

Leadership Ethos: A Framework for Value Creation in Organisation Management

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I. Introduction

The role of leadership in securing value creation in organisation management has been intensely scrutinised by scholars and practitioners over particularly the last decades with a view of addressing the discrepancies that have been observed (Leavy, 2013; Frost, 2014; Grandy and Levit, 2015; Neesham and Freeman, 2016; Caldwell, 2017a; Kodama, 2017).

In fact, Kalafut and Low (2001), and Skoog (2003) are amongst scholars who recognise the importance of “intangible assets” as a driver of corporate performance. Furthermore, Grimaldi, et al.’s (2012) reading underlines the role and influence of “intellectual capital elements” or knowledge (Schiuma, et al., 2012) on the economic performance of the communities of innovation in improving the value creation process. In this view, Storbacka, et al., (2012) argue that value is co-created in use as actors integrate resources (e.g. intellectual capital) in practices – hence the role of leadership. In other words, leadership, as a practice, plays a significant role in securing value creation in organisation management but only if it is associated and practiced following some ethical principles (Ciulla, 1998, 2003, 2014; Cheng, et al., 2014; Ehrich, et al., 2015; Kalshoven, et al., 2016; Engelbrecht, et al., 2017).

Ethical Leadership (EL), by referring to ethical principles applied in the practice of leadership, focuses on the leadership agent who must uphold certain principles that serve as fixed points. These ethical principles in the words of Caza, et al., (2004:170) “indicate what is right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, by reference to universal standards.” Such an understanding and practice, however, must go beyond the leadership agent and be instilled in the organisation as a whole. It must be developed and nurtured as a culture and value system within the organisation making it an *ethos* of the organisation, of a group. On this basis, Leadership Ethos (LE) may be described as moral judgments concerning the characteristic way in which leadership is embodied and exercised within particular “influence relationships” (Rost, 1991:102).

The purpose of this paper is to identify the importance of LE as a framework for value creation in organisation management in terms of the promotion of both (1) the system of belief and values of the organisation; and (2) the integration of both the individual and organisational objectives, by revisiting Barrett’s (1970) proposed three mechanisms of goal integration. The paper begins by examining the concept of LE. This is followed by the introduction of the concept of virtues as an attribute of LE leading to the discussions on LE as (1) the promoter of the system of belief and values of the organisation; and (2) the facilitator of the integration of both the individual and organisational objectives. Four testable propositions are submitted throughout the discussion and four action steps are offered for the implementation of LE. The paper concludes with a summary of contributions underlining the need for scholars and practitioners to explore the understanding of LE as a framework for securing value creation in organisation management.

UNDERSTANDING LE

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines the Greek word (/’i:θɒs/) “ethos” as the disposition, character, or fundamental values peculiar to a specific person, people, culture, or movement -- suggesting that ethos could also indicate an attitude or predisposition towards others. In summary, the meanings of ethos focus on the characteristic ways in which a group enacts, embodies, and practices its convictions and moral judgments and sense of what is right and wrong -- including virtues, social values, goals and obligations, or rules (Conradie and Abrahams, 2006).

LE incorporates the moral judgment by which leadership is embodied within “influence relationships” (Rost, 1991). For example, one may judge something (an act, a person, an institution, a society or a form of leadership) to be virtuous, moral, immoral or indeed amoral – constituting a continuum through which moral duties and responsibilities are fulfilled. LE is associated with actions which add value, honour commitments to

stakeholders and society, and obey laws (Caldwell, et al., 2015). In influencing others, leaders are most effective when they are perceived as ethical stewards – choosing service over self-interest (Block, 2013) maintaining a long-term perspective about wealth creation, and treating others as trusted owners and partners (Pfeffer, 1998). A morally virtuous leader is perceived as highly responsible, committed to the best interests of others, and effective at achieving results that come from highly motivated and engaged team members (Paine, 2003).

