

Developing a Virtuous Aspect of Corporate Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this research article is to contribute to the scholarly field of corporate leadership development in connection to virtues, by mapping a concrete initiative that seeks to develop a virtuous aspect of corporate leadership. This article postulates that the view of human nature must be a fundamental part of any discourse on the nature, purpose and development of corporate leadership and offers one perspective of the view of human nature, as a contribution to this discourse. The view of human nature that this article observed on is that humans have the virtues in potential and the purpose in life is to develop these virtues and to contribute to the welfare of the environment.

Keywords: Virtues, Corporate Leadership, Leadership Development, Ethics, Morals

Introduction

The number of corporate and political scandals that happened during the beginning of 21st century has caused widespread concerns about leadership. Several rapidly growing areas of leadership scholarship have sought to respond to the shortcomings of mainstream leadership research and practice. Because of assessments, codes of conduct and regulations have failed to control and limit the wrongdoings of leaders, several leadership researchers are starting to study the virtues in order to find how the ethical behavior of leaders can be better nurtured and sustained. As this article combine the fields of virtues and corporate leadership is still in its infancy, this article will hopefully make a contribution to this growing field (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

Universally Values, Interrelated and Balanced

The virtues are central to geographically and culturally diverse philosophical, religious and spiritual wisdom traditions (Ciarrocchi, 2012). According to Manz et al., (2008) virtues are as old as recorded history. They may be practiced differently from culture to culture, but are universally valued (Popov, 2007).

Ciarrocchi (2012) states that the concept of unity among the virtues is an ancient one, even though there are disagreements on how they are integrated. Also Hackett and Wang (2012) argue that the six virtues they have identified (courage, temperance, justice, prudence, humanity and truthfulness) are

interrelated, interact with each other and are often demonstrated simultaneously when required. According to Ciarrocchi (2012) positive psychology views virtues as independent from each other and focuses on people developing signature strengths. Ciarrocchi (2012) refers to Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) who liken this to a physical fitness buff overdeveloping one set of muscles disproportionately to his body as a whole.

The virtues can help to balance each other; a virtue can be balanced with a complementary virtue. For instance an excess of assertiveness can be balanced with humility and vice versa; an excess of generosity can be balanced with modesty and to forth (Popov, 2000). This is more in line with positive psychology than with Ciarrocchi's (2012) view of virtue ethics. Not necessary to see a dichotomy between virtues being a mean between two extremes and trying to develop as much of a virtue as possible. Because the virtues are a mean between extremes, then developing more of a virtue is actually developing more of a mean between two extremes and does not, as Ciarrocchi suggests, become a vice of excess. This is to say that virtues taken to excess are not virtues at all. Assertiveness taken to excess can be belligerence, which is vice. Humility taken to excess can be self-abasement, which is also a vice. Therefore moderation, harmony and balance between the virtues is part of the very definition of what a virtue is.

Intrinsically Motivated

People can be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to be virtuous. Virtues are intrinsically motivated when someone is being virtuous as an end in and of itself, while virtues are extrinsically motivated when someone is being virtuous as a means to an end (Ciarrocchi, 2012). Youssef and Luthans (2008) view virtues as having inherent value, rather than merely being a means toward other ends. They go on to say that there is a sense of fulfillment associated with virtues. This fulfillment results in the internal value of virtues beyond any other intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. The practice of virtue requires conscious choice and the investment of effort. Viewing virtuous acts of worthy in and of themselves and not as a means to an end, is according to Ciarrocchi (2012) the foundation for virtue ethics, while is opposed to the mainstream psychological research tradition.

Also Hackett and Wang (2012) highlight that virtues are expressed through voluntary, intentional and intrinsically motivated actions; the virtuous actions are neither coincidental nor compelled by external forces and do not arise from the desire to gain personal advantages. Accordingly, someone is being virtuous only when they are intrinsically motivated; only then is it a true expression of the virtue. This means that the intention behind a virtuous act determines to what extent we are actually being virtuous. A person is virtuous out of the desire to be virtuous, to develop to be a good human being and to be of service to the people around them. If this is not the intention, then it is not a true expression of the virtue.

