An "Ethical Mindset" – Linking OD and the Implicit Assumptions Leaders Make When Reviewing the Insights of Douglas McGregor

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Leadership styles and organizational development (OD) interventions are influenced by significant contextual concerns. The contextual concerns examined in this paper highlight the important potential role of ethics within OD and leadership, though ethics is only considered a central tenet within some, but not all, leadership theories. The founders of OD placed ethical issues as a central tenet to the theory and practice of OD, although the language of ethics was not specifically used. Thus, this paper invites readers to challenge themselves on the extent to which their implied leadership assumptions are in alignment OD values. Additionally, this paper showcases the role of ethics — an Ethical Mindset —in the future development of OD.

INTRODUCTION

Organization Development (OD) has almost as many definitions as there are writers in the field. Each definition varies slightly from the others because of differences in the ontological and epistemological assumptions, or worldviews, of the writers. Friedlander and Brown (1974) and Woodman and Dewett (2004) recognized that OD has been influenced and shaped by the changing environmental context and from the collective understanding of human behavior. As a result, one can see the evolution of this field by observing the various subtle differences in the definitions of OD over time. Mirvis (1988) goes so far as to group some of the decades into specific bands of OD and label them based on the contextual issues that shaped the practice and theory of the day. This again highlights the evolutionary nature of our understanding. Within OD literature, McGregor (1960) was the first to assert that one needs to understand the underlying assumptions of theories, and he argued that these were not discussed and challenged often enough (Heil, Bennis & Stephens, 2000). In "The human side of enterprise," McGregor (1960, p. 11) stated, "[h]uman behavior is predictable, but, as in physical science, accurate prediction hinges on the correctness of the underlying theoretical assumptions." More recently, Marshak and Grant (2008) asserted that differences in philosophical assumptions influence the choice of intervention method. Palmer and Dunford (2008) stressed that different research agendas stem from differences in ontological assumptions about change and change management. Furthermore, Bushe and Marsehak (2009) stated that the underlying assumptions are so fundamentally important that they result in two different, yet compelling, forms of OD: diagnostic and dialogic. Thus, assumptions play a pivotal role in OD theories and interventions and have implications for both practitioner and scholar.

Leadership is also central to the work within OD, and this centrality stems from four main reasons that relate to the group setting of OD theory and practice. The role of leadership, whether individual or collective, is to firstly, clarify and determine the purpose and task to be performed; secondly,

communicate with others (both internally and externally); thirdly, ensure there is accountability to each other and to other potential stakeholders; and fourthly, consistently attend to group maintenance. All of these factors are consistent with the work of Katzenback and Smith (2003).

Leadership literature also has an overwhelming number of definitions and "[e]fforts to develop an integrated framework of leadership are limited by the biases, narrow focus, and superficiality of most leadership theory and research" (Yukl, 2012, p. 448). Yukl also asserted that most of the theories are biased because of implicit assumptions that underpin models of leadership. Within leadership literature, as in OD research and practice, the field has developed as the contextual background and our collective understanding of these concepts has advanced (see Appendix 1: Historical Development of Various Leadership Theories). As a result, the practitioner and scholar would be wise to ask the following pivotal questions:

1) What are the current contextual influences directly and indirectly shaping our understanding of both OD and leadership?
2) To what extent do our underlying assumptions of leadership concur with our underlying assumptions of OD? Or, in other words, are our ontological and epistemological assumptions surrounding leadership and OD consistent?

To address these questions, this paper begins with a discussion regarding the contextual issues of our time. Secondly, the paper briefly clarifies our definition of ethics and how the notion of an *Ethical Mindset* can be shaped and developed. The paper then reviews the implied assumptions of transformational versus transforming leadership and attempts to determine the extent to which their underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, or worldviews, align with the values of OD. Finally, this paper closes with a discussion of the implications of the role of ethics within the field of OD.

CONTEXTUAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME

Many have asserted that leadership is a social construction (Meindl, 1995; Grint, 2005; Sjostrand, Sandberg & Tyrstrup, 2001; and Ladkin, 2010) and, thus, as Ladkin asserted, leadership is always contextually dependent. This assertion is supported by the fact that there have been significant shifts within both OD and leadership literature. The collective understanding of OD and leadership through time is predicated upon social concerns. Currently, there appear to be two significant concerns. First, the unethical behavior on Wall Street threatens economic stability and the entire premise of capitalism. This assertion is strongly supported by Lewis (2010). Second, the tension between our environment and capitalism is threatening our very existence as a species (Fremantle, 2008). These two contextual concerns create a "perfect storm" and, ultimately, history will prove this period to be a significant bifurcation point in our collective journey, similar to (and, perhaps, as significant as) the Renaissance period. Given these contextual concerns, this paper contends that ethics will become an increasingly important issue in the field of OD and leadership. Ethics will be the central element in resolving these two critical contemporary, contextual concerns.

