

The Challenges of Practical Ethics and Leadership in the Age of Cyber Education: A Crisis in Management

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Abstract

Education in this cyberage has enjoyed the rapid pace of expansion and availability to areas and people who before now had no access to or notion of obtaining the affordable and quality education they have today. However, this rapid expansion has brought with it simultaneously an increasing complexity in educational leadership and management, where the physical walls of a traditional classroom have been replaced in some cases by the computer desk and laptop. This negotiation of instructional milieu has called for a re-evaluation of the role and type of leadership that will be equally “absent” yet effective. Hence, leadership styles and traits become very important as each type may make or mar the organizational set-up and effectiveness of each institution or enterprise. This write-up attempts to discuss the various types of leadership traits and styles and how a strict adherence to only one may eventually spell the doom for educational leadership and usher in a period of chaos, especially at a time when teaching is becoming faceless, borderless, and campuses are spread throughout the entire world. How does a leader as an agent of change effect the change from a distance without losing the feeling of power which has often gone with hands-on leadership? This will definitely call for the re-thinking of leadership roles, characteristics and traits that are consistent with the new world order.

Peter G. Northouse (2007) who has done a lot of studies on leadership maintains that “there are as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (p.2). However, he came up with some definitions and features which are quite standard or universally accepted. These features include influences, groups, goals, followers. Hence, leadership is a process whereby a person influences a group of individuals to achieve a goal (Baesu & Bejinaru, 2013). The key principle here is that leadership cannot exist in a vacuum and that it involves cultivating the habit that will encourage workers to work at their best to achieve the set goals. As such, educational leadership will engage in encouraging all the faculty and staff to work towards achieving the goals of education, which is to create an atmosphere

conducive to students learning and doing well in school. Hence, institutions acquire or establish reputations based on results and also behavior, and these reputations are a direct result of the connections between the leadership and faculty who work collaborative toward success. These relationships are not accidental, but emanate from a calculated trait or character disposition developed and maintained by the leaders and managers.

These outcomes could best be achieved in schools led or headed by transformational leaders. According to Northouse (2007), transformation leaders advocate for their followers. They are not only interested in reward or the learning outcomes of the school or organization but with the needs and growth of the followers. Transformational leaders work with faculty and staff whom they consider as human beings who have needs and issues/problems. Transformational leaders take and show interest in their staff and faculty's needs, values and morals. They are present to encourage them to move higher. They motivate workers to transcend their own selfish interest and to reach for the good of the team and the school/institution or company. As soon as the workers see themselves part of the governing body and as real stakeholders in the institution of business, they will be motivated to go above the call of duty to invest their time and energy into their assignments and work, knowing that their work is a reflection of themselves. Indeed, Max DePree (2010), John Garner (1990), Larry Spears (2004) maintain that the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality and that leaders should leave behind them legacies and assets. According to the researchers, every good leader has nine significant functions: envisioning goals, affirming values, motivating workers, managing the business, achieving workable unity, explaining and teaching, serving as symbols, representing the group, and renewing confidence and assurances. Next to Transformational Leadership is Servant Leadership, which, according to Larry C. Spears (2004), offers hope and guidance for better and more caring work places and institutions and provides a platform to improve how we treat the people with whom we work or who do the work in our institutions and workplaces. Servant-leadership is an aspect of shared leadership where leaders lead other people through influence, not by force or fear or authority and, by so doing, convince workers to act by the force of their conviction.

According to Northouse (2007) and Wynn (2012), team leaders become effective coaches, who monitor group composition to get the strength and weakness of each team member in order to place each team member according to his/her strength and expertise and also to intervene internally and externally to see the team succeed. The team leader is also an evaluator or assessor who is constantly taking the temperature of the team to see their internal and inter-interpersonal relationships and their productivity so as to intervene at the right

moment to resolve internal conflicts and placement. A leader is a facilitator who focuses on goals by clarifying and gaining agreement, planning and organizing and delegating power to structure for optimal results, synthesizing and coordinating in times of decision-making to come up with the correct decision about activities and changes, education and training team members in task skills, and maintaining standards of excellence.

Finally, team effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to engage in clear and precise knowledge of the goals of the team and to be able to select competent team members, who are result driven and committed to hard and collaborative work to occupy those strategic plays and positions that are central to the success of the business. Robert Greenleaf (1977), Ronald Heifetz (1994) and James M. Burns (1978)'s research on leadership qualities (all quoted in Northouse, 2007: 341- 368) identified *servant leadership* as an aspect of transformational leadership where the leader's main attention is directed towards the empowerment of subordinates to aspire to greater positions of self-uplifting within the establishment or the school environment. On the other hand, *Authentic Leadership* is built on honest relationships with followers through trust and ethical foundation. Such leadership depends upon and values the followers' or workers' input and openness. Authentic leaders are positive and optimistic people, whose intention is always to improve working conditions and better working relationships in a just and more loving society (Bishop, 2013).

