Moral Leadership

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ABSTRACT: Leadership has become one of the most important topics and challenges in society. In spite of the growing literature available, leadership is still perceived as both a term having no definite form or distinct shape and an uncertain nature or significance. Beyond the lack of understanding concerning the nature, traits, objectives of the leading process, leadership is an essential component of the human condition, given the specific problems of the society, difficult to manage. Leadership is neither a position or title nor an action. It is instead an interactional process in which leaders and followers involve in reciprocal interaction to achieve common goals. An appropriate approach to this process recognizes the value of all elements of the process. However, this article proves that the actions of a leader impact significantly the perceptions, attitudes and actions of the followers. The more is known and understood about how the leader's example conditions the follower's responses in regard to the principles delineated, the more likely it is that the theoretical principles and ideals exposed by leaders in speeches and mission statements will yield satisfactory results.

KEY WORDS: morality, leadership, values, moral behavior, followers

Introduction

In this article, we intended to briefly analyze the impact of morality on the leadership process, seen from a twofold perspective: how the morality impacts

the leader's development and behavior and consequently, how is the leader's moral example perceived and illustrated in the lives of the followers. Beyond the theoretical analyses, there is a widely circulated process of perceiving the lack of leadership in our society, so much the more in a society haunted by problems and needs. Promising prospects could be smashed by the lack of morality of a leader.

1. The general perception of the morality

The headline on the front cover of *Time*'s magazine May 25, 1987 issue, raise a compelling question – "What Ever Happened to Ethics" with the subtitle "Assaulted by sleaze, scandals and hypocrisy, America searches for its moral bearings." In one of the main articles, "What's Wrong – Hypocrisy, betrayal and greed unsettle the nation's soul", the author provides the reader with a lurid view of the inherent complex of attributes that determines the moral and ethical actions and reactions of the society of those times. "Hypocrisy, betrayal and greed unsettle the nation's soul. Once again it is morning in America. But this morning Wall Street financiers are nervously scanning the papers to see if their names have been linked to the insider-trading scandals. Presidential candidates are peeking through drawn curtains to make sure that reporters are not staking out their private lives. A congressional witness, deeply involved in the Reagan Administration's secret foreign policy, is huddling with his lawyers before facing inquisitors. A Washington lobbyist who once break-fasted regularly in the White House mess is brooding over his investigation by and independent counsel. In Quantico, Virginia, the Marines are preparing to court-martial one of their own. In Palm Springs, California, a husband-and-wife televangelist team, once the adored cynosures of 500,000 faithful, are beginning another day of seclusion. Such are the scenes of morning in the scandal-scarred spring of 1987. Lamentation is in the air, and clay feet litter the ground… Their transgressions – some grievous and some pretty – run the gamut of human failings, from weakness of will to moral laxity to hypocrisy to uncontrolled avarice. But taken collectively, the heedless lack of restrains in their behavior reveals something disturbing about the national character. America, which took such back thumping pride

in its spiritual revival, finds itself wallowing in a moral morass. Ethics, often dismissed as a prissy Sunday school word, is now at the center of a new national debate. Put bluntly, has the mindless materialism of the '80s left in its wake a values vacuum?"

Beyond the fact that this article appeared in a secular magazine, it is amazing to find out that the world itself tackles what we consider the biggest challenge in our society today: deficiency of morality and ethics, extended worryingly throughout the Christian community, whose credibility suffers. "I discovered, that it's perfectly possible to win a debate and lose a friendship. People can simply refuse to accept you ostensibly superior arguments, because they dislike your attitude" (Black 2006, 54).

The plain truth is that the leaders are not immune to public pressure, personal and group pressure, insidious temptations, so much the more given the general expectations that they are supposed to exemplify the standard they are preaching / teaching about (Ciocan 2018, 182).

Burns (1995, 483) says that leadership is such a gripping subject that once it is given center stage it draws attention away from everything else. But attention to leadership alone is sterile (Wren 1995, 4). Toulassi (2020) argues there is no leadership except moral leadership and that leadership does not exist outside of morality. Over the years, Kouzes and Posner (1993, 14) have surveyed thousands of people and concluded that in virtually every survey, integrity was identified as the characteristic most desired in a leader.

According to John Maxwell (2004, 83-84), the followers could choose between many options to live their live, to invest their money, to spend their time etc. Notwithstanding, the higher the responsibility of the leader, the fewer are the options to choose. Consequently, at the top the leaders, in essence, have no options but to serve. Or, as the responsibility increases the options decrease. The Bible highlight this truth: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged strictly." (James 3:1) or "and from everyone who has been given much shall be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more" (Luke 12:48).

