Leading with Morals in a Complex Environment

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the connectivity between faith, ethics, and leadership. These three dimensions intersect each other during all facets of a leader's responsibilities. The culture, values, and religion of an individual influences these dimensions based on their experiences. This paper first dissects the definition and avenues of connectivity between faith, ethics, and leadership. The paper then links the influencers of culture, values, and religion into the dimensions of faith, ethics, and leadership. Faith and ethics are supportive of each other. The possession of faith and ethics enables leaders to create an atmosphere that influences others to emulate their actions, which increases the overall organization's effectiveness. The employment of the right leadership develops a climate of trust that enhances productivity. Leaders must walk the thin line along the spectrum of religion to leverage unique opportunities for developing others and growing an organization that operates within the band of faith, ethics, and effective leadership.

Keywords: Faith, Ethics, Right-Versus-Right, Leadership, Culture, Religion

1. Introduction

The current contemporary environment demands that a leader possess faith, ethics, and leadership for leading an organization in a growing, complex domain coupled with diverse cultures, religions, and values to achieve organizational success. Leadership centers on influencing others without compromising faith and ethical principles that originate from an individual's values. An individual's values form from the culture, religion, and governmental structure as well as those things deemed as essential to an individual's life according to their faith. Faith involves understanding beliefs through the comprehension of Christianity (Lewis, 1980). The grasping of beliefs enables a connection to God. When leaders are connected with God, they lead their organizations according to their faith. An individual's beliefs are linked to emotions such as hope, fear, and feelings versus being nested with a form of rationality (Brown, 2015). Morgan (2015) characterizes faith as conducting necessary actions according to your beliefs. Morgan captures comments from Melinda Gates defining faith as, "faith is about faith in action" (2015, p. 66). This illustrates the connection between faith and leadership by actually performing an act according to an individual's faith. The performing of actions within an individual's faith enables them to adhere to ethics. The adherence to ethics requires an individual to conduct themselves within appropriate moral standards in terms of what is right and wrong. Toner (1995) described ethics as "doing what is right" (p. 9). If the execution of virtues requires individuals to routinely perform associated habits, one can conclude that leaders operating with ethical standards are doing ordinary and routine actions within ethical habits (Ciulla, 2003). This contributes to leaders' commitment to perform leadership tasks within ethical standards. Moreover, leaders assert their faith and ethics within all of their actions, thus facilitating an organizational environment that breeds success.

The cultures, religions, and values that constitute the organization's environment contribute to a leader's ability to remain faithful and ethical in the conduct of executing his or her leadership responsibilities. First, cultures are comprised of an individual's life style, community, and experiences. Kahan and Braman (2006) argued that culture forms prior to actual facts in the cognitive sense, where individuals create beliefs according to their faith. Secondly, the local environment that individual resides in during their early childhood will build the foundation of key cultural assumptions that they possess (Schein, 2010). Lastly, the experience that an individual encounters along life's journey assists in forming their espoused beliefs and values (Schein, 2010).

The beliefs and values of an individual are linked to their religious practice according to their faith. Scholars generally associate religion with a defined construct that focuses on specific doctrine and socially acceptable processes (Barnett et al., 2000). Although values are centered on what's important to an individual in their life (Hultman and Gellerman, 2002), they are deeply influenced by the type of behavior that is expected within a particular culture or religion. Therefore, the culture, religion, and values of a leader will assist them in remaining faithful and ethical in the conduct of their leadership duties.

Faith

Definition of Faith

Faith requires a commitment to Christianity doctrine that is enhanced through an individual's imagination and emotions (Lewis, 1980). In essence, the conflict resides between faith and reason representing tangent one, and emotion and imagination representing tangent two (Lewis, 1980). For example, Bill's best friend Alex, has a tendency to elaborate on certain rewards issued by the resort Hotel Ray. Bill is keenly aware of Alex's historical past of embellishing Hotel Ray's amenities that are not actually available. However, because Bill is committed to his best friend Alex, he continues to accept Alex's suggestions and travels to the resort knowing the possibilities of poor amenities upon arriving. Bill thinks it will be different this time, but he arrives at a resort with poor amenities, and tells Alex derogatory information pertaining to his conduct. Bill's emotional reaction destroyed his faith, but he knew the potential outcome and still elected to pursue the situation. Christians must walk by faith and not by sight. As illustrated in 2Co 5:7 "For we live by faith, not by sight" (NIV). Therefore, Christian leaders must allow their faith to guide their actions to remain along the correct path that God demands.