WHAT IS ETHICS AND HOW IS IT SHAPED?

Pepper (2010) summarized ethics well when he stated that "[e]thics refers to rational deliberation about questions of right and wrong (what are moral questions) and to the result of that deliberation" (p. 19). Shaw and Barry (2009) purported that ethics deals with the individual character that governs and limits behavior. There are four generally accepted (e.g., Shaw & Barry, 2007; and Seawell, 2010) approaches to ethical decision-making: utilitarian (outcome based); deontological (duty based); virtue (virtue based); and communitarian (community based). Each approach has a unique and specific way of identifying and resolving issues. Seawell highlighted that there are four elements common to all approaches:

1) Impartiality: Weighting interests equally.

2) Rationality: Offering reasons a rational person would accept.
3) Consistency: Applying standards similarly to similar cases.
4) Reversibility: Using standards that apply no matter who makes the rules. (p. 3)

However, the real challenge within ethics is not in regards to the various theoretical constructs that have been debated and studied since man could record, but rather with attaining a working definition of ethics *per se*. This dilemma arises because context plays such a pivotal role in influencing/mitigating the difference, if any, between normative ethics — what one should do — and descriptive ethics — what one actually decides to do.

Lichtenstein, Smith and Torbert (1995) asserted that an individual's ethical development occurs through a series of stages, and, ideally, in groups. This assertion is consistent with the views of many authors, such as Werhane (2002), Christensen and Kohls (2003), Bowen (2004), and Cha and Edmondson (2006), to name a few. It is also congruent with leadership development models (both in relation to senior leaders and their immediate followers), such as that suggested by Rooke and Torbert (1998). Furthermore, Lichtenstein, Smith and Torbert determined that only in the latter stages of their model did "leaders begin to use multiple ethical frameworks to plan and judge actions" (p. 101). Cooper's (2012) and Greva's (2000) models indicated that higher levels of ethical thinking involved a dynamic process between everyone involved and dependent on the relationships, how everyone viewed those relationships, and the individuals' worldviews. It is essential to appreciate that several levels of ethical development exist simultaneously in contemporary organizations, and that not everyone in the organization will be at the same level of ethical development, particularly within organizations that value diversity.

OD VALUES AND IMPLIED ASSUMPTIONS OF TRANSFORMING VS. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Cummings and Worley (2009) suggested the following definition of OD could be readily agreed upon by OD practitioners and scholars alike: "Organization Development is a system-wide application and transfer of behavioral science to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness" (pp. 1-2). Yet, for the OD practitioner and scholar, a universal definition is less important than ensuring that all work within OD is grounded in the same critical values and principles as held by the original founders, those being: humanism, optimism, and democracy (French & Bell, 1999; Yaeger, Head, & Sorensen, 2006; and Cummings & Worley, 2009). Weisbord (2004) used different language, but with a similar intention, that stated that OD should be based on values that ensure personal human dignity, meaning, and community. He asserted that these values and principles stem back even to the very essence of Taylor's work in 1915.

McGregor, one of the founding fathers of OD, in his seminal work *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960), espoused philosophical ideals for organizations. Heil, Bennis and Stephens (2000) aptly summarized the ideals found in his writings as follows:
1) Active participation;
2) Transcending concern with individual dignity, worth, and growth;
3) Reexamination and resolution of the conflict between individual needs and organizational goals, through effective interpersonal relationships between superiors and subordinates;
4) A concept of influence that relies not on coercion, compromise, evasion or avoidance, pseudo support, or bargaining, but on openness, confrontation, and working through differences; and
5) A belief that human growth is self-generated and furthered by an environment of trust, feedback, and authentic human relationship. (p. 172)

These philosophical ideals in McGregor's (1960) writings are as relevant today for OD as they were some 50 years ago, and his underlying premises reflect the importance of one's worldview and how it influences perceptions of individuals in many organizations. Because these ideologies speak to the worldview of the practitioner and/or scholar, they are of the utmost importance and need to be a priority

within any attempt to define OD. Cummings and Worley (2009) purported that these values distinguish OD from change management and organizational change, while Yaeger, Head, and Sorensen (2006) stated that these social justice principles promoted by the founding pioneers "established OD as a field unlike any other discipline because of its contribution to values based change" (p. 11).

