



CHARACTER STRENGTHS OF THE LEADER AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PHASES

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ABSTRACT

Today leaders are being forced to deal with extreme challenges inside and outside the communities. Community indicates a group consisting of persons who share some values and have some common standards of behaviour (eg. religious community). All groups exist with a particular tasks or mission, and groups go through different phases like inclusion, confrontation and collaboration in its developmental process. Leader has a vital role in community building. Positive psychology has made wider discussion on strengths of character and it has proposed character strength as the foundation of effective leadership. Character strength is built on six pillars of virtue: humanity, wisdom, courage, temperance, transcendence, and justice. There is a correlation between leader's strength use, community cohesion and well-being. All character strengths are significant in all phases of community development. However, the present paper explores leader's strengths of 'wisdom and humanity' in the inclusion phase, 'courage and temperance' in the confrontation phase, and 'transcendence and justice' in the collaboration phase.

Key Words: COMMUNITY, CHARACTER STRENGTHS, DEVELOPMENT PHASES, LEADERSHIP, LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATION.

Introduction

Positive psychology focuses on the study of positive emotions, positive traits, positive institutions and positive communities. Character strength is the corner stone of positive psychology. Character strengths are the psychological ingredients that define virtues (Peterson and Seligman, 2004. [1]) which reflect in one's feeling, thinking, and behaving in a

way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes (Linley and Harrington, 2006. [2]). There are 24 character strengths which categorized under six virtues: wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective) courage (bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest), humanity (love, kindness, social intelligence), justice (team work, fairness, leadership), temperance (forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation) and transcendence (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality) (Peterson and Seligman, 2004., [1]). The relationship between the leader and the community development is interconnected and interdependent. If the essence of the community is union of hearts and unity in diversity, leader's character strengths have an integral role in actualizing it.

Hammet and Sofield (1981. [3]) has brought out eight stages of community development in their work '*Inside Christian community*': inclusion, control, conflict, faith sharing, intimacy, and termination. Markham (1987., [4]) in his article '*Three Crucial Phases in a community life*' explains community growth in three phases, namely, inclusion, confrontation and collaboration. Here, my attempt is to bring together these two community developmental theories and see the leader-follower dynamic within the context of character strengths. The present paper presents a framework for describing how the character strengths of the leader play an integral role in community development phases.

Leadership

Northouse (2006., [5]) defined leadership "as a process where one individual influences a group of persons to achieve a common goal". The definition indicates four significant factors of leadership: it is a *process*, it involves *influence*, it includes *goals* and it occurs in *groups*. All these aspects pin down leader-follower relationship as a transactional event where leader affects followers and is affected by followers. Leadership by character strength is the capacity to influence subordinates through actions and attitudes. Leaders' character strength sets the standard for the entire dynamic of leadership functioning, and the followers learn from leader's actions, words and attitudes (Gene, 2003., [6]).

Role of Character Strengths in Leadership

Researchers have found a definite relationship between character strength of the leader and the leadership function (Peterson et al., [7]; Gene, 2003., [6]). Bennis (1999.,[8]) has underlined that leadership is the concrete expression of our character. The process of becoming a leader is same as the process of becoming an integrated human being with

sufficient character strength. Sankar (2003.,[9]) in his research on leadership concluded that leaders' character strength contributes much in shaping a leader's vision, goals, strategies, judgements and behaviours in community functioning. Character strength is described as the foundation of transformational leadership (Calabrese and Robert, 2002.,[10]). Gene (2003.,[6]) too quoted that "the greatest personal quality of all is character, which is everything in leadership." As Gene (2003.,[6]) stated, good character helps leaders reach their full potential and achieve success; it enhances self-acceptance, self-confidence, energy and enthusiasm; and it improves interpersonal relationships. After having 35 years of research Puryear (2010., [11]) concludes there is nothing as significant and noteworthy in successful leadership as character strength. The study of Littman-Ovadia and Steger (2010., [12]) suggested that the deployment of character strengths at work is interrelated to work satisfaction and meaning at work. Thun (2009., [13]) also depicted that the demonstration of leader's character strength increases subordinates' levels of both workplace and individual outcomes, and that the strength increase will be mediated by subordinates' affective and cognitive trust in their leader. Approaching leaders' mission and the requirements to facilitate such mission from the point of positive psychology, in order to maximize the better animation of communities, the leaders need to use their character strengths and grow in it.

