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Profound Leadership and Adult Education: An integrative Review of the Literature

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Abstract: This integrative literature review presents profound leadership through the lens of key characteristics of servant leadership, authentic leadership, level five leadership, profound leadership, transformational leadership, and spiritual leadership.

Introduction

We theorize from key leadership literature to develop the concept of profound leadership; relating the concept to adult education. The chosen leadership theories represent both the emergence of values-based leadership in response to wide-spread corporate scandals of the late 20th century and an increased focus on work-life integration, wellness, and mindfulness. The volume of research exploring leadership's constituent characteristics is significant with very little scholarly discussion of the concept of profound leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold: (a) to review existing leadership theories that can enrich the profound learning framework (Kroth, 2016; Carr-Chellman & Kroth, 2017), (b) to examine these leadership theory's definitions and their concomitant dependent variables, and (c) to apply the outcomes of (a) and (b) to build the theory of profound leadership and suggest future theory-building research connecting profound leadership and adult education.

Significance. Consistent with the methodology of integrative literature reviews (Torraco, 2005), we leverage existing key leadership theories and the nascent concept of *profound learning* (Kroth, 2016) to build our construct of profound leadership. This literature study helps build the profound leadership theory while establishing the relevance of leadership development for the adult education field. Synthesizing this literature into a useful adult learning framework is another eventual intended developmental outcome. Reinforcing this relationship, Merriam and Bierema cite Peter Senge (1990):

> Leaders must give up the old dogma of planning, organizing and controlling and realize the almost sacredness of their responsibility for the lives of so many people. A manager's fundamental task is providing the enabling conditions for people to lead the most enriching lives they can (Merriam and Bierema, pp. 141-142).

Nearly 30 years after Senge's writing, scholarly inquiry into a developmental and adult learning focused leadership approach remains slow; therefore, we explore profound leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Kroth's conception of the profound learner (2016) frames this research, and Carr-Chellman and Kroth (2017) provide the initial template for preparing lifelong profound learners. Kroth (2016), defined a *profound learner* as "someone who pursues deeper knowledge regularly over time" (p. 29). This foundational *learning* concept supports the profound leadership theory and our selection of five leadership constructs for investigation: servant leadership, authentic leadership, level 5 leadership, spiritual leadership, and transformational leadership.

Servant leadership is first attributed to Greenleaf's (2008) 1970 essay "The Servant as Leader". Greenleaf states his idea for the "servant leader" came from Herman Hesse's Journey to the East and the character of Leo, where servant nature is the real person (Greenleaf, 2008). Servant leadership is a highly referenced key contributing leadership theory; personifying servanthood, humility, intuition, and empathy (Greenleaf, 2008). The profound leadership concept bases some of its initial formation on these essential servant leader qualities.

Authentic leadership was first developed by Luthans and Avolio in 2003. Illies, Morgenson, and Nahrgang (2005) condense Gardner and Avolio's characteristics (2005) to four basic pillars: (1) self-awareness (introspection), (2) balanced processing (unbiased decision making), (3) ethical and moral identity, and (4) relational transparency (consistency in actions). The pillars essential to profound leadership and the similarities with characteristics from other key leadership theories will be further discussed in the findings section.

Level 5 leadership was first introduced in Jim Collins' print book "Good to Great" (2001) and subsequent publications, talks, articles, and videos. A level 5 leader sits at the top of the leadership hierarchy at the pinnacle, embodying all the capabilities of the layers below (Collins, 2006). Level 1 makes productive contributions as highly capable individual; Level 2 contributes to group achievement by being a contributing team member; Level 3 organizes resources as a competent manager; Level 4 is an effective leader, committed, pursuing a clear vision, and stimulating the group; Level 5 is the "Executive" level, "building enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility and professional will" (Collins, 2006). The qualities of humility and reflexive will contribute to our profound leadership construct.

Spiritual Leadership focuses on altruism (Vieweg, 2018); and a need to serve others (Eva, Sendjaya, & Liden, 2018). Smith, Minor, & Brashen (2008) suggest the key skills in spiritual leadership include intrinsic motivation; promotion of behaviors such as respect, fair treatment, expressing care, active listening, appreciation, and reflection. The intrinsic focus aligns with the Transformational leadership concept; with care and active listening supporting servant leadership. The self-awareness quality aligns with authentic leadership characteristics.