OD practitioners and scholars alike are acutely aware of the desire to improve the effectiveness and efficiency, that is, the task focus of organizations. Yet, there is relatively little emphasis on the importance of leadership and its role and responsibilities. The values of OD, as discussed above, are concerned with how the organization achieves its improvements and, at the same time, acknowledges "the sanctity of the individual, the right of people to be free from arbitrary misuse of power, the importance of fair and equitable treatment for all, and the need for justice through the rule of law and due process" (Yaeger, Head, & Sorensen; 2006, p. 10). This highlights OD's concern with social justice issues and, therefore, presents OD as a discipline steeped in ethics and ethical thinking. Even more specifically, McGregor (1960) himself cautioned that once an individual attempts to 'control' human behavior there arises a concern about manipulation and exploitation. McGregor emphasized that "[s]cientific knowledge is indifferent with respect to its uses" (p. 12), and, thus, "science is independent of values" (p.12). McGregor continued this cautionary tone by emphasizing that as an individual becomes more skilled or learned in scientific knowledge, she or he needs to also become even more "sensitive to the ethical values" (p. 12).

The leadership literature of Greenleaf (1977/1999), Burns (1978), Bass (1985), Thompson (2000), Kouzes and Posner (2003, 2007), and Yukl (2012) all suggested that ethics is an important aspect of leadership. Placing an even greater emphasis on leadership, Ciulla (2005) stressed (and continues to emphasize) that ethics and ethical decision-making are the very heart of leadership. She purported that various definitions of leadership focus on the explicit nature of the relationship between leaders and followers, and thus—regardless of whether these premises are known to the individual or not—how a person regards relationships (the person's private worldview) is of the utmost importance and has significant ethical considerations. Based on over 20 years of research, Kouzes and Posner (2007) posited that leadership is always a relationship predicated by mutual needs and interests. Moreover, Kouzes and Posner stressed that the most important aspect of developing and nurturing this relationship was honesty, which, within their research, was defined as being truthful and ethical. These observations are important, not only on the basis of their temporal stability, but, even more remarkably, because of their consistency across cultures, countries, regions, and countless types of organizations.

Another significant contribution to ethical practices within leadership comes from Burns (1978/2003). Burns developed the notion of transforming leadership, which was based on the central tenet that the transforming leader is acutely aware of the needs of the followers, service to others, and the need to abide by a higher moral purpose. Burns stated that "moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations and values of the followers. I mean the kind of leadership that can produce social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs" (as cited in Wren, 1995, p. 483). This notion of leadership places the ethical consideration of the workers as first and foremost and, as such, is congruent with McGregor's writings and, in particular, Theory Y assumptions, which are discussed below.

While Burns (1978/2003) promoted the notion of transforming leadership, Bass (1985) was more widely known for his distinction between *transactional leadership* and what he called *transformational leadership*. It is important to note that the latter was not the same as Burns's notion of transforming leadership. Bass asserted that transformational leaders are able to get followers to follow more than they otherwise would by raising the followers' consciousness about the importance and value of specific outcomes and ways of reaching those outcomes. The result was that, by raising the need levels of the followers, followers would overlook their own self-interests to achieve the priorities of the organization. Essentially, Bass asserted that transformational leaders draw upon inspiration, vision, charisma, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation to induce followers. This approach highlights the very same concern McGregor (1960) described as "manipulation and exploitation" (p. 12) and warned against. Indeed, Ciulla (2005) believed Bass's philosophy of leadership was devoid of any grounding in

ethics.

The significant difference between Burns's (1978) transforming leadership and Bass's (1985) transformational leadership was that, for Burns, followers were to be in 'relationship with' leaders, while, for Bass, followers were to be "acted on" by leaders. Thus, this significant distinction showcases the difference in the underlying assumptions and worldviews of these scholars. McGregor (1960) defined management success as "the ability of others to achieve their goals or satisfy their needs" (p. 20) and his entire premise, the *central principle*, of Theory Y assumptions was that "integration and self-control carries the implication that the organization will be more effective in achieving its economic objectives if adjustments are made, in significant ways, to the needs and goals of its members" (p. 50). In other words, McGregor supported being in 'relationship with,' a concept that is akin to Burns's approach. Burns also asserted that leaders "define[d] public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of a people" (p. 29). In other words, virtues were the central tenet and the main criteria for leadership. On the other hand, Bass determined four factors that drove organizational performance: leadership behavior, organizational culture, mission and strategy, and structure and size. These elements would result in intentionally changing the climate and culture of the organization so that leaders, through systems and processes within the organization, 'acted on' the followers. This premise indicates why leadership charisma—a concept originally developed by Webber (1947)—was a central tenet of Bass's theory of transformational leadership. Bass appears to have neglected McGregor's writings regarding socially constructed views of motivation that suggest "the use of extrinsic rewards and punishments to get people to do what we want them to—may be the biggest stumbling blocks to building a workforce committed to the job and not the reward that comes after" (as cited in, Heil, Bennis & Stephens, 2000, p .95). McGregor believed that a focus on extrinsic rewards influenced management to view or interpret the organization in mechanical terms.

