COM 803-12 Hermeneutics and Communication

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September 28, 2024

Professor

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Assignment #3 – Essay on Hermeneutics

1. Write a 5-page paper about the need for hermeneutics, or how to intelligently read the scholarly subject literature and published social research about the topic of your research interest. Explain why learning how to read scholarly literature is needed to learn how to do scholarly writing about your research interest. Cite sources from the seminal course resources and find at least two articles about a topic of your interest. The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the issue of hermeneutics and a subject of their research interest for this assignment.

2. Paper Outline a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement. b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought. c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis. d. Use a minimum of ten scholarly research sources (NOTE: Use at least five books provided in course resources and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

# The Role of Hermeneutics, Communication, and Personal Conduct in Ethical Leadership

In today’s ever-evolving organizational and societal landscape, ethical leadership has become increasingly important. Leaders navigate increasingly complex challenges, and their ability to interpret ethical principles and apply them consistently in both their professional and personal lives is crucial to fostering trust, credibility, and long-term success. But why is hermeneutics, the practice of interpretation, so central to ethical leadership? Observing how leaders' personal conduct and communication shape ethical climates reveals that hermeneutics is indispensable for interpreting and applying ethical standards that align with both organizational and societal values. Hermeneutics, communication, and personal conduct are essential components that together promote ethical leadership excellence by enabling leaders to interpret ethical principles, effectively convey them, and embody them in both professional and personal contexts.

## Hermeneutics

Ethical leadership has shifted from rigid, rule-based frameworks to more dynamic and context-sensitive approaches that consider both the leader’s actions and the broader organizational culture. Hermeneutics provides a method for interpreting ethical guidelines within this evolving context. As Zimmermann (2015) asserts, "Hermeneutics allows leaders to interpret ethical guidelines within the broader social and historical context in which decisions are made" (p. 7). By engaging with ethical principles through the lens of hermeneutics, leaders can ensure that they are not simply applying rules but are interpreting those rules in ways that resonate with the needs of their followers and the demands of the situation. Sire (1988) adds that "reading critically means recognizing that every text has a context" (p. 5), underscoring the importance of understanding the surrounding circumstances and conditions in which ethical principles must be applied. Leaders who fail to do so may risk making decisions that appear ethical on the surface but do not align with the deeper values and contexts of their organizations.

Hermeneutics also enables leaders to address ethical challenges with greater precision and integrity. By applying interpretative methods, leaders are better equipped to consider not just the letter of the law but also the spirit of the ethical principles they are promoting. Pyrczak and Tcherni-Buzzeo (2019) argue that leaders must employ "careful, deliberate methods of inquiry to ensure that ethical decisions are grounded in a thorough understanding of the issues at hand" (p. 148). Hermeneutics provides the tools to achieve this level of understanding, enabling leaders to navigate the complexities of ethical decision-making with greater confidence and consistency.

**Communication**

Communication is another critical component of ethical leadership, as it allows leaders to convey their ethical values and expectations clearly and consistently. According to Brown and Treviño (2006), "Ethical leadership involves the promotion of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p. 120). Effective communication ensures that ethical principles are not only understood but also embraced by members of the organization. Leaders who communicate ethical standards clearly and consistently create an environment of trust and transparency, where employees feel confident that their leaders will act with integrity and fairness. Grojean et al. (2015) further emphasize that "leaders must guide the behaviors of their subordinates and institutionalize ethical values through communication" (p. 22). When leaders actively communicate their ethical expectations and engage in dialogue with their teams, they not only reinforce the organization’s ethical culture but also encourage followers to internalize those values in their own behavior.