VIRTUES: AN ATTRIBUTE OF LE

“Great” leadership is increasingly recognised as a “transformative” relationship with others (Bennis and Nanus, 2007) that adapts to change, pursues the best interests of stakeholders, and optimises long-term wealth creation (Pfeffer, 1998). LE incorporates virtues amongst its vital attributes. Virtues are strengths of characters associated with excellence and improved quality (Crossan, et al., 2013). Aristotle (2013) suggested that virtues were the golden mean between two vices. For example, he explained that a proper awareness of oneself was the virtue between haughty pride and self-disregard (Aristotle, 2013). Hursthouse associated virtues with mindsets, character traits, and dispositions that are key foundation of ethical relationships and that implicitly encompass moral duties owed to others (Hursthouse, 2007). Virtues promote behaviour that enables the building of trust in relationships (Cameron, 2011). Virtuous leaders possess several important qualities.

1. Character -- honesty and integrity are universally recognised as the qualities people identify to be the most important qualities of their leaders (Kouzes and Posner, 2011).
2. Competence -- the ability to achieve results, to understand what needs to be done, and how tasks must be accomplished is absolutely necessary in any successful endeavour (Covey, 1991).
3. Commitment -- leaders demonstrate that they are personally dedicated to the organisation’s success (Senge, 2006) and model that commitment by their actions (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).
4. Courage -- organisational efficiency and effectiveness imply differentiating the organisation from “weak” and inappropriate practices and being willing and able to innovate to redefine excellence (Christensen, 2011).
5. Clarity -- leaders who are not able to communicate what they know to their organisation are in the same position as leaders who lack that knowledge (Simon, 1997).
6. Compassion -- the ability to show compassion for others and to establish personal connection with them is a fundamental element of emotional and social intelligence (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005, Caldwell, 2017).
7. Cooperation – the ability to bring people together in pursuit of a common goal while also meeting individual needs is the essence of cooperation and the heart of leadership (DePree, 2004).

Each of these qualities enables leaders to bring out the best in others and inspires others to follow a leader’s example.

LE: The promoter of the system of beliefs and values of the organisation

It is universally recognised and acknowledged that an organisational belief system embodies the myths, values, and ideologies of the organisation, suggesting that beliefs, values and norms within an organisation are a part of what is commonly referred to as organisational culture (Schein, 1985; Shafritz, et al., 2005; Mattila, 2008; O’Neill, et al., 2017; Valliere, 2017). To this end, the beliefs (and values and assumptions) play a significant role in shaping behaviours while at the same time helping individuals understand the organisation (Brummette and Zoch, 2016; Valliere, 2017). Unfortunately, in most cases, they are taken for granted for being abstract (invisible). In this regard, Senge (2006:285) notes, “while these taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world (beliefs) are often invisible to those who hold them, they shape organisational practices, guide how people do things, and, in turn, determine what skills and capabilities people develop based on those organisational practices.”

The system of beliefs and values of the organisation aim at promoting commitment at a personal level within an organisation as it is widely acknowledged that the highest level of commitment to an organisation comes from a person who is clear about both personal and organisational values. The lowest level of commitment comes from people who have high clarity about organisational values but low clarity about personal values (Kouzes and Posner, 2012) certainly because of the importance and impact of values in shaping people’s personality portrayed through their behaviours (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). To this end the influence of values in shaping people’s behaviours is fundamental in securing and promoting a sound organisational culture, for values guide people’s behaviour, empower people’s decision-making, motivate people, and keep people focused (Kouzes and Posner, 2012; Holman, et al., 2007; Stacey, 2007). Values are believed to be social principles, goals and standards that cultural members believe have intrinsic worth (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006), and are understood as beliefs about what is desirable or “good”, e.g., honesty, and what is not desirable or “bad”, e.g., dishonesty (Krech, et al., 1962; French and Bell, 1999). Values influence every aspect of people’s lives: their moral judgments, their responses to others, their commitments to personal and organisational goals. Values set the parameters for the hundreds of decisions that people make every day (Kouzes and Posner, 2012). This is what LE is all about. Amongst other things, LE intends to promote a system of beliefs and values of the

organisation aiming at promoting commitment at a personal level within an organisation by instilling and helping to develop the required character (Kouzes and Posner, 2011). In this respect, unless organisational leaders demonstrate the above-mentioned virtue-associated quality, it will be difficult to produce desired values. Consistent with the above, the first proposition suggests the following:

P₁: Organisational leaders who invest time and energy to instill and help develop the required character to the followers are more likely to establish and promote a system of belief and values that will secure commitment at a personal level within an organisation than those who do not.