Understanding this difference in the work of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) is of the utmost importance, especially for the OD practitioner and scholar. For example, Burns argued that Hitler and Stalin could be seen as transformational leaders, but not be considered transforming leaders. In contrast, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi are examples of transforming leaders who raised people's awareness and empowered them to become part of the solution to a particular ethical issue—the reduction of a social injustice. Essentially, leadership is about developing those within our various communities. Thus, what becomes important is how we develop those around us, and this can only be a reflection of the underlying assumptions, whether known or unknown.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Bass and Avolio (1993) observed that leadership often reinvents itself. In the 1960s, the specific role and nature of leadership was being redefined. At that time, as a result of the Vietnam War, the world witnessed a epic challenge to authority. The social constructs of leadership were found wanting and unable to meet the demands of a changing world. Today we are at another bifurcation point. Thus, the writers concur with Ciulla's (2005) assertion that leadership literature has significant normative implications regarding "how leaders get people to do things (impress, organize, persuade, influence, and inspire) and how what is to be done is decided (obedience, voluntary consent, determined by the leader and reflection of mutual purposes)" (p. 12). Ciulla advised that, in order for leadership to progress, it needs to focus more on understanding leadership, a premise consistent with the seminal work of Davis (1971).

More than ever before, it is evident that both leadership styles and OD intervention methods are contextually influenced, and the common thread woven through all leadership styles and OD interventions is the field of ethics. These ethics are the guiding values and principles that influence and shape the behavior and worldviews of leaders and followers, both individually and collectively— virtuous or not. The field of OD is based on humanistic principles and this foundation is what separates it from other academic disciplines. However, to date, what has not been stated is that these humanistic principles are essentially a guiding set of ethical values and principles.

As a result, the importance of this discussion for OD practitioners and scholars is, firstly, recognition that the OD field is clearly grounded in ethical thinking and will, therefore, stand the test of time (Bartunek & Woodmen, 2010). As our collective understanding of ethics and ethical thinking expands, we need to ensure that practitioners and scholars are familiar with the rudiments of ethical thinking and research. The field of OD can no longer speak of values and principles while being completely silent on the topic of ethics. If the field of OD is to continue to progress, it needs to ensure ethics becomes more integrated and a central element when determining how to aid individuals (leaders or otherwise) in the development of an Ethical Mindset, both individually and collectively. This would include: 1) aiding the individual in identifying what an ethical issue is; 2) developing a framework for ascertaining the ethical concerns of other individuals and groups; 3) being familiar with models for resolving ethical paradoxes and tensions; and 4) finding ways to aid other people and organizations in developing their individual ethical identities. An Ethical Mindset would not only strengthen the validity of the OD field, but also—and, perhaps, more importantly—aid greatly in resolving the tension between various conflicting operating principles (e.g., performance and quality of work life). The values of OD can no longer be dialogued about as 'lofty' ideals. Instead, the field of OD can strengthen itself by being intentional about linking humanistic principles to specific ethical values and operational principles.

Secondly, the OD field can no longer ignore the significant differences between the implied assumptions of particular leadership theories or styles and the values of OD. It is important for both the practitioner and scholar to ensure that there is alignment between implicit assumptions of a leadership theory or style under consideration and the values that qualify OD as OD. This is important because, as this paper demonstrates, there are some leadership theories that contradict the fundamental values of OD. Within the field of OD, leadership is central to developing individuals and groups to achieve the desired outcome. Thus, the way leadership is developed has ethical implications. It is also leadership's role to ensure that the Ethical Mindset (as discussed above) is developed and nurtured in others. This imperative of leadership is immensely important, and, indeed, once again highlights the prominent role of ethics within leadership.

Thirdly, the seminal works of Goffman (1959) and Smith and Berg (1987) showcased that groups are slaves to task and assumptions. Given this reality, the following question arises: What are the ethical assumptions that groups are a slave to, and how can these suppositions be shaped or enhanced, if need be? Additionally, the research and literature on ethics indicates that ethical decisions are best determined within cohesive groups (i.e., community). The field of OD has, without question, a rich history of the development of groups and group processes. Thus, OD can and should play a significant role in connecting/joining/bringing/relating the field of ethics to the development and maintenance of individual and collective Ethical Mindsets.