Many well-known ancient writers underpinned this, from their perspective. Interestingly enough, in spite of a completely different context, the principle is similarly underlined. Herodotus, to a great degree considered the first writer who systematically studied historical subjects declared that we are less convinced by what we hear than by what we see. Cicero, the first-century BC Roman orator the Roman statesman (Rotaru 2005, 202), encouraged his fellows to be "a pattern to others, and then all will go well; for as the whole city is infected by the licentious passions and vices of great men, so it is likewise reformed by their moderation". Juvenal, according to historians the most powerful Roman satiric poets, who bemoaned especially the poisonous degeneracy of Rome under Domitian, tried to convince his contemporaries that "examples of vicious courses, practiced in a domestic circle, corrupt more readily and more deeply when we behold them in persons of authority." And Seneca, Rome's main intellectual figure in the mid-1st century AD, encouraged his fellows with the thought that "Noble examples stir us up to noble actions" (Wayne Jackson 2020).

According to Burns, the crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power. That's why he asks if leadership is simply innovation – cultural or political, or inspiration, or mobilization of followers or goal setting or goal fulfillment (Wren 1995, 483).

2. Qualifying the terms

Some define leadership as leaders making followers do what followers would not otherwise do, or as leaders making followers do what the leaders want them to do; "I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and the needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations" (Burns 1995, 100). According to the author, transforming leadership changes some of those who follow into people whom others may follow in time and changes leaders into moral agents.

Wren asserts that an understanding of the nature and process of leadership must be coupled with a clear sense of the moral and ethical

overtones of leadership; that is to say, the group goals which are the objective of leadership must be moral, and the process of achieving these goals must be ethical (Wren 1995, 481). Leadership is not a position which one is given but a position which one earns by proving faithful (Maxwell 2004, 84).

But what about moral leadership? By this, Burns means, first, that leaders and followers develop a relationship not only of influence but of reciprocal needs and values. According to him, moral leadership is not mere preaching, or the uttering of pieties, or the insistence on social conformity. Moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations and values of the followers (Wren 1995, 483).

"We live in deeds, not years: in thoughts not breaths; in feelings, not in figures on a dial. We should count time by heart throbs. He most lives, who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best" (Black 2006, 78). Is it possible that the leader influences the moral development of others? How should he start this endeavor, with establishing and maintaining an ethical climate, or with selecting moral people who might be properly trained? Are there chances to develop into followers capable of moral decisions? Which are the stages of the process of moral development and how can this be implemented within an organization?

In an article, Prince II mentions several theories related to moral development of both the leaders and followers. The first one he brings up, is that of Sigmund Freud. Developing the concept of superego, Freud asserted that the superego develops early in life (around age 5 or 6). Consequently, if the basic personality of the individual is mostly developed by early childhood experiences, then the child of age 5 or 6 must experience and the society must witness a spectacular change from lack of morality to an adult morality. Since nobody can provide either practical evidences or research support for such a dramatic change at early stages of life, we might consequently affirm that moral development is rather a long duration process (Prince II 1995, 484-485).

Lawrence Kohlberg (1976, 29), from Harvard, synthetizes his observations on moral behavior, mentioning that people both seem to be at different stages of moral development and might have different rational motives for their moral belief and action. Using the storytelling technique, he studied the answers to a moral dilemma, in the hope to find out how moral perceptions modified over the years. According to his observations, when

it comes to understanding and practicing the moral convictions, there are three different phases of moral development: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional, each having two sub-stages and people could pass gradually through these phases, not necessarily reaching all the stages. The moral behavior develops over time as the capacity for moral decision increases. However, McLeod point out clearly some drawbacks regarding this theory, even if it might suggest that moral development could be influenced. Firstly, the evidence does not always support the distinct stages of moral development, or the reasoning about right and wrong depends more upon the situation than upon general rules. Secondly, moral behavior doesn't always match moral behavior, having to do with social factors, alike. Thirdly, justice is not the most important moral principle, since caring for others, for example, is equally important (McLeod 2013).

Table 1. Phases, stages and motives of moral development

Level	Stage	Dominant theme
Level 1 **Pre-conventional morality** (children, a few adults)	Stage 1 Stage 2	Fear of punishment Opportunistic – "what's in it for me?"
Level 2 **Conventional morality** (most adolescents and adults)	Stage 3 Stage 4	Good Interpersonal Relationship – the child / individual is good in order to be seen as being a good person. Maintaining the social order – the individual becomes aware of the wider rules of society, being aware of a duty to live up to his/her word or to maintain the social system.
Level 3 **Post-convention-al** (a few highly developed adults)	Stage 5 Stage 6	Social contract – the individual becomes aware that while rules/laws might exist for the good of the greatest number, there are times when they will work against the interest of particular individuals. Universal principles – there are a few basic principles which apply in all situations.

