and incensed others. Although this meant losing support from some people, it represented creating the “ disequilibrium” that Heifetz describes as necessary for mobilising adaptive work.

Roosevelt was hence able to effectively “ orchestrate conflict and create disorder” in order to achieve greater overall progress. Roosevelt was a leader who avoided letting his personal life affect his political career. In the summer of 1921, he contracted poliomyelitis, which resulted in permanent paralysis from the waist down. However, Roosevelt was adamant about preserving his image of health to the people, which he believed was necessary to run for public office again.

He made sure that the press presented him in a manner which did not highlight his disability, and refrained from being seen in his wheelchair in public. In doing this, he protected his status as a leader in the eyes of the people, rather than allowing his illness to undermine his ability to serve in public office. Roosevelt went further to establish the March of Dimes, a non-profit organisation seeking to combat polio. He was hence able to turn an adversity on its head and generate even greater public support from it instead.

In the 1920s, Roosevelt mended fences with the Democratic Party, and moderated his stance against the Tammany Hall machine. He went on to be elected as Governor of New York in 1928, and re-elected for a second term in 1930. While in that position, he instated several social programmes such as the New York State Emergency Relief Commission. In line with the importance of working with partners that Heifetz emphasises in his book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Roosevelt worked closely with Frances Perkins and Harry Hopkins, particularly in the aspect of solving America's economic problems during the period.

Roosevelt also made the key statement that " progressive government by its very terms, must be a living and growing thing", presenting governance as a conceptual space that could be explored and transformed, and once again relating to Heifetz's " adaptive challenge". When Roosevelt was elected President in 1932, the United States was struggling under the Great Depression, which began even while he was Governor and involved a stock market crash and soaring unemployment. It was on this backdrop that Roosevelt introduced the New Deal, a series of economic programmes to tackle the problems during this difficult period.

Within his " First 100 Days", he passed various programmes through Congress, setting up the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Emergency Banking Act among many others. Roosevelt made his mark on the history of American politics in this record number of bills passed during the initial months of his Presidency; since then, U. S. Presidents have been judged by what they achieve in their first hundred

days. Roosevelt entered the Presidency with immense political capital due to the urgency of the economy's state, and effectively capitalised on this to implement creative policies.

In the " Second New Deal" (1935-1936), he went on to propose bolder and even more initiatives, such as the Works Progress Administration and the Social Security Act. The latter, in fact, set the foundation for the framework of the U. S. welfare system which exists till today. Roosevelt was willing to take risks; he implemented policies which involved significant government intervention at the expense of a budget deficit, even though he knew this would be unpopular. He was aware that leadership was not merely about appeasing the people, but required tough measures in response to the situation at times.

Although his New Deal policies met criticism as being a haphazard collection of schemes, Roosevelt himself insisted that they were " the orderly component parts of a connected and logical whole". Either way, we must recognise that the economic climate at that time was extremely volatile, and in reacting spontaneously to unfolding events rather than strictly adhering to a set plan, Roosevelt was doing exactly what Heifetz describes of creative leaders - bringing adaptive work to the people, and mobilising it towards solutions. Roosevelt also found a novel way of addressing the people through a series of radio talks called " fireside chats".

Through these, he introduced and explained the policies to the people as they were being implemented. He knew that transparency was important, and even as he passed acts which allowed greater state intervention in the

country's social and economic affairs, he made clear to the people what he was intending to achieve with these initiatives. His policies were met with mixed reviews, but ultimately, most agree that this era was an important milestone in the progress of the U. S. political and economic systems. In 1940, Roosevelt became the first President to run for a third term, going against the unwritten rule of a two-term tradition.

By this time, World War II had broken out. Roosevelt, as President, gave covert support to Britain and France in the form of arms provision despite officially stating neutrality. Eventually, while still remaining detached from actual military participation, he passed the Lend-Lease Act, essentially providing supplies to the other Allied nations at war. This was an innovative measure on Roosevelt's part to support the Allied Powers against the Axis Powers without putting his own country in direct harm. Unfortunately, such a position can only remain temporarily, as the U. S. was clearly demonstrating its alliance.

Unsurprisingly, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, drawing the U. S. inescapably into the war. Not having fully recovered from its economic woes, being forced into combat was a heavy blow to the U. S.. Even in the throes of war, however, Roosevelt was successful in "externalising the conflict", focusing on the Axis Powers as the enemy and keeping himself out of a position of blame. The situation also drove Roosevelt to establish the United Nations - originally the 26 countries opposing the Tripartite Pact represented by the "Declaration by United Nations".

Although not entirely a case of historical creativity, the coalition of governments across this large a number of nations was certainly a visionary initiative by Roosevelt. The UN has since grown into one of the most prominent international organisations. Roosevelt was definitely a man who saw purpose in his public service. Just before his death in 1945, he entered an unprecedented fourth term as President. His commitment was reflected in his continuous political presence and effort to evoke positive change in systems, even in times when support for him was low.

Roosevelt incorporated wit when he was addressing the people, and maintained his dignity till the very end. Although it is impossible for all of his policies to have succeeded, especially considering the sheer multitude of new programmes and magnitude of fundamental change instigated during his time, Roosevelt did display fluency and flexibility - in that he generated a large number policies in a wide range of categories - as well as originality and the capacity for elaboration in his intricate plans. As one of the most influential figures in American history, Franklin D.

Roosevelt definitely embodied the essence of a creative leader.
----- [1]. " Groton School. " Theodore Roosevelt Center. Web. 27 Sept 2012. . [2]. Burns, James MacGregor. Roosevelt. Vol 1. New York: Easton Press, 1956. Print. [3]. " American President: Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Life Before the Presidency. " Miller Center. Web. 27 Sept 2012. . [4]. LaCerra, Charles. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Tammany Hall of New York. Lanham, MD: University of America, 1997. Print. [5]. Heifetz, Ronald. Leadership Without Easy Answers.

Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994. [6].
Chen, Deborah. " The Embodiment of an Illness: Franklin Roosevelt's Public Representation of Polio. " *Deliberations*. (2001) Web. 26 Sep 2012. . [7].
Rose, David. " A History of the March of Dimes. " *March of Dimes*. 26 Aug. 2010. Web. 27 Sept 2012. . [8].
Pederson , William. *A Companion to Franklin D. Roosevelt*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Web. [9].
Theinl, Kevin. *America's Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to reorganize the market with his New Deal*. GRIN Verlag, 2011.

Web. [10].
Boden, Margaret A. " What Is Creativity. " *Dimensions of Creativity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996. Print. [11].
" The First Hundred Days. " *US Government Info*. Web. 27 Sept 2012. . [12].
" The New Deal. " *123HelpMe. com*. 27 Sep 2012. . [13].
Burns, James MacGregor. *Roosevelt*. Vol 1. New York: Easton Press, 1956. Print. [14].
Heifetz, Ronald. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994. [15].
Boden, Margaret A. " What Is Creativity. " *Dimensions of Creativity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996. Print.