In the book *Character Strengths and Virtues – A Handbook and Classification*, positive psychologists Peterson and Seligman (2004) set out to create a classification of virtues and character strengths with the intention of being able to assess people's virtues. The view that it is the intention behind the act and not the act in itself that determines if an act is virtuous of nature, takes away the possibility to measure to what extent we reflect a virtue. No one knows our intentions, except us and even to ourselves this intention may be unclear. As the authenticity of the virtue is determined by the motive behind the action that shows the virtue, it is difficult for others and even at times also ourselves, to judge to what degree we are reflecting a virtue. The focus turns then from assessing others towards ourselves and working to make our own intentions purer.

Expression of Virtues and Contextual

Whetten (2008) writes that corporates consist of people and that virtues originate from how they interact with and treat each other. According to Cameron (2008 in Manz et al., 2008) virtues are experienced behaviourally, cognitively and emotionally. Popov (2004) shares that, the virtues are first about being and then reflected out actions. Virtues can be expressed through seeing (seeing the virtues in others and in ourselves); hearing (using our listening skills); speaking (to acknowledge, guide, correct and thank) and acting. In the literature on virtue ethics and on using virtues towards leadership there is an overemphasis on the action and behavioural dimension; virtue is expressed through actions. Hackett and Wang (2012) state that it is a long-standing belief of virtue ethics scholars that virtues guide people to behave ethically. According to them virtues make up good character and character provides the moral foundation of our actions. They added that virtues can only be fully understood when considering the context of the virtuous act, because the same behavior might be interpreted as reflecting a particular virtue, while in another situation it might not be. Also Ciarrocchi (2012) states that virtues are called for in specific situations; what it is right to do in a specific situation.

In *The Language of Virtues: Toward an Inclusive Approach for Integrating Spirituality in Management Education* Manz et al., (2008) suggest that personal sources of virtuous behavior in corporate can be religious, spiritual, philosophical, ethical, legal and humanistic origins. These personal sources have their own private, exclusive language. They suggest that the language of virtues is a way of speaking and communicating that offers a more public, inclusive language that honours the individual origins of virtuousness. The language of virtues includes the individual sources of spirituality at work and translates these virtues into sources of actions that can be implemented by the corporate as a whole. Yet Manz et al., (2008) do not elaborate on how they use the language of virtue.

Virtues, Ethics, Morals and Values

There is not much consensus on what ethics, morals, values and virtues are and there are many different definitions. Popov (2001) states that there is a lot of confusion about ethics, morals, values and virtues and that these concepts are often used interchangeably. He writes, each one points to the same goal – the right way to be or to do something and each uses a different criterion. It is their basis or criterion by which success or failure is judged that makes them different.

According to Popov (2001) ethics are designed and developed by various communities to establish standards of minimum acceptable behaviour required to remain a member of the community. They are based on fundamental principles that all the members of the community agree to live by. The most enduring principles are the virtues and a community can chose certain virtues as the fundamental principles to base their ethics on, stating that the application of the virtue may change from time to time while the core virtue remains the same (Popov, 2001).

According to Popov (2001) morals define what is good and right what is bad and wrong. He states that most moral frameworks are based on religious text and therefore are not subject to alteration, even though the interpretation and application of them vary from age to age. Popov (2001) found the virtues running through all the religious texts like a silver thread, as the teachings that did not vary from age to age. He states that the virtues are what it always means to be good, although the emphasis may shift somewhat (Popov, 2001).

Manz et al., (2008) state that virtues and values are sometimes confused. Hofstede (1980) defines values as a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others. Ciulla (2005 in Hackett & Wang, 2012) differentiates values and virtues by stating that someone can hold values without practicing them, while virtues must be practiced and expressed behaviorally. As Linda Kavelin – Popov (2007) puts it, values are whatever people consider of worth, from material success to the importance of ethics. She further explains that values vary from person to person and could be anything, while virtues are universally valued by all cultures. Virtues may be practiced differently from community to community but at the core will be the same virtue. They may not be the only values but they will always find a place among them (Popov, 2001). For instance, one culture may view it as sign of respect to not look the other person directly in the eye, while in another the exact opposite is sign of respect. The importance of showing respect towards others, however, may be equally emphasized by both cultures.

Corporate Leadership Virtues

As shown in the table below there are several scholars that pick a certain number of virtues to focus on in connection to corporate leadership.

