

FRAMING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ETHICAL LEADERSHIP MODEL BUILD ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MORAL TRADITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Why should educational, business, religious, and community organizations develop leadership training programs when leaders can simply emulate the techniques of societal leaders? Historically, this question has been the center of concern for numerous scholars and various leadership approaches. Wren (1995) provides a list of concerns supported by individuals opposed to teaching leadership in institutions of higher learning. The list ranges from people believing that leaders are born and not made to leadership often involving an element of manipulation or deviousness, if not outright rudeness. Although these concerns are discussed, leadership research and programs continue to grow (Gardner, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Stogdill, 1974). This growth of leadership programs, over the last few decades, has been combined with a fueled demand from citizens for ethical leadership within our societal organizations (Cinard, 1983; Franklin, 2007; Weaver, Trevino, & Cochran, 1999).

According to a four-year study conducted by Fluker (1997) which was sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the black church tradition has played a significant role in shaping the moral languages or discourses of this nation and can serve as a strategic resource in the formation of ethical leaders for national and international communities. In addressing the need for developing ethical leadership models for college curriculum and leadership programs, Fluker derived and implemented models from the four-year study based on the role of story, the power of imagination, the strategic importance of tradition, and the dangers of traditionalism.

METHODS

Research Design

This case study design used orientational qualitative fieldwork with a critical theory approach to inquiry. The design involved an explicit theoretical perspective that determined what conceptual framework directed the fieldwork and the interpretation of the findings (Patton, 2002). As part of the process, the researcher compared and contrasted fieldwork findings from data with the theoretical guidelines of Pawelski (2003) and with existing theories from the literature. As stated by Patton (2002), what gives critical theory its name, what makes it critical, is that it seeks not to merely study and understand society but rather to critique and change society. Critical theory provides a framework, both philosophical and methodological, for approaching research and evaluation as fundamentally and explicitly political and as change-oriented forms of engagement.

Ethics in leadership is primarily based on moral values and not quantifiable, which is why the orientational qualitative approach was used for this study. As a critical theory, leadership ethics can reveal new types of dialogues among researchers and practitioners (Culla, 2004). This study used the critical theory perspective in an attempt to increase and enrich new ethical leadership dialogues among scholars and within organizations.

FINDINGS

Research Question One

How do college administrators, professors, students, graduates, and corporate executives involved with the GLI perceive the effectiveness of the programs and classes in relationship to pedagogy and practical application?

The findings were arranged according to shared themes described by participants during interviews. Participants were grouped into two categories of students and administrators/professors. This was strategically done in order to show the relationship of instructional methods and practical applications of those instructions. Themes shared by the participants consisted of critical thinking, self-analysis, construction of meaningful language, productive team building, and enriching life experience, flexibility in instructional approaches, theoretical applicability, international awareness, and holistic nature. Table 3 summarizes the shared themes expressed by participants in both categories based on instructional approaches used by administrators and professors, and practical use of the approaches used by students.

Table 3

Administrators/Professors Instructional Approaches	Students Practical Use of Approaches
Encouragement of critical thinking	Provide language for meaningful communication
Challenged leadership viewed from role modeling	Importance of self analysis
Encouraged hands-on interactive class	Productive team building skills
Enriching the quality of student leaders	Provide a place of belonging
Discouragement of rote methodology	Constructive dispelling of myths
Leadership viewed scientifically	Enriched knowledge of leadership based on theoretical and practical application
Holistic inclusion	Holistic inclusion
Broadening international awareness	Exposure to international influences

FINDINGS

Research Question Two

What are the historical, current, and future strategies employed in developing an ethical leadership program based on African American moral tradition?

In providing data on involvement with other organizations, Fluker continued to be a valuable resource by sharing historical, current, and future strategies of the GLI. Corporate, academic, and community partnerships were some of the components used to benchmark best practices employed by leadership programs. Many of Fluker's comments were reflective of leadership studies cited within the literature review chapter of the original study. Summary of his comments addressing past, present, and future strategies with partners consisted of: (a) continued sharing of best practices with other institutions is important, (b) recruitment companies are looking to recruit individuals that bring not only technical skill, but also an ethical bearing reflective of today's world, (c) a number of corporations also have in house ethical training activities and ethical leadership programs, (d) corporations see this program as a way to supplement their activities via learning and active global participation in lieu of maybe direct funding, and (e) mentoring, workshops, and lectures are beneficial to the program.

Table 4 was compiled based on administrators/professors and students sharing strategies they employed or sought to employ while involved in the ethical leadership program.

Table 4

Strategies in Developing an Ethical Leadership Program	Students
Administrators/Professors Intimate learning environment	Personal responsibility
Mental discipline	Interpreting stigmatism
Measurability	Media influence
Media influence	Encourages constructive actions
International with cultural/political interactions	Overcoming fears
Collaboration	Acceptance of others
Entrepreneurial concept employed with research and development	Meaningful conversations
Confidence builder	Defining an ethical leader
Addressing ethical skepticism in dealing with others	Tool for self-analysis
Espoused values integrated into relationships	Importance of historical leaders
Tool for improving social practices	Discussing biases (racism, sexism)
Immediate practical results versus continuous abstract planning	Importance of ethical leaders

Research Question Three

What are the personal experiences of individuals as they relate to their participation in the leadership center's scholastic, community, and global initiatives?

