

LEADING WITH INTEGRITY IN A FREE SOCIETY FROM AN EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: In all modern leadership literature, integrity of leaders is an important ingredient in shaping and maintaining a free society. The level of their perceived integrity influences and shapes the Church and Society giving freedom and welfare. However, not all leadership types and styles produce or support freedom, so in this article the author will describe different leadership types, their characteristics, and their results. Based on empirical research and personal experience of the author, integrity and its level will be discussed for each leadership style presented in this article.

Keywords: *Authoritarian leadership, freedom, integrity, laissez faire leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership*

Introduction

Humanity has long been interested in understanding leadership. Discussions on leadership started with theoretical issues, trying to find different styles of leadership and to correlate them with the needs of society. Philosophers¹ also examined the characteristics of leaders and how they related to the world around them. In *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*, Bernard Bass writes about Plato's leadership typologies presented in *The Republic*: "(1) the philosopher-statesman, to rule the republic with reason and justice, (2) the military commander, to defend the state and enforce its will, and (3) the businessman, to provide for citizens' material needs and to satisfy their lower appetites."²

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru (2005). *Istoria filosofiei, de la începuturi până la Renaștere*. Cluj Napoca, Romania: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2005, p. 163.

2 Bernard Bass (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 3rd Ed., New York: The Free Press, p.21.

Theorists have defined many leadership styles using various classifications. For the sake of the limited size of this article, the author will use only the human nature classification. According to this classification, there are four major leadership styles: autocratic or authoritarian, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership styles.

Someone could argue that leadership styles are different due to different cultures, environments, or historical events, and this is true up to a point. However, when leadership hinders, limits, or excludes freedom in that specific society, the leadership style should be revisited and adapted to the change society is experiencing or requiring.

What is Leadership?

The understanding of leadership is crucial in defining leadership styles, so a definition of leadership is needed. Rock³ defined leadership as a process of teaching people how to think. Before him, Barnard (1938) defined leadership as “a specialized work of maintaining the organization in operation”⁴, seeing leadership more as a function than a position.

Givray defines a leader from the perspective of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), rather than a leader because “leaders are shaped and defined by character. CEOs are expected to boost sales, improve profit margin, and make money for shareholders. Leaders “inspire and enable others to do excellent work and realize their potential”⁵. Givray asserted that a leader’s function is to inspire followers and model organizational culture. Bass defined leadership as the relations between two or more members of a group “that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members”⁶. In other words, leaders influence followers and shape organizational relationships.

Leadership Styles

As mentioned in the Introduction, leadership literature identifies the following leadership styles: authoritarian, laissez-faire, transactional, and

3 Rock, D. (2006). *Quiet leadership*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

4 Barnard, C. L. (1938). *The functions of the executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 215.

5 Givray, H. S. (2007, Sept. 3). *When CEOs aren't leaders*. BusinessWeek, 102.

6 Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial application* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press, 20.

transformational. Although it is difficult to provide a definition for each of the four leadership styles, it is important to note the similarities and differences among them. In trying to define various leadership styles, the changes in leadership theory from trait to behavioral to contingency and situational models must be emphasized.

Authoritarian Leadership

The authoritarian leadership model refers to the way power is distributed, how decisions are made, and how leaders solve a problem⁷. In the authoritarian leadership model, the leader defines the problem, diagnoses the problem, generates, evaluates, and chooses among alternative solutions⁸. Aryee et al. observed that an authoritarian leader has an internal need or control manifested in such behaviors as “ignoring subordinate suggestions, belittling subordinate contribution, and insisting on absolute obedience”⁹. Authoritarian leadership style is the dominant leadership style in Romania, even in many Christian organizations. Partially, this leadership style is due to the long communist rule in the country¹⁰.

Autocratic Paternalistic Leadership

The autocratic paternalistic leadership model is another form of the authoritarian leadership style, as both styles emerge from *patriarchism*. According to Lee, *patriarchism* is “a form of social organization in which the father is the supreme authority and is the highest-ranking member in the family, clan, or tribe”¹¹. The autocratic paternalistic leader “acknowledges and considers the employees’ rights and feelings.