In contrast to Freud and Kohlberg, Albert Bandura promotes the Social Learning Theory, having as key features conditioning and imitation (McLeod

2016). When a child does wrong and is punished, experiencing negative feelings, his behavior might be restrained or prevented. Observing others is another way of learning moral behavior, assimilating also the consequences associated with different actions. What influences the learning process by observing? Bandura has given a description of a four-stage process in which we deal with others' actions, keep back the observed information, are given incentives to carry out an action and act (Bandura 1977, 58). However, we should first of all pay attention to others in order to be influenced by others. This theory doesn't explain how we develop our thoughts and feelings and describes the behavior only in terms of nature or nurture. Consequently, this theory doesn't not provide explanations for all behaviors (McLeod 2016).

Conclusively, Prince II sustain that of the three approaches presented regarding the moral development (see table 2), Social Learning Theory with its emphasis on learning by observing others seems to have a relatively large relevancy for the moral leadership (Prince II 1995, 487). "It is self-evident that a hypocrite is unqualified to guide others toward attaining higher character. No one respects a person who talks a good game but fails to play by the rules. What a leader does will have a greater impact on those he wishes to lead than what he says. A person may forget 90 percent of what a leader says, but he will never forget how the leader lives" (Boa 2006, 16).

Table 2. Comparison of the Three Major Theories of Moral Development

	Psychoanalytic (Freud)	*Cognitive-Developmental (Kohlberg)*	*Social Learning (Bandura)*
Basic emphasis	Feeling (conscience, guilt, remorse)	Thought (quality of moral reasoning, stages)	Behavior (influence of models and the situation, rewards, punishments, expectations)
How morality is acquired	Formation of a superego by internalizing parental values	Through invariant stages of increased capacity for reason based on intelligence and experience	Learning through observation of others, rewards and punishments

Principal agents of socialization	Parents (especially same-sex parent)	People who are at a higher stage	Any significant model (parents, peers) or person who controls rewards and punishments
Research support	Slight	Moderate	Strong
Implications for organizational leader	Leadership exerts little influence except through selection	Leadership influences stage of development through increasing capacity for moral reasoning, e.g. education	Leadership influences moral behavior directly by example, communication of expectations and consequences, control of rewards and punishments.

Essentially, the leader can act upon the moral behavior of his followers establishing the validity of principles and the desired behavior by his/her example, giving recompense in recognition of followers' behavior and inflicting punishment for not conforming to approved standards or professional behavior. Or, put in other words, "those who seek to be as true to duty as the needle to the pole often exasperate their enemies, but inspire their friends" (Black 2006, 112).

3. The contemporary perspective

Does this really apply to the leadership practice today?

The secular people, "those who don't have either a true religious experience as a central objective of their life or do not allow their live to be influenced by the Christian beliefs" (Golcalves 2013, 123), affirm that the morality should rely exclusively on the well-being of persons in the present life, excluding any consideration deriving from faith in God or a future hope (Bush 1984, 6). The relativists, on another hand, assert that as long as the life is clean of any supernatural intervention and the people decide for themselves the direction to follow, everything depends on context and interpretation. There

is no absolute guide mark for orientation to help the human being discern good from evil and no moral objectives as guiding principles for the human relationships, the community having the duty to decide what's good and bad (Paulien 2012, 32).

On another hand, Baumann (1993, 150) maintains that the morality does not depend on society, being on the contrary, the foundation of the social life. According to him, the ethical judgements belong exclusively to the individual person and cannot be transferred upon others. Ethically speaking, Sire (2005, 228) states that we witness a slow move from one understanding to another, along with the historical stages: from the theistic era (premodernism) to the modern one (built on the human rationalism and on its capacity to discern between good and evil, ending with the postmodern era, where morality is decided by the multitude of expressions used to differentiate good and evil.

Consequently, the basic products of morality and service have not been considered capable of producing social cohesion any longer and have been replaced with civism and political platforms.

However, in a society suffocated by an exacerbation of populism, an efficient leadership process needs an illustrative support. Instead of a cosmetic image, the people seek a clear, moral imagine. The postmodern people detect falsehood from distance. If a community or a leader pretend to have had an experience that is either immoral or unreal, the people will soon lose their interest (Paulien 2012, 68).

Goncalves (2012, 14) says that, in their attempt to lead efficiently, the leaders should focus much more on the integral approach, developing moral relationships that produce trust. The message communicated through the life of the leader, become much more important for the followers than the message they utter.

"The greatest want of the world is the want of men, men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall" (White 2014, 57).

Conclusions

This article was intended to enhance the reader's understanding of an enormously important aspect that lies at the heart of all our efforts to make better the leading process. This is not to say that the principle delineated here is the only one to reach the goal. But given both the expectation of the society for an embedded example and the need to check the validity of the theoretical principles uttered publicly, a leader affects the ethical choices and conducts of his/her followers. To a great extent, the followers' decisions are the responsibility of the leader.

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