Transforming Self Concept

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Effective leadership is more than just giving orders and managing people; it demands a complex set of skills that are deeply connected to a person's psychological and ethical makeup. Self-concept, spirituality, and moral development are all critical components of effective leadership. In fact, they are essential. The thesis of this essay, supported by Brown (2018), entails a leader's self-concept significantly impacts their approach to leadership roles, while spirituality acts as a moral compass, and moral development is essential for ensuring leaders can make ethical decisions that sustain their effectiveness and credibility over time (Dweck, 1999; Schwartz & Huie, 2015). In this paper, I will explore why these qualities are extremely crucial to leadership success and how they can be cultivated to enhance one's leadership abilities.

Self-concept refers to an individual's self-perception which has a direct impact on their leadership style. According to the insights shared by Brown (2018), leaders tend to shape their leadership approaches based on their self-view. Leaders who have a positive self-concept exhibit confidence, resilience, and often adopt a transformational leadership style that inspires and motivates their followers. Schwartz and Huie (2015) further advocate the idea that self-concept is a fundamental aspect of resilience and effective leadership. On the other hand, a distorted or negative self-concept can lead to leadership approaches characterized by insecurity, authoritarianism, or manipulation. Thus, it is critical for leaders to have a positive self-concept to ensure they can lead their teams effectively and inspire them to achieve their full potential.

Research, by Day and Dragoni (2015) in organizational psychology, suggests that self-awareness, a key component of self-concept, is vital for effective leadership. Leaders who are self-aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and emotional triggers are better equipped to handle the sometimes-complex dynamics that come within leadership roles. This self-awareness also helps in fostering authenticity, which, according to McLeod (2018), is one of the most important traits that generate trust and respect from followers.

Leaders who possess a powerful sense of purpose and ethical grounding often exhibit qualities such as empathy and compassion, which are commonly associated with spirituality. In today's complex and interconnected world, spirituality in leadership transcends religious beliefs and plays a pivotal role in bringing about social change. According to Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle (2014), it enables leaders to make ethical decisions and fosters a positive organizational culture. Being spiritually aware can thus enhance a leader's effectiveness in guiding their team towards success. Fry and Nisiewicz (2013) also support this view, suggesting that integrating spirituality into leadership development can yield significant benefits. Additionally, Fowler's (2016) stages of faith development provide a framework for understanding how spiritual values evolve, further enriching our understanding of spirituality in leadership.

The concept of servant leadership, which emphasizes the importance of serving others as the primary goal of leadership, is deeply rooted in spirituality. Such leaders prioritize the well-being and development of their team members. Furthermore, Fry and Whittington (2005) argue that spirituality provides a buffer against the moral disengagement that can occur in high-pressure leadership situations, ensuring leaders remain grounded in ethical principles.

Moral development plays a crucial role in shaping a leader’s decision-making process. Leaders who have attained higher levels of moral development are more likely to make decisions that consider the greater good and not for personal gain. Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, as discussed by Crain (2015), provide a structure for understanding how moral thinking changes over time and how it affects leadership.

Leaders who have developed a more advanced understanding of morality, as described in Kohlberg’s model, reach a stage known as "post-conventional morality." At this stage, their decision-making is guided by principles that are universally accepted as ethical and just, rather than just following rules or conforming to society's expectations. This advanced level of moral development is especially important for leaders, as they often face complex situations where the right course of action is not always clear and must be thought about in depth. In addition, leaders with post-conventional morality are more likely to act in the best interest of their team or organization, rather than being swayed by personal gain or outside pressures. These leaders can recognize the impact of their decisions on all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the community leading to a more equitable and sustainable approach to leadership, which can positively impact the short- and long-term success of the organization. Overall, the development of post-conventional morality is a crucial factor in the success of any leader. By prioritizing ethical and just decision-making, leaders can create a culture of trust, fairness, and accountability within their organization, and ultimately contribute to a better world for everyone.

In real-world leadership, ethical dilemmas are quite common and can be extremely challenging to navigate. Ethical dilemmas are situations where making the right decision is difficult because it might involve a conflict between different values or interests (Worthington Jr., Griffin, & Gartner, 2017). For example, a leader might have to choose between what is best for their organization and what is best for the wider community, or whether to take a controversial stance on a sensitive issue. However, studies show that leaders who operate with post-conventional morality are better equipped to handle these dilemmas. They do not solely look at what is legally correct or what will bring the most immediate benefit to themselves or their organization; instead, they consider what is ethically right and fair for everyone involved. Having a strong moral compass and the ability to think beyond the immediate situation is essential for leaders to make principled decisions that are aligned with their values and beliefs. Furthermore, leaders who operate with post-conventional morality are better positioned to inspire and motivate their followers to act ethically and with a sense of purpose. They effectively communicate a clear vision that resonates with their team members, providing a structured and well-thought-out approach for achieving long-term success, and simultaneously ensure that this vision aligns with both the organization's core values and the personal aspirations of the team, thereby fostering a sense of shared purpose and collaborative engagement for all involved.

In conclusion, the integration of self-concept, spirituality, and moral development forms the cornerstone of effective and ethical leadership. The theoretical insights from Brown (2018), Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle (2014), Crain (2015), Dweck (1999), Day and Dragoni (2015), Schwartz and Huie (2015), Fowler (2016), Fry and Nisiewicz (2013), Fry and Whittington (2005), McLeod (2018), and Worthington Jr., Griffin, & Gartner (2017) provide a solid foundation for this assertion. A leader's self-concept shapes their approach to leadership, allowing them to possess the necessary confidence and authenticity. Spirituality anchors leaders in a sense of purpose and ethical conduct, fostering qualities like empathy and compassion. Moral development ensures that leaders make effective, ethically sound, and publicly responsible decisions. Integrated approach to leadership is not just desirable but imperative in the complex, hightech fast-paced world we live in today. The thesis that these elements are critical for leadership is reaffirmed, highlighting their indispensable role in shaping leaders who are not only successful but transformative.

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