

NOETIC LEADERSHIP: LEADERSHIP SKILLS THAT MANAGE THE EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

Currently, leadership faces its own existential dilemma, becoming meaningless where business itself lacks meaning, and appears values-less as evidenced by the collapse of Enron. A number of scholars have called for a new leadership that fulfills employees' search to make meaning in their lives and find, in work, the answers to their own existential dilemmas. In this paper, we offer an answer to this question in the form of a new leadership we call Noetic leadership, a term based on Frankl's use of the Greek Noös, for spirit to encapsulate a process of making meaning. Noetic leadership is a new kind of leadership built around principles of servant-leadership, spiritual leadership, transcendental leadership and the counseling models and therapeutic interventions designed to resolve the existential dilemma. The paper concludes with a presentation of one skill set underlying Noetic leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Argued to be the one major transforming force that will lead and determine the survival and success of organizations in the new millennium (Bolman & Deal, 1995; Briskin, 1996; Chappell, 1993; Dehler & Welsh, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999), the last decade witnessed a surge of interest in spirituality in the workplace on both the academic and practitioner fronts. More and more, major organizations in the U.S. and around the globe are embracing and incorporating spiritual concepts and practices (Galen & West, 1995), while leading scholars and thinkers in management science eagerly initiate dialogues and research efforts on the topic (Biberman & Whitty, 1997; Fox, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Vaill, 2000; Wilber, 2000). The growing importance of this burgeoning phenomena is also avidly demonstrated by the establishment, in 1998, of a new interest group devoted to its study at the world's foremost empirical management conference and academic association, the U.S. Academy of Management. It is among hundreds of new conferences and interest groups in the area established during the 1990s.

In the last 100 years, the concept of leadership has been explored in order to develop models of leadership that either explain, inform or advise (Polleys, 2002). Currently, leadership faces its own existential dilemma, becoming meaningless where business itself lacks meaning (Albrecht, 1994) and appears values-less as evidenced by the collapse of Enron (Zandstra, 2002). Yet, leadership can inspire with meaning and purpose and be more than charismatic, particularly because charismatic leadership alone lacks a values base that can protect from immoral action (Graham, 1977). What then is the new leadership required to fulfill employees' search to make meaning in their lives and find, in work, the answers to their own existential dilemmas (Fairholm, 1996; Page, 2002; Terez, 2000)?

In this paper, we offer an answer to this question in the form of a new leadership we call Noetic leadership*, a term based on Frankl's use of the Greek Noös for spirit to encapsulate a process of making meaning (Frankl, 1955, 1963, 1969). Noetic leadership is a new kind of leadership built around principles of servant-leadership (Spears, 2003, 1996; Spears & Lawrence, 2002), spiritual leadership (Fairholm, 1996), transcendental leadership (Cardona, 2000) and the counseling models and therapeutic interventions designed to resolve the existential dilemma.

The Need for Meaning: Spiritual Needs in the Workplace

Human beings, according to Frankl (1963, 1969), need to 'make meaning'. This can take many forms. For example, "Baumeister (1991) proposed that a person is likely to experience a meaningful life whenever four needs for meaning are met, namely, (a) a sense of purpose or direction, (b) a sense of efficacy or control, (c) a set of values by which to justify actions, and (d) a firm foundation for a sense of positive self-worth." (Nickels & Stewart, 2000). Spirituality, using the Noetic construct espoused by Frankl, involves making meaning through: freedom – to make choice; responsibility and accepting such for the choice; attitude to acknowledge the freedom and accept the responsibility; self-determination to enact the freedom, take responsibility and make the choice; and conscience, "...

which involves a set of ideals and values that pulls (rather than pushes) an individual toward a choice or a decision” (Fratzke, 2000).

This need for Noeticism and meaning exists in the workplace as much as in other aspects of life. “In an environment racked with stress, insecurity, tough decisions and 60-hour weeks, you might expect a resurgence of a management model based on Machiavelli's Prince, Leona Helmsley or some other Theory-X icon. Instead, there's a stirring in the opposite direction: A flood of management books, articles and musings trying to make sense of the current chaos by proposing a management model filled with heart--and soul” (Lee & Zemke, 1993). This view is supported by Wagner-Marsh et al. (1999) who propose the existence of a “spiritually-based firm”. “In short, some evidence exists that suggests a link between workplace spirituality and enhanced individual creativity (Freshman, 1999), increased honesty and trust within the organization (Wagner-Marsh & Conely, 1999), enhanced sense of personal fulfillment of employees (Burack, 1999), and increased commitment to organizational goals (Leigh, 1997)” (Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002).