Table 1: Scholars that pick a certain number of virtues to focus on in connection to corporate leadership

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|----------------------------|----------------------|------------|---------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Peterson & Saligman (2004) | Wisdom and Knowledge | Humanity | Justice | Temperance | Transcendence | Courage |
| Havard (2007) | Prudence | Humility | Justice | Self-control | Magnanimity | Courage |
| Manz et al., (2008) | Wisdom | Compassion | Justice | Integrity | Faith | Courage |
| Hackett & Wang (2012) | Prudence | Humanity | Justice | Temperance | Truthfulness | Courage |
| Kilburg (2012) | Wisdom | | Justice | Temperance | Reverence | Courage |

Peterson and Seligman (2004) distinguish three conceptual levels, where virtues is the overarching level, with character strengths as the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues and situational themes as the specific habits that lead people to manifest given character strengths in given situations. They identify six classes of virtue consisting of 24 measurable character strengths. For instance, Peterson and Seligman (2004) characterise the virtue of wisdom by the character strengths of creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective.

Ciarrocchi (2012) problematizes Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification of placing certain character strengths under the virtues, as several of these character strengths are defined by others as virtues. For instance Hackett and Wang (2012) have both temperance and prudence as cardinal virtues, while Peterson and Seligman (2004) classify prudence as a character strength under the virtue of temperance. Ciarrocchi (2012) especially points out how spirituality is classified under transcendence, arguing that spirituality is a form of meaning-making that describes the whole point of the good life, rather than a single virtue among others that constitutes the good life. Ciarrocchi (2012) also refers to Schwarts and Sharpe (2006) and Annas (1993) saying that practical wisdom guides a person's decision in

choosing which specific action is good for the person in this specific situation and therefore it is not just one for the six major virtues.

Whetstone (2001, 2003 in Hackett & Wang, 2012) concludes that it is presumptuous to adopt any a priori list of virtues to define character qualities of corporate leaders, because of the various definitions of virtues offered by researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds. Which virtues are needed differ from culture to culture, individual to individual and situation to situation and it is therefore problematic to pick a limited set of virtues and focus on them as what is needed for corporate leadership.

Corporate Leadership

Most people participate in a leadership relationship in the course of their lives, as leadership takes place on all levels and in all human spheres (van Velsor, McCauley & Ruderman, 2010). Corporate leadership is widely seen as both the problem and solution to all manner of contemporary issues and has been referred to as an essential ingredient for personal and social change (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Jackson & Parry, 2011). Corporate leadership is highly valued phenomenon that is very complex and the study of leadership can be traced back to Aristotle (Northouse, 2004). Yet there is still active debate and disagreement about what leadership actually constitutes. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985) corporate leadership is the most studied topic in social sciences, but also the least understood. Corporate leadership has traditionally been understood in four quite different ways: leadership as person, as result, as position and as process (Grint, 2005; Jackson & Parry, 2011).

According to Hanum, Martineau and Reinelt (2007) early understandings of leadership focused almost exclusively on the capacities, characteristics and traits of individual leaders. Van Velsor et al., (2010) admit that they have shifted their understanding of corporate leadership from leadership as primarily an achievement of individual leaders to leadership as an achievement of the collective and that the early focus on individual leader development can be understood as rooted, like much of Western psychology, in values of individualism and achievement and that there has been a natural tendency to place less emphasis on the communities and forces outside the individual. There is growing focus on corporate leadership as a collective phenomenon, a process where all members of the corporate contribute, on the relationships between people and their ability to act upon a shared vision (Hanum et al., 2007). Moving from leader to leadership and from leader development to leadership development, gives a broader perspective on what leadership is and effects the targets and methods of leadership development (van Velsor et al., 2010).

An organizational member with a supervisory capacity will often be both leading and managing, as this refers to two different processes. According to Northouse (2004) management and leadership are different concepts that have a considerable amount of overlap. In fact there are four processes – management, leadership command and governance – that all must be properly developed and allowed to make a contribution to the vitality and sustainability of all corporate (Jackson & Parry, 2011).

Combining the Fields of Virtues and Corporate Leadership

Corporate Leadership towards a Higher Purpose

As pointed out previously, the number of corporate and political scandals that happened during the beginning of the 21st century has caused widespread concern about leadership. This has caused a series of efforts, within the field of leadership scholarship, to rehabilitate and invigorate leadership with renewed emphasis on authenticity, ethics, morals and virtues. Each is trying to separate themselves from the others, as something more holistic that can be an overarching theory for the rest, adding a unique perspective. Most of the literature focuses on three things: creating a theoretical conceptual model of what their leadership perspective is, developing an instrument in order to measure the construct of their leadership perspective and exploring the potential outcomes of their leadership perspective. Most of the approaches are theoretical and relies on what Northouse (2004) calls the descriptive and anecdotal writings of a few individuals and the theory lacks empirical support.