7 Aryee, S., Chen, Z. X., Sun, L., & Yaw, A. D. (2007). Antecedents and outcomes of abusive supervision: test of a trickle-down model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(1), 191-201.

8 Hing, L. S. S., Bobocel, D. R., Zanna, M. P., & McBride, M. V. (2007). Authoritarian dynamics and unethical decision-making: high social dominance orientation leaders and high right-wing authoritarianism followers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 67-81.

9 Aryee, S., Chen, Z. X., Sun, L., & Yaw, A. D. (2007). Antecedents and outcomes of abusive supervision: test of a trickle-down model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(1), 191-201.

10 Kets de Vries, M. F. R. (2009). *Reflection on character and leadership*. Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

11 Lee, H. (2001). Paternalistic human resource practices: Their emergence and characteristics. *Journal of Economic Issues*, XXXV (4), 841-869.

This type of relationship is analogous to a father who does not forcibly control or direct the activities of his child or children but guides them in an understanding and loving way¹². The disadvantage of the autocratic paternalistic leadership style is limited communication between the leader and followers and little teamwork. For many centuries Romanian society was a patriarchal society, with strong authoritarian leadership¹³. Leaders were father figures with absolute authority and followers were children with limited or no personal responsibility.¹⁴

Laissez-faire Leadership

The laissez-faire leadership model refers primarily to the extent which leadership is avoided. Bass described the attitude of laissez-faire leaders as allowing followers “complete freedom of action, providing them with materials, refrained from participating except to answer questions when asked,”¹⁵ and without giving evaluative remarks on their performance. Laissez-faire leaders exercise little control over their followers leaving them to set the direction for their actions, define their roles, and describe their tasks.

The laissez-faire leadership style is almost non-existent in the Romanian Christian leadership culture because Romanians, in general, wait for their leaders to decide for them. They do not want to make risky decisions if there are other options.¹⁶

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership uses social exchange as a means of leadership. According to Bass and Reggio, this exchange, “is based on the leader discussing with others what is required and specifying the conditions

12 Dalton, K., & Kennedy, L. (2007). Management culture in Romania: Patterns of change and resistance. *Journal for East European Management Studies*, 12(3), 232-259.

13 Radulescu-Motru, C. (1990). *Sufletul neamului nostru: Calitati bune si defecte (Our nation's soul: Good qualities and faults)*. Bucharest, Romania: Anima.

14 Chen, Z., Lam, W., & Zhong, J. A. (2007). Leader-member exchange and member performance: A new look at individual-level negative feedback-seeking behavior and team-level empowerment climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(1), 202-212.

15 Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Publishers, 545.

16 Nicolae, M., & Nicolae, E. E. (2009). Values, mentalities, and leadership in Romania. *Theoretical and Applied Economics. Supplement*, 37-46.

and rewards these others will receive if they fulfill those requirements.”¹⁷ Transactional leaders motivate subordinates “by appealing to their personal desires.”¹⁸ According to leadership theorists, transactional leaders do not encourage their followers to think creatively, and innovation is not a requirement. These followers may be monitored based on predetermined criteria and on standard procedures.

In their study, “Transactional and transformational leadership impacts on organizational learning,” Zagorsek, Dimovski and Skerlavaj described three dimensions of transactional leadership.¹⁹ The first dimension is contingent reward leadership. It describes the behavior of the transactional leader who is interested in clarifying the role and task requirements for followers and providing material or psychological rewards after the followers have fulfilled their contractual requirements. The second dimension presents the transactional leader as an active enforcer interested only in fulfilling organizational standards. The third dimension describes the transactional leader as a passive manager waiting to act after followers make mistakes. Passive management by exception presents a leader that neglects to act until problems become acute.

In Romania, transactional leaders are developing the second and the third dimensions of transactional leadership. Many Romanian managers have an engineering background and are task oriented, interested only in fulfilling organizational standards. Other Romanian leaders, including Christian leaders, use a passive management by exception style because of poor management skills, uncertainty in dealing with their tasks, or lack of organizational direction.²⁰

Transformational Leadership

Before defining transformational leadership, it is important to observe that transformational leadership is not a well-known

17 Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Publishers, 4.

