

Leading with Responsibility - A Psychological Model and Development Process
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Leadership requires character, competence, courage, compassion, commitment and choosing to take prudent risks in decision making to move self and others in the direction of doing the right thing to serve all stakeholders, which now includes the sustainability of our planet. Responsibility, a key element in making the right decision, requires being accountable and proactively taking ownership to resolve problems in the interest of serving others above self. To lead with responsibility requires a high level of psychological maturity (Antonioni, 2003).

Organizations need more executives and managers to be great and inspiring leaders. Jim Collins (2001) in his book *Good to Great*, indicated that great leaders inspire others by who they are, placing service to others above self-interest, crediting others for their successes, and taking responsibility for mistakes or failures. Research on great business leaders demonstrates that there is a positive relationship between great leadership and organizational performance (Collins & Porras, 2004). The unanswered question is, why do some executives and managers transform to become great leaders, practicing high levels of self-responsibility? The author posits that it is a process of self-realization and psychological maturity that contributes to some individuals transforming from good to great leaders. This author developed a psychological model for leading with responsibility based on increasing an individual's self awareness and the self-realization process (Antonioni 2003). Awareness is unanimously believed to be the number one attribute of successful business leaders (Business Education Magazine, April, 2010). In this paper the author will expand on his previous model and discuss a process to help facilitate the psychological transformation of great leaders towards self-realization.

The four progressive stages in leading with responsibility are manipulating, conforming, achieving, and inspiring (Antonioni, 2003). In the manipulating stage individuals see and relate to others as objects to be controlled, use fear and coercive power to force selfish outcomes, do not take responsibility for poor decisions and look for who to blame. The conforming stage is one where individuals can easily feel victimized and they give in to group decision making pressure because they need to be accepted and fear the group's rejection. They deny responsibility by claiming they were powerless because it was the group's responsibility. In the achieving stage individuals focus on their personal achievements so that they can build an autonomous self, which often is called ego. They limit taking personal responsibility. Finally, in the inspiring stage individuals begin to realize their best and greatest selves. That is, being fully

responsible for oneself and consciously choosing to serve others above their own self interests (Antonioni, 2003). What follows are more specific details of each stage.

Stages of Leading with Responsibility

The lowest level of responsibility development is **manipulating**. These individuals are driven by getting into positions of power and authority because they need to have control over others. They may be unaware of the anxiety they feel when they are not in control. They relate to people as objects, using them as a means to accomplish their own ends to build an empire in which their followers are fearful of them. There is little to no mutual trust in the relationship. They behave in a selfish and opportunistic manner, using "foolish courage" to exploit loopholes, and operate without concern for the negative impact of their decisions. They micromanage information that is shared with others, decide what is good or bad, lie to themselves and others, justify lies, cover up misdeeds from a position of authority, and blame others when something goes wrong. They manipulate their way out of personal responsibility because it is easier to blame someone else. In terms of ego development (Loevinger, 1976), they operate at a self protective stage in which they understand the rules and use the rules to their own satisfaction or make sure they don't get caught violating the rules. Their moral development is most likely equivalent to the instrumental stage during childhood (Kohlberg 1981). At this stage, self-criticism is rare, they get triggered emotionally and respond defensively when they receive constructive feedback about their undesirable work behaviors or outcomes. People reporting to these executives or managers may feel fearful of sharing their perceptions about working with them. Therefore, manipulators don't know how people truly feel about working with them and have a low level of awareness of how others really see their leadership behaviors.

At the **conforming** level, people have a strong need for acceptance by their managers and peers. For them, decision making is strongly influenced by perceived group pressures, even when the group's decision is not an ethical one. In terms of ego development these individuals focus on surviving in the system and are concerned about what others think of them, thus they strive to impress others (Loevinger 1976). Senior managers at Enron, for example, betrayed their sense of making the correct ethical choice for employees because they feared rejection by their peers. The same could be said for senior managers at Ford motor regarding unsafe Pinto cars in which people were dying. Executives conformed to the group decision to not do a major recall and improve the safety of the car. Instead they left unsafe cars on the road and paid for the deaths as they occurred. In both cases, executives failed to have the nerve to stand up to the others in the group and describe the reality of unethical decisions. They betrayed their sense of doing the right thing. Instead

they looked for ways to justifying making the wrong decision appear to be the right one, thus avoiding taking responsibility for the potential impact of their decisions. Furthermore they justify, by claiming they were victims of the system in which they work, that they have little power and influence in their positions or that the decisions were the group decisions, not theirs. Individuals in this stage do not have the courage to challenge authority even when the people they report to engage in questionable behaviors.