Hence, there are strong, in fact compelling, arguments for a spiritual workplace in terms of both human needs and the benefits to organisations for addressing such. What then are the key attributes or elements of spirituality that are applicable to the workplace and the spiritually based firm and or the leadership of such. Based on the notions of Frankl as espoused earlier, the following can be suggested as representative of Noeticism: a core set of values intrinsic to the person; freedom to make decisions; responsibility for making decisions; self-determination, i.e. controlling one's own destiny; and an attitude of acceptance of all these elements.

The identification of leadership approaches or practices that will enact spirituality in the workplace, the inherent spiritual values or beliefs that are the foundation are, evidentially, absent. Hence, in order to complete the construct that can identify spirituality in the workplace, the values themselves must also be extracted. In pursuing this line of thought, this paper briefly considers leadership in general in order to determine a leadership model that might provide an answer to the values question. For the purposes of this paper, values will be placed in abeyance. The 8 key characteristics of a spiritual workplace, are based upon the approach used by Frankl and Wagner-March (1999).

Leadership – Discussion

The 20th Century was a 100-year period of the exploration of leadership. “During this century, the study of leadership can be roughly divided into three periods and three generic models. The first period, from around 1910 to World War II, dealt primarily with who the leader is and included Great Man, trait, and psychological theories. Researchers during the second period, from the onset of World War II to the late 1960's, focused mainly on what the leader does, i.e., behavioral theory. And finally, from the late 1960's to the present, theorists have emphasized where leadership takes place and have developed contingency and situational theories (Polleys, 2002).

This move to more descriptive considerations of the activities of leadership is a developing theme beginning with Greenleaf's (1969, 1970, 1977) servant-leadership paradigm to broad-reaching phenomenological approaches. "A more recent definition of leadership from Gardner (1990, p. 38) holds that 'leadership is the accomplishment of group purpose, which is furthered not only by effective leaders but also by innovators, entrepreneurs, and thinkers; by the availability of resources; by questions of value and social cohesion.'

Grint (1997) considers type of behaviour and the "Qualities of Leaders" (Grint, 1997, pp. 98-100) and Ulrich and Zenger (1999, p. 4) examine attributes in terms of, "..... who leaders ARE what leaders KNOW and what leaders DO" .

Based on the preceding review, there is strong indication that, "there is no universal definition of leadership; its meaning or definition tends to be local and impacted by context" (Kezar, 2000), albeit Kezar (2000) offers a multifaceted definition, or descriptor, of leadership involving position, power and context.

As can be seen, these leadership approaches are generic descriptions of outcomes, purpose or approach and largely ignore meaning or the noetic dimensions. Except for servant-leadership, leadership approaches fail to address the spiritual component, the need to make meaning. There is, however, one leadership type that addresses needs and values. Polleys (2002) points to transformational leadership as a leadership style that seeks to satisfy needs and King (1991) aligns transformational leadership with humanistic values. Consequently, we focus our discussion on three models of Transformational Leadership, these being *Servant-Leadership*, *Spiritual Leadership* and *Transcendental Leadership*.

LEADERSHIP MODELS: SERVANT-LEADER, SPIRITUAL LEADER AND TRANSCENDENTAL LEADER

Servant-leadership

"The term servant-leadership was first coined in the 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf entitled, *The Servant as Leader*" (Spears, 1996). "Servant-leadership seeks to involve others in decision-making, is strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and it enhances the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of organizational life" (Spears, 2003).

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership is a leadership model which, like servant-leadership adopts a stewardship approach and an interest in the well-being and development of employees (Fairholm, 1996). An example of the model characteristics include: commitment to serving others; and an environment that encourages openness, fairness, individuality and creativity.

