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LEADING IN THE FACE OF CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS: CARING FOR THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF THE ORGANIZATION

Abstract: This paper explores the tension between caring for the needs of persons and caring for the needs of the organization. Biblical themes and contemporary scholarship are used as a lens through which to better understand this tension as it relates to true integrity. Suggestions are provided for integrating the concepts into leadership training.

Keywords: Body of Christ, cognitive tension, conflicting goals, creation, covenant, environment, freedom, Golden Rule, immanence, incarnation, individual-community tension, integrity, interdependence, leadership education, paradox, political philosophy, responsibility, sacred, self-interest, transcendence, trinity, wholeness.

We often think of Christian leadership in terms of servant leadership and the related concept of stewardship. If viewed from a limited understanding of what it means to be stewards and servants, these ideas can easily be reduced to a simplistic formula of how to behave and what to say around other persons. This is all well and good until you place the Christian in the middle of leading an organization. We must face the brutal fact that at this point the question of what it means to be servants and stewards becomes a little murky and at times complicated. It raises the thorny issue of the nature of true integrity.

It is one thing to discuss in general the Scripture teachings about stewardship and service that are applicable to the role of a leader. It is quite another thing to consider how faith is integrated in the work of a leader when the situation is complicated and sometimes ambiguous, such as when the leader comes face to face with the reality that for each significant leadership principle, a plausible opposite and even

contradictory principle for the same situation also exists and may be called for (Cafferky, 2007, 2012; Simon, 1946). For example, are we more effective as servants and stewards when we care for the needs of persons in and around our organizations? And, are we less effective when we care for the needs of the organization whose mission is to serve these and other persons outside the organization?

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Christian leader can view the fundamental, universally experienced tension between caring for the needs of the person and caring for the needs of the organization. It is this tension point that is the sacred ground upon which all leaders unavoidably stand.

To explore this fundamental tension, the following points will be discussed:

- The nature of organizational tensions
- The individual-community tension
- Relevant biblical themes
- Secular approaches to managing tensions
- Issues that Christian leaders face
- Implications for leadership training

The Nature of Organizational Tensions

Scores of tensions are co-present in organizations (Cafferky, 2012). The tension between caring for the needs of the individual while also caring for the needs of the community or the group illustrates the interesting nature of these and other paradoxes (Aram, 1976; Cafferky, 2007;

Individual-Community Tension

To give legs to this abstract concept of the individual-community tension,¹ consider a few examples.

In Numbers 32:1-32 we have an interesting narrative of Moses being faced with the need to care for the desires of two tribes (Reuben and Gad)

financial assistance from the European Union of countries must be weighed against the needs of all the countries in the region as well as countries in other regions which will likely be affected by an unsavory change in the financial stability of one country.

There are times when leaders require of subordinates to perform tasks that, while moral, are unpleasant. The leader can be courteous and caring in demeanor when delegating the tasks to persons. Nevertheless, in order for the organization to fulfill its mission, the tasks need to be done. Employees may disagree and even wave the flag of “unfairness” at the leader in an attempt to avoid having the tasks given to them. Leaders are sometimes in an unenviable position of having to listen to the concerns of employees but in the end still getting the task done.

Every leader has been faced with the challenge of giving individual team members freedom and caring for their individual needs (Johnson, 1996, pp. 56, 251). The more the leader emphasizes individual needs, the more likely persons are to become isolated from the group and more focused on their own goals and interests. Furthermore, the more individuals are the dominant concern, the more likely the whole team will begin to lose its central focus or common direction. Team support will start to suffer. Individual self-interest can turn into individual selfishness. But the opposite is also risky. Emphasizing team work and structuring the team to promote cohesion, solidarity, and support for organizational goals will require increased sacrifices on the part of each team member. The more connected the individuals become to the team, the more isolated they become from their personal needs and interests. Leaders who give all for the sake of the team or organization end up creating stability, as well as excessive conformity, staleness, loss of creativity, and group-think. Personal needs tend to be (or are at risk of being) neglected. Community self-interest can turn into group selfishness.