At the **achieving** level the primary drive is advancement, building status and power within the organization's hierarchy and increasing control over resources. Executives and managers strive to achieve in tangible ways that are recognized in the external world – money, status, power, rising stock price (George, 2003). In terms of ego development, these individuals are aware of their identity as an individual, more aware of alternatives, more emotionally independent and aspire to achievement (Loevinger, 1976). These people strive to accomplish more in order to achieve status as producers to build their identity (ego). They become pacesetter leaders (Goleman 2004), but have learned to do things for personal gain; thus they are transactional leaders in which others get recognized only when they do things to help the leader's achievements. At this stage they cannot be transformational leaders who are capable of inspiring others because their ego still needs to use others as a means to accomplish their desired ends. Pacesetter leaders realize the power they have, based on their achievements, and may not be aware that they have become egotistical, autocratic and arrogant. These leaders have a limited awareness of the anxiety that drives their need to control things related to their advancement, and expend excessive amounts of energy protecting their accomplishments. Some of these individuals may resort to using coercive power to control situations. While there is an awareness of the importance of ethics, individuals may test the need to respond ethically by finding procedural or legal loopholes or not sharing all information because they were not asked the right questions.

Because the achievement stage is about mostly self rather than service to others, responsibility development is somewhat limited. These individuals focus on surviving in the system and are concerned about what others think of them. They tend to be self-centered and focus only on their own needs and seek to preserve their ego, thus they don't continue to learn about themselves and grow. Unfortunately this is the way that most of their management and peers function. They cannot see that all their self-interests are contributing to a lack of excellence and having a negative impact on the organization's performance. They prefer not to see all this because if they did, they would be faced with increased accountability. Because they don't take risks to model being an inspiring leader, the organizational system and culture do not change (Quinn 2004). Many executives and managers are trying to establish themselves in a world that leaves little time for self-reflection, thus they have limited their self

awareness. Their egos need to be stroked, insecurities need to be smoothed and fears need to be allayed. And as they age they realize they are holding back from being the person they want to be (George, 2003).

The highest stage of leading with responsibility is defined as **inspiring**. These individuals have the character, competencies, commitment, and courage to lead based on making choices (decisions) that are best for the all stakeholders. They are aware that doing the right thing is putting the common good before self-interests. They are aware of their ego and have learned how to manage it so that they do not separate themselves from truly being connected and interdependent with others. They have the self awareness and the willingness to resolve or manage their inner conflicts between interests in self-preservation and interests in pursuing valued outcomes for the common good of others. These leaders are purpose-centered and motivated to find meaning in what they are creating for the common good of all (Quinn, 1996).

Inspiring leaders know their strengths and weaknesses and are willing to increase their self awareness because they sense the vitality of fully realized self. They are internally directed by principles and values and have integrity. Their sense of responsibility means the way they behave is congruent with their way of thinking and being (Thayer 2010). The primary drive is to be self-competent, relate to people as people, not as objects, to be fully self-responsible and teach others to be responsible for themselves. They prefer to influence followers by using referent power rather than position power because they are aware that by sharing control with their direct reports they can actually gain control, thus people reporting to them take action based on commitment rather than compliance. However, they also know that they need to take charge as a leader when there is adversity.

Responsibility for these leaders means being accountable for one's choices and not depending on others to establish controls for one's behaviors. These leaders take responsibility before decisions are made and are willing to be held accountable for the consequences after the decisions. They know that they are responsible for the impact they have on others. They do not pass the buck, look for who they can blame, or deem their decisions above discussion.

