Authentic Leadership : An Agenda for Building Vigorous Organisation of the Future

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Abstract

Leadership is the ability of our individual to influence others to achieve some predetermined goal, This paper attempts to examine the ethical context of two types of Leadership theories viz: Transformational Leadership and Authentic Leadership. It also tries to understood the essence of authentic leadership and how it will eventually contribute to organisational vigor.

Keyword: Authentic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Organisational Ethical Leaders.

Leaders, good or bad, ethical or unethical great or small, arise out of the needs and opportunities of a specific time and space. Often critical issues, worthy causes, and a hungry and willing constituency generate great leaders.

In the past, the focus was on the leaders leading to the "Great-Person Theory of Leadership" In fact, the English verb, "Lead" comes from an Indo-European root, "Leith", which means "to cross a threshold". People who are truly leading seem rarely to think themselves in that way. Their focus is invariably on what needs to be done, the larger system in which they are operating, and the people with whom they are creating–not on themselves as "leader"(Senge,1990). Then the focus was eventually on the various system and types of leadership. Currently, the focus is also on the followers as collaborators (Gini, 2004).

Leadership is the ability to influence an individual or a group toward the achievement of some predetermined goals. Luthans and Avolio(2003) introduced *authentic leadership* as separate construct that lies at the intersection of positive organisational scholarship and transformational full range leadership. They explained it as a root

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construct that could incorporate charismatic, transformational, integrity and/or ethical leadership. Interestingly, they also argued that these construct could be discriminated from each other.

This paper makes an attempt to examine the ethical context of two leadership theories- Transformational Leadership and Authentic Leadership. An attempt will be made to conceptualise the deep sense of self of an authentic leader and higher capability in judging ambiguous ethical issues, viewing them from multiple perspectives, and aligning decisions with moral values and vigor. The vigor refers to individual's feelings that they possess physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness, a set of interrelated affective experiences (Shiron and Arie,2007). The focus of this paper is to understand the essence of authentic leadership and how it will eventually contribute to organisational vigor. That is a synergetic accumulation of individual employees level of vigor. On the positive light of this, some organisational implications will be drawn in the end.

The Agenda

Etymologically, leadership can be well traced to the old English word "Leaden"or "Loedan", which meant to make go, to guide, or to show the way, and to the Latin word, "Ducers" which meant to draw, drag, pull, guide or conduct. Popular usage often confounds leadership with power, status, popularity or position of influence (Rhode, 2006). A plain understanding of leadership requires that leaders must inspire by example, not simply compel or direct their followers. All these explanations understand and denote leadership as a process, act, or influence exerted by one or a few on many to get something done. Rost (1991) said that neither scholars nor practioners have been able to define leadership with precision, accuracy, and conciseness so that people are able to label it correctly when they see it happening or when they engage in it. Morally sensitive leaders are the essential feature of any sound organisation (Solomon, 2004).

Given the many recent ethical scandals and unethical practices in businesses and corporate world, scholars as well as authors of popular leadership books have become interested in better

understanding the ethical dimension of leadership. Leader honesty integrity, trust-worthiness, forgiveness, and vigor has long been seem as important to perceived leader effectiveness.

Warren Bennis with over fifty years of leadership experience and in depth writing about it, is one of the leading scholars on leadership. Bennis strongly believed that leadership is not some set of tricks to be studied and how-to-do manual for the ambitious, it is the all encompassing study of the human condition, it is full potential, its vision and imagination, its dignity and sanctity. A leader strives to attain a harmonious relationship in his/her inner world. He/She achieves a measure of equilibrium between his/her active life and contemplate life. All great leaders instinctively are aware of this.

Leadership also requires a quality, that is, often called commonsense. It is really hard to define what commonsense is, yet to 'sense' it when we see it. Commonsense comes from freshness of perspective. Commonsense demands child-like innocence of looking at reality without conditioning of our senses. Those with good commonsense not only ask the correct questions but also question that–very premise on which these questions are based. This is the real backdrop for the study of authentic leadership.

