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Ethical Leadership: Exclusivity, Attributes, and Originations

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Ethical Leadership: Exclusivity, Attributes, and Originations

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LDRS 870: Project in Ethical Leadership, Fort Hays State University

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Abstract

This paper seeks to look at three aspects of the ethical dimension of leadership, posed as research questions. RQ1: *Exclusivity* - should only ethical influence be classified as leadership? While researchers agree that leadership should be ethical, none to this point have chosen to give exclusivity of the leadership label to ethical influence. The position of this paper is that leadership is a high calling and process; therefore, unethical influence should have another designation. RQ2: *Attributes* - what specific attributes (traits and/or behaviors) should characterize ethical leadership? Most research designates common attributes of ethical leadership, but the taxonomy of characteristics varies from researcher to researcher. This paper seeks to give a succinct taxonomy of ethical leadership attributes. RQ3: *Originations* - from where do ethical standards originate? Again, researchers agree that leadership should be ethical and that there are specific attributes to that domain; however, there is wide divergence as to the origination of those ethical attributes or standards. This paper looks at that divergence and attempts to find the “first cause” or origination of an ethical standard.

This paper will explicate the methodology utilized, review current literature on this subject matter, detail limitations and areas for future research, and demonstrate critical implications of this research for leaders and the leadership process.

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Many thanks need to be sent to those who responded to my survey on the research questions. These people are professional researchers, instructors, and practitioners of leadership; they are also personal friends.

My love and appreciation is no higher than for my wife, Janice. Her self-proclaimed mantra, the “Master’s widow,” has been true for the last two years. Janice, I want to thank you for your love, support and constant encouragement to “stay the course.” I would like to say that your widowhood is almost over, but the terminal degree is next. My hope is that the “terminal” designation isn’t too literal. You and I will have a short reprieve this summer and fall, so we’ll make the most of it. Thank you for partnering with me on this new academic and career-change journey. I love you!

Without my relationship with God, this journey would not have been possible or even imagined. This was His plan for my life and has been for over 30 years. He has given the passion, the strength, and the wisdom to pursue this path. Of course, from my worldview, His character is the basis of ethical leadership!

Introduction

It is appropriate here to state two stipulated definitions that give some boundaries to the subject of this paper. By *ethical*, I mean the *right* or appropriate behavior. Ciulla (2003) believes that “the study of ethics is about what we should do and what we should be. It’s about right, wrong, good, evil and the relationship of humans to each other and to other living things” (p. xi). Brown & Treviño (2006) define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct...” (p. 595).

Ciulla’s (2003) continued thought leads us into our next stipulated definition. “Leadership is a particular type of relationship, the hallmarks of which are power and/or influence, obligation, and responsibility” (p. xi). Though many different, nuanced definitions of *leadership* abound, many agree that leadership is an *influence relationship* (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Ciulla, 2003; Frunzi & Savini, 1997; Kreitner, 2004; Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991, 1993) as opposed to a coercive or authoritative relationship.

Therefore, when this paper speaks of *ethical leadership*, it intends *ethical influence* in the leadership process.

Our society has been rocked by individual and corporate scandals such as Alex Rodriguez’s dishonesty regarding steroid use, Bernie Madoff’s rip-off, ponzi scheme, Enron’s cooking the books, and AIG’s use of tax-payer bail-out money to extraordinarily compensate executives. As Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski (2005) note: “society’s fascination with leaders has given way to anger, frustration, and feelings of betrayal...” (p. 1326). Ciulla (2003) understands that information about leaders is much more forthcoming and transparent in today’s media savvy world. She believes that we are able to see the defects in leadership, which has increased our desire for ethical leadership. Frankl (1959, 1962, 1984) “recommend[ed] that the

Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of responsibility on the West Coast” (p. 156) [note: his recommendation is being followed – see www.sorfoundation.org].

Ethical leadership and responsible behavior is needed now more than ever from our leaders and in the leadership process.

Kouzes & Posner (2006) and Northouse (2007) place the need of ethical leadership in the center of human contact. These authors believe that leaders impact and affect other people, and that none of us operate in a vacuum. Therefore, we must be cognizant of and burdened about our behavior toward others. Potts (2001) believes much research on leadership has focused on different types of leadership, but has been lacking in the area of values and leadership’s higher goals. In Exodus 17:4-5 (New International Version), during a leadership crisis with the people of Israel, Moses’ frustration was evident: “What am I to do with these people?” God answered and told Moses to “Walk on ahead of the people.” Thus, ethical leadership or influence is paramount in our discussions of the leadership process with other humans.