Indeed, *Servant-Leadership* eventually builds into *Authentic Leadership* because they both share the fundamental values of moral rectitude, trust, confidence, helping others, especially workers to grow and feel valued as human beings with individual weaknesses and problems that the leadership could help resolve. Both styles recognize that leadership could and should be groomed and that is where each of them creates room for individual workers (staff and faculty) to act like minor leaders in their area of expertise and to eventually aspire to higher leadership on the ladder of corporate development and growth. These leadership styles lay emphasis on moral responsibility and higher ethical standards. Each leader finds himself/herself as a moral mentor whose daily activities and actions are mirrored to their workers to emulate. Both leadership styles involve values and the showing of respect for workers, faculty and staff and building a community of decent faculty and staff that respect each other because the leader (president, provost, principal or superintendent) respects each of them. These standards always remind the leaders to ask questions about the right thing to do, how to act with a generous spirit, how to honestly and faithfully serve people, especially the workers and how to treat the workers in caring and loving ways and how to be sensitive to their needs.

Furthermore, Richard Rodriguez, Mark Green, Yu Sun and Barbara Gaggerly-Hinojosa (2017), Len Tischler; Robert Giambastista, Robert McKeage and David McCormick (2016) argue that Servant Leadership and Authentic Leadership are fertile predictors of job satisfaction that affect important changes in employees as people. These positive attributes definitely present servant leadership and authentic leadership skills and styles as proactive, admirable and reputable. Servant leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations and ultimately creates a more just and caring world. Such leadership further manifests in making sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served.

From the combined definitions of the *Servant-Leadership* and *Authentic Leadership styles*, one can conclude that these two leadership styles are complementary and constitute the basis for a humanitarian relationship in working places. Applied to the field of education, these qualities definitely sum up and select important aspects from all the various leadership traits and characteristics that exist. Under such leadership style, teachers and staff will work in support of each other, strengthening and encouraging each other in order to please their leader or superintendent out of the conviction that doing the right thing makes them feel good, and that working together really works.

The concept of team work, trustworthiness, ethical behavior, group collaboration and identification are all values which can transform any working environment to a loving place. While different situations may call for different leadership traits and styles, the authentic and the servant leadership styles tend to combine other styles and traits since the building of team work and delegation of power will enable leaders groom workers and leaders who will stand out during specific instances to solve or handle different situations as they arise. This unity of goal and objectives will be the centrifugal force pulling all the workers to collaborate to work as a team. As a servant leader, the leader's role will be more as a facilitator and an encourager to enable faculty and staff feel appreciated as they work as a team, as a family to achieve these goals, without losing sight of their individual roles as workers within an institutional setup. This attitude is particularly true in institutions of higher learning, where the leader is an equal among equals. In fact, what distinguishes such leaders from the led is a matter of character development rather than credentials or rank and qualifications. Some of the best leaders of institutes of higher learning do not have a terminal degree, but they head faculty and departments with credentialed terminal degrees and extensive teaching and administrative experience. However, the beauty of these arrangements lay in the administrators and faculty

acknowledging and respecting their boundaries, while realizing that their relationship is not conflictual.

However, these feelings become tempered with when jobs and institutions become outsourced and lose the centrality of a unique campus. Today, instructional technology has expanded the parameters of working environments where work is performed virtually and on computers located in individual houses and located thousands of miles apart. In the academic field, the online format of instruction is rapidly overtaking face-to-face traditional teaching and learning. However, these arrangements are all subjected to a centralized administration, where the presidents or directors are located in the head office and occasionally visit the satellite campuses. In some cases, the logistics of such visits are impossible, and the heads or leaders virtually communicate via phone, web conferences or other means. This becomes extremely challenging as the employees feel the physical absences of their bosses and sometimes feel like they are boss-less.

Although technology through electronic communications has facilitated the operation of satellite campuses, distance has created a challenge to administration where the administration located on the parent campus finds itself cut off from the workers they should control. Each administrator has to adjust his or administrative style to accommodate a reduction in presence. This is particularly very difficult for those administrators who micro-manage or want to have total control of whatever transpires on the school campus. Unfortunately, he or she cannot be in two or more campuses and be the same person at the same time. This is when team leadership and transformational leadership takes precedence over other leadership styles. With servant, team and transformational leadership, we have leaders who delegate power and step backwards to allow and watch those workers assume power and move the institution ahead. At such a level, fear or intimidation have no power or role to play, because the lack of physical presence dilutes the implosive and sometimes suffocating presence of leadership.