Scholarship on This Paradox

The tension of individual freedom and responsibility to the common good has been at the foundation of political philosophy discussions during the last three hundred years (Hobbes, 1660/1996; Locke, 1690/1823; Lukes, 1971; Milne, 1968; Rousseau, 1762/1913). Although this tension point appears to be at the root of the difference between a constitutional, free-market democratic approach and a centralized socialist approach to governing, the individual-common good question applies to more than just the level of the state (Koslowski, 2005). Hofstede’s (1984, 1993) research has raised our awareness regarding

how different cultures view the individual-community tension (see also Ketcham, 1987; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994). This tension exists in all social relationships: the family, dormitory roommates, marriage, organizations, domestic society, the relationship between an organization and its community, and in the relationships among the nations of the world. It is at the root of many ethical chal-

meaning of work that workers bring to their tasks. Scientific management principles alone cannot solve the core problem of human collaboration (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger, 1941).

Max Weber's celebrated approach to handling this problem was to create impersonal bureaucracies where policies and procedures guided individual behaviors toward achieving organizational goals (Weber, 1947). If individual workers believed that their personal needs were not being cared for, policies were in place directing the workers on how they should pursue a complaint.

An organization has requirements for its survival that are quite different from the needs of persons. Individuals can find their own needs met as the needs of the organization are being met. But sometimes the personal needs conflict with organizational needs (Aram, 1976; Argyris, 1957). A degree of individual self-interest is allowed among employees and volunteers. But when self-interested behaviors exceed or are divergent from organizational needs, organizational leaders will attempt to place limits on self-interested behavior. Likewise if the other extreme occurs, i.e., the organization self-interest becomes dominant at the expense of personal needs, persons will respond by attempting to limit the organization (e.g., stop giving, reduce effort and commitment, terminate employment or membership, end volunteer activities).

We can think of this cognitive tension as being self-imposed. Every person willingly joins an organization to work to fulfill vocational drives and for economic survival. Volunteers join nonprofit organizations to fulfill their needs for serving a cause greater than their own self-interest. In becoming an employee (or volunteer) the individual voluntarily gives up a measure of individuality in favor of pursuing the goals of the organization. The person is willing to submit to and cooperate with authority and as a result is willing to be organized according to the wishes of organizational leaders or negotiated among peers.

When a person joins an organization, an interesting independence-dependence relationship is established. To fully experience independence in the context of group life, one has to constantly be giving expression to one's dependencies. "For only as reliable dependencies are established does interdependence emerge" (Smith & Berg, 1997, p. 142). It is as individual members come to depend upon each other that the group as a whole becomes a dependable entity to serve the greater good of society.

The same tension is implicit in the concept of organizational culture. In order for an organization to develop a strong culture, its leaders must require conformity to the shared organizational values (Pascale, 1985).

At the same time, persons are intellectually and culturally opposed to manipulation for organizational purposes. We want all new employees to become socialized into the organizational values such that they internalize these values into their being-thinking-doing patterns. Yet we also value new employees who bring us new ways of being-thinking-doing that, if incorporated into the organization, would make it stronger. This challenge is important for the Christian leader who values human freedom—derived from the image of God at Creation—but also values the

living apart from the Creation community. He implied that individual behavior has no effect on the social group. This tension reveals the beauty of the social world created by a loving God who values complex social relationships. Although this social-structure work of art is more abstract than the beauty inherent in physical creation, the structure of social relationships is no less stunning when its full significance settles into the mind.

God gives leaders the privilege of continually standing in the presence of complex social relationships. At the moments when the individual-community tension is acute, leaders may not at first see the beauty of God's Creation. As they become open to experiencing God at work in their life as a leader in the midst of these tensions, they will come to appreciate the inherent beauty of preserving both individual needs and community needs. As the leader in humility repeatedly helps a community work through this tension, the work of Creation continues as together the community participates as co-workers with God in providential behalf of all of God's Creation.

Covenant Theology

Another interesting perspective is biblical covenant theology. If Christians are to use the covenant model in their leadership, we find that the biblical covenants were both corporate and individualistic (Robertson, 1980, pp. 280-300). If either pole is left out of the picture or diminished, the entire experience as a child of God could be undermined. If the covenant is viewed as primarily between God and the community, the Christian organizational leader will attempt to model this and will likely manage the individual-community tension in favor of the organization and its goals. But if the locus of the covenant is with the individual, the leader may likely manage the tension in favor of individual interests subordinating the interests of the organization to the interests of persons (Novak, 2000, p. 78).