Ciulla (2003) says that Confucius “believed that the only way to reform his decadent society was to reinstate the moral teachings of ancient sages” (p. 123). But, what are those teachings (*attributes*) and from where do they originate (*originations*)? And, if leadership is embedded in ethical influence, then should only ethical influence be classified as leadership (*exclusivity*)? We now attempt to answer those questions.

Methodology

A simple, but multiple-approached methodology was utilized for the research that organizes this paper. First, a bibliography search was conducted at the Lawrence, Kansas Public Library through its e-catalog system on December 22, 2008. The keywords of “leadership,” “ethics,” “ethical leadership,” and “moral leadership,” were used. The resources gained from the

keyword search were further analyzed for concept, familiar author, and relevance to the topic. A shelf search was then conducted, with the “left/right of selected book” technique employed.

Three books from this search were utilized in this paper.

A *Google Scholar* web-search was conducted on December 30, 2008, utilizing the key phrase “ethical leadership.” Fort Hays State University’s *FirstSearch* was also used on December 30, 2008, again with the key words “ethical” and “leadership.” Each of these searches paired the results by relevance to the topic.

A book that was gifted to me and signed by a previous Fort Hays State University instructor was read for this paper. Its subject matter was appropriate to this paper.

Ten journal articles were selected by my advisor/instructor, Dr. Brent Goertzen, from the LDRS 870, “Readings in Ethical Leadership” course and each of those were read.

A qualitative, open-ended survey was sent to 15 selected individuals. The survey instrument (See Appendix, Figure A1) utilized a non-random, selected distribution and asked for responses to the three research questions to gain further understanding on ethical leadership. The survey recipients were chosen based on my personal knowledge of their positions as researchers, instructors, or leadership practitioners. An attempt was made to gain a balance of the aforementioned positions and a balance of gender.

To determine a consensus toward a definitive and succinct taxonomy of ethical attributes, a simple, qualitative and quantitative approach was utilized. From the research material and survey responses, content analysis was used to interpret and code various attributes. The repetition of those attributes was then counted and listed (See Appendix, Figure A3).

My personal, daily reading habits were also utilized in this research. I was constantly cognizant of ethical leadership issues as I read the newspaper, the Bible, and the reading material for LDRS 880: Supervisory Leadership. Some of these resources were used.

Literature Review

Exclusivity

Northouse (2007) believes that leadership contains a moral dimension; therefore the leader must be sensitive to his or her personal, ethical behavior. Kouzes & Posner (2006) are adamant that the leadership relationship is personal and that it demands an ethical approach. Though neither author is arguing that only ethical influence should be classified as leadership, it is undeniable that they believe leadership must be ethical.

Ludwig & Longenecker (2003) state that “ethical leadership is simply part of good leadership and requires focus, the appropriate use of resources, trust, effective decision making, and provision of model behavior that is worth following” (p. 80). Baucus & Beck-Dudley (2005) insist that leaders should “view leadership as a moral or ethical endeavor” (p. 366).

Potts (2001) may move us closer to our proposition that the label *leadership* should be used exclusively for *ethical influence*. Potts “argue[s] that leadership can only be understood in ethical terms...” (p. 15). He contends that “leadership is an ethical proposition” (p. 23), and that “without ethics, perhaps, leadership does not occur at all” (p. 33). Potts makes an interesting statement that bears repeating:

Superior-subordinate relationships in a typical organizational setting are initially transformed by something other than leadership, and that something is influence. Not just any kind of influence, but *ethical* influence...It is an ethical action or idea, usually on the part of one individual, that influences others to enter the leadership relationship, and it

is the continuation of that influence, against and over all other competing influences, that causes them to remain in it. Ethics thus both precedes and sustains leadership. (p. 109)

Potts also theorizes that leadership involves progress for the common good. He then deduces that since the behaviors of Hitler and Jim Jones did not lead to good progress, their actions were not leadership. Since Potts believes that ethical leadership is service to the common good, he suggests that we should make “a conscious attempt to use the word ‘leadership’ only when the activity in question served the common good” (p. 143).