LE: The facilitator of the integration of both the individual and organisational objectives

Bearing in mind Kouzes and Posner's (2012) exposition on varying employee levels of commitment to an organisation, leadership scholars and practitioners have been debating over the past decades on how to get people to work together with a view of integrating and simultaneously satisfying their needs and the objectives of the organisation in which they find themselves (Argyris, 1957a, 1957b, 1964; Viteles, et al., 1962). In this respect, LE through its quality-associated virtues, creates necessary conditions to implement it. Barrett (1970) proposes three mechanisms of goal integration, namely the exchange, the socialisation and the accommodation models as a way forward.

The exchange model denotes a fairly bargaining relationship established between the organisation and the individual in which the organisation offers the individual incentives associated with his/her personal goals. In return, the organisation receives commitment through time and energy to help achieve its objectives (Taylor, 1923; Weber, 1947; Barrett, 1970). This suggests that an individual's behaviour in an organisation depends upon the capacity of the organisation to engage with the individual. This view is supported by Simon (1957) as he affirms, "to understand how the behaviour of the individual becomes a part of the system of behaviour of the organisation, it is necessary to study the relationship between the personal motivation of the individual and the objectives toward which the activity of the organisation is oriented" (1957:16). Fundamentally, it is a question of informal social relations within a formal setup through considerate treatment from superiors and the opportunity to engage in informal social relationship with peers (Barrett, 1970; Moon, 2017). LE, again through its quality-associated virtues, namely competence (Covey, 1991) and commitment (Senge, 2006; Kouzes and Posner, 2012) facilitates the implementation and practice of the much-needed informal social relations. In this regard, the second proposition suggests the following:

P₂: The practice of LE is a way of requesting the exhibition of competence and commitment from both the leader and followers as a prerequisite for the establishment of informal social relations in a formal setup, allowing particularly the followers to be at ease while providing them with the resources to achieve individual goals, and seek their highest potential.

The socialisation model is a social influence model that encourages individuals to value activities that help to achieve organisational objectives and disvalue activities which do not help achieve such objectives (Barrett, 1970). At the heart of this model is the use of persuasion or modelling behaviour whereby the individual is encouraged to adopt as personal goals some of the organisation's objectives. This is referred to as positive socialisation; the contrary is negative socialisation. To achieve such a task, it is necessary for the organisation to demonstrate a sound system of belief and values through leader and peer socialisation. Without this system, it will be difficult to persuade the individual to adopt some of the organisation's objectives as personal goals (Schein, 1985; Schein, et al., 1961). Essentially, leaders here need to inspire and persuade followers to transcend their own self-interests in the pursuit of a higher purpose (Brown and Trevino, 2006; Horn, et al., 2015; Gebert, et al., 2016). Likert (1967) stressed the importance of leaders maintaining high standards of performance and the use of group methods for supervision. By doing so, the leader encourages subordinates to follow the example and set high standards for themselves while leading the group to establish a group norm of high performance. It is in such a way that persuasion takes place (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Bowers and Seashore, 1966). It is through courage (Christensen, 2011) and clarity (Simon, 1997) that individuals are encouraged to adopt as personal goals some of the organisation's objectives. It is against the backdrop of the above that the third proposition suggests the following:

P₃: Leaders, in their practice of LE, exhibit courage and are clear in their communication. This encourages and persuades naturally followers to value activities that help to achieve organisational objectives and disvalue activities which do not help achieve such objectives.

The accommodation model stresses the importance of taking into consideration individual goals in determining organisational objectives, including designing procedures for attaining them (Barrett, 1970). Fundamental to this model is that it promotes participation and inclusion in a way that individual members at all levels are included in a wide range of the objective setting, problem solving, and decision-making activities of

the organisation (McGregor, 1960). Integration of the individual's goals and the organisational objectives through participation and inclusion is done in two ways. "Firstly, the process of participating will be directly satisfying to individuals whose personal goals include exerting control or contributing to policy formulation. Secondly, participation allows the individual to represent his own unique needs and interests in the processes which actually define the nature of the organisation" (Barrett, 1970: 12). LE intervenes through elements of emotional and social intelligence – compassion (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005; Caldwell, 2017) and cooperation (DePree, 2004). Following the above, the fourth proposition suggests:

P₄: Unless organisational leaders are compassionate and cooperative, as it is required in the practice of LE, there will be less participation and inclusion of individual members at all levels in a wide range of the objective setting, problem solving, and decision-making activities of the organisation.