18 Bennett, T. M. (2009). A study of the management leadership style preferred by IT subordinates. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, 13(2), 3.

19 Zagorsek, H., Dimovski, V., & Skerlavaj, M. (2009). Transactional and transformational leadership impacts on organizational learning. *Journal for East European Management Studies*, 14(2), 144-165.

20 Neesham, C., Nicolae, M., & Naftanaila, I. (2009). Business leadership in Romania: An overview of research, education, practice. *Theoretical & Applied Economics. Supplement*, 23-31.

concept in Romania. Transformational is translated many times into Romanian as *transformative*²¹ and the four components are not well defined. Nevertheless, Amar and Zlate emphasize the need of the transformational leadership style in modern Romanian society as an instrument for increasing organizational efficiency. By providing significance and direction, transformational leader has an inspirational impact on followers, motivating them to achieve extraordinary outcomes. Bass defines the transformational or charismatic leader as “a person with strong convictions, determined, self-confident, and emotionally expressive.”²² For Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership has four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Using the multifactor leadership questionnaire for transformational leadership, Snodgrass et al. defined transformational leadership, and emphasized that idealized influence relates to a leader being “admired, respected, and trusted.”²³ Inspirational motivation happens when “the leader provides meaning and challenges their followers’ work. Individual and team spirit is aroused, and enthusiasm and optimism are displayed. The leader encourages followers to envision the future.”²⁴ Intellectual stimulation is the result of “followers’ effort to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways.”²⁵ Individual consideration occurs when “the leader considers each individual’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach and mentor.”²⁶

Integrity

Some leadership theorists consider that integrity should be one of the main personal qualifications a leader should display. In *Integrity is the*

21 Zlate, M. (2004). *Leadership si Management (Leadership and management)*. Iasi, Romania: Polirom.

22 Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial application* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press, 220.

23 Snodgrass, J., Douthitt, S., Ellis, R., Wade, S., & Plemons, J. (Spring 2008). Occupational therapy practitioners’ perceptions of rehabilitation managers’ leadership style and the outcomes of leadership. *Journal of Allied Health*, 37(1), 38-44.

24 *Ibidem*, 39.

25 *Idem*.

26 *Idem*.

Cornerstone of Leadership, Colonel Mickey Addison, a career Air Force officer, wrote,

Integrity must be at the core of who we are as leaders if we're to successfully inspire confidence in our teams. Because leadership is fundamentally about human relationships, integrity must be the very cornerstone of any leader's foundation. In every aspect of our lives we depend on the integrity of others, and others do the same for us.²⁷

In the light of this affirmation, a leader should overcome the human natural tendency to be dishonest. R. Kent Hughes asserts that humans are fundamentally dishonest. To support his affirmation, he gives the example of the great writer Ernest Hemingway who was "an inveterate liar who lied about everything, including his childhood, his athletic prowess, his military exploits, his liaisons, so that he was, as one of his wives called him, 'the biggest liar since Munchausen.'"²⁸

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines integrity as "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values; incorruptibility; the quality or state of being complete or undivided, completeness."²⁹

In the beginning of the 20th century, Henry Blackaby said that integrity "is foundational to business and leadership success...leadership is ultimately based on trust."³⁰ In an extensive study of employees across the United States, "employees have counted honesty in their leaders more important than vision, competence, accomplishments, and the ability to inspire others."³¹ The value placed on honesty and integrity seems very encouraging.

However, at the same time, R. Kent Hughes, asserts that "truth and integrity have not only proven elusive for many in leadership, but likewise for our future leaders, some of whom are literally schooling themselves in deception. Magazines such as the *New York Times Book Review* and *Rolling Stone* carry ads with such captions as 'Term Paper Blues?' and list

27 Addison, Mickey (Jan. 30, 2015). *Integrity is the Cornerstone of Leadership. Leadership Advice from America's Most Trusted Leaders*, 67. Retrieved August 28, 2020.