Avenues of Faith

The comprehension of Christianity enables an individual to follow their beliefs to build a connection with God. When an individual discovers their life's purpose, they have identified the first avenue of faith for connecting with God (Warren, 2002). The understanding of purpose provides true meaning to life. Mahaffy (2014) argued that individuals must discern what they are being called to do and be in life. When leaders are capable of relating their life's purpose to responsibilities as a leader, they build confidence to follow their faith regardless of the situation they encounter. As a result, leaders have a propensity to employ authentic leadership in the execution of their duties. The first key aspect of authentic leadership involves an intrapersonal perspective that focuses on what is occurring within the leader (Northouse, 2013). Secondly, authentic leadership encompasses an intrapersonal process consisting of a relational component comprised of followers (p. 254). This approach affects both leaders and followers, because they are equally contributing to critical efforts that are occurring in the organization. Lastly, authentic leadership integrates the possibility of nurturing certain skills within a leader over a period of time (Northouse, 2013). This latter effort focuses on behavioral habits that are developed from "the leader's positive psychological qualities and strong ethics" (p. 254).

A second avenue of faith for connecting with God centers on the cultivating of habits that incorporate the virtues of love, hope, and faith for learning the meaning of life (Lewis, 1980). Leaders that continuously adhere to their faith are capable of influencing others through their constant display of Christian's characteristics that entice followers to embrace their leadership. Can individuals consider themselves to be a Christian without possessing the virtue of love? Love serves as a primary characteristic for a Christian. During the last supper, Jesus tells the Disciples to love each other just as you would love your brother. John 14:34 states, "A new command I give you: Love one another, as I have love you, so you must love one another" (NIV). Lewis (1980) noted that Christians must love their neighbor; therefore, an individual must love another person just as they love themselves. In essence, your personal family's love should extend into the community, organization, and people that you enter act with on a routine basis.

The love you share with others should inspire hope for a brighter future for all mankind. Lewis (1980) argued that the virtue of hope requires an element of forward looking to examine the world to determine that action a Christian should expect to accomplish. Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff (2011) alludes to the fact that hope does not serve as a method; however, it does enable a leader to visualize what the future could possibly entail. As a leader assesses him and the organization, there exists a necessity to hope for the very best in him and the organization during the execution of leadership responsibilities. In order to adhere to the dynamics of hope, one can conclude that faith serves as an essential ingredient. Hope is not tangible, but it demands a form of faith, in order for an individual to possess it.

As previously mentioned, faith involves beliefs (Lewis, 1980), but leaders must have hope with a vision that connects to their faith to enable success. When the disciples asked Jesus in Matthew 17:19, "Why couldn't" (NIV) they drive out the demonic force in the boy, Jesus replied with "Because you have so little faith…if you have faith as small as a mustard seed…nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt. 17:20, NIV). Therefore, leaders must possess faith to lead their organization to success. The adherence to the virtues of love, hope, and faith through solid habits will enable a heightening level of accomplishment by a leader.

Ethics

Definition of Ethics

Ethics requires leaders to assess what is right in their actions (Toner, 1995). Lewis (1980) posits that ethics centers on a sense of what is right and what is wrong. Kaufman (2008) stressed the importance to analyze ethics through the eyes of "doing things right" and "doing the right things" based on the study by Peter Drucker and a proposal from the National Education Association. In essence, executing any type of action in a particular situation could result in a form of "right-versus-right", where both actions meet the definition of ethics (Badaracco, 1997). For example, An early education department director receives a message from the education dean during a routine visit, that the early education department will be closed next semester, due to the lack of registered students for the curriculum.