Inspired leaders are aware of their responsibility to all stakeholders, not just one group, and they share information with others in a timely manner. They can deal with the conflicts of stakeholders' competing interests so that they can do the right thing, that is, what is best for the common good. Leaders at this stage are deep listeners and constantly learning what is right for them and what is right for others. In terms of ego development they have the courage to acknowledge and cope with inner conflicts rather than projecting them. They have a high tolerance for ambiguity (Loevinger, 1976).

Inspired leaders are not perfect and realize that every choice to do the right thing incurs risks, thus they will make mistakes and experience failures. The difference is that they are willing to allow themselves to be vulnerable by accepting accountability for their mistakes and quickly learn from them. Because they know that a high performing organization cannot afford people to choose the role of victim, they know that they need to model self-responsibility first and then help others develop their self-responsibility. Leaders at this stage have moral courage, which means they speak with authenticity about doing the right thing in the face of the discomfort of dissension, disapproval or rejection because they want to preserve justice and focus on service for the common good (Putman, 1976; Woodard, 2004). By holding the tension in the thinking process until problems are well defined and solutions meet the short and long-term requirements of all stakeholders, they use their imagination as they search for optimal solutions and find common ground among stakeholders.

Finally, these great leaders have a sense a humor about themselves because they don't take themselves too seriously. They do take the principle of personal responsibility seriously so that they can continuously learn and grow and become inspiring models to others. In terms of ego development, these individuals take a broad view of life as a whole, aspire to be realistic and objective about themselves and others and self-fulfillment becomes a goal, partly supplanting the drive for achievement (Loevinger, 1976). They are open to feedback and changes in a dynamic changing world. They are motivated to increase their awareness because they have taken small steps towards self-realization and appreciate the energy and vitality they feel.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING TO THE INSPIRING LEADERSHIP STAGE

The conceptual model of leading with responsibility not only captures the reality of leadership development stages in organizations, it also provides more clarity about the attributes and behaviors of great leadership. However, there is an unanswered question. What is the process for transforming to higher stages of leadership development? What would contribute to executives and managers moving to the inspiring leadership stage? In essence, how do leaders learn to go from being good to great?

What follows is description of a process for facilitating the transformation to higher developmental stages of leading with responsibility. The process could be used with participants in open-enrollment executive leadership development programs and Executive MBA Programs. Better yet is to use the process internally within an entire organization for a period of two years starting with top management and working down to middle managers and first line supervisors,

bringing about a culture change within the organization. McKinsey Consulting group found when they worked with executives and managers within organizations for a period of two years that their approach helped one percent of the executives and managers per year move up in stages of leadership and values realization. Although this percentage is small, the one percent that transformed to focusing on service to community, society and humanity had a strong positive impact on others (Aiken, Keller, Rennie, 2009). There is additional support for focusing on increasing self awareness. Recently 75 members of Stanford' Business School Advisory Board unanimously believed that self awareness was the number one attribute of successful business leaders (Business Education Magazine, April, 2010).

The process for facilitating the development to higher stages of leading with responsibility is a two year leadership development program where participants are introduced to the stages of leading with responsibility and are invited to take a leadership learning journey. This process will include a 360 degree "leading with responsibility" assessment inventory, a leadership education program and professional leadership coaching.

Leadership Assessment

Currently there are no 360 degree leadership inventories that specifically focus on the development of responsibility and courageous behaviors. Thus, little has been done to help managers increase their awareness of behaviors related to leading with responsibility and engaging courage. The author proposes developing a 360 leadership inventory to provide feedback to participants and increase their self awareness. The inventory would be given by the organization to assess executives and managers' stages of leadership development. This increases awareness of their strengths, identifies areas for improvement, and highlights discrepancies where they rated themselves higher than others. The feedback report can then be used to develop leadership goals and action plans.

Education

During the leadership education program they will be helped to use the assessment feedback to develop their leadership goals. Every three months participants return for a one-day leadership development session, discussing what they are experiencing on their leadership journey and learning new material to help them make the transformation to leading with responsibility. The topics in these sessions will cover the components of inspiring leadership. These include character, competence, courage, compassion, commitment, and making difficult choices.