Understanding Authentic Leadership

Ethical orientation has long been incorporated into transformational leadership. Burns(1978)originally introduced transformational leadership to describe political leaders. He distinguished transformational leadership from compliance based transactional approaches. According to Burns(1978), transformational leaders encourage followers to look by and their own individual desires and needs to a broader collective purpose. It is very interesting to note that Burns relied upon Kohlberg's Theory of Cognitive Moral Development, Maslow's Theory of Human Needs, and Rokeach's Theory of Values to explain why transformational leaders are thought to satisfy followers lower level existence needs, allowing them to focus on their higher level growth needs. Burns also pointed out that transformational leaders move followers to higher stages of moral development, by directing their attention to important values such as

justice and equality. Developing shared values through value internalisation process is also an important element of transformational leadership.

Burns presumed that transformational leaders were moral leaders and were not manipulative. A good leader exploits tension and conflict within people's value system and plays the role of raising people's consciousness. For this, the leader should be extremely conscious, alert and sensitive to the subtle Laws of Nature including human nature. He knows when loyalty turns into flattery and when genuine commitment degenerates into soulless performance. All this he/she understands because his/her alert mind can read silent language of Nature, which is the language of paradox.

Transactional leadership deals with the values of the means of the act which he calls moral values (eg responsibility, fairness honesty and promise-keeping). Transactional leadership helps leaders and followers to reach their own goals by taking care of lower level of needs and wants, so that they could move up to higher needs and values. Transforming leadership, on the other hand, is concerned with values such as liberty, justice, and equality. Burns believed that a good leader needs both transactional and transformational leadership with a touch of moral philosophy.

The research has provided some support for the idea that transformational leadership is built upon a moral foundation and that transformational leaders will be committed to furthering moral goals such as justice and rights. Threfore, transformational leadership appears to be consistent with an ethically positive leadership style (Nelson Debra and Cooper Carg,2007).

Luthans and Avolio(2007) introduced authentic Leadership as a separate construct that lies at the intersection of positive organisational scholarship and transformational, full range leadership. They defined it as a root construct that could incorporate charismatic, transformational, integrity and/or ethical leadership but they also organised that these construct could be disseminated from each other. They proposed that authentic leaders can be developed by building upon the leaders in born characteristics their self awareness

and self regulation process. They argued that authentic leader incorporates transformation leadership, but is a bit different because, while changing followers in some fundamental way is key to transformation leadership, it is not necessary to authentic leadership. It should be noted that the operational definition of authentic leadership includes descriptions such as genuine reliable, trustworthy, real and veritable. Authenticity includes owning one's personal experience's as well as acting in accord with the true self. Thus, self-awareness, openness, transparency, and consistency are at the core of authentic leadership. Authentic leaders are capable of judging ambiguous ethical issues, viewing them from multiple perspectives, and aligning decisions with moral values. Interestingly Avolio and Colleagues(2004) differentiated authentic leadership from transformational leadership by noting that–authentic leaders are anchored by their own deep sense of self, they know where they stand and with that base they stay their course and convey to others often times through actions, not just words, what they represent in terms of principles, values and ethics.This sense of self is the source of their confidence, hope and optimism.

Authentic leadership is obviously concerned with the ethical dimension of leadership. It focuses on a self-aware leader who has strong ethical intentions and make good ethical decisions and finally becoming a role model for others in the process. It is clear that the broad ethical dimension of leadership fits within the transformational and authentic leadership domains. Ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Brown et al.2005). This means that ethical leader's model conduct that is considered to be normatively appropriate in the particular context. Ethical leaders promote ethical conduct by setting ethical standards, communicating with followers about those standards, while providing voice and input, and holding followers accountable to those standards via the reward system.

Finally, ethical leaders make normatively appropriate (principled and fair) decisions that followers can observe and emulate. In a way this description of ethical leadership overlaps with the description of the moral component of authentic leadership (May, 2003). A true ethical leader has the capacity to discipline unethical conduct. He/She upholds organisational norms and supports the values of those who obey the rules(Trevino, 1992).

Can authentic leaders build a vigorous organisation? Vigor refers to individual's feelings that they possess physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness, a set of interrelated affective experiences. Authentic leaders can certainly contribute for the development of a vigorous organisation with his/her core values and life theme. Authentic leaders are grounded and they have a keen sense of reality and identify unethical practices easily and take the organisation towards sustainability.

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