For the purpose of this brief story, Ed is the early education department director and Crystal is the dean of education. Crystal conveyed to Ed that this decision resulted from two consecutive years of low enrollment in the early education department. Crystal also tells Ed that this information must not be shared to any faculty, staff, or students. Three days later a faculty advisor named Mark, approaches Ed to inquire about a rumor he heard that the early education department will closed at the end of this semester. Mark reminds Ed that he serves as the primary bread provider for his family of five, and if the early education department is closing he needs to know immediately in order to seek other employment opportunities. So, what action serves as an ethical answer to Ed's dilemma? This demonstrates a classic case of right-versus-right, where both decisions would align with the definition of ethics (Badaracco, 1997). Therefore, leaders should pursue a leadership style that encompasses conducting actions as a professional, and exhibit behavioral conduct that aligns with a code of ethics.

Avenues of Ethics

The challenge resides within a leader's ability to execute ethical actions while performing their routine responsibilities on a daily basis. This introduces the need for leaders to serve as a professional within their perspective careers. Toner (1995) posits that professionalism centers on the capacity of a leader to implement standards and behavioral conduct that are receptive to a group. This leads to the first avenue of ethics consisting of professionalism. Leaders must comprehend their traditions, honor, history, and privileges of their organizations to abide by a standard of professionalism (Toner, 1995). Today's organizations operating within their professional global environment may appear reluctant to response to misdemeanors. This reluctance results from a potential fear of over reacting or underestimating the impact of the situation.

This relates to the need to tell the truth or simply tell a lie, which the latter leads to operating outside of professionalism. Leaders that are "in the know" receive information pertaining to finance, personnel, decision-making analysis, and constantly dialogue with other managers in different departments (Hackman and Johnson, 2013). These leaders routinely encounter different situations that possibly places them in an ethical dilemma. Moreover, occasionally leaders act out of self-interest or group interest, which further creates dilemmas (Hackman and Johnson, 2013). A quick reflection upon former senator and vice-presidential candidate John Edwards' actions of denying being a father to a child on the campaign staff during his spouses' illness serves as an example of this dilemma (Hackman and Johnson, 2013). The best approach resides within telling the truth during all dilemmas to ensure adherence to the standard of professionalism. Leaders that follow a standard of professionalism build successful habits that models behavioral conduct of an ethical leader.

The second avenue of ethics centers on behavioral conduct. Just as the disciples departed from their old ways and transitioned to follow Jesus' teaching of Christianity, leaders must willingly pursue a code of ethics that aligns with their behavior (Fedler, 2006). Ciulla (2004) proposes using Freeman's "The Problem of the Two Realms" to better understand that ethics relates to how well individuals treat each other throughout a normal day of activities.

Freeman further recommend that a leader can assess their organization's ethics by analyzing the treatment of the customers, workers, and suppliers associated with the company (Ciulla, 2004). This can serve as a mechanism for leaders to discern how their behavioral actions are influencing the workers, customers, and suppliers.

Leaders should seek to emulate a behavioral model that aligns with a transformational leadership style, which focuses on removing self-interest for the desires of the organization and other members (Northouse, 2013). The first key aspect of transformational leadership in connecting it to ethics centers on the leader being out-front standing on solid morals while leading change in the organization (Northouse, 2013). The second connection to ethics involves the leader obtaining an understanding of the true needs of followers by discerning the right actions to support followers' needs, which enhances transformational leadership execution (Northouse, 2013). The third connection with transformational leadership and ethics consists of the growth of followers comprehending the necessity to operate morally as they gain additional skills for promotions and leading others (Northouse, 2013). The successful use of transformational leadership style and treating each other equally will facilitate leaders' behaviors to remain aligned within ethical standards. This alignment with ethical standards should contribute to a leader's ability to discern blind spots.