Action steps for the implementation and practice of LE

1. *Establish character such as honesty in leadership relationship to promote mutual trust within the organisation:* Trust in any organisational relationships has been regarded as a defining factor of success or failure (Hosmer, 1995; Reina and Reina, 2015). Trust behaviour is associated with cognitive beliefs, affective attitudes and emotions, conative intentions to act, and actual actions and behaviours. Therefore, honesty in leadership relationship will enhance trust behaviour because of beliefs, attitudes and intentions (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010) that are portrayed.
2. *Demonstrate compassion in leadership relationship within the organisation:* Caring leaders recognise the importance of getting followers involved in organisations by "encouraging the heart," one of five key leadership practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (2012). Hayes, et al., suggested that leaders who treated employees with genuine caring would see those employees respond by becoming stewards of their organisation's best interests and dedicated participants in creating long-term value (Hayes, 2015).
3. *Promote commitment to effectiveness in reaching the objectives in organisation management:* Leaders influence followers based upon "a shared sense of what is important, what is worth doing well and expending energy on" (Homrig, 2001). Therefore, competence or ability in achieving outcomes and reaching objectives constitutes a grouping of knowledge, skills, and characteristics that make it possible for an individual to have influence within a given domain or area of expertise (Mayer, 1995). This is accomplished through commitment.
4. *Promote cooperation and participation in leadership relationship within the organisation:* Creating a culture of engagement recognises the importance of aligned programmes, practices, policies, and systems that integrate employee efforts and involve employees as full partners (Pfeffer, 1998; Caldwell, et al., 2015). In this view, Smith, et al., (2016) explored the critical importance of clarifying key roles of the top management team, the human resources staff, individual supervisors, and non-supervisory colleagues in creating that culture. In order to engage employees, such leaders treat them with compassion and their leadership behaviour resonates with employees at both an emotional and cognitive level (McKee, 2008).

Each of these four steps plays a significant role in helping leaders identify with their ethical and moral duties and responsibilities and demonstrating LE. By establishing character such as honesty in a leadership relationship to promote mutual trust, by demonstrating compassion in the leadership relationship, by promoting commitment to effectiveness in reaching the objectives, and by promoting cooperation and participation in the leadership relationship, LE enhances organisations and improves goal achievement.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE PAPER

LE is a way of making the best world possible and treats others as ends, not means. It treats others with respect and creates added value. It pursues the welfare of the organisation and avoids breaking the letter or the intent of the law, as opposed to pursuing self-interest with guile and taking advantage of self-serving opportunities (Caldwell, et al., 2015).

In addressing the importance of creating value in organisation management, this paper makes five meaningful contributions.

1. It offers an understanding of LE as a framework for value creation in organisation management.
2. It presents the ways in which LE creates conditions for the promotion of the system of beliefs and values in the organisation.
3. It presents the ways in which LE creates conditions for the integration of both the individual and organisational objectives.
4. It offers four testable propositions for LE as a framework for securing value creation in organisation management.
5. It identifies four action steps for the implementation and practice of LE, leaving room for debate and further discussion with scholars and practitioners.

CONCLUSION

As a means for articulating right and wrong, LE can create cultural values that align organisational systems to build trust, value employees, focus objectives, and engage participants. Based upon virtues as associated qualities, LE assists decision-makers by establishing criteria for the strategic governance of organisations that enable them to function both efficiently and effectively.

As a strategic resource, LE provides a behavioural foundation based upon ethical and moral obligations to create organisational wealth, serve society, and honour relationships owed to stakeholders. The practice of LE is a way to assert that intangible assets are indeed a driver of corporate performance (Kalafut and Low, 2001; Skoog, 2003). Therefore, scholars and practitioners are encouraged to invest in exploring the understanding of LE as a framework for securing value creation in organisation management.

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