We Need Good (Virtuous) Leaders

The primary goal of this article was to examine the question of what is good leadership? More specifically, how do we advance both leadership effectiveness and leadership ethics? A second goal was to promote virtues-based leadership, which is at the heart of effective and ethical leadership.

The authors define good leadership development (LD) as connecting leaders to "the best versions of themselves," enabling them to foster meaningful relationships, and to behave effectively and ethically with "their organizations, communities, society, and the environment." However, they acknowledge there is disagreement about which virtues are most essential to good leadership. This is, in part, due to the contextual nature of virtues and leadership—what is considered most important will vary by context. Thus, more research is needed to determine which leadership virtues are most needed in certain contexts.

The Relationship Between Virtues and Leadership

The relationship between virtues and leadership can be realized in the following five key points:

- Good leadership is both ethical and effective
  - It is not enough to know what the right thing is to do; one must do it.
  - Leadership cannot be divorced from context; what is leadership in football is different than what is leadership for a non-profit.
  - Virtues are not personality traits; they are behaviors and skills learned through observation and direct instruction.
- Learnability
  - Moral virtues are cultivated through practice and habit.
  - They are learnable and teachable (social learning theory).
- Virtues and Character
  - Good character is built of virtues.
  - Cultivation of virtues and subduing of vices builds virtue.

- The unity and universality of virtues
  - Six universal principles across ancient traditions are: courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom.
  - However, context precludes a having a universal list. What is universal is the inclination toward good or moral character.
  - Each organization must determine which virtues are most essential.
- Virtues—the linchpin between individual and community
  - Humans cannot survive in community without the practice of virtue.
  - Individual good cannot be separated from the common good.
  - Virtues-based LD connects what is good for the individual with what is good for the community.

How Do We Develop Good Leadership?

Next, the authors ask how can we develop good leadership? They highlight two approaches for their potential in LD. First, there must be developmental readiness on the part of the individual. Regardless of which approach to LD is taken, readiness must be considered. Second, developing good leadership should be grounded in moralized foundations theory, which postulates six key behaviors: care, fairness, loyalty, sanctity, authority, and liberty. Even so, a widely accepted leadership development theory is lacking. But the authors put forth three emerging approaches to LD:
- Virtues language and labeling
  - Communication and language are central to leadership and character development.
  - Moral talk influences the moral identity of followers.
  - Virtue-labeling—calling out virtue when you see it in someone.
- Pedagogical approaches
  - Leader character development in business schools.
  - Coursework and experience in the organizational context.
  - Ben Franklin self-development project—select virtues to develop, then consciously practice them, followed by self-reflection and journaling.
- The virtues project (TVP)
  - TVP uses virtues-language and direct instruction to teach 100 virtues.
  - Two-day workshop, optional three-day facilitator training.
  - Advocates speaking the language of virtues.
  - Recognizes teachable moments to cultivate virtues.
  - Sets clear boundaries (ground rules for the group).
  - Honors spirit—celebrates individual and collective spirit.
  - Offers companioning—listen attentively, be present, unrushed, encouraging.
  - TVP can be self-applied across the lifespan.
  - However, TVP has yet to be empirically evaluated

- o 100 virtues are a bit cumbersome, although the list excludes prudence
  (Aristotle considered it the most important one).

The authors conclude by acknowledging not everyone and not every organization aspires to good leadership. Unfortunately, some sacrifice ethics for effectiveness. Also, there remains disagreement about which virtues are most important. Moreover, no virtues-based LD program has yet been evaluated. Nonetheless, the authors hope that by focusing on the role of virtue in LD, leaders will be motivated to pursue to virtuous behavior and to lead in ways that are both effective and ethical.