The adherence to a code of ethics enables leaders to assess their behaviors for discerning blind spots (Bazerman and Tenbrunesel, 2011). Although leaders may possess the knowledge of a particular belief, and understand the appropriate behavior that models that belief, there still exists a tendency to act contrary to the expectation of the belief and behavior (Bazerman and Tenbrunesel, 2011). This relates to the old adage of "do as I say, and not as I do". It also relates to Jesus' story on building a solid foundation described in Luke 6:48 where a man builds a house on a rock that withstands a flood. Jesus states, "But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation" (Lk. 6:49, NIV). In essence, leaders must adhere to doing the right thing, especially when they know the right actions to remain ethical. Bazerman and Tenbrunesel (2011) recommend during the "mom test" in ethical dilemmas or decision making, if your mom will approve, then there exists a high possibility that you are making the right choice. This analogy also supports the previous discussion on "right-versus-right". In the end, leaders are expected to act according to their faith and ethics, in the conduct of executing required actions.

Leadership

Leadership Definition

Leadership centers on guiding others towards the accomplishment of organizational goals by a leader's ability to influence followers (Winston and Patterson, 2006). Good leadership consists of morally good acts, which encourages followers to replicate those actions (Ciulla, 2004). Northouse (2013) defined leadership as the ability of an individual to influence others to achieve a common goal for an organization. Crandall (2007) argued that leadership resides within a leader's ability to look their subordinates directly into the eyes to discern a measurement of their performance. These diverse leadership definitions center on the key term of commitment. Leaders commit themselves to lead, train, and prepare others for success (Crandall, 2007). For example, an assistance manager recently transferred to another store to serve as a general manager. The general manager may not possess the details of the departments' leadership capabilities, training proficiency, and methods for developing others. However, when the general manager commits to lead, train, and prepare others, his or her subordinates will observe this level of commitment, which should inspire followers to commit to the organization. This overarching commitment will entice followers to emulate the actions of their leader (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).

Avenues of Leadership

When followers start to emulate the actions of their leader, they are creating the type of environment that most organizations and leaders desire. Leaders want to conduct themselves in a moral, ethical manner. This initiates the connection of leadership and ethics. The functioning of an ethical environment aligns with effective leadership (Hitt, 1990). The application of cause and effect can be related to ethics and leadership (Hitt, 1990). Leaders are responsible for influencing their followers to accomplish assigned missions. Therefore, the first step associated with the application of cause and effect for leadership and ethics reside within the role of the leader. This first step is directly linked to the leader because, he or she serve as the individual that is influencing others. Leaders accomplish this by obtaining power, transforming their vision into action, and empowering others to accomplish key goals (Hitt, 1990). One can now conclude that power serves as a key avenue of leadership.

However, leaders must remain cognizant of the amount of power they possess, and avoid flaunting their control over peers and followers. Power can serve as a significant resource to influence others to accomplish missions, but it can also hinder leaders' success, if not employed properly. Aime et al. (2014) argued that power centers on resources, formal authority, expertise, and access to information. Power generally remains stagnate, because organizations that stabilize power within hierarchies have a tendency not to change leaders unless a drastic situation occurs or over an extensive period of time where change is needed (p. 327).

The second step associated with the application of cause and effect for leadership and ethics involves establishing the organizational climate for ethical conduct (Hitt, 1990). The organizational climate refers to how things are done within the environment. The climate characterizes the rules that the organization's members abide by in the conduct of their duties (Hitt, 1990). Leaders are the principal agent that enable rules to be created and used according to the organizational climate and ethical guidelines (Hitt, 1990). This leads to the second key avenue of leadership called building the right climate. The establishment of a positive working climate for organizational members support both positive and negative information to flow to leaders for improving the organization's effectiveness. Leaders should seek to eliminate an environment where workers are reluctant to speak up because of the fear of retaliation (Sprague and Ruud, 1988). Leaders' desires should center on fostering a climate that stimulates individuals to submit innovative ideas and concepts for growing the organization. It is also important to distinguish between organization's climate and culture, despite the constant effort to use these terms interchangeably. An organization's culture defines the values, assumptions, and beliefs of the members assigned (Otken and Cenkci, 2015). Conversely, climate captures the value system of the organization by defining social themes that are fixed according to how the members and leaders conduct themselves (Otken and Cenkci, 2015).

