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IN PURSUIT OF AUTHENTIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES¹

Abstract. A practice-grounded and research-validated reinterpretation is presented of the ways in which values and ethics influence administrative practices in schools. The basic proposition is that acquiring administrative sophistication is a function of understanding the influence of personal values on the actions of individuals and the influence of values on organizational and social practices. A values perspective is used to link theory and practice with the objective of promoting authentic leadership and democracy in schools. The perennial challenges of leadership are discussed together with the special circumstances of our times. The following are then proposed: the pursuit of personal sophistication, sensitivity to others, and the promotion of reflective professional practice. Examples of findings from recent research that demonstrate the utility and relevance of values and valuation processes as guides to educational leadership are presented. These findings are used to reinterpret key values theories in ways that increase their relevance to school leadership practices. Specifically, the values typology of Hodgkinson is reconceptualized and informed by the accumulated findings of research on administrative valuation processes in schools conducted since 1988. This reconceptualization of theory also reflects efforts to integrate cognitive theory perspectives, together with experiences working with groups of school administrators in Canada, Barbados, Sweden, Australia, and Russia.

Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge-based, values informed, and skillfully executed. With these notions in mind, values are formally defined and proposed as an influence on the actions of individuals as well as on administrative practice. A syntax of values terminology is then developed and grounded within the context of a single individual living among many in a social environment. Several persistent conceptual issues are given brief discussion. Finally, the seven arenas of administration are identified and their relevance to authentic leadership practice is discussed.

An Initial Conceptual Image of Authentic Leadership

Appreciating the nature of authentic leadership begins with a thoughtful and rigorous analysis of leadership activity. This can occur through formal research, through personal reflection, but preferably both. Leadership by definition refers to practices that extend beyond the usual procedural context of organizational management. Authentic leadership implies a genuine kind of leadership -- a hopeful, open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances, as opposed to the more traditional dualistic portrayal of management and leadership practices characteristic of now obsolete and superseded research literature on effective principal practices (e.g., Leithwood & Montgomery, 1986). Traditionally management was viewed as mechanistic, short-sighted, precedent focussed and context constrained practices. An image of leadership and management that is more in keeping with current times is a values informed leadership -- a sophisticated, knowledge-based, and skilful approach to leadership. It is also a

form of leadership that acknowledges and accommodates in an integrative way the legitimate needs of individuals, groups, organizations, communities and cultures -- not just the organizational perspectives that are the usual preoccupation of much of the leadership literature. The innovative dimension being proposed here is the adoption and application of a values and valuation process perspective to educational administration makes the objectives of leadership more understandable, compelling and achievable.

The Nature of Values

There is much inclination in recent years for educators, politicians and other publicly accountable individuals to speak in terms of lost values or declining social values rather than a perception of any sort of improvement in social values. Within our recent social history, many traditional values seem to have become threatened or at least fragile. To suggest that one does not have values implies a rejection of the formative experiences of family, community and society. Possessing values is generally viewed as a good thing, although a person could just as easily be imagined to hold bad values as good values. The real issue is who gets to decide which values are good and bad. Administrators, for their part, readily acknowledge the importance of values to leadership situations in organizations. It is their role to act as agents for the values of their society, and research suggests they usually employ such values most consciously when they are encountering ambiguous, unprecedented, or time constrained problem situations, or when consensus is impossible to establish (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995).

Other basic characteristics of values can be identified. Pirsig's more recent novel *Lila* (1991) incorporates a conception of the dynamic and static nature of values which is instructive. Using the example of an individual who hears a piece of music and likes it increasingly from day to day, Pirsig illustrates the dynamic nature of a value. In time, the dynamic value of the musical piece increases to the point that the individual must buy the recording so they can hear it as often as they want. As time passes though, the dynamic value of the music declines through familiarity and frequent play, and the piece of music assumes a more subdued, but enduring static value. The dynamic value is gone or reduced. Yet, the dynamic value may experience a resurgence when, for example, a friend drops by who has not heard the tune and the owner of the recording vicariously experiences it anew by playing it for the friend.