According to Ciulla (2005) corporate leaders should live by higher moral standards than the rest of us, but because their behavior impacts many lives, they should have a higher compliance rate. The leadership relation is characterized by the leader trying to influence the collaborators and part of leader's job is to help other people recognize their own moral obligations and make them care about something bigger than themselves. It is imperative that leaders treat collaborators and their ideas with respect and dignity, in order to engage collaborators to accomplish mutual goals. Leaders must be particularly sensitive to the values and ideals they promote as they play a major role in establishing the ethical climate within their corporate (Northouse, 2004).

Why Combine the Fields of Virtues and Corporate Leadership

According to Thun and Kelloway (2011) leadership has deep roots in virtue. As Hackett and Wang (2012) point out several leading researchers are starting to study the virtues in order to find how the ethical behavior of leaders can be better nurtured and sustained, because assessments, codes of conduct and regulations have failed to control and limit the wrong-doings of leaders. Also Havard (2007) states that increased government oversight, reform of corporate governance and revision of code of ethical conduct, miss the essential point that the leaders who commit the wrong-doings, invariably know that what they are doing is wrong, but do it anyway. According to Havard (2007) this is a failure of character and the content of character is the virtues. Manz et al., (2008) state that one must move beyond seeing legal and policy enforcement as the primary impetus for motivating and sustaining ethical behavior incorporates, because the motivation to behave virtuously can originate from philosophy and religion.

How Combine the Fields of Virtues and Corporate Leadership

There are several ways to describe the relationship between the fields of virtues and corporate leadership. Putting the virtues at the heart of corporate leadership and creating a new leadership style called virtuous leadership would be following the trend of the other approaches. A virtuous aspect of leadership is that the innate and praiseworthy qualities of the human character (virtues) should be taken into consideration when an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (leadership). Acknowledging the virtuous aspect of human beings effects how one interacts with other humans, seeks to motivate and influence them and how one communicates with them.

Developing the Virtuous Aspect of the Corporate Leadership Relationship

Pearce et al., (2008) state that it is possible to manage environmental cues such that they are in support of virtuous leadership. They define environmental cues as very clear cues about what is appropriate behavior. They look at three of these cues: leadership selection, leadership development systems and reward systems. According to Pearce et al., (2008) leadership development systems can signal the importance of virtuous behavior and educate the members of the corporate in virtuous approaches to leadership.

Developing

Development can be to acquire new or change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, identities, behaviours, capacities, relationships, activities and actions. The changes can take place on different levels; individual, corporate and societal. Grove, Kibel and Haas (2005) discern between three fundamentally different, yet interrelated forms of change that leadership development programs seek: Episodic changes (knowledge gained), developmental changes (a sustained change in individual behavior) and transformative changes (substantial shifts in viewpoint or vision, or new corporate directions). According to Hanum et al., (2007) leadership development is a complex and ongoing process and is not something that we can fully know in a short period of time, as its outcomes rarely fall into a neat, linear progression. They say that, sometimes profound change can happen very quickly.

The whole notion of development is based on the assumption that humans have the power to change the way they act and think, that they can learn and grow (Seligman, 1999 in Thun & Kelloway, 2011). This is something that happens when individuals learn from experience and reflecting on experience (Kolb, 1984). van Velsor et al., (2010) acknowledge that although leaders learn primarily through their experiences, not all experiences are equally developmental and that combining assessment, challenge and support make the developmental experiences more powerful.

Avolio et al., (2010) emphasise the importance of reflection for the development of corporate leaders. They write that greater leader self-awareness offers opportunities for enhancing the leader's self-knowledge and capacities for self-regulation. Self-awareness involves learning about one's strengths, limitations and developmental goals and can be induced through training exercises and self-reflection. They define self-reflection as a conscious and deliberate process of thinking about and interpreting experience in order to learn from it. The process is not automatic, but takes place in response to experience and with a definite purpose (Avolio et al., 2010). They differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive self-reflection, preferring the adaptive self-reflection which arises out of an intrinsic curiosity and non-judgemental desire to learn about oneself as a leader, is a constructive process and focuses on what is right with situations and people. It occurs when a leader engages in non-judgemental observation of their own thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and the outcomes of their behaviours (Avolio et al., 2010).