Transformational leadership forms an integral building block for our profound leadership theory. Burns (1978) and Bass (1990) are credited with formation of transformational leadership in response to a shift away from transactional leadership, focused on productivity, contingent reward, and active management by exception (Sun, Chen, Zhang, p. 3). Transformational leadership focuses on individual consideration and orientation, shared vision, inspiration, providing support, modeling behavior, setting goals, empowering the organization, and self-efficacy (Sun, Chen, Zhang, p. 12). Transformational leadership and profound learning encourage the individual to question their own assumptions, fostering curiosity and reflection; ultimately promoting growth-oriented practices, processes, and habits (Carr-Chellman &Kroth, 2017).

Each of these theories expresses certain elements of profound learning and can be integrated to construct a potentially useful concept of profound leadership. Our intent is to depict profound leadership in a practical manner; providing application and provoking further research.

Research Design

Using Torraco's approach to integrative literature reviews (2005), we constructed a profound leadership conceptual framework based on our guiding theory of profound learning, selected existing leadership theories best fitting this conceptual framework, and integrated these five existing leadership theories to embellish the construct of profound leadership. Each research

team member assessed available scholarly literature; tracking, sharing, and documenting source characteristics.

Through process iterations we refined the criteria, focused the scope, and systematically included literature to identify emerging themes. Based on these themes, we selected characteristics from each of the five leadership theories and identified essential profound leadership traits based on those characteristics as stated in the theoretical framework and findings.

Research Questions. Four research questions are used to guide and inform the inquiry:

1. With available resources, what leadership theories express the profound learning framework?
2. What are the identified theories' constituent characteristics and variables?
3. What patterns exist among the identified theories' characteristics and variables?
4. What is the potential for the resulting profound leadership theory and characteristics to inform or be integrated into adult education theory building?

Findings

In response to research questions 1 - 3, as described above, we find that authentic, servant, and spiritual leaders hold altruistic behavior as a core purpose of leadership; altruism may be a key component of profound leadership. Other findings include:

Servant leadership: Greenleaf (2008) focused on the leader as servant first. Greenleaf suggested a servant leader focuses on listening, empathy, and others' needs. The components of Greenleaf's assertions transferring well to profound leadership include acceptance of persons as imperfect, creative, fallible and leaders as intuitive and humble.

Authentic leadership: The four pillars of authentic leadership are self-awareness, balanced processing, ethical and moral identity, and relational transparency (Illies, Morgenson, and Nahrgang, 2005). Authentic leadership theory addresses society's need for an ethical and successful workplace; supporting development and relationship maintenance in other spheres and venues. Two components transfer well to profound leadership theory: (a) self-awareness; a profound leader never stops thinking and questioning; and (b) relational transparency; a profound leader centers their leadership on other-directed emotions and improving followers' eudaemonia (Michie & Gooty, 2005; Illies, Morgenson, & Nahrgang, 2005).

Level 5 leadership: Humility and resolve are important characteristics of Level 5 and profound leaders. Collins suggests Level 5 leaders are adept at selecting successors; we suggest profound leaders are well-suited to enable profound learners. This capability demonstrates leaders' abilities to promote follower growth and development. A level 5 and profound leader may be capable of incredible will and ambition. We suggest a profound leader requires the requisite reflection and awareness to maintain balance.

Spiritual leadership: Smith, Minor, & Brashen (2008) suggests spiritual leadership allows one to leverage multiple leadership styles while still achieving "positive and humane results" (p. 80). Spiritual leadership suggests an intrinsic, visionary, and moral approach. As with servant leadership, a spiritual leader focuses on listening, appreciation for others' contributions, respect, and fair treatment.

Transformational Leadership: Bass's (1990) initial factors include idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) place the practices in four categories: 1. setting directions; 2. developing people; 3. redesigning the organization; 4. managerial aggregate. Burns (1978) adds "the purpose of leadership is to motivate followers to work towards transcendental goals instead

of immediate self-interest" (Sun, Chen, Zhang, p. 3). Transformational leadership aligns with the spiritual leadership trait of altruism, working towards the greater good; balanced with individual needs.

Discussion

In this integrative literature review, we investigate five leadership theories and identify common characteristics to build a profound leadership theoretical framework. Inquiry into a unified theory of leadership offers resources and possibilities for further research and practical application. Even more, this inquiry highlights the complimentarity of learning and leading. An important implication of profound leadership is the necessity of supporting and developing a learning approach to leadership. Additionally, answers to the research questions have important implications to the field of adult learning and leadership development. A better understanding of profound leadership will contribute to adult learning theory, higher education, and leadership practice.

