Developing Leader Character

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Agenda

• Report "Leadership on Trial: A Manifesto for Leadership Development"
  – Competencies count. Character matters. Commitment is critical.

• The "problem" with leader character
  – The importance of bridging theory and practice

• To define and unpack leader character
  – Character dimensions and supporting elements

• To present results from two surveys
  – The perceived importance of leader character dimensions
  – Relating dimensions of leader character to performance and outcomes

• Implications for leader character development in organizations
Among the Questions We Asked

• Could good leadership have made a difference? Or … was this an act of Mother Nature?

• What do we know about good leadership? What did we – scholars, practitioners – miss about formulations of good leadership?

• How did business school contribute to the crisis of business leadership?

• What do institutions such as business schools and organizations need to do – or do different – to reduce the likelihood from these kind of events to happen again?
The Effective Leader

If any of these three pillars are deficient, the shortfall will undermine the other pillars and, ultimately, lead to performance problems for leaders, organizations and related stakeholders.
Some Unexpected Endorsements …

"When we think about leadership we focus too much on what leaders do … and we don't spend enough time on who leaders are – the character of leaders."

Domenic Barton, head of McKinsey's global consulting practice

"You cannot legislate virtue, you can't enforce integrity … even the most intense supervision can't guarantee absolute adherence to basic ethical norms."

Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England
Survey – Institute of Corporate Directors (Ivey, 2015)

• 70 percent of respondents believe that boards spend insufficient time addressing or assessing the character of potential nominees to their boards, notwithstanding the fact that they believe that character is very important.

• 64 percent believe that the educational system does a poor job of developing character and an overwhelming 92 percent believe that business schools need to address character-related issues more than they do.

• 66 percent also believe that character can be further developed after someone becomes an adult and 82 percent believe that early workplace experiences can have a substantial impact on character formulation.
The "Problem" with Leader Character …

• The gap between the perceived importance and the actual use of character can be attributed to at least three things:

  – Character is a "loaded" word. There is a great deal of ambiguity about what is meant by the word character.

  – Leaders need a contemporary, practice-focused vocabulary with which to address character in the workplace.

  – There are few tools available for the systematic assessment of character. Leaders and HR professionals need these tools if they are to move from thinking and talking about character development to actually doing something about it.
So … Where Did That Leave Us?

- Focus on bridging theory and leadership practice
- Conducted countless executive focus groups with directors, executives, practitioners and executive MBA students
- Surveys at multiple organizations
- Partnering with SIGMA Assessment on the Leader Character Insight Assessment
- Pilot testing the assessment at a large organization (360 feedback)
- Partnering with the Institute of Corporate Directors to understand character in board governance
- Academic and practitioner publications

- Student programming and significant outreach
Leader Character Dimensions

Transcendence
appreciative, inspired, purposive, future-oriented, optimistic, creative

Drive
passionate, vigorous, results-oriented, demonstrates initiative, strives for excellence

Accountability
take ownership, accepts, consequences, conscientious, responsible

Collaboration
cooperative, collegial, open-minded, flexible, interconnected

Judgment
situationally aware, cognitively complex, analytical, decisive, critical thinker, intuitive, insightful, pragmatic, adaptable

Humanity
considerate, empathetic, compassionate, magnanimous, forgiving

Temperance
patient, calm, composed, self-controlled, prudent

Humility
self-aware, modest, reflective, continuous learner, respectful, grateful, vulnerable

Integrity
authentic, candid, transparent, principled, consistent

Justice
fair, equitable, proportionate, even-handed, socially responsible
Keep in Mind …

• Each dimension is composed of several character elements; and they affect the strength of the particular dimension (deep reservoir)
• The character dimensions are interconnected
• The character dimensions are "non-negotiable"
• Judgment serves as the air traffic controller
• Character is exercised through judgment; and the quality of judgment impacts performance
• Character is developed over one's lifetime and individuals can enhance the development of character through deliberate practice and reflection on experience.
Survey – Large Canadian Conglomerate (Ivey, 2015)

• All of the 11 dimensions were seen as positive contributors to both leadership performance (e.g., being an effective team member) as well as leadership outcomes (e.g., building a successful leadership career)

• But … there was considerable variance in the ways in which people viewed these character dimensions as detrimental or beneficial for individually- and organizationally-relevant variables

  – 14% of respondents thought that Humility was very, moderately, or somewhat detrimental to being successful in one's leadership career;

  – 12% of respondents considered Humanity to be detrimental; and

  – 11% of the respondents thought the same about Temperance
Research Led to the LCIA

Character is essential to effective leadership and preventing leadership failures:
- Qualitative interview data from leaders
- Quantitative data linking dimensions of leader character to performance

The LCIA provides a way to assess leadership character. It provides a baseline against which development can be measured.

The LCIA equips HR professionals and leaders with language to discuss the concept of leader character.
Call to Action

• Whether the quality of leadership in organizations improves or not will depend on the efforts of many. In the report Leadership on Trial we issue a "call to action" to five groups:

  – professionals in the field of organizational and leadership development;
  – those who are involved in management education in universities and colleges;
  – senior leaders in the business community;
  – boards of directors of companies; and
  – the next-generation leaders.
Implications for Practice - I

• Never assume that leaders, managers and employees understand the meaning of character and its importance to individual and organizational success.
  
  – Develop leadership profiles that go beyond defining competencies and address leader character
  
  – Never miss an opportunity to bring character to the forefront (e.g., be explicit in explaining how character dimensions contributed to a person's promotion)
Implications for Practice - II

• The importance of character must be embedded in organizational systems and processes including but not limited to recruitment and selection; performance management; developmental processes; promotion criteria; compensation; disciplinary and termination practices; and so forth.

  – Systems and processes serve as beacons – they signal what it takes to be successful as a leader in the organization
  – Always remember that when an organization emphasizes narrow outcomes such as shareholder value … we should not be surprised to get narrow leaders!
Implications for Practice - III

- Managers and employees must be able to observe role models of character to whom they can relate.
  - Recognize behaviors that exemplify good character and affirm verbally those who exhibit the lesser appreciated dimensions of character that nevertheless contribute to success.
  - Understand that stated values mean nothing unless they are reflected in actual behaviors of people in the organization; and if they don't … corrective action is warranted.
Selected Publications

- **Refereed publications**

- **Books**

- **Book chapters**
Selected Publications

• **Non-refereed**


  - Crossan, M., & Byrne, A. (2013). Linking candour to leadership character with General (ret.) Rick Hillier. IVEY BUSINESS JOURNAL [online], November - December.