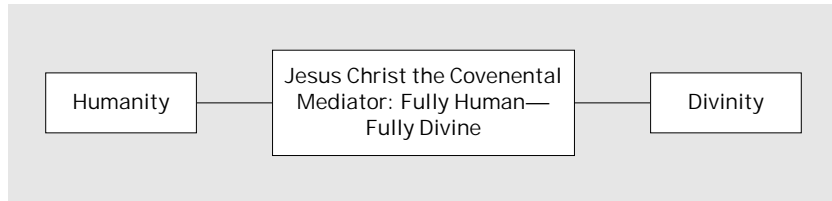
Incarnation Theology

A third biblical theme relevant in this discussion is incarnation theology. As Philippians 2 states, the incarnation is a model of human relationships:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:3-5, New American Standard Bible)

The person of Christ being fully human and at the same time fully divine is inseparable from the covenantal mediatorial work relationship He took on by coming to this earth. Here the covenantal Messiah engages humanity in a self-imposed humility as a servant toward both the divinity and humanity (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1



Appropriately applied to the work of leaders, we see that the Christian leader is part of the community like any other person in the group. As such the leader has personal interests as well as communal interests, like any other member. However, in following Christ's model, the leader will completely identify with the individual follower who expresses a particular need at the same time as fully identifying with the community, humbling herself toward both the individual and the community as a servant.

Only in this broader context of covenant and incarnation can true servant leadership be fully understood. The leader is truly a covenantal mediator, embracing both individuals and the social group and being a servant not only to persons (the most common understanding of servant leadership) but also to the group and its needs (see Figure 1.2).

Corollary Teachings From the Bible

As Griffiths (1984, pp. 53-55) has pointed out, the doctrine of the Trinity can also be seen as a biblical model of the individual-community interdependence. The Apostle Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12) is another illustration of the relationship between individuals and the church. Sire (1990, pp. 25, 58-59, 64-67) sees in Paul's writings

the individual and communal connections. Leadership is shared among

ful, unerring will. It is the Christian's responsibility to be open to receive the information contained in the revelation of God's will and then to follow it. This belief comes into tension in the life of the Christian manager who sees the complexity of a situation as she evaluates several alternatives of action, any one of which might be morally and practically right.

If a Christian manager expects to discern God's will in a specific situation, yet is unable to achieve this discernment in the midst of a particular situation, this leaves the Christian in a potentially precarious position of apparently either lacking faith or lacking the proper understanding of how to go about discerning God's will. But if we allow for the possibility that God reveals His will to us through providential paradoxical situations in organizations, managing paradox as God would have the Christian to do might mean capturing the "enlightening potential" (Lewis, 2000, p. 763) of those paradoxes as they emerge. If the advice of organizational scholars can be relied upon, paradox management "entails exploring, rather than suppressing, tensions" (Lewis, 2000, p. 764). For the Christian this will be of interest. Believing in the midst of this paradox that one can find God's truth, the leader brings this cognitive tension into captivity to Christ only by preserving the integrity of both poles of the paradox (2 Cor. 10:5).

Paradoxically, God is both Immanent (Ps. 73:28) and Transcendent (Ps. 145:3). He reveals Himself through Scripture and through the person and work of Christ. Perhaps He also reveals Himself through nature in this social paradox established at Creation. When a Christian leader feels "caught" in the crucible of this paradox, not knowing immediately how to give due regard to both individual and organizational needs, it could be that both the Immanence and Transcendence of God is at work at that moment. On the one hand, the leader desires to know God's will but on the surface God may not reveal His specific will (Transcendence). But on the other hand, if the leader stays with the cognitive tension and listens to the wisdom of others in the community, the situation itself may become a providential leading to understand God's will (Immanence).

Leaders (and their followers) become obsessed with the product of a leadership decision or action. They cry out, "Decide and tell us your decision!" When faced with the individual-community cognitive tension, perhaps it is the community journey or process through the ambiguity that is just as important as the product of the decision. When the leader is given the opportunity from the organizational community to walk alone (yet in community) in dealing with a tension-filled decision, the leader may find God in the paradoxical still small voice (of aloneness) and in

the storm (of the competing voices in the organization).