28 Hughes, R. Kent (2001). *Disciplines of a Goodly Man*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Ill., 126.

29 Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online (2020). *Integrity*. Retrieved August 28, 2020.

30 Blackaby, H.T. & Blackaby R. (2001). *Spiritual Leadership: moving people on to God's agenda*. Broadman & Holmes Publishers, Nashville, TN, p. 104.

31 *Ibidem*.

a toll-free hotline to ‘Research Assistance’ in West Los Angeles.”³² The two different points of view present “what should be” (Blackaby) and the other “what is.” Lack of integrity is not a problem that has occurred only in the last few years, but it is one that has lingered in American society for many years. Hughes writes about the survey among business executives conducted by George Gallup in 1983 for the *Wall Street Journal*. The survey is now one of the most well-known surveys on business.

The study revealed a shocking disparity between top executives and the general population. Eighty percent of the executives confessed to driving while drunk, as compared to 33 percent of the general public. Seventy-eight percent admitted using the company phone for personal long-distance calls. Thirty-five percent had cheated on their income tax reports. And 75 percent had stolen work supplies for personal use, as compared to 40 percent of the general populace.³³

The numbers presented by the Gallup survey are staggering! However, the author of this article wonders what would be the numbers in the Romanian society if such a survey could be done? The same, higher, lower? His opinion is that the numbers in Romania would be about the same with the numbers in the U.S. because humans are fundamentally dishonest. As Hughes notes, “in Romans 3, the Apostle Paul wrote, ‘Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving’ (v. 13). No one had to instruct us in the art of dishonesty. Even once we are regenerated, if we do not discipline ourselves under the Lordship of Christ, we return to deceit like a duck to water.”³⁴

Manifestations of Integrity

If the importance of integrity can be agreed upon, then what are the signs of integrity in a person? In his book, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Dr. Hughes describes the shape of integrity.³⁵ First of all, the idea of integrity speaks about completeness, that a person of integrity is whole. The root word is Latin, *integritas*, with the same meaning. A person of integrity is

32 Hughes, R. Kent (2001). *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL., p. 124.

33 *Idem*.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 126.

35 *Ibidem*, pp.128-129.

inwardly and outwardly righteous and honest. In other words, he refuses to lie; honesty is one of his fundamental moral traits. Usually, people lie for different reasons: to cover up something they did wrong or to keep things pleasant emotionally. A person of integrity acknowledges the wrong committed and provides compensation. He also speaks the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Jeremia Rusu believes that living with integrity in society is based on an honest relationship with God: "A person who lives without hypocrisy, honest with God, will be honest in society or at work."³⁶

In a world filled with temptation, many people just fall in the trap of white lies, keeping belongings forgotten by other people without returning them, lying to customers about real value or the performance of products, and taking bribes from people they have helped. A person of integrity never cheats or defrauds another and never steals.

"Politicians lie" is the stereotype expression everybody hears, especially during the election seasons. Looking back on all of the elections this author has experienced, remembering the promises made by politicians, and seeing few promises fulfilled, the expression seems to describe real life. People do not keep their word! Some make pledges and sign documents to seal the agreement...but later they renege on their promises and refuse to keep their word. A man of integrity keeps his word. He never promises to do something he does not intend to do.

Last, but not least, a person of integrity is a man of principle. This is more than having principles; it means standing up for his convictions even when it costs him. To do so, a leader needs courage, determination, and the willingness to pay the price for his integrity. For example, if you are working and your boss asks you to lie about a certain product or service, a man of integrity will refuse to do so, knowing that he can lose his job or that he will be excluded from the next pay raise.