Community Phases and the Role Of Leader's Character Strength

Community is not a static reality. Each time when a person enters into a community or leaves a community, the community begins to constitute itself as a distinct entity. Combining the community development theories of Hammet and Sofield (1981.,[3]) and Markham (1987., [4]), one can say that each phase of Markham contains the characteristics of Hammet's theoretical concepts of community development. These are as follows: inclusion phase (orientation and inclusion), confrontation phase (control and conflict), and collaboration phase (cohesion, faith sharing and intimacy). According to the dynamic aspects of leader-member exchange, there may occur either regression or progression in community development. Here the role of leader is significant in varied ways. All 24 character strengths are significant in all phases of community development. However, the present paper explores 'wisdom and humanity' in the inclusion phase, 'courage and temperance' in the confrontation phase, and 'transcendence and justice' in the collaboration phase.

Inclusion Phase

Orientation seems to be the initial task of this phase where the members come together and begin their community journey. They seek for a specific structure and try to arrive at a common goal. It is certain that in early stages individuals desire belongingness and acceptance by the leader and by other members in the community. 'Belongingness' is the most important motivating force, and on this basis lays the success of community development (Bonner, 1959., [14]). When a group of strangers start to live a common life and search for belongingness, within it, there may be many obstacles for valid interactions. Among these, two major areas of internal insecurity are (1) the area of group members' relations toward authority or more generally toward the handling and distribution of power in the group, and (2) the area of members' relations toward one another (Bennis, 1956.,[15]). It may be communicated through defensive reactions towards authority such as rebelliousness, aggressive and avoiding behaviours. Here the task of the leader is to understand them, accept them and provide them an atmosphere where members can reduce their anxieties. The other characteristics of this phase are the 'anticipation of rejection' and 'the unconscious search' for an ideal community (Hammet and Sofield, 1981.,[3]). When the members enter into the community by sharing their own visions and services, there creates a gap between old and new. Members' hidden expectations of the ideal community may not be met in a satisfying way. The members then begin to experience ambivalence and anxiety simultaneously. At the same time this would hinder healthy inclusion of all members and valid communication in all leader-follower interactions. As a result, disintegration occurs by moving to the point of either enslavement of the other in the service of self or enslavement of self in the service of other (Shepard and Bennis,1956.,[15]).

Role of Wisdom & Knowledge And Humanity

In the inclusion phase, the virtues of wisdom and knowledge, and humanity and their respective character strengths have greatest application in leader-follower dynamic. However, the master strength in leadership functioning is humanity. Strength of humanity is considered as interpersonal strength that includes love, kindness, social intelligence (Peterson and Seligman, 2004.,[1]). Strength of humanity accepts the uniqueness of each member in the community and it could create safe-havens in the community to foster interpersonal relationship of support and respect by demonstrating cognitive and affective acceptance of members (McGovern, 2012.,[16]). It promotes relational transparency which allows the leader to present one's true self to others. Such behaviour promotes confidence and trust

through disclosures that involve open sharing and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings while reduce displays of inappropriate emotions (Walumbwa et al, 2008.,[17]). Thus it is this transparency on the part of the leader that forms the foundation of the leader-follower relationship (Gardner, et al., 2005.,[18]). Kernis (2003.,[19]) added that relational transparency involves developing, achieving, and then valuing openness and truthfulness in the leader-follower relationship. When the members begin the community life with anxiety and fear of being excluded, love and kindness of the leader promote individualized consideration. A leader with humanity listens to his/her members, accepts the members unconditionally, and gives them space in their leadership functioning. It reduces follower's ambivalent feelings and conveys affection and understanding. Where there is humanity, there is availability. This creates a non-threatening environment to the followers to approach and to co-operate with. As a consequence of such caring, followers show a genuine concern to manifest their best interest for the sake of community development.