Northouse (2007) argues:

Because the conceptualization of transformational leadership set forth by Burns (1978) includes raising the level of morality in others, it is difficult to use this term when describing leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein, who were transforming but in a negative way. To deal with this problem Bass (1998) coined the term *pseudotransformational leadership*. This term refers to leaders who are self-consumed, exploitive, and power-oriented, with warped moral values (Bass & Riggio, 2006). (p. 177)

Attributes

Burns (1995) complained that there was no “school of leadership” that defined standards for leadership practice. Thus, leaders could not be distinguished from tyrants. “[Hitler’s] grotesque *führerprinzip* is solemnly examined as a doctrine of leadership. But, Hitler, once he gained power and crushed all opposition, was no leader—he was a tyrant. A leader and a tyrant are polar opposites” (p. 10). Burns’ position not only speaks to the need of a list of ethical leadership *attributes*, but also to our previous section on *exclusivity*.

Northouse (2007) believes that ethical leadership demonstrates sensitivity to, care for and just treatment of others. He also gives five principles of ethical leadership: respect for others, community-building, honesty, service to others, and justice. Northouse insists that leaders have integrity which includes firm principles and a sense of accountability for behavior.

Potts (2001) understands that a leader's success in life is not measured by goals achieved, but by "an unwavering inner commitment to what is right" (p. 138), so that correct goals are chosen and appropriate methods are used to achieve them. Buddha (2003) teaches a "Noble Eightfold Path" (p. 67) that includes right views, right resolves, right speech, right acts, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Ciulla (2003) understands that "Kant's ethical theory emphasizes the importance of acting on principle or doing something because it is the right thing to do, regardless of the consequences" (p. 93). "Confucius said: 'A superior man in dealing with the world is not for anything or against anything. He follows righteousness as the standard'" (Confucius 2003, p. 129).

Credibility is about walking the talk, according to Kouzes & Posner (2006). That leadership attribute, to them, is foundational to the behavior of a leader. In an effort to list another leadership attribute, these same authors insist that transparency is the only way to really connect with others. Their rationale is that followers will only do so if they know the person "behind the mask" (p. 93). Confucius (2003) believed that if a leader corrected his own errors, then followers wouldn't dare to not correct their own. Lao Tzu (2003) said: "I am honest to those who are honest, And [sic] I am also honest to those who are not honest. Thus honesty is attained" (p. 180). Psalm 24:4 (NIV) speaks to integrity (wholeness, the same inside and out) and honesty when it asks: "Who may stand in his [God's] holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." Justice is the

cornerstone of Jeremiah 7:5 in its call for the proper treatment of the marginalized of society.

Treviño, Hartman, & Brown's (2000) research indicates that executives see the attributes of honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity as most descriptive of ethical leadership. They add that "integrity is a holistic attribute that encompasses the other traits of honesty and trustworthiness" (p. 130). Solomon (2003) says that "without trust, leadership is impossible" (p. 206).

Ramo (2003) details Kofi Annan's five virtues: dignity, confidence, courage, compassion, and faith. Confucius' (2003) ethical system included: humanity, wisdom, courage, righteousness and propriety. Kouzes & Posner (2006) would add to the list of attributes: humility, the four cardinal virtues of Socrates and Aristotle (courage, prudence, temperance, justice), and serving others by making them better.

Serving others is a common theme in ethical leadership research. Ciulla (2003) contends that leaders are "obliged to promote the greatest good for their constituents and organizations" (p. xv), and that practitioners of leadership will avoid self-interest in order to do what is best for those around them. Confucius (2003) weighs in on this attribute by the negative of the Golden Rule: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you" (p. 134).

Romans 12:4-8, New International Version (NIV), speaks of proper humility as a further attribute. Simply stated, leaders are encouraged to know who they are and who they aren't in relationship to God's gifting in their lives. Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski (2005) believe that humble persons lead without attracting attention to themselves, with "modesty, restraint, patience, mutuality, and care" (p. 1327).

Atwater, Dionne, Camobreco, Avolio, & Lau (1998) believe that persons at "higher stages of moral reasoning...focus on equity, dignity, justice, and human rights (Kohlberg, 1981,

1984)” (p. 563). Bolman & Deal (2003) list organizational ethics: excellence, caring, justice, and faith; and, they list leadership ethics: authorship [ownership], love, power, and significance.

Originations

Researchers are quite varied as to the origination of ethical standards, if they address this dimension at all. Hobbes (2003) takes a Pauline approach to law or ethical standards of behavior. In his mind, as in the New Testament writings of Paul, one is not accountable for sin until some standard has been set. But, from where do these standards of ethics originate?