By encouraging participants to tell their story, remembering, retelling, and reliving stories utilized the concept of hermeneutic philosophers (Ricoeur, 1961). The answers reflected participants leaving the realm of academia and sharing personal feelings about the program. A summary of the experiences of individuals as they relate to their participation in the GLI scholastic, community, and global initiatives consisted of: (a) high respect for program developers, especially the program originator, (b) strong feeling of satisfaction in helping others, (c) watching and being a part of a leadership development process that positively impacts lives, (d) a sense of hope, often under-depicted by the media, regarding the success rate of African American males, (e) community involvement, and (f) cultural and intellectual stimulation. While data and observations provide additional information on individual experiences, this perspective was presented as findings through personal interviews.

Research Question Four

What is the perceived effectiveness of the GLI model as it relates to existing leadership approaches and societal issues in addressing racism/biases? Table 5 provides a quick glimpse of how students viewed these societal influences in relationship to individuals developing and implementing the leadership program.

Table 5

Factors Addressing Leadership Approaches and Racism/Biases	Students
Administrators/Professors Higher leadership involvement	Disrupts religious beliefs
Practical application in learning environment	Deeper meaning of inner self
Recognition of specific leadership styles	Recognizing ethics within
Culturally embedded leadership	Importance of communication
Significance of civil rights struggle	Peer approval
Heart power leadership	Revealing hidden identity
Strong spiritual focus	Viewed through world lens
African American leadership approach	Strength in knowledge
Focus on justice and equality	Non-Economic success indicators
Shared values	Importance of narrative
Normative standards	More than intellectual trait
Validation of desired behaviors	Positive habits and practices

FINDINGS (cont.)

Summary of interviewed participants provided the following findings: (a) Critical thinking allows students to dispelling stigma of intellect versus just a personal narrative, (b) ethical leadership approach aids in community, (c) understand leadership as more than an intellectual trait, (d) clarity in invisible man concept or hermeneutics in addressing biases, (e) significance of cultivating habits and practices: the focus of positive psychology regarding what we do right versus counseling on what we do wrong, (f) addressing lack of African American influence in developing leadership approaches, (g) networking and mentoring opportunities, (h) dispelling the myth of economics as being the only factor for success, and (i) the importance of narrative.

Pawelski's Seven Key Principles

Components of the philosophy of plasticity, developed in a model by Pawelski (2003), served as the theoretical guideline in analyzing the findings from the interviews and data collected during the case study guided by his seven key principles:

- 1) They are grounded in the texts of our intellectual history.
- 2) They are informed by best thinking on character and moral development in those texts.
- 3) They are informed by the latest relevant research in the natural and social sciences.
- 4) They promote theoretical understanding of character and its practical application.
- 5) They are holistic.
- 6) They enable students' democratic self-determination.
- 7) They lead to measurable results.

In addressing the research question regarding the perceived effectiveness of the GLI model as it relates to existing leadership approaches and societal issues in addressing biases, a comparative analysis of these three models was conducted. Data was grouped into Table 7, with seven components: (a) theory, (b) theorist, (c) time frame, (d) key points, (e) pros, cons, and (f) implications for leadership today.

Table 7

Comparative Analysis of Three Leadership Approaches

Approach One (Fluker, 2005)

Theory: Ethical Leadership

Key Points:

Focus on psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of ethical life in respect to character, civility, and community in addressing leadership development; influenced by African American moral tradition; and theoretical framework based on epistemology (knowledge) and axiology (value) combined with hermeneutics (method of interpretation).

Pros:

Practical application, model/set examples, community oriented, holistic approach, focus on people of color in leadership development, grounded in psychology and philosophy, collaborative, encourages critical thinking, leadership center established supporting this approach.

Cons:

Lack of research, potential for cultural biases, potential conflict of placement within ethics of leadership studies, and not included in most leadership literature used in leadership studies.

Implications for Leadership Today:

Provides greater social awareness of ethics in all areas of leadership development; used to develop curriculum and programs for academic, corporate and non-profit organizations; established an academic leadership center that encourages ethical leadership approach through publications, workshops, and conferences.

Approach Two (Wren, 1995)

Theory: Servant Leader

Key Points:

Focus on philosophical approach of leadership based on leader being servant first to make sure other individuals' greatest primary needs are being served; influenced by civil unrest on college campuses, discrimination, senseless wars, and other problems of the day, theoretical framework based on concepts such as truth, human existence, freedom, and causal effects.

Pros:

Practical application, model/set examples, community oriented, holistic approach, collaborative, grounded in philosophy, included in most leadership studies, highly researched, and leadership center established for this approach.

Cons:

Perceived as being soft based on concept of serving others, difficult to measure and lack of empirical data.

FINDINGS (cont.)

Implications for Leadership Today:

Provides greater social consciousness in the field of leadership, used to develop leadership programs for academic, corporate, and non-profit organizations; established a non-academic leadership center that encourages servant leader approach through publications, workshops, and conferences.