The strength of wisdom and knowledge is understood as the cognitive strength that entails the acquisition and use of knowledge, and also comprises creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective (Peterson and Seligman, 2004.,[1]). From the inclusion phase to termination phase, wise leader conceptualizes and systematises long-range goals, vision, and mission for the requirements of completing the community animation programmes. They could anticipate the pros and cons of their initiatives and thus ideally influence their followers. By reading the signs of the times, a wise leader can animate the community by planning for creative and novel ways and thus reduces the gap between the old and the new. Open-minded leaders can question and reflect the old ways and can stimulate the exploration of the new ones. They will be more flexible to attend alternative view points of others. Through social as well as emotional intelligence leader attends to even subtle needs of members and community. Such environment provides followers a just and safe place where they will live righteous lives. Sosik and Cameron (2010.,[20]) found that leaders who possess love of learning can inspire their followers for lifelong learning and challenge them in mastering new skills. It also enriches their wisdom by keeping their esteem on a top level. Not only wisdom makes leadership function better but also wisdom acquirement cultivates character of the leader (Zacher, et al., 2014.,[21]).

Confrontation Phase

While inclusion phase is focused on authority relations and structure of the community, the confrontation phase is preoccupied with members' interactions in the community. Members begin to test their influence in the community because of the predominant need for esteem. Those who are low in esteem tend to feel threatened by the other regarding self-worth. In most of the communities, there exist distinctions in roles such as professors, social workers, teachers, leaders, doctors, jobless etc. The reluctance to allow good and bad to be brought together, and the difficulty in tolerating a genuinely ambivalent position in community give rise to variety of denials, projections, and defensive splitting. Markham (1987.,[4]) noted that members' focus on power, dominance and control at both conscious and unconscious levels take them to see the community as imperfect as one's family origin. The unresolved issues take the community to the stage of conflict. Conflict can be among members, or between members and leader. The way members and leaders handle these conflicts would predict the growth of the community. Conflict is productive only when it is resolved and dealt with. Here the task of the leader is to create an atmosphere where the members can talk about their issues and deal with it.

Role of Courage and Temperance

Strengths of Courage considered as emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of internal and external opposition and also comprises bravery, persistence, integrity and vitality (Peterson and Seligman, 2004.,[1]). According to McGovern (2012.,[16]) courage requires a compilation of heart and head. This means an act of courage is built on the cognitive discipline gained from wisdom and knowledge and the emotional discipline gained from practicing temperance. Researchers (Yammarino et al., 2008.,[22]) suggest that successful and effective leadership behaviour primarily depends upon the leader's capacity to solve the multifaceted issues that arise in the group. Great leaders exhibit great courage (Zacher, et al., 2014.,[21]). With authenticity, integrity and honesty leader can communicate clear principles and values. A brave leader acts with conviction even in the midst of risks and obstacles to bear witness in the community. Without any possibility of fixation on this stage, a brave leader solves the issues of the community in a realistic way and takes the community to the stage of cohesion, intimacy and sharing. When leaders lack bravery, conflicts are left out without resolution and often such situation lead to fixation which hinders further growth of community. Persistence at the time of difficulties inspires followers and thus leader can win their mindset. Even under adverse situations

persistence and vitality of the leader continue to function effectively (Lineley et al., 2010.,[23]) and energize others too.

Strength of Temperance considered as a strength protects against excess and includes forgiveness and mercy, humility, prudence, self-regulation (Peterson & Seligman, 2004.,[1]). Strength of Temperance enriches strength of humanity. Leaders with temperance are the best personalities for problem solving and discernment. Negative reactions and immediate judgement patterns never raise bias in their activities. Often leader's unforgiving attitude, pride, imprudent behaviour, and distracted self cause members of the community to have negative reactions. These are the root cause of many leader-member issues as well as community issues. Forgiveness diminishes anger with empathy; sustain relationship though there are setbacks that derive from other's short comings and mistakes. Here a leader with temperance can reduce all such possibilities.