In addition to outsourcing, educational leaders face a series of problems and challenges today many of which revolve around finances to run the school effectively without losing faculty or missing the opportunity to repair or improve school structures; retaining well-qualified teachers, many of them who are looking for better paying and less frustrating jobs; maintaining safety and security in the face of the increasing school shootings and attacks that are on the rise and we have witnessed recently; adapting to and accommodating the new computer-age students with changing attitudes toward education and the use of gadgets such as telephones and iPads and tablets for class work; and being competitive in terms of the qualification of their graduates to acquire immediate and responsible jobs immediately on

graduating. While outsourcing schools and institutions has helped in enhancing financial gains, when class are taken online, the cost of maintenance and protection from cyberattack has offset the relative gains acquired from the absence of physical infrastructure. major operational items such as budget augmentation, fundraising, supplementary school security at the entry gates, gun and smoking policies and other issues that can be handled locally without compromising the integrity of the academic atmosphere.

These complexities call for a redefinition of leadership and management which span across the general spectrum of leadership traits, behavior and qualities as spelled out by Peter Northouse (2007) and the contributors to leadership discourse in James L. Perry (2010). The answers are a hybrid of those leadership qualities that have been deemed serviceable and useful in most circumstances of leadership challenges. Authentic and Servant leadership tend to score more points because they nurture and embody the spirit of living by examples and empowering workers to assume leadership positions, which have eluded many of our leaders today. Yusuf Cert (2009), Bright Mahembe and Amos Engelbrecht (2014) and Joanne Lyubovnikova, Alison Legood, Nicola Turner and Mamakouka (2015) in their research on the influence of servant leadership on teachers and their relationship with principals revealed that job satisfaction was at its highest when the leaders exhibited and practiced servant leadership qualities. Presidents and Principals are the leading determinants of quality in education although the teachers actually carry out educational activities and spend more time with students. Teachers confessed that their relationship with certain principals who exhibited servant leadership qualities directly influenced their productivity and relationships with the students.

The staff and faculty work hard knowing that they work under and with a leader who cares about them as individuals. In such cases, the principal becomes a collaborator rather than a boss or manager who oversees them to make sure that they do what they are supposed to do. This same attitude was exemplified by the research subjects in research on the relationships between servant leadership, organizational citizenship behavior and team effectiveness. Effective team work and refined servant leadership produce high levels of internal consistency, because servant and authentic leadership promote positive behavior and the attainment of positive outcomes for each team work. The servant leadership is much in need today in institutions that face challenges of coming up with methods and strategies for achieving and encouraging team effectiveness. This style promotes a one-on-one development of followers thereby promoting positive outcomes and the achievement of academic goals.

However, Izhak Berkovich (2014) maintains that authentic leadership, at its best, is problematic because the attempt to provide a coherent personal narrative can sometimes lead

to self-deception and the leadership becomes a victim of deceit and hypocrisy where workers hoodwink their leaders in order to gain relief or become lazy. Furthermore, this leadership style, which is becoming so popular, can lead to assumptions of alignments of goals which are deceptive, making individual authenticity to be assumed as superior to other social values, moral ethics and organizational commitment. This assumption could be misleading. In fact, the assumption that aspiring authentic leaders form their self-identity incrementally may be misleading because life continues to offer challenges making the search for authenticity a lifelong quest. Authenticity in this case becomes a journey, not a destination and the satisfaction of having arrived becomes misleading.

Although there is a tendency for abuse where some of the over-aggressive employees can assume too much power as a result of the confidence and trust given to them, an institution's or entrepreneurial administrator will definitely benefit from the amalgam of these two qualities and styles that tend to overlap.

The above discussed leadership styles and traits have been fully tested in traditional organizational settings where leadership and workers meet daily in location called the head office or administrative building. However, the outsourcing of work and instruction has called for a rearrangement of organizational principles and ethics. For starters, it calls for the introduction and internationalization of cultural diversity and tolerance. The mere presence of culturally diverse workers does not equate to diversity; rather, it is the first step towards creating an atmosphere of cultural diversity. In fact, cultural diversity is a principle of operation, an acknowledgement of cultural difference that leads to the acceptance and accommodating of these differences and finally blending of these differences to create a culture of equality and sameness that is unique to the work environment. It is not just a matter of presence; it goes beyond the acknowledgement of presence to the practice of equality where "the presence" becomes assimilated into a unity of purpose where everybody feels at home without being reminded of how different he or she is.

Since outsourcing and online education will inevitably lead to interactions with different cultures, issues of public value and sovereignty will become major sources of conflict which the management or leadership must solve. Public values are found everywhere in any civil society, and those values determine relationships between workers and the administration. They constitute a bone of contention when these values are not infused into the institution's or organization's operations (Bozeman, 2007, Verkuil, 2007). So, the administration is faced with the problem of how to become educated in these societal values, and how to use them to sustain a meaningful working relationship with the global community wherever they are established.

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