Culture

Culture Definition

As previously mentioned, an individual's culture is shaped by their local community, experience, beliefs, and values (Hultman and Gullerman, 2002). Culture serves as the foundation for an individual's leadership style. The local community is comprised of unique traditions and a way of life according to their beliefs. However, it is important to note that a community will change over a period of time. This change is predicated upon the movement of diverse populations and economic factors that may contribute to enhancing and degrading the local community. The transition of a local community can support intercultural by integrating new ethnic groups (Sarmento, 2014). Intercultural consists of a community experiencing overlapping cultures because of the arrival of new ethnic groups (Sarmento, 2014). This merger of different cultures into a community is also known as cultural translation. Leaders must possess the skills to operate within a local community that is experiencing a cultural translation. For example, when the local community of West Kingston experienced an increase of a different ethnic group, in order to support the harvesting of various agricultural crops, the leaders of the community worked directly with religious and small business owners to provide religious services and supplies according to the new ethnic group that joined the community. Leaders can still adhere to their faith and ethics while embracing a new ethnic population without comprising their fundamental values.

Avenues of Culture

Leaders must understand the assumptions that are associated within their cultural environment and their organization. As an individual grows from childhood to adulthood, and into a successful leader, their cultural assumptions remain a part of their fundamental values, faith, and beliefs. These assumptions are further influenced by their experiences, group behavior, common learning, and feelings within their culture, which defines their shared assumptions (Schein, 2010). Therefore, the first key avenue of culture for a leader resides within understanding their shared assumptions. The creation of the group and culture consists of the same dimensions, resulting from the leader's actions and shared experiences in the execution of their responsibilities (Schein, 2010). Leaders will operate within the organization's cultural characteristics, but should adhere to their values, faith, beliefs, and ethics.

Muls et al. (2015) argued for leaders to operate within the "6Cs", which involves caring, compassion, competence, communication, courage, and commitment. Caring should involve improving the individual and the organization (Muls et al., 2015). Can a leader operate within the realm of ethics without caring for others? Ethics centers on doing the right thing, and one of those right actions should involve caring for others. Compassion centers on how an individual is exercising caring functions within their organization (Muls et al., 2015).

The key functions focus on empathy, respect, dignity, and humility. All of these functions are essential in being a leader with compassion. Humility probably serves as the greatest of these functions. It is not about the quantity of followers, instead, it is about the quantity of followers that you serve (Engstrom, 1976). Competence requires leaders to possess the skills, knowledge, and understanding to operate effectively within a variety of complex situations (Muls et al., 2015). Leaders must always possess the requisite "know how" in performing their jobs to enable individual and organizational success. Communication serves as an essential component to team work and creating an atmosphere that supports active listening (Muls et al., 2015). Effective leaders listen attentively to others to obtain new ideas, concepts, and respond to what they hear from followers to support achieving organizational goals (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Courage afford leaders the opportunity to stand-up for what is right, embrace new concepts, and contribute to innovative projects (Muls et al., 2015). A leader with courage is a leader with faith and ethics. Courage alone conveys a sense of morality for an individual to follow according to their faith. Finally, commitment focuses on aligning within the framework of the institution's values and vision to execute a strategy that leads to an enduring present that breeds organizational success (Muls et al., 2015). Collins (2001) described commitment consisting of pursuing a clear, concise, and compelling vision that stimulates high performance to maximize organizational success.