Profound leadership presents the possibility of a leader's own deepening, as well as an awakening in those being led. Deepening increases awareness of the humanity of those we lead, follow, teach, or work alongside. The increasing pressure to perform and produce can be balanced with humane, thoughtful approaches embodying learning and mindfulness. Workplace and classroom implications are boundless and present an exciting, fruitful opportunity to delve into a new leadership framework; developing better understanding of leadership and benefitting persons, society, and theory.

Our review blends optimal characteristics of the key contributing theories: servant, authentic, level 5, spiritual, and transformational leadership. The combination of characteristics captures the beauty of profound learning, with its endless questioning and pursuit of knowledge. A profound leader is like a chef, trying different seasonings to find those best suited to desired outcomes. The profound leader's intentional, yet thoughtful approach allows the selection of complementary ingredients; recognizing, as well, that leaders need to support a diversity of approaches.

Leaders are held accountable for delivering results; a profound leader also focuses on humility, listening, reflection, and development. Humility is taken from servant and level 5 leadership, demonstrating leaders can be humble as well as successful. Listening is an important, integral concept taken from servant and spiritual leadership, and echoes the leader as learner. Self-reflection is borrowed from authentic, level 5, and transformational leadership; we recognize reflection as an essential quality of profound leadership. Leader and follower growth and development are extracted from all five of the key contributing theories. Collaborative and individualized learning, knowledge transfer, and personal and professional growth are facilitated by profound leaders.

The foundational qualities described above may not all be available or offer the best approach at any given time; acknowledging we are not always our optimal self and that circumstance might require flexibility, leaders can contextualize and individualize their approach. Sometimes the servant leader takes priority, other times transformational leader might be optimal, still other times the qualities of the authentic leader might be required. A discipline of profound leadership is digging deeper to recognize new and unforeseen situations and circumstances requiring creativity. In this way, recognition, creativity, and flexibility highlight the interface of profound leadership and adult education.

What does success look like for a profound leader? A profound leader embraces diversity of thought, acknowledges and supports the human side of leadership, and drives performance. A

profound leader is ever learning, ever growing, flexible and adaptive; they support learning and development while meeting bottom-line outcomes.

The Study of Leadership in the field of Adult Education. As a field of study, adult education should take seriously the development of leaders. Educational leadership, organizational leadership, and community leadership fit squarely within the purview of adult education; yet they are not often pursued as research topics within the field. Leadership as a general category has been exhaustively studied and has much to offer adult education; inquiry into more focused leadership areas such as educational leadership could benefit from a profound approach to leading.

Considering Merriam and Bierema's adult learning assumptions (2013), we must be aware of "who our learners are and how they learn" (p.11). If we agree with Hoppe's assertion (2007) that "adult learning theory may be a catalyst to boost global leadership competency development" (McCrory, et al., p. 208), profound leadership could be a catalyst focusing adult learning theory on educating future leaders. Incorporating a leader's willingness and ability to recognize differences in our adult learners' education may foster leadership conducive with individual strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

Engaging profoundly as a leader means we are listening, thinking of and serving others, while maintaining balance to provide our best service to others. Just as teaching is about the learner, leading is about the follower; one cannot exist without the other. We recognize learning and leadership are not done in isolation and focus on the interconnectedness of the learning and leading relationship. These are the seeds of profundity in leadership, resulting in practical application of the concept to the classroom and workplace. Likewise, the strong connection between profound learning and profound leadership provides a solid grounding for leadership development within adult learning theory.

Conclusion

Profound leadership's deeper thinking, service orientation, and other-directed focus enhance organizational health. Connecting learning and leadership provides a developmental path for profound leaders. Further defining this learning-leading connection, we promote a profound leadership approach that contributes to more meaningful learning, holistic perspectives, and lifelong growth.

The perceived dichotomy between wellness and performance is challenged by profound leadership; we assert profound leaders do not have to choose between them but acknowledge and enhance both. This integration of opposites – humanity and performance, reflection and outcomes, awareness and delivery - leads to profound leaders' success. Success is based on an interconnected network of followers, peers, and associated relationships. Each stakeholder has a voice in shaping a profound leader's presence, influence, and impact. In response, the profound leader must be aware of and recognize these characteristics in followers, embracing the opportunity to teach profundity.

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