Transcendental Leadership

Transcendental leadership is similar to servant-leadership in terms of an interest in employees in that the "... transcendental leader is concerned with the people themselves and tries to contribute to

their personal development, and a focus on service (Cardona, 2000).” A core element of transcendental leadership is the importance of interaction and communication, which involves dialogue and exchange. “Thus, the most important competence of transcendental leaders - besides their capacity to negotiate and control transactions, and their capacity to create and communicate a vision - is their integrity and capacity to sacrifice themselves in the service of their collaborators, even at the expense of their own interests” (Cardona, 2000).

COMPARING SERVANT-LEADERSHIP, SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND TRANSCENDENTAL LEADERSHIP WITH THE SPIRITUAL MODEL

These three models of leadership can be compared with the Characteristics of Noetic Leadership as seen in the table below.

Characteristics of Noeticism	Identification of Spiritual Characteristics In Servant-leadership	Identification of Spiritual Characteristics In Spiritual leadership	Identification of Spiritual Characteristics In Transcendental leadership
Working with a person's values	Yes – re: listening and empathy	No – re: the corporate philosophy	Unclear
Putting a person's values choice first	No – re: Persuasion	No – re: the corporate philosophy	Unclear
Articulation the individual's values	Yes – re: listening and empathy	No – re: the corporate philosophy	Unclear
Enabling freedom to make decisions	Yes – re: empowerment	No – re: commitment to group unity	No – negotiate and control transactions
Providing responsibility for making decisions	Yes – re: empowerment	Unclear	Unclear
Supporting self-determination, i.e. controlling one's own destiny	Yes – re: empowerment	Yes – a value of personal development	Unclear
Accountability for decisions	Unclear	Yes – in the continuing evaluation	Unclear
An attitude of acceptance of all these elements stated above	Unclear	No	Unclear

Clearly, the three leadership models fall short of fulfilling all the requirements of Neoticism. Therefore, Noetic leadership is required in order to address the clearly identified need for a workplace that can address the noetic needs of individuals. This paper now proposes a model of Noetic leadership.

NOETIC LEADERSHIP: AN INTEGRATION OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP, SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND TRANSCENDENTAL LEADERSHIP

Based on the foregoing discussion, Noetic leadership is described as a spiritual type of leadership that values people and enables, through dialogue and interaction, the development of personal meaning and purpose within an organisation that moves towards goals that enable a future where others will also have the opportunity to make meaning for themselves. This model, therefore, implies interaction skills that will facilitate the making of meaning.

NOETIC INTERVENTIONS – THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES FOR MAKING MEANING

In terms of interaction skills for creating meaning, this paper focuses on the principles encapsulated in Frankl's logotherapy, which is derived from Frankl's search for meaning (Frankl,

1955, 1963, 1969). Logotherapy-based counselling is described by Rugala and Waldo (1998): “Existential counseling is characterized by its understanding that the task of life is to create an existence characterized by integrity and meaning. The logotherapy therapeutic process involves challenging individuals to find meaning and purpose through work, love, and the attitude one takes toward suffering (Frankl, 1965).” It is in this discovery that one enacts one’s Noetic, or spiritual, aspect of life. “Frankl’s Logotherapeutic techniques use dialogue to help a person establish a personal sense of meaning and set goals, thereby deriving hope for the future (Fratzke, 2000). In fact, meaning is a key coping mechanism, as indicated by Halama (2000), “the results support the assumption about the role of life meaning as a source of positive coping strategies and its relationship with processes of stress management”.

Whilst Wong (2000) offers numerous techniques, this paper focuses on those that assist the management of emotions because, “One of the components of feeling a sense of meaning in life is the ability to become aware of feelings and to think about relationships....” (Blatner, 2000). “...Emotional intelligence and personal meaning are complementary, the former offering methods for the energizing of the latter”(Blatner, 2000).

However, prior to proposing a model for dialogues that enable the exploration of meaning with respect to emotions, this paper first offers an overview of emotions and a model describing where and how the dialogue would operate.

Emotions – A Brief Overview

In terms of emotions, this paper has adopted Frijda and Mesquita’s (1994, p. 51) definition of emotion which is “Emotions are complex, structured phenomena...They are affective responses to what happens in the environment and cognitive representations of the event’s meaning for the individual.”