Where values come from is also a matter subject to debate. Are we born with some values 'hard-wired' as part of our nature, or are they all socially acquired? Conventional wisdom has it that most values are socially acquired. However, empiricist scholars like Edward Wilson, author of *Consilience* (1998), attribute human predispositions to things such as a fear of snakes to mankind's evolutionary past. It is not that difficult to imagine how such instinctual values could persist as a biologically fixed human condition. Other similar biologically fixed human values might include the instinct to survive, a fear of death, and the drive to reproduce. On the other hand, it is also clear that lots of values are socially acquired. Many values are formatively accumulated, and an apparent, objectively shared meaning can often be assigned to such values. By this, is meant that people

appear to share the same values even though the acquisition of those shared values may have occurred in radically different ways from person to person. Nevertheless, the opposite, more existentialist perspective is also possible. It is likely that individuals may also possess at least a few distinctly personal values. Some values have a rational, consensual or factual basis, but there is evidence to also support the existence of non-rational and transcendental values. The nature of God is an example that has meaning for many people.

These are complex matters to ponder, and language can be a significant barrier to dialogue on these issues. Accordingly, a critical first step towards exploring these matters more fully is being clear about what the term 'values' means and adopting a suitably comprehensive working definition.

A Working Definition of Values

Values are a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action. (Parsons & Shils, 1962, p. 395)

Conceptualizing values in this manner highlights their function in making choices. In administration, the making of choices is usually termed decision-making, problem solving or dilemma solving: activities familiar to most administrators. Willower puts it this way:

Because a significant portion of the practice in educational administration requires rejecting some courses of action in favour of a preferred one, values are generally acknowledged to be central to the field. (1992, p. 369)

The Parsons and Shils definition expands the scope of the term *value* beyond the relatively narrow philosophical domain of the meta-physical (the study of first principles) to several other types of values relevant to educational administration. It includes: social ethics (e.g., Beck, 1990, 1993, 1999; Cohen, 1982; Frankena, 1973); transrational values (Hodgkinson, 1996), the rational moral domain of administrative decision making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000; Strike, 1990, 1999; Willower, 1994, 1999); plus the realm of self-interest and personal preference (Begley & Johansson, 1998; Evers & Lakomski, 1996; Hodgkinson, 1996).

So, values are essentially a conception of the desirable with motivating force. However, further explication is required. Within the administrative context, it is possible, even necessary, to distinguish the values manifested by individuals from the more collective social values of a group, profession, society or organization. Doing so highlights the interactive relationship between the formation of personal values and social values, implying an answer to the question about which comes first. Values appear to be derived from both within the individual's psychology as well as from the individual's interaction with collective groups, organizations and societies. For this reason, it is important to establish a balanced appreciation of the relationships among personal values, professional values, organizational values, and social values. The bulk of the literature of leadership and management has not been helpful in this regard, as it reflects a predominantly organizational perspective, to the extent that individual and professional values are often ignored,

assumed to be the same as, or fully subordinated to an organizational imperative. The current interest of many educators in 'organizational learning' stands as a shining example of this pathology. In the literature on this subject, the importance of the individual to the leadership process is usually acknowledged on the first page and henceforth lost to an unremitting collective perspective. During a time of heightened social awareness and environmental activism, it is easier to see why a profit-oriented corporate sector might not be allowed to dominate or to remain unaccountable to the broader interests of community and society. The same can be said of educational organizations and organized religion. Sophisticated administrators are wise to consciously distinguish among the arenas of personal, professional, organizational, and social values of their environments. A further discussion of these inter-related arenas of administration occurs later in this chapter.

