

Moral Leadership in a Troubled World-A Transformative Model

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Opinion Article

It is well established that we live in a world of chaos, conflict, and complexity – a world where nations struggle for economic survival and even the most economically and politically powerful nations find that their leaders are currently facing a crisis of trust. It is a world plagued by philosophical and political conflicts, economic greed and corruption, world climate change, and political intrigue on a grand scale in many countries. Eminent scholars have called for a new “transformative” model of leadership in which leaders redefine their place as role models, creators of new meanings, and exemplars of character and integrity in honoring duties owed to stakeholders.

In this brief paper I introduce the recently articulated model of transformative leadership – a highly ethical integration of morally relevant qualities contained in six other leadership perspectives [1], and this model as a useful paradigm of moral leadership for today’s turmoil filled world. Transformative leadership integrates ethical elements of Level 5, Covenantal, Charismatic, Servant, Principle-Centered, and Transformational Leadership and holds leaders to the standard of “ethical stewardship” in seeking to optimize value and wealth creation while honoring duties owed to others [2].

Level 5 leaders adopt a utilitarian ethic, seeking to optimize the greatest good for others by demonstrating a ferocious resolve and commitment to excellence – combined with a personal humility about their own responsibility for failure and a willingness to give credit to others for successes achieved [3]. Level 5 leaders are generous in giving praise to others but take upon themselves personal responsibility for sub-standard outcomes. Former US President, Harry S. Truman, was such a leader – willingly living by the mantra “The Buck Stops Here” and embracing personal responsibility for his decisions as a leader.

Covenantal leaders are exemplars, role models, teachers, servants, and empowers of others – and constantly seek the truth in partnership with others [4]. Covenantal leaders adopt a duty-based ethic, focused on seeking, following, and creating truth. Former Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, was such a leader and was called “the greatest statesman of our century” but US President, John F. Kennedy but his reputation as a leader has been acknowledged worldwide. Hammarskjöld is one of only four people ever to be awarded a posthumous Nobel Prize.

Charismatic leaders create commitment with others based upon their personal character and charisma. They are widely respected and appeal to others as leaders of a noble cause – adopting a relationship-based ethic of care that is responsive to human needs and that honors responsibilities [5]. Canada’s Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, is increasingly being recognized as a modern day charismatic leader – earning the trust of his citizenry and of residents of other nations worldwide.

Servant leaders put service over self-interest [6] and view their role as owing a complex set of duties to others to help them fulfill their highest potential. Their ethical perspective is relationship-based and axiological but acknowledges duties owed to create great organizations, great communities, and a better world [7]. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is widely recognized as a world class servant leader who devoted her life to helping others.

Principle-centered leaders seek to advocate and model universal truths that reinforce both the principles and values of an ethic of universal laws and the focus on freedom of the ethic of individual rights [8]. Mahatma Gandhi exemplifies this leadership perspective as he advocated that we must “live the change you wish to see in the world.”

Transformative leaders recognize the need to manage change and to create synergy by seeking both the best interests of stakeholders and the optimization of success for organizations – whether at a local, national, or international level. These leaders adopt an ethical perspective that integrates an optimization of economic efficiency with a distributive justice commitment to avoid harming others. Perhaps the best recent example of a highly effective transformative leader is Nelson Mandela whose revolutionary approach to change profoundly changed South Africa and set standards for effective leadership worldwide.

Transformative leaders seek to honor all of the ethical responsibilities of these six leadership perspectives. They recognize the need to meld solutions that integrate economic and social imperatives in solving today’s problems [9]. Great leadership honors a comprehensive set of ethical and behavioral duties and constantly pursues excellence [10]. The essence of moral leadership is the exercise of choices, the recognition of responsibility, and the commitment to excellence in creating a better world. The challenge facing leaders throughout the world is to earn the trust of others by being true transformative leaders – a leadership model desperately needed in today’s troubled world (Figure 1).

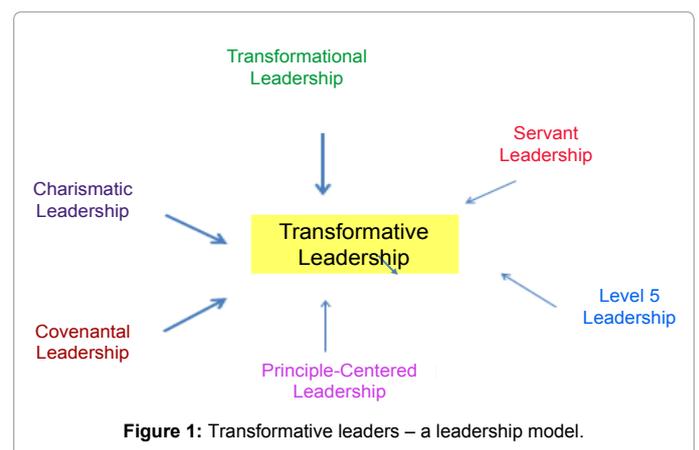


Figure 1: Transformative leaders – a leadership model.

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Received May 31, 2016; Accepted June 02, 2016; Published June 09, 2016

Citation: Caldwell C (2016) Moral Leadership in a Troubled World-A Transformative Model. Arabian J Bus Manag Review 6: 233. doi:10.4172/2223-5833.1000233

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Citation: Caldwell C (2016) Moral Leadership in a Troubled World-A Transformative Model. *Arabian J Bus Manag Review* 6: 233. doi:[10.4172/2223-5833.1000233](https://doi.org/10.4172/2223-5833.1000233)