This paper has drawn a linkage between McGregor's (1960) writings, OD values, and the implicit assumptions within transformational and transforming leadership. Neither the practitioner nor scholar can ignore the implications any longer. In his seminal work, McGregor specifically addressed this issue over 50 years ago. How could we have missed it? What else is in McGregor's writing that awaits a contextual need before its significance is revealed? McGregor continues to whisper to us from the past. He challenges us to "check" our assumptions and highlights the importance of being able to develop our metacognitive processes. These days, individuals and organizations are struggling with two significant contextual concerns: 1) capitalism appears to be failing; and 2) the tension between ecology and capitalism is becoming progressively worse and is changing at an accelerated rate. Einstein was the first to assert that today's problems cannot be resolved with our current level of thinking, and what is needed is to move to new levels of awareness and understanding. In the field of OD, an Ethical Mindset is a critical element in the 'how to' that will aid in building the bridge between the current knowledge and the future unknown, and, thus, constitutes a critical factor in individual, organizational, and societal development. An Ethical Mindset, thus, goes to the very heart of OD.

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APPENDIX 1

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP THEORIES

1930 – Trait Approach
>>> (Stogdill, Maccoby, Gardner, & Collins)

1950 – Behavioral Approach
>>> (Blake & Mouton, Blake & McCanse, Lickert, Mintzberg, Kotter, & Kouzes & Posner)

1970 – Power and Influence Approach
>>> (McClellan, Conger, & Winter & Stewart)
>>> Contingency Theories
>>>> (Fiedler, Tannenbaum & Schmidt, House & Mitchell, & Hersey & Blanchard)
>>> Charismatic Approach
>>>> (Weber, House, Conger & Kanungo, & Salvendy)
>>> Transformational Approach
>>>> (Burns, Bass, & Bennis)
>>> Transactional Approach
>>>> (Burns)
>>> Leader-substitutes
>>>> (Kerr & Jermier, Howell, & Pettigrew & Whipp)

1980 – Situational Approach
>>> Transforming Leadership
>>>> (Burns)
>>> Organizational Culture and Climate Approach
>>>> (Schein)
>>> Servant Leadership
>>>> (Greenleaf)
>>> Leader-member Exchange Theory
>>>> (LMX) (Scandura, & Graen & Novak)

1990 – Contemporary and Integrated Approaches
>>> Relational Leadership Approaches
>>>> (Hollander, Nirenberg, Hunt & Dodge, & Crossan, & Vera)
>>> Servant Leadership
>>>> (Greenleaf, Spears & Lawrence, DePree, & Wheatley Blanchard)
>>> The Learning Organization
>>>> (Senge, & Garvin, Edmondson & Gino)
>>> Stewardship Model
>>>> (Block)
>>> Emotional Intelligence (EI)
>>>> (Bennis & Nanus, & Goleman)
>> The New Leadership Approach (Bryman): "manager of meaning"
>> Cross-cultural Leadership
>>>> (House, & Wright & Aditya)
>> Political Leadership
>>>> (House & Aditya)

Dialogical Theories
        (Habermas, Bouwen & Fry, Gergen, Starratt, & Bohm)

2000 –   Ethical Leadership
        (Gini, Caldwell, Bischoff & Karri, & Rost)
        Appreciative Leadership
        (Schiller, & Holland & Riley)
        Level 5 Leadership
        (Collins)
        Distributed Leadership
        (Gronn)
        Authentic Leadership
        (Avolio, Gardner, Shamir, & George)
        Socially responsible leadership
        (Dugan)
        Strengths-based Leadership
        (Rath & Conchie)

Non-individualized Approaches
        Collaborative Leadership
        (Follett, Rost, Chrislip, Kanter, Rubin, Archer & Cameron, Raelin, & Huxham's "collaborative advantage")
        Shared Leadership
        (Heifetz, Pearce & Sims, & Pearce & Conger)
        Leadership Role Constellations
        (Denis & Langley)
        Collective leadership
        (Driskell & Salas, Friedrich et al., Kellogg Foundation, & Baghai & Quigley)
        Distributed forms of leadership
        (Spillane, Pearce & Conger, Eisenhardt, Bennet et al., & others)
        -coordinated leadership
        -delegated leadership
        -democratic leadership
        -dispersed leadership
        -team leadership; teams; self-managing teams
        -high performance teams, top management teams (TMTs)
        Hybrid Leadership
        (Gronn)
        Tribal Leadership
        (Logan, King & Fisher)
        Concentric collaboration
        (Roberts & Coghlan)