Many researchers believe ethical standards are formed through socialization. “Individual ethical principles spring from a vision of the whole of human experience, and are therefore meant to apply in some way to all groups” (Potts 2001, p. 30). According to Ciulla (2003), leaders will emulate only what they have learned from either their societal or organizational ties. Ciulla reiterates this point in summing up Aristotle’s position: “People learn about virtue from role models and from society” (p. 55). Bennett (2003) illustrates this point with his retelling of the story of Huck Finn. Huck found himself in an ethical dilemma when he caught Jim, the runaway slave. Huck’s affective realm wanted to let Jim go, but his socialized ethics told him to turn Jim in to his owners. Huck’s dissonance came because of the ethics of his culture, but his inner conscience knew there was a higher standard. Benedict (2003) concludes from her anthropology research that “normality [of behavior] is culturally defined,” (p. 237), and that abnormality of behavior exists for those removed from one culture to another. Cropanzano & Rupp (2003) add on to this socialized origination when they say that people may be “socialized into genuinely accepting certain moral standards (Cropanzano, Byrne, et al., 2001). Hence, people behave fairly because they have come to believe that this is the right or ethical thing to do” (p. 86).

Ethical standards certainly vary from one culture to another. However, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted in 1948 by the United Nations “demonstrates that people from other cultures can agree on a set of universal values” (Ciulla 2003, p. 257). Gardner’s (2007) research has lead him and his colleagues to believe that there is one ethical path that is superior and that those ethical standards are achieved by societal consensus, and that there can be consensus across societies as to normative behavior. However, he sees that there can be no consensus on values if individuals attempt to form their own and “prioritize and emphasize different values” (p. 315). Badaracco (2006) contends that an ethical standard is more than just personal beliefs; it is “melded with the convictions and concerns of others” (pp. 50-51). Barker (1993) believes that employees can form a set of values that guide and help them make sense of work day processes and interactions. These values are considered binding since arrived at in a democratic style or by consensus or “value configuration” (p. 423). Gardner’s (2007) research also demonstrated ethical standards can originate from a worker’s set of values, which in turn came from the organizational domain of the worker.

Berlin (2003) believes that it is impossible to form a universal standard of values since values will always be in conflict between cultures:

Happy are those who live under a discipline which they accept without question, who freely obey the orders of leaders, spiritual or temporal, whose word is fully accepted as unbreakable law; or those who have, by their own methods, arrived at clear and unshakeable convictions about what to do and what to be that brook no possible doubt. I can only say that those who rest on such comfortable beds of dogma are victims of forms of self-induced myopia, blinkers that may make for contentment, but not for understanding of what it is to be human. (p. 268)

Ciulla (2003) understands Kant's categorical imperative as a morality based more on reason, than religious affiliation. However, she describes his ethical standard as a description of the Golden Rule, which actually comes from Scripture. Jesus said that we should treat others as we wished to be treated. Kant (2003) would insist that the imperative is to see any of our actions toward others as becoming a universal law and that people are never a means to an end. Therefore, in Kant's mind, an ethical standard is based on this question: "Would I desire my treatment of this person to become a standard of ethics?"

Judges 17:6 (NIV) describes a dark time in the history of Israel: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." This verse alludes to the fact that if Israel had a king, then the king would enforce the ethical, behavioral boundaries set by God. Gardner (2007) examined the spiritual dimension of workers' lives and found that "metaphysical beliefs act as a frame, often directing their [the study subjects] activities to fulfill spiritual goals" (p. 134). Gardner found that the spirituality of a believer can offer a framework from which to understand life, his place in the cosmos, and how work is conceptualized and done.

Role models and mentors play a huge part in the formation of our ethical standards (Badaracco 2006; Treviño, et al. 2000). Brown, et al. (2006) state: "having had an ethical role model in one's career is likely to contribute to the development of ethical leadership" (p. 600). Organ (1988) describes the same: "Krebs noted rather consistent findings showing that subjects are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior soon after having observed someone else behave prosocially in a similar situation" (p. 29).

Victor & Cullen (1988) understand that the "sociocultural environment, organizational form, and organization-specific history are identified as determinants of the ethical climates in organizations" (p. 101). These researchers believe that individual traits do not alone explain

ethical behavior, but that there are other contributing factors such as the work climate, rules and policies of the organization, and even the external legal system. Treviño, Butterfield, & McCabe (1998) agree in that individual values combine with organizational elements such as “reward systems, rules, and code” (p. 447).

Baucus & Beck-Dudley (2005) argue from Kohlberg’s stages of moral development that people progress toward ethical development. The stages possibly reveal maturity development as well. Their contention is that people are ethical to avoid punishment, to serve their own desires, to follow group norms, to obey law, to adjust to relative situations, and to finally be committed to a global set of values.