Affective Events Theory poses a model of emotions where events interact to produce behavioural outcomes that can be driven by emotion alone or by cognitive judgement, (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). This is consistent with Alwyn’s view (1985) of a relationship between emotion and action although there is some contention whether emotions mechanisms operate in advance of cognition (Massey, 2002) or simultaneously with it (Moser, 1991) or in association with cognition (Parrott & Schuklin, 1993).

Based on these notions regarding emotions, we can pose the following models. Figure 1 represents behaviour, which might be moderated or unmoderated. Figure 2 depicts behaviour moderated through a Language-Emotion-Thought (LET) dialogue as described in Kibby & Härtel (2002) and Härtel, Kibby & Pizer (2003).

Figure 1 – Emotions

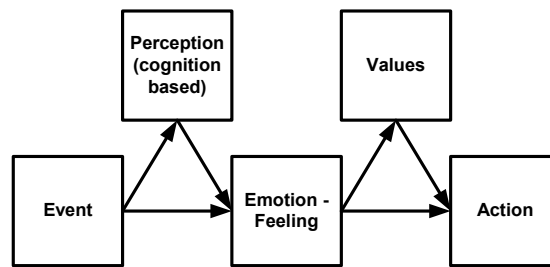
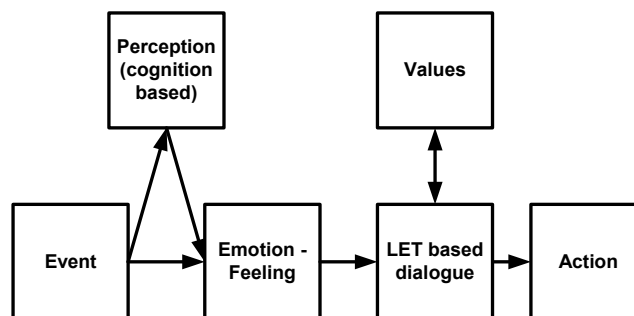


Figure 2 – Emotions-based action moderated by dialogue



From the second figure we can see that a dialogue based around values can moderate action and transform emotion, through the pursuit of values-based action, into a Noetic outcome that provides hope and the “making of meaning.” This accords with ideas about emotions as espoused here and views of meaning, purpose and emotions as expressed above.

The Dialogue Skills of Noetic Leadership

Dialogue skills appropriate to Noetic leadership must take into account the LET relationship and enable an exploration of values in order to assist the clarification of meaning and purpose.

Dialogue needs to incorporate Taylor’s (2002) six-step strategy for making meaning which will also build resilience: (1) the construction of a new vision of the client; (2) validation of the client’s story; (3) labeling of protective factors; (4) making a decision; (5) determining goals; and (6) development, implementation, and evaluation of a plan.” According to Rogers (1957, 1989) Empathic Listening which within the LET framework means hearing the emotional state is logically the first step. This accords with the importance of hearing the speaker’s point of view (Buzan, 1999) and linking emotions to problem solving (Isen, 1984). These are practical applications of Noetic leadership and conform to the principles of servant-leadership, spiritual leadership and transcendental leadership. Equally, these principles of listening to understand are appropriate leadership practices for dealing with issues (Kant, 1997). These principles are enacted in the ERA interaction skills which is not discussed here due to space limitations (See Kibby & Härtel, 2002; Härtel, Kibby & Pizer, 2003).

CONCLUSION

As presented, Noetic leadership is a new form of leadership that encompasses servant-leadership, spiritual leadership and transcendent leadership. Even more importantly, the skills of

Noetic leadership can help make meaning and purpose that is linked to ethical, values-based behaviours which are the essence of meaning and personal spirituality (Frankl, 1955, 1963, 1969). Likewise, we know that emotional intelligence itself shares an overlap with spirituality (Tischler, Biberman & McKeage, 2002) thus moderating behaviour so that it becomes Noetic, or spiritual, action. This paper discusses the preliminary findings of two studies which provide insight into how spirituality is conceptualized in the workplace, its perceived impacts among top management, and how emotion management skills enact Noetic leadership. It is hoped that such findings can provide initial glimpses of the intricate ways in which work-related emotions and spirituality interplay and intertwine, as well as help to identify some of the emotional dimensions potentially important to the ways of enacting spiritual or Noetic leadership in the workplace.

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*NOTE – Noetic Leadership is a concept created by the first author Leigh Kibby