Leadership Styles and Integrity

Although all leaders should show integrity and live by it, the author of this article asserts that some leadership styles nurture integrity and

36 Jeremia Rusu (2012). "Echitatea în relațiile angajat – angajator din România : O perspectivă teologică și socială". In Murzea, Cristinel, Carmen Adriana Gheorghe, Emanuela-Laura David & Nelu Burcea, *Dreptatea – abordare juridică, politică, socială și teologică* (2012), Scientific Conference October 30-31, 2012 at Bucharest, Editura Universitară, Bucharest, pp. 81-91.

others can hinder it. In 2007 a group of researchers studied the level of perceived integrity in transformational leadership, in transactional leadership and in laissez-faire leadership styles. The results of this empirical research were published in *Estudios Gerenciales* in March 2008.³⁷ The first observation was that the transformational leadership model has a higher level of integrity than transactional leadership because it elevates the collaborator's morality. As a caution, the study points to the possibility of "leaders that intend to be transformational when in reality they are not, becoming instead pseudo-transformational. This has opened fierce debates because of the difficulty when it comes to distinguishing an integral transformational leader from a pseudo-leader who is manipulative, and deceitful and a threat to human dignity."³⁸

The second observation is that transactional leadership style displays less integrity than the transformational leadership style. An explanation could be that "transactional leadership style is defined as not interested in elevating the morality of his or her collaborators. This is a more restrictive type of leadership and is focused exclusively on meeting expected goals and objectives."³⁹

However, transactional leadership style displays more integrity than laissez-faire leadership style because a transactional leader uses his position of power and control capacity through a system of rewards and sanctions. Trapero and De Lazada explain that "the integrity of this type of leadership resides in the fulfillment of the agreements previously reached between the leader and his or her collaborators, unlike the Laissez Faire, which forsakes the necessities and interests of the collaborators."⁴⁰

The author of this article was looking for other studies on leadership styles and integrity, but he could not find any. So, for the relationship of integrity with the authoritarian leadership style he will use his personal observations from 60 years of living, and his experience of leading and being led in Romania, the United States, and other countries in the world. Because an authoritarian leader has an internal need for control manifested in such behaviors as "ignoring subordinate suggestions,

37 Trapero, Florina Guadalupe Arrendondo & De Lozada, Veronica Maldonado (2008). *Differences Between the Relationship of Integrity and Leadership Styles According to the Model of Bernard Bass*. *Estudio Gerenciales*, Vol.26 No 114, pp.59-76.

38 *Ibidem*, p. 66.

39 *Ibidem*, p. 71.

40 *Ibidem*, p. 72.

belittling subordinate contribution, and insisting on absolute obedience,"⁴¹ he does not need integrity to lead: he does whatever he wants.

This is extremely dangerous for a person's character because a leader without accountability or relationships in a team environment can lose his integrity if he ever had it or will never become a person of integrity. At the same time, a leader without integrity will be guided by his emotions, interests, and/or grudges. People around him will be influenced in a negative way because they will learn a wrong leadership style or will run away from someone with power and narcissistic tendencies. This type of leadership is not constructive to healthy human relationships. One biblical example is Saul, the first king of Israel: he led by his own understanding, without paying attention to God's commands or to the advice or warnings of God's prophet, Samuel. As a result, Saul lost his kingship and destroyed his family (1 Samuel 31).

Conclusion

Integrity is one of the most important character traits that influences the life of a person. Integrity is even more important for leaders because they influence their followers and become models for them. A leader characterized by integrity looks after his followers and helps them to become better people.

The author of this article found that the level of perceived integrity is higher or lower in different leadership styles. For example, transformational leadership style has a higher perceived integrity than the transactional leadership style. Transactional leadership style displays more integrity than authoritarian or laissez faire leadership styles. The last two do not show much perceived integrity because those leaders are not interested in the wellbeing of their collaborators. Their interest is self-centered: the authoritarian leader looks for total control, and the laissez faire leader looks for personal comfort. To develop a free society, leaders should evaluate their leadership style and learn how to relate to their followers with integrity. Their positive influence can help people from smaller or larger communities to embrace integrity and help create a healthier and strong society, in a time of great uncertainty and dismay.

41 Aryee, S., Chen, Z. X., Sun, L., & Yaw, A. D. (2007). Antecedents and outcomes of abusive supervision: test of a trickle-down model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(1), 191-201.

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