Another fundamental issue we must address is whether the demands of contradictory leadership behaviors undermine, have no effect on, or actually support integrity. On the surface and to the person who lacks leadership experience or who is unable to see beyond personal self-interests, the apparently contradictory behaviors of serving the needs of the individual and serving the needs of the organization can appear to be a sign of lack of integrity. But at a deeper level, once the issues of the tension are explored and once the person has the benefit of actual experience in dealing with the paradox, one might say that to simplify a situation, ignoring or glossing over the paradox, will undermine integrity. It might be debated whether integrity is merely an individual matter or both an individual and a communal matter. If the latter is true, to allow for simultaneous and apparently contradictory behaviors (though each one in itself is moral) may actually foster true integrity.

Implications for Leadership Training

Several implications derive from the review of this tension. First, leadership students might receive benefit from being exposed to the idea of paradox—especially the fundamental individual-community tension. Such exposure should naturally lead to consideration of the biblical expectations of what it means to be servants and stewards in society. This exposure can be in the form of classroom lectures and discussions. However, personal experience in leadership at the same time as classroom learning might give the best opportunity for learning the issues. If this is true, Christian leadership professors in higher education would do well to encourage (or require) students to take an active leadership role in an organization during the same semester as leadership concepts are learned in the classroom. Student leadership experiences that align with this and other paradoxes considered here can be explored in personal journals as well as during class discussions and personal mentoring. During these discussions the professor can ask the students to share their stories and to reflect on what this has taught them about leadership and about themselves. These discussions can then be used to reinforce the importance of listening to God, to individuals, and to the community when making a decision.²

ing with and sharing leadership in the community through listening to the voices in the community. These ambiguous moments are “holy ground” locations, Sabbath-like times for Christian leadership worship (cf. Exod. 3:5-6; Josh. 5:14-15).

The definition of servant leadership should be revisited with the understanding of the tight individual-community interconnection in mind (cf. Greenleaf,³ 1977). Organizational scholars and biblical theology (creation, covenant, incarnation) all suggest that individual and communal interests are inseparable. If this is true, servant leadership cannot be seen in a restricted way as applying only to serving the interests of individual members. Rather, to be truly servant leadership, organizational leadership must be a humble stewardship that serves the individual needs and the organizational needs, as well as environmental needs.

Numbers 32 can be used as a biblical case study. The professor can assign students to read just the first part of the story (Num. 32:1-15) and then discuss various options that Moses might use for resolving the situation. With each option evaluated students can consider both the long-term and the short-term impacts. At the end of the discussion students can be asked to read and evaluate the choice that Moses made (Num. 32:16-32).

Giving voice to the import of a paradoxical situation, recognizing both the needs of the individual and the needs of the community, helps community members continue to give their consent and support to the leader. Here is where visioning on a day-by-day basis is helpful to both the leader and the community. When we confine the discussion of visioning to the strategic planning process, we unintentionally leave out a major portion of the operational visioning work of the leader. Visioning is not just talking about the great things that will come in the future when a new strategic plan is implemented. Visioning is also about taking what is going on right now in the community in terms of the tension points and giving voice to both sets of needs. The professor can help students practice giving voice to the issues contained in this sacred space, taking situations from the students’ experiences and then showing the different ways in which the leader can talk about the situation to all involved. Students can role play and explore the advantages and disadvantages of creatively framing the vision in particular ways.

Paradoxes such as the one explored in this paper provide the professor an opportunity to teach Christ-centered leadership from a perspective students might not receive from religion classes. This will give students

an opportunity to see an adult Christian explore their own personal challenges within Scripture. As the professor discusses personal experiences where this paradox was prominent, it provides an additional opportunity to explore the question, "Where is God during ambiguity?" The emerging paradox, revealing God's will in the context of providential events in the organizational life of a community, provides the professor the opportunity to discuss Creation theology, covenant theology, the incarnation, providence, and related topics.

Professors also are classroom leaders. How lecturers care for both the individual needs of students in a course as well as the group needs models for students the leadership potential in this tension point. Preparation

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