Mill (2003) perceives that ethical standards should revolve around the concept of the least individual harm for the highest good. But, he also attests that an individual’s actions has some bearing on individual happiness, and thus form some type of codified morality for the masses.

Discussion

Exclusivity

As the literature review has shown, the research does not address research question one. Though researchers believe that leadership should be ethical, none suggest that only ethical influence should be classified as leadership.

The survey respondents agree with the research [See Appendix, Figure A2]. Seven of the eight survey respondents answered “no” to research question one. The overwhelming majority expressed that the leadership label should include both ethical and unethical influence. 88% feel that leadership should not be exclusively reserved for ethical influence.

One respondent said that “it is reasonable to stipulate that leadership must be ethical.” Another respondent who was reluctant to place ethical “subjectivity” onto leadership and who used Hitler as an example of leadership and influence, went on to say: “Unfortunately, Hitler’s ideas continue to inspire people to this day.” Though this researcher was unwilling to attach an ethical position to leadership, he was willing to give negative commentary about Hitler’s leadership. The point is that most students of leadership dislike the thought of unethical leadership and they do not deny its existence. Neither does this writer. Rost (1991, 1993) suggests that the leadership construct should first be identified as the action that is happening; then, labels of bad or good can be attached.

However, if unethical leadership is distasteful or bad, then I propose that it be classified by another name, such as Bass (pseudotransformational) or Burns (führerprinzip) earlier suggest; *Enronship* may be an illustrative label for unethical leadership as well. I chose to not give credence or validity to unethical influence as a designation of leadership. Unethical influence certainly exists; we should give it another name. And, leadership is a high calling, thus deserving only ethical influence.

Proposition 1: Ethical influence should be classified as leadership; unethical influence should be labeled by another name.

Attributes

The attributes of ethical leadership found in the literature review and stated by survey respondents are varied and many [See Appendix: Figure A3]. The coded attributes that received the highest quantity of tallies are: values other and their needs; is just, equitable, and fair; serves others; has integrity; has humility; builds community; is right/righteous; has transparency; and is honest.

As will be shown later in this discussion section, I propose that ethical standards originate in the character of God himself, specifically the attributes of *love* and *righteousness*. Could we create a listing of ethical attributes from just those two characteristics? I would propose that we can and should for succinctness and simplicity. All the other ethical characteristics, chosen by quantity, can follow from the two main attributes of *love* and *righteousness*.

Some may reject love as a main attribute due to a misunderstanding of its meaning. From Biblical literature and the original Greek, the highest form of love is not an emotion or a feeling like most in society understand love today. The Greek language carries several nuances for the word love that incorporate emotion and/or reason: passionate love, family love, friendship love, and selfless love. This “selfless love” nuance is the highest form of Biblical love and relies mostly on reason. In the Greek, this selfless love comes from *αγαπη*, pronounced “a-ga-pay.” It designates a devotion or faithfulness to others (Wigram n.d.). It is the primary word used in the New Testament for God’s love for us and humankind’s love for each other. It is used in these familiar verses: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” (John 3:16, NIV) and “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NIV). Based on its definition and these verses of Scripture, this type of love is not emotional or self-centered. It is reasoned and other-oriented. My stipulated definition of agape love, then, is this: “a devotion to, desire for, and decision of the will to do what is best for another.”

Love becomes the first characteristic in my listing of ethical attributes. The other characteristics or behaviors, which were chosen by researchers and survey respondents in our tally, would fit thusly:

- Love
 - Values others and their needs: Kouzes & Posner (2006) believe that some of the greatest thrills and deepest burdens of leaders are to ensure the success and significance of their followers.
 - Builds community and collegial relationships
 - Serves others: Greenleaf (1995) believes that the only allegiance leaders will gain from followers will be “in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (p. 20). Potts (2001) declares that the management process is survival-oriented, while leadership is service-oriented. According to Kouzes & Posner (2006), the leaders who serve leave the most enduring legacies.

Righteousness, too, needs a stipulated definition. “To be right is to be fair, just, straight, or equal. The word carries the concept of correct judgment or righteous acts. The word ‘righteousness’ is applied to one who is right in character and action” (Cox 1983, p. 460). The New Testament Greek word for righteousness is δικη, pronounced “di-kay.” Its synonyms are: right, acquit, equitable, fair, innocence, pious, generosity, and godliness (Wigram n.d.). My stipulated definition of righteousness then, is simply “to do the right thing.” The question then becomes, “by whose standards?” As will be proposed in the next section, the ethical standard by which we measure our behavior is the character of God, as demonstrated by Jesus Christ.

