

# VALUE-BASED LEADERSHIP - INPUT

## INTRODUCTION

Our century witnessed an overwhelming leadership crisis in both public and private spheres. Many charismatic and pseudo-transformational leadership models often brought about deception and exploitation. In response, leadership and management theorists:

- Pointed out how leader-centered models could easily result in narcissism, authoritarianism, flawed and self-serving vision, power abuse, and dependency if they are not grounded in moral foundations
- Shifted their focus on the role of values, ethics and morality in leadership development to restore hope and confidence to leaders and organizations.

In this context, interest in value-based and authentic leadership increased and numerous theories emerged.

## MAIN IDEAS

With the growing complexity and current leadership crisis, interest about ethical and moral leadership has risen. Although most corporate **models still tend to be competency-based rather than character centered** (as it is easier to measure competencies rather than human quality), the question of character remains central to leadership work.

### **Beyond charismatic leadership**

Following the failure of many charismatic leadership models, experts' focus is gradually shifting away from the attractive and visionary personalities "the champion profiles" towards quieter types of leadership characterized by a certain degree of humility, self-control and realism. The capacity for authentic and ethical leadership is not linked to leaders' charisma or extraordinary personality traits. Similarly, it is less about their knowledge or expertise and more about **their character: who they are as a person and who they need to be.**

In this discussion, it helps to distinguish between personality traits and character attributes. While personality traits are deep-seated behaviors that are generally fixed and difficult to unlearn (for example: being outgoing, being introverted, being hot-tempered..), character attributes on the other hand can be learned through external experiences (many can be developed following adversity or challenging situations) and could act as predictors of how an individual will react or behave in a given context. Developmental psychologist Thomas Lickona suggests three essential psychological components for character: knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.

**Developing ethical and moral leadership** is therefore about tapping into our human quality to lead out of what is already in our soul. Leading ethically and authentically is not a rational exercise nor a one-time thing. It is a **lifetime process that emanates from the heart.**

## Love: the essence of ethical leadership

Interviews and research work on the topic are pointing that love (the warm desire to see others grow and become better) constitutes the essence of ethical leadership. (Kouzes & Posner, 1992).

In this context, the focus on values and morals is less to prevent people from doing the wrong thing, and more to enable them and inspire them to act out of what is right. When one's heart is in the right place, they will naturally be disposed to find and develop the competencies needed to perform their functions and will inspire others to demonstrate higher moral reasoning. (Burns (1978) Dukerich, Nichols, and associates (1990)).

Nourishing leadership from the inside out and deepening integrity and authenticity are far from easy and often linked to a sense of vulnerability and exposure. Aligning our principles and behavior takes time, practice and the courage to constantly inquire about our values and intentions. It is a commitment to embrace a more complex code of ethics and virtues than the one we originally developed. This means **developing a wide set of human values that are varied and adaptable to the complex situations we face**, and that we commit to constantly examine.

Among the practices and exercises that can help us develop our character and lead authentically, we cite:

- Carving out time for reflection.
- Learning from defining moments that force us to examine our choices and ways of being ([Link](#))
- Narrowing as much as possible the gap between our work self and our private self.
- Surrounding ourselves with people who will give us true feedback.
- Working with coaches, mentors, and spiritual directors.
- Finding role models and individuals who inspire us to act from the best version of ourselves.
- Setting virtuous habits (for example committing to being courageously truthful,...)
- Being accountable for our mistakes and encouraging others to do so.
- Cultivating a spiritual life (Josep M. Lozano). The spiritual dimension does not only refer to virtuous and moral behavior but is mainly understood as having an open disposition to the transcendent meaning of human existence.
- Examining our values and aligning them with our actions. This includes striving for consistency between what we believe and value and what we say and do.

**The hardest challenge is probably to ask ourselves whether the values we proclaim are those we live by.** For this reason, it is not only important to articulate the values that seem most precious to us (in both our personal life and our leadership work) but to identify as well defining moments in which we honored our core values and other moments in which we failed to act according to them.

Striving for consistency is key, but learning to be compassionate with our vulnerable selves and shadows is also at the core of building integrity. Unfortunately, it is not easy to know and validate our real value system (although every person has one even if they think they do not), but it is even harder to live by it since it is always being put to the test. That is why, those who stand out in history are those leader figures who have been willing to risk their lives, or in some case of other people's lives, for the values they hold and truly believe.

## IGNATIAN NOTE

With his meditation on the two standards, Ignatius offers a reading key that helps us understand two value scales and see which of these two value systems we are personally living: the first one is very attractive, even though it is the dynamics of evil, while the second one may seem spontaneously not attractive at all, however it is that of Christ.

A reflection handout by Nikolaas Sintobin SJ on the two standards is offered in the resources.

## FINAL THOUGHT

### The Greatest Commandments

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." - Mark 12:30-31

## EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Considering the risks of leadership models that are not grounded in moral foundations
2. Reflecting on character and values as pillars for purposeful and authentic leadership
3. Suggesting practices for developing authentic and ethical leadership

*"It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable."*

**Molière**