Approach Three (Wren, 1995)

Theory: Transforming Leader

Key Points:

Focus on psychological approach of leadership based on the interaction of leader and follower as each seeks to transform the other to higher levels of motivation and morality, influenced by social movements and politics; theoretical framework based on terms and concepts borrowed from humanistic psychologists, Kolberg, Erickson, and Maslow.

Pros:

Practical application, model/set examples, globally oriented, promotes moral responsibility, collaborative, grounded in psychology, included in most leadership studies, highly researched, encourages critical thinking, and leadership center established supporting this approach.

Cons:

Too broad in addressing political and social issues, difficult to measure, and conflicting research on transforming versus transformational leadership creates concerns in many studies.

Implications for Leadership Today:

Provides greater social consciousness in the field of leadership, used to develop leadership programs for academic, corporate, and non-profit organizations; established an academic leadership center that encourages transforming leadership approach through publications, workshops, and conferences.

This comparative analysis was presented as a glimpse of the Fluker Ethical Leadership Model in relationship to two comparable models. The analysis revealed similar time frames for all theorists involved in developing their approaches. Key points that were similar among all approaches consist of being influenced by social concerns and the need to enrich the lives of others. While the Fluker and Greenleaf models appeared more holistic or spiritual, Burns model focused more on moral development. As indicated in Table 7, similar pros for the approaches consisted of: (a) practical application of the models, (b) guidelines and tools for model, (c) community and/or globally oriented, (d) collaborative, and (e) leadership centers supporting the approach. Greenleaf's model appeared to be grounded primarily in philosophy, and Burns model appeared grounded primarily in humanistic psychology. Fluker's interdisciplinary model appeared primarily grounded in history, literature, psychology and philosophy.

Greenleaf's and Burns' models were highly researched in leadership development and were included in literature for most leadership studies. Fluker's model was not widely researched in leadership development and was not included in literature for most leadership studies. Other cons for the approaches consisted of Greenleaf and Burns models being described as difficult to measure (Wren, 1998), while Fluker's model had potential for cultural biases based on being influenced by African American moral tradition. This sampling of information supported answering the research question on the perceived effectiveness of the model in relationship to other models used in leadership programs. Models for Greenleaf and Burns were reviewed based on being highly publicized and supported by several leadership programs reviewed in this study. The model for Fluker was reviewed based on being used in the leadership program at GLI.

As shown in Figure 1, the triadic model depicts the psychological, social and spiritual relationships of ethical life in respect to character, civility, and a sense of community. Originating from the Fluker Ethical Leadership model, GLI expanded upon each component by providing working definitions and curricular guidelines for developing socially conscious leaders.

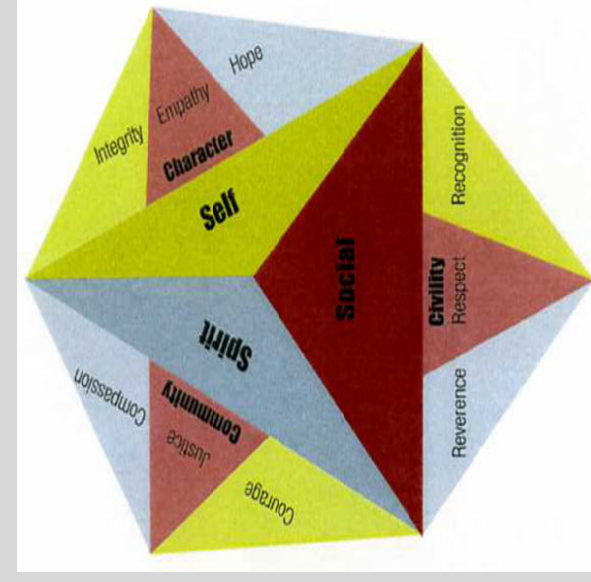


Figure 1. Tools for ethical leadership development. The triadic model depicts the psychological, spiritual and social relationships of ethical life in respect to character, civility, and a sense of community. (Permission to use figure granted by Walker Earl Fluker)

CONCLUSIONS

According to Fluker, one of the premises underlying this program was the significance of cultivating habits and practices. By sharing two important components of the program, he provided a summation for all three categories. In component one he addressed the model's relationship to existing theoretical approaches by being inclusive of both epistemological and hermeneutical frameworks. Component two addressed the model's significance in addressing societal issues regarding three distinct biases: (a) Bias one-racism, the model labeled as black church tradition, (b) bias two-interpretative analysis, the language used for describing ethics, and (c) bias three-religious perception, the inclusion of spirituality.

In pioneering an ethical leadership program, GLI contributed greatly to the field of leadership development. The research revealed that despite the limited inclusion of African American influences in studies for leadership development, this program overcame this challenge and ranked among the top leadership programs in the country. During the initial development, the program benchmarked top comparable leadership programs and experts in ethical leadership as models of influence. This led to an interdisciplinary program that was grounded in history, literature, philosophy and psychology, encouraged critical thinking, was community oriented, holistic, and collaborative, focused on inclusion of people of color in leadership development, and was measurable and practical to use.

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