Righteousness then, becomes my second characteristic in the listing of ethical attributes. The other characteristics or behaviors that were chosen by researchers and survey respondents in our tally would fit thusly:

- Righteousness
 - Just, equitable, fair
 - Integrity, credibility
 - Transparency, openness
 - Humility
 - Honesty

Proposition 2: Ethical leadership needs a definitive taxonomy of attributes. Love and righteousness, with their stipulated definitions and accompanying characteristics form a simplified code of ethics for leadership.

Badaracco (2006) makes the following statement: “A moral code is basically a set of values and principles that guide behavior. But this doesn’t tell us what counts as a good moral code, and it says nothing about how a leader develops one” (p. 31). The next section will attempt to answer his complaint.

Originations

Many researchers or leadership authors do not address the origination issue – from where do ethical standards or codes originate? It is just assumed that ethical standards exist without understanding where those standards originate. Those researchers who address this issue, as seen in the literature review, do offer many sources of an ethical standard. The survey respondents offered a wide variety of originations as well: cultural or societal influence, law, science, feelings, and reason [See Appendix, Figure A2]. However, 63% of the respondents

offered some form of spirituality as the origination of ethical standards. Those who do address this significant issue are also unwilling to set an absolute standard against which all persons can be compared, thus leaving the issue open to interpretation. Many insist that since cultures vary, so do standards of ethics. I don't deny the existence of different standards across cultures; however, that doesn't mean that an absolute standard does not or cannot exist.

It seems appropriate that the philosophical argument of "first cause" could be applied to this issue and answer the origination question. It could also give foundation to the absolute issue. To every consideration of the origination of ethical standards, the question could be raised: "But, what was the first cause; what is further in the past." If ethical standards are cultural, from where did that culture get its parameters? If ethical standards come from our role models, from where did our role models learn those behaviors? And, from where did the next learn theirs, and so on. Of course, the answer to the question of "first cause" will rest in a personal worldview of creation and life itself. My personal worldview attests that God created, and that God was as described in the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, NIV).

"In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4, NIV).

God is the "first cause" of creation and life; therefore, He is the "first cause" or origination of ethical standards of behavior. Ethical standards, to me, originate in the character of God himself, demonstrated by His Son, Jesus Christ.

Two, distinct attributes of the character of God are *love* and *righteousness*, and we, as His people, are called to the same standards. “God is love” (I John 4:16, NIV); “let us love one another for love comes from God” (I John 4:7, NIV); “Righteous are you, O Lord, and your laws are right” (Psalm 119:137, NIV); “He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3, NIV). These two attributes of God and humankind are seen throughout the Scriptural story, and many of the ethical attributes listed by researchers and by the survey respondents [See Appendix: Figure A3] flow directly from love and righteousness.

One survey respondent, in answer to the origination issue implied: “what would Jesus do?” Superficially, this response seems cliché; but, on closer scrutiny, it seems to hit the nail on the head. If ethical standards of behavior flow from the character of God, and since Jesus is fully God and fully man (according to my worldview), then we can see ethical standards in the life of Jesus as He walked this earth. Another respondent based ethical behavior on the concept of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It should also be noted that some researchers and survey respondents, though not advocating an absolute standard, also insist that they are not advocating a moral relativism:

Leaders need moral codes that are as complex, aired, and subtle as the situations in which they often find themselves. This does not mean abandoning basic values or adopting moral relativism. It does mean, over the course of a career, embracing a wider set of human values and understanding them personally and emotionally. (Badaracco 2006, p. 33)

“No, I do not believe that there is one universal ethical standard for every person and culture (though that is not to suggest jumping to too many conclusions about moral or ethical relativity, either)” (survey respondent). “Some ethics are immutable while perhaps, depending upon the

situation, there might be some flexibility of ethics [based] on certain facts or situations (not necessarily situational ethics)” (survey respondent). But, that is incongruent; if there is no absolute standard, then the only standard left is relative. While there may be cultural adaptations to certain aspects of behavior, it seems entirely prudent (to use an attribute of ethical leadership) that there can be an absolute, universal set of ethical standards that is cross-cultural.

If ethical standards originate in the character of God, as demonstrated in Jesus Christ, then a set of standards can be absolute. It is understood that not all cultures or even people in our own culture would be comfortable with my perspective on originations. However, review again the taxonomy of attributes in the previous section. Would many object to those characteristics of ethical influence? It is doubtful. I see those ethical standards as absolute and as originating in the character of God; others may view their origination otherwise.