In addition to establishing trust, clear communication in ethical leadership also promotes a shared understanding of the organization’s ethical vision, creating alignment between leaders and their teams. Zhu et al. (2018) argue that ethical communication by leaders enhances employees' ethical self-efficacy, encouraging them to take personal responsibility for their actions and decisions (p. 575). This alignment helps build a cohesive ethical climate where ethical decision-making becomes ingrained in everyday practices, rather than being treated as an occasional consideration. When leaders provide consistent feedback and engage in open dialogue, they empower employees to speak up about ethical concerns, which strengthens the organization's overall integrity. As Moslehpour et al. (2022) assert, "Transparent communication from leaders fosters a culture where ethical values are both discussed and demonstrated, creating a space where employees feel supported in making ethical decisions" (p. 11). By this level of engagement, communication becomes not just a tool for disseminating ethical guidelines but a dynamic process that cultivates an ongoing commitment to ethical behavior throughout the organization.

**Personal Conduct**

Furthermore, leaders must also model ethical behavior through their personal actions. Leaders who fail to live up to the ethical standards they promote risk undermining their credibility and losing the trust of their followers. As noted by Sharma, Agrawal, and Khandelwal (2019), "Ethical leadership is associated with positive organizational outcomes such as enhanced employee satisfaction and reduced turnover." (p. 730). Leaders who consistently model ethical behavior through their personal conduct demonstrate a commitment to the values they espouse, which strengthens their influence and earns them greater loyalty among their followers. Conversely, leaders who fail to act ethically in their personal lives often face significant consequences, both for their own careers and for the organizations they lead.

The role of personal conduct in ethical leadership cannot be dismissed. While communication is critical for setting ethical standards, it is through personal conduct that leaders demonstrate their own commitment to those standards. As Sire (1988) points out, "Ethical leadership must be grounded in personal integrity, ensuring that leaders embody the values they promote" (p. 2). Leaders who act ethically in their personal lives build trust and credibility with their followers, creating a culture of accountability that reinforces ethical behavior throughout the organization. O’Leary (2007) adds that "Engaging with jargon is central to understanding, but this must be supported by personal engagement with ethical principles" (p. ix), highlighting the importance of living out ethical values rather than merely discussing them.

However, personal conduct is not just about avoiding ethical failures; it is also about proactively demonstrating ethical leadership in all areas of life. As Moslehpour et al. (2022) argue, "Ethical leadership is grounded in fairness, honesty, and responsibility, and leaders who fail in these areas lose the trust and respect of their teams" (p. 11). Leaders who consistently model fairness, honesty, and responsibility in their personal and professional lives create a ripple effect throughout an organization, inspiring others to develop both personal and professional integrity. This alignment between personal and professional conduct is essential for ensuring that ethical leadership is not just a set of guidelines but a lived reality.

Moreover, the consequences of ethical failures in personal conduct are often far-reaching. Leaders who fail to embody ethical principles in their personal lives risk losing the trust of their followers, which can lead to disengagement and diminished organizational commitment. Haack (2009) emphasizes the importance of collective responsibility in leadership, noting that "Working within a group under the guidance of an experienced leader sharpens understanding and upholds accountability" (p. 8). This collective responsibility extends to the leader’s personal conduct, as followers look to their leaders not just for guidance but also for moral example. When leaders fail to live up to these expectations, the entire organization suffers.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, ethical leadership is a multifaceted process that integrates hermeneutics, communication, and personal conduct. Hermeneutics equips leaders with the ability to interpret and apply ethical principles in ways that align with the complexities of their organizational and cultural contexts, ensuring decisions are made with insight and foresight. Communication plays a critical role in reinforcing these principles, creating a transparent and trustworthy environment where values are not only conveyed but fully embraced by followers.

Finally, personal conduct is the tangible expression of ethical leadership, as leaders must embody the values they champion. True ethical leadership demands more than intellectual engagement; it requires a continuous commitment to personal integrity. By integrating hermeneutics, communication, and personal conduct, leaders create a strong ethical foundation that transcends organizational boundaries and applies to all areas of life. To cultivate ethical leadership excellence, leaders must rise to the challenge of not only understanding ethical principles but living them with conviction and consistency.

**Works Cited**

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