Other semantic difficulties. There are other semantic difficulties that need to be acknowledged. Certain commonly used synonyms and closely related values terminology must be distinguished from one another for the sake of clear communications. Words like *morals*, *values*, *quality* and *ethics* are often used interchangeably in school leadership literature. Is there one overarching term within which the other terms can be subsumed? It can be illuminating to substitute one term for the other in a sentence or phrase. For example, substituting the word 'value' for 'quality' in the ubiquitous phrase, 'total quality leadership', produces 'total value leadership' or 'value added leadership.' These alternatives sound plausible, and the substitution actually works reasonably well in application. However, several troublesome questions may also be triggered. If one espouses 'total value leadership', one may then reasonably ask *which values*, and *who decides* which values? The procedurally preoccupied proponents of the 'total quality' movement may not examine such questions too deeply.

In the school leadership literature, and particularly among North American scholars of educational administration, there is a pronounced tendency to adopt the word *ethics* or *moral* as an umbrella term for anything values-related (e.g., Grogan & Smith, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992). In contrast, other scholars, notably several Canadians (i.e., Begley, 2000; Campbell-Evans, 1991; Leonard, 1999), follow Hodgkinson's lead (1996). They reserve the term *ethic* or principles for a particular and very special category of transrational values and employ the word *values* as a generic umbrella term for all forms of 'conceptions of the desirable.' Ethics represent a particular category of social/collective values of a transrational nature and research (Begley & Johansson, 1998) suggests they are employed under quite particular circumstances by educational administrators. For example, most administrators appear to avoid using ethics as guides to practice when they can (Begley & Johansson, 1998). This is not so much due to a character deficiency on their part or a lack of moral integrity; rather, it is a natural outcome of the particular accountability patterns associated with school leadership. Ethics are often culturally exclusive and they therefore can be a very troublesome category of values to employ as guides to action in our increasingly diverse societies. As a practical consequence, administrators naturally tend to opt for employing rational consequences and consensus grounded values as guides to action and decision making whenever that is possible.

A syntax of values terminology. It is now appropriate to conceptually situate values within the broader context of one person's being. Basic questions might include the following: Where do values fit in as a component of human nature? What is their relationship to the other dimensions of an individual's or a group's identity? What is the relationship of actions, speech, and attitudes to values? What is the relationship of values to psychological motivations? One of the simplest ways to illustrate the relationships among these terms is through the use of an onion figure which illustrates a syntax of values terminology. Figure 1 is an adaptation of a graphic found in several of Hodgkinson's books (e.g., 1991; see also Chapter 13). When considering the figure, it is important to keep in mind that one person is portrayed; one individual, not a group or organization or collective social context.

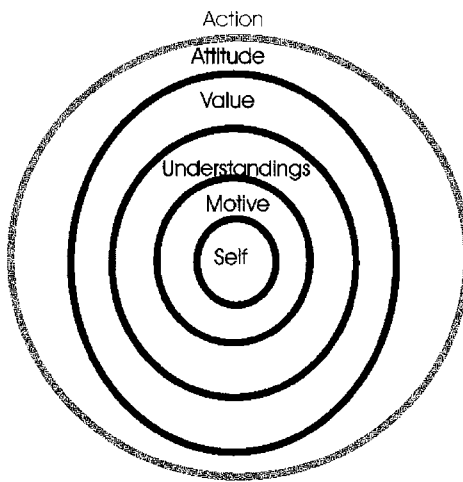


Figure 1. Values Syntax.

Beginning from the outside, the first ring represents the observable actions and speech of the individual. This is the way by which one makes empirical attributions about the value orientations of any other person. Observed actions and speech are also the source of data used to generate research findings. There is nothing else that is empirically discernible. Accordingly, most people intuitively rely on the clues provided by the actions and attitudes of others to make predictive insights into the nature of values held by other people. This is a generally sound strategy, but it has the same limits to its reliability in day-to-day life as it does in a research context. As political leaders, principals, teachers, parents and children regularly demonstrate through their speech and actions, the observable actions they manifest may or may not be accurate indicators of the person's underlying values, particularly when individuals articulate or posture certain values while actually being committed to quite different values. This implies the significant limitations



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