In addition to factors that affect learning, like the variety of the experiences, the amount of challenge, the quality of feedback, the learning environment and culture and the ability and willingness to learn (Jackson & Parry, 2011). It refers to the level of capacity, sensitivity and motivation to develop leadership. They state that those leaders that have high developmental readiness will embrace trigger events and even experience more trigger events since they seek out positive learning opportunities for leadership development. They are investigators of such triggers and recipients of their effects (Avolio et al., 2010).

Teaching is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills and habits are transferred from one person to another (Dewey, 1916). Even if something can be learned, does not necessarily mean that it can be taught; the process of learning could be too complex, unconscious, or non-replicable to teach (Doh, 2003 in Jackson & Parry, 2011). If teaching does not result in learning then all teaching activities would be of little value (Carbone, 2009). Virtues and leadership are primarily learned through experience and there are no short-cuts when it comes to experience, it cannot be speeded up (Jackson & Parry, 2011; Hackett & Wang, 2012).

Developing the Virtues

Virtues are acquired, developed and sustained through continuous practice; repetitively practising them until they are developed into a habit. Learning a virtue is usually difficult at first, but becomes easier with practice over time until it becomes a habit. A virtue can be lost if a person stops exercising it for some time. If lost virtues can be reacquired through practice and self-learning (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

Ciarrochi (2012) emphasizes the role reflection has on developing the virtues. Adds a dimension to the development of virtues by showing how it is possible to have three focuses when developing virtues' focus on developing the virtues that are lacking' focus on developing the virtues that are strong and focus on the virtues that are strong in order to develop the ones that are lacking use the signature strength as a motivational tool for engaging in practices that can develop the essential virtue.

Avolio et al., (2010) use a term core positive psychological resources similarly to how the virtues are defined in this thesis. These resources or virtues are developed by developing more self-aware of one's current level of these virtues and focusing attention on how one demonstrates positive leadership behaviours every day, which again can triggering self-reflection and succeeding change of behaviours. They refer to recent empirical work that shows that these positive psychological resources can be authentically developed with focused training interventions.

Developing the Corporate Leadership Relationship

Day (2000 in Jackson & Parry, 2011) has distinguished between leader development which focuses on building human capital, developing the individual capabilities of leadership enhancing self-understanding and building individual identities and leadership development which focuses on building social capital, developing reciprocal relations and commitments helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments and develop extended social networks (Day, 2001 in Carbone, 2009). This distinction is important since a lot of the literature on leadership development is actually leader development according to the definitions above.

Jackson & Parry (2011) recognize that leadership is co-produced and argue that one should extend leadership development activities to include collaborators as well as leaders. Also van Velsor et al., (2010) state that the leadership culture is the target for leadership development rather than the individual leader; leadership development encompasses the development of connections among individuals and the development of the culture and systems in which individuals are embedded. Also, Avolio and Gardner (2005) view leadership development as more complicated than developing leaders, because it also involves the development of the relationship between leaders and collaborators. The leadership relationship is between individuals and is dependent on these individuals and what they

contribute to it, therefore developing individual motivation and skill is critical and individual development remains an important aspect of leadership development (van Velsor et al., 2010).

Avolio et al., (2010) view the promotion of adaptive self-reflection, self-awareness and subsequent development of core positive psychological resources, or virtues, as being an integral part of what they refer to as authentic leadership development. Leadership interventions that seek to develop leadership will also develop the followers and also the climate in which the leaders and collaborators interact. They describe that leadership development of leaders and collaborators is a reciprocal process, where they develop each other and forms that the basis for developing the leadership climate (Avolio et al., 2010). Through increased self-awareness, self-regulation and positive modeling, leaders can foster a similar development in their collaborators (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

When an individual changes it affects the relationship this individual has with other people. Therefore, when an individual develops, the relationship develops, which again develops others involved in that relationship, which again can develop the environment and culture around. Developing the leadership relationship entails the development of both individual (leader and collaborator) and the relationship between them. The development of individual and relationship goes hand in hand and it is possible to develop the one without it affecting the other. Leadership development should therefore focus on developing both the individuals, relationship between them and the environment and culture around them.

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