Proposition 3: Ethical leadership standards have a “first cause.” That “first cause” or origination is in the character of the God as demonstrated through Jesus Christ, thus securing the absolute nature of those standards. Two attributes of God, love and righteousness, form the foundation from which other characteristics flow.

Limitations and Potential for Further Research

The limitations of this research on ethical leadership are apparent, but do give some reason for further research:

- The research is cross-sectional through selected resource material and a limited time frame; it needs to be more longitudinal with comprehensive resource material over a longer period of time. Further study could employ comprehensive resources in more journal articles and other media on ethical leadership. Northouse (2007) believes that ethical leadership is still in the early years of development. He says that a theoretical

basis is needed for ethical leadership. It seems that research questions one and three of this project may give a start to that theoretical basis.

- My worldview, which is Biblical, creates an understood bias as to research question three and the origination of ethical standards. Further research could be done by devising a survey instrument that listed several origination sources (e.g. culture, role models, the character of God, law, etc.) and testing it in various demographic groups (gender, age, education level, religious background).
- The survey in this research project was not random, but was sent to personal friends, albeit strong researchers, instructors, and leadership practitioners. The survey instrument suggested above, randomly sent to the demographic groups suggested in a larger population pool, would increase its validity and generalization to the population.
- The taxonomy of attributes suggested here narrowly defines ethical behavior. The intent was to simplify exhaustive lists. Other survey instruments could be devised that list the entire taxonomy in Figure A3 and allow respondents to quantify choices based on a Likert-type scale. An additional option would be to utilize my shortened taxonomy of attributes and operationalize those as variables in job performance and job satisfaction.
- Gardner's (2007) research did focus some on the spiritual background of his subjects.

Spiritual engagement does not guarantee that a person will do good work.

Moreover, many who do not hold spiritual beliefs frequently take on the responsibility to respond to societal and global problems in their work, and the specific ways in which a spiritually oriented person does his or her work does not appear to differ in any specifiable manner from the ways of someone who is not spiritual. At the same time, evidence from this study suggests that spirituality not

only helps to connect one's personal beliefs with one's work, but it is also capable of awakening a person to the desperate need for good work in our world. (p. 152)

More research could target work performance and job satisfaction and compare the results between those who would agree and those who would disagree with my propositions.

Implications for Leaders and Leadership

This research on ethical leadership has a few implications for today's leaders and the leadership process in organizational, service, and civic arenas:

- A belief that ethical standards originate with the character of God could increase work quality and effectiveness.

Rather than a self-centered diversion, spirituality can help people take responsibility for their actions and their work. Indeed, it seems quite clear that spirituality...can lead individuals to carry out work that is both excellent in quality and vitally important for the broader world" (Gardner 2007, p. 152)

- The taxonomy of *love* and *righteousness* and its accompanying characteristics offers an effective approach to an effective and healthy organization. The converse is true if those standards are not implemented. O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner, & Connelly (1995) assert that an "uninhibited willingness to use others for personal gain represents a course of action completely outside the bounds of socialized behaviors and should exert a strong direct influence of harm to the organization" (p. 533). "Leaders who choose organizational goals based upon personal gain can have a significant detrimental impact upon long-term organizational performance and the well-being of members of that organization" (O'Connor, et al. 1995). My taxonomy of attributes should contribute to a

better organization; if implemented, those attributes would be effective in the handling of organizational conflict as well.

- Leaders should be role models of the taxonomy of the attributes defined herein. “We know that exposure to positive models and mentors, deeply rooted religious beliefs, and alignment of individual and professional values are strong predictors of good work” (Gardner 2007, p. 311). Treviño, et al. (2000) believe that leaders should be moral persons and moral managers and should intentionally model and talk ethical behavior around their employees.
- Organizations can reward ethical behavior based on the taxonomy for greater organizational performance and to ensure repetition of the attributes. Brown & Treviño (2006) understand that the ethical climate of an organization sets standards that will either support or deny ethical behaviors by its use of rewards and punishment.
- If only ethical influence is to be characterized as leadership, the leaders will need to express that in everyday language. Another label for unethical influence, such as *Enronship*, would become part of organizational language as well.
- Conflict can be expected if these ethical attributes are implemented. Kouzes & Posner (2006) insist that when a leader takes a stand on values, not all will be happy and go along.
- Society is desperate for ethical leadership in our modern organizations. As Frankl (1959, 1962, 1984) said: “Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake” (p. 179). That statement could be modernized to read: “Since Enron, AIG, GM, etc., we know what man is capable of. And since the government bailout, we know what is at stake!”