The initial formation of an organization or group's beliefs and values become a reflection of the dominant person's beliefs and values (Schein, 2010). This occurs because the organization or group does not possess any shared beliefs or values. The exception to this is when an organization's founder establishes beliefs and values for the members during the initial stand-up phase of the firm. Therefore, one can discern that the second avenue of culture for a leader involves beliefs and values. Leader's beliefs are aligned with their faith according to their values. Engemann (2015) asserted that faith affords humans to conduct themselves according to their faith without feeling guilty of their actions. However, this result with humans being subject to communication through speaking, listening, and understanding based on their faith. Faith and values are connected by revealing what an individual stands for. Sai (2014) argued that the organization's values reflect what it stands for. The organization's values originate from the founder and leaders that are leading the organization. Therefore, the organization's values encompasses the faith and values of the leaders. The level of commitment to the organization and leader's values are observed in their daily operations (Sai, 2014). Leaders operating with solid beliefs and values with enable a climate of success.

Religion

Definition of Religion

The right for every American to practice their religious belief according to their faith serves as one of the most essential component of the United States Constitution (Usman, 2007). Several scholars noted that defining religion is practically impossible because it would require all religions to conform to that particular definition, which is a violation of the First Amendment in the United States Constitution (Usman, 2007). In essence, the mere act of dictating certain traditions, ideas, beliefs, and models to define religion for an individual conflicts with the First Amendment. Therefore, as an individual defines their religion, it generally aligns with their culture, faith, ethics, and values within their communities. Leaders are required to operate within vast religious domains as they execute their responsibilities. The critical concern associated with religion resides within the fact that various religious motivation can ignite terrorist activities that result in harming others (Haynes, 2012). For example, the terrorist group known as al Qaeda, which practices the Muslim Religion, was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the United States and other key infrastructure around the globe (Haynes, 2012). The challenge resides with eliminating different cultures and group segments from a religion that does not adhere to their descriptive definition of religion. Leaders will walk the thin-line of religion by remaining within the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. In essence, leaders should conduct themselves according to their religious beliefs, as the disciples conducted themselves to adhere to Jesus' guidance.

Avenues of Religion

Leaders should execute their duties within the framework of their respective religion. In essence, leaders should seek to live a life according to Jesus' life on earth. This reflects modeling a life of Jesus, which is the first critical avenue of religion for a leader. Military leaders actually hope that the impact of values associated within religion will influence Armed Forces personnel to conduct themselves in an ethical manner in all military operations (Connelley and Tripodi, 2012). This analogy of hope, links back to assumptions that are made within a particular culture or group.

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Yes, the military desires centers on obtaining Armed Forces personnel that possess acceptable religious behaviors according to society and acts morally right. However, questions such as "Are spiritual or religious commanders more ethical in their decision making?" are never answered because the facts are not research or analyzed to discern an accurate conclusion (Connelley and Tripodi, 2012). This storyline equates to civilian sectors as well.

All organizations seek to have fidelity on characteristics of their leaders to enable the right climate for success. However, leaders at every level are provided unique opportunities to serve as an example for others to emulate. This is the second key aspect for a leader to consider in journeying along the avenues of religion. Leaders must leverage every opportunity to develop others and themselves according to their faith and beliefs while simultaneously staying within the organization's guidelines. The leader's objective is to avoid stepping outside of the organization's guidelines or vision while mentoring others on faith, ethics, and religion. This mentoring must encompass the understanding to follow Jesus wherever he takes you, whenever he initiates the action, and whatever situation it will involve (Idleman, 2011).

Conclusion

Faith involves commitment to Christianity through reasoning, emotion, and imagination. Leaders must assess themselves internally to discover their strength. The effective use of the virtues love, hope, and faith will facilitate a leader accomplishing the organization's objectives. When leaders abide by these virtues, they conduct themselves in a moral manner that adheres to ethical standards. Leaders must conduct their actions within the framework of doing what is right. The goal is for leaders to operate within "doing things right" and "doing the right things", which facilitates them to remain professional in all of their actions. Although, they still may occasionally encounter a 'right-versus-right' situation that requires them to make a decision. Leaders must exercise the appropriate leadership style that takes the organization to the next level of success that keeps them within their fundamental religion, beliefs, and values based on their culture, while simultaneously staying within the organization's guidelines. Ultimately, the faith, ethics, and leadership shaped by an individual's culture, values, and religion directly connects with each other to enable a leader and organization to remain successful.

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