Courage development, for example, would be one of the topics presented. Courage is defined as the willingness to take prudent risks in the face of perceived fear and to engage one's authentic leadership. Participants will learn that authenticity is a form of courage because it is a reaffirmation of self and being (Tillich, 1980). In addition, they will learn that authenticity and integrity are closely associated with the expression of personal views and values in the face of dissension and rejection. In terms of developing courage to lead from the inspiring stage, participants would learn what it means to take risks in the face of uncertainty, showing concern for others rather than just oneself, standing up for what one believes in even if others don't feel the same, defending a viewpoint that is different from the norm, doing something outside of one's comfort zone, and thinking out of the box so that solutions to problems have purposeful value for all stakeholders.

Coaching

Most leadership development occurs back on the job rather than in leadership program sessions. Therefore coaching is essential to help participants practice new leadership behaviors and process their experiences. Each participant will initially receive individual coaching to process the feedback from the 360 assessment, specifically, whether they felt the feedback was valid and discuss feelings about the feedback. Some participants may feel shocked and angry receiving feedback from others indicating that they are behaving at the manipulating stage or even the conforming stage. These feelings will be processed with the coach. The coach then discusses the participant's goals for practicing at the inspirational stage of leadership, checks whether they are willing to commit to the goals and listens to any concerns they may have. If the choice is to move ahead, action plans need to be discussed and the participant's manager needs to sign off supporting the choice and the action plans.

Participants additionally receive individual coaching once a month after each session and discuss the feelings they are experiencing, specifically anxious and fearful feelings about making a change. Individuals at the conforming stage will have fears about leaving their comfort zone and demonstrating their leadership with their manager or in group situations. Individuals in the achieving stage will be fearful of leading their manager or a management group when they sense that the right thing will not be done and that the group is deceiving itself by justifying why they are about to make a wrong decision seem right. Achievers will fear that their management will see their leadership in the moment as a "thorn in their side" and as a result will be perceived as a trouble maker and therefore not get promoted. It will also be a challenge for participants to change from being self-focused at the achieving stage to other-focused at the inspiring stage.

Coaching participants to develop their courage, for example, is essential for practicing inspirational leadership. Coaching needs to focus on helping participants taking prudent risks to stand up for what they believe, even if others don't feel the same. They need to learn how to defend a viewpoint that is different from the norm. Participants also need to develop courage to think out of the box and look at problems in a new way so that solutions to problems have purposeful value for all stakeholders. Coaches need to follow up with participants on their attempts to "exercise their courage muscle" and provide timely recognition for small successes. They need to discuss lessons learned and work toward further courage development. Coaches can help individuals become more aware of the negative head chatter that occurs when they get scared to engage their leadership greatness. Individuals need to practice leading at the inspiration stage and then receive coaching regarding fears and disappointments. Coaching is also critical to help participants have compassion for who they currently are, allowing for natural regression, while concurrently learning to love who they are capable of being.

Discussion

If we want more leaders to change from good to great and be inspiring leaders, we need to make concerted efforts to increase their self-awareness, facilitate courage development and invite them on a learning journey to take prudent risks to "be all that they can be." Increasing self awareness can be painful because individuals will wake up to the fact that they engage in self-deception and collusion with others that prevent them from being fully functioning beings. Pain usually accompanies increases in self awareness; however, pain brings people into the present moment and can motivate them to continue the struggles on their self-realization journey. The deeper people look into who they are, accept who they are and how they are limiting themselves, the more likely that change will occur. The very moment they get in touch with themselves and accept responsibility, they will begin to grow.

Organizational cultures may not want leaders to grow beyond the achieving or conforming stages of development, but organizations are faced with increased transparency and there is more press coverage than ever when executives choose not to do the right thing. Organizations are increasingly facing the necessity for more leaders to be models of integrity and responsibility. To change the culture of organizations requires that a few individuals take the risks to model the desired change. The challenge for leadership development programs (open public enrollment, Executive MBA and internal training programs) is to get out of the normative comfort zone of leadership training and start developing powerful leadership journeys that focus on the inspiring leadership stage. It is possible for executives and managers to transform to higher stages of psychological

maturity. The model, "leading with responsibility" can help executives and managers see the stages of developing inspirational leadership. Organizations can go beyond the norm and commit to the three-part process presented in this paper, helping executives and managers transform themselves into being truly impactful and inspiring leaders.

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