Conclusion

Kouzes & Posner (2006) believe that all leaders will leave a legacy. In terms of a campfire/campsite metaphor, these authors stress:

We guarantee that what people will say about you will not be about what you achieved for yourself but what you achieved for others. Not how big a campfire you built but how well you kept others warm, how well you illuminated the night to make them feel safe, and how beautiful you left the campsite for those who would come after you to build the next fire. (p. 19)

Ethical influence leaves the campsite better than when it found it; love and righteousness and its accompanying characteristics will achieve for others and will keep them warm; and ethical standards which originate in the character of God will illuminate the night of organizational decisions. Ethical influence, called leadership, leaves the campsite prepared for those who follow.

Northouse (2007) believes that writings on ethical research are mostly personal opinions. That will be the situation until more research is done, especially in the context of the research questions of this paper. These may be my opinions on the subject of ethical leadership, but it is my hope that these research questions and propositions will resonate with others and that this project has added value to a needed subject.

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Appendix

Figure A1: Survey Instrument

I am doing research on ethical leadership for part of my Master's of Liberal Studies degree in Organizational Leadership from Fort Hays State University. We tend to view leadership today as a group-centric process where the relationship among participants is based on "influence," versus authority or coercion. In my research, I am seeking the answers to three questions:

RQ1: should only ethical influence be classified as leadership?

RQ2: what specific attributes (traits and/or behaviors) should characterize ethical leadership?

RQ3: from where do ethical standards originate?

Would you be able to answer the following three questions to aid me in my research? If so, you can simply hit "reply" and respond to the questions directly in the email. I respect you as a leader, instructor, and researcher; I appreciate your time with this short survey.

1. Should only *ethical* influence be labeled as leadership and should *unethical* influence be labeled by another name? (Bass used the term "Pseudotransformational" leadership to label leadership that was transforming in a negative or unethical way. Burns suggested that Hitler was not a leader, but a tyrant who used the term "führerprinzip"). If we should label unethical leadership by another name, do you have a suggestion?
2. In your opinion, what are the five most critical attributes or characteristics of an ethical leader?
3. Who determines what is ethical or unethical? Or put another way, from where do ethical standards originate? Is there an absolute standard that fits every person and culture or does society demand flexibility and relativity on ethical leadership?

Figure A2: Survey Responses

| LDRS 870: Survey Responses | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| Survey # | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| RQ1 | no | no | no | no | yes | no | no | no |
| RQ2 | honesty, integrity, openness, humbleness, willingness to learn | honest, transparent, non-coercive, consistent in values/principles, respect for human dignity | serve, humility, unselfish goal | intellectual acuity, moral integrity, empathy and ability to know situation, adaptation, interpersonal skills, slow to accept credit & quick to give it | humility, confidence, love, listening, flexibility | fair & just, value-based decisions, honest, does what is right, nurture leadership in others, collaborative, transparency | value people by fair treatment, honest, collegial, serve, impartial, objective, transparency, accountable | integrity, transparency, consistency, flexibility, accept blame, collegial, society |
| RQ3 | societal behavior; no | culture; no | Bible | God | Trinity | Christianity - what would Jesus do | feelings, religion, law, culture, science; no | cultural, reason; no |

Figure A3: Coding and Tallies of Ethical Leadership Attributes
 [From literature reviewed and survey respondents – like attributes were combined]

| LDRS 870: Coding & Tallies of Attributes | |
|---|--------------|
| Attribute | Tally |
| Values others and their needs | 11 |
| Builds community, collegial | 7 |
| Serves | 8 |
| Just, equitable, fair | 9 |
| Right, Righteousness | 6 |
| Integrity, credibility | 8 |
| Transparency, openness | 6 |
| Humility, give credit, accept blame | 8 |
| Courage | 3 |
| Prudence, propriety | 2 |
| Temperance | 1 |
| Honesty | 8 |
| Trust | 2 |
| Dignity, significance | 2 |
| Confidence | 2 |
| Faith | 2 |
| Love | 3 |
| Cognitive abilities | 3 |
| Adaptability, flexibility | 3 |
| Interpersonal skills | 1 |
| Consistency | 1 |
| Non-coercive | 1 |
| Value-based decisions | 1 |
| Nurture leadership | 1 |
| Listener | 2 |
| Excellence | 1 |