Collaboration Phase

Those who deal conflict effectively move to further stage of community development - cohesion. The stage of cohesion entails lots of interaction, team work, concern for another, mutual acceptance and lack of judgemental attitudes. Cohesion among the members develops a new trust in the community. It means that the members respect the dignity of one another and of themselves where personality differences and value differences are reverently discussed (Galvan, 1997.,[24]). In collaboration phase, the question of intimacy seems to be the fundamental concern. Intimacy requires a great deal of love and willingness to receive other persons as they are and to trust that they may be received in the same way. In intimate relationships one person is not absorbed by the other, and identities are not compromised. Nor is there an attempt to manage or manipulate others for one's own advantage (Hammett and Sofield, 1981.,[3]). The leader's task in this phase focuses on taking initiative for collaborative activities, helping members to interact in a unique way, promoting greater cohesion while fulfilling various community tasks, guiding community assemblies by valuing their opinions and insightful visionary projects and thus enhance greater cohesiveness and productivity.

Role of Transcendence and Justice

Strength of transcendence is considered as a strength that builds connections to the larger universe and provides meaning and includes appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour and spirituality (Peterson and Seligman, 2004.,[1]). Leaders with

transcendence do not let the opposition distract them from fulfilling the final goal. Purpose and spirituality sustain the leadership by providing high performance and success in task performance. Meaningful ways of functioning promote the joy of transcending self. They know how to appreciate their followers and thus they can tap out best from the members for the community development. With spirituality and purpose the leader fosters motivation and search for higher purposes and meanings of fraternal life in the community (McGovern, 2012.,[16]). Above all, the strength of transcendence seeks nothing other than the well-being of community and the well-being of the leader. As a result, leaders will be liberated from any type of corruption which disrupts the community cohesion.

Strength of Justice is considered as civic strength that underlies healthy community life and includes citizenship, fairness and leadership (Peterson and Seligman, 2004.,[1]). The individual with these strengths has a strong sense of duty. They blend compassion with a sense of justice. Such leaders will be good teammates who show a special capacity to work with others in a group for a common purpose (Peterson and Seligman, 2004.,[25]). Fairness appreciates the uniqueness of each individual. The strength of fairness never allow a leader to make decisions from a subjective point of view, instead it promotes objectivity in all kinds of discernment

Foster Character Strengths in Leaders

Character development is a long journey. Character development doesn't take place accidentally. It can be natural or be nurtured by many factors like family, parents, schools, and religious practices. Whatever it may be, it has past roots. Hence the past life experiences of the leader are very crucial to recognize the character strength they possess or need to develop (Sosik and Cameron, 2010.,[26]). According to Lickona (1992.,[27]) three social institutions -family, the church and the school- have traditionally been responsible for shaping the character of the young. The factors like family, morality, mutual respect, learned capacity to think for themselves and one's responsibilities, examples of parents, religious beliefs, child rearing practices and the education shape one's character. The conceptual research of Sosik and Cameron (2010) confirms that leader's past experiences, education, family environment, and the religious training programmes are directly associated with character. Sosik (2010), cited from Hart and colleagues, confirms the idea that family relationships influence the character development. Koshy (2011.,[28]) has reported his findings that the parenting goals or values, parenting practices and parenting styles create the ground for the development of character strength. Emergence of people into leadership roles is due to two-thirds of life

experiences and one third of heritability. Here, life experiences become significant factor in the formation of leaders. The basic knowledge of character development processes could formulate a more comprehensive model of leadership development with character strength. Susan (2011.,[29]) confirms that leader's early development in childhood and adolescence affects the leadership behaviour one exhibits in the workplace.

However, there is no definite time line or set period for character development. Though researchers do agree that the first 10 years are optimum for character development, the possibility of developing and building up character strength is always there (Lopez and Rettew, 2007.,[30]). Damon (1997.,[31]) has confirmed that a sense of purpose is the prime predictor in character development. Setting goals, identifying one's own character strength and planning for the future are the major parts of character development. Helping the leaders to re-read the life events, to reinterpret it in view of character strength, will give new insights for 'working through' character development. This in turn gives the hope that character development of leaders through training programs could be a realised event if there are structured programs.

Conclusion

Character strengths of the leader enrich the community development and enhance the leader-follower relationship in many varied ways. They promote the well-being of the leader as well as the well-being of the community.

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