

Ethical leadership is
mostly about
leadership integrity
philosophy essay



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Leadership comes from emotions, and one cannot lead without emotions. The passion and drive to lead that make others look at him or her in the eye and say “ I want to follow you” (Patrick D, 2010). These are the moral values and principles that form the ethics that leaders lead by.

Ethics, Integrity, Leader

Ethics are a set of moral and just principles that serve as a deep guiding sense of what is right, fair and proper while Integrity is part of this principle, defined as the quality that makes people trust the leader. It acts as a bridge between personal ethics and professional ethics that the leader adheres to values that may be outside of themselves, mainly, truth – where trust is built on. Trust is of paramount importance in all personal relationships (John, A, 1987).

Integrity also represents the consistency and accuracy of actions and behaviour which further assures the trust people put in the leader.

Ethical leadership, law abiding or human compassion?

Ethics comes from different perspectives, depending on situation and objective, for instance, euthanasia. Mercy killing is not legalised in many countries including Singapore, so is it humanely ethical for a medical practitioner to follow the law and watch his/her patient suffer emotionally and physically day after day? Is it professionally ethical to disregard the law and have professionals and patients question the practitioner's ability to perform his or her duty in a professional manner, would anyone prefer an emotionally compromised doctor to treat him or her? Many professional doctors will

establish a professional code of ethics that they do not get personally and emotionally involved in such cases, and continue to treat patients in such cases with painkiller to ease their pain till they pass on. In my opinion, a passionate doctor will definitely be emotionally involved, after all it is what they love to do – saving lives and relieving people of their pain. We all have different opinions of what should be done, depending on the principle and experiences that form our moral awareness (refer to Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, figure 1). Integrity is practiced when regardless of which decision the doctor choose to make he or she stands out and be responsible by facing the consequences of his/her actions. Supporters from both sides of the argument can deem the doctor's actions to be right or wrong but they cannot deem the doctor to be unethical because of the level integrity the doctor display.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development (figure 1)

Different leaders can have different standards of ethics and when we talk about ethical standards, there is the question of whether this standards are applicable, after all ethical behaviour is actually an absolute, good or bad-right or wrong. (Ken, L, 2002). Kohlberg's stages of moral development begs to differ.

Stage 1, a person in this stage is aware only of one fixed set of rules enforced by authorities which he or she must unquestioningly obey. Failure to do so will result in punishment. Ethical behaviour in this stage only limits to punishment avoidance.

Stage 2, person in this stage now realise and is aware that there are more than one view points with regards to right or wrong, different personality have different viewpoints.

Ethical behaviour in this stage is widen to include self-interest.

Stage 3, moral values become more complicated in this stage involving, intention and emotions. person in this stage is very conscious of what others think because what is right or wrong subjects to the approval of the family or community.

Ethical behaviour in this stage factors in the person's emotional state and motives.

Stage 4, person becomes aware of the consequences of failure maintaining law and order. right or wrong depends on " the greater good" for the society.

Ethical behaviour in this stage involves keep social order.

Stage 5, person in this stage adopts a more utilitarian philosophy, where social utility or public interest is put on top of social order. Ethical actions involves protecting the rights of the individual according to rules agreed upon by the whole society. unethical action involves totalitarian rule, which bring social order but morally flawed.

Ethical decision is one that ensure all parties are satisfied and on agreeable terms.

Stage 6, person in this stage has attained the highest level of moral awareness, moral principle becomes the main concern. Where the principles of justice is based on treating prerogatives of all parties in an unprejudiced manner, individually respecting the basic dignity of all people, therefore, universal.

Ethical decision is one that is made based on individual point of view of all parties, under the “ veil of ignorance”(Rawls, 1971).

According to Kohlberg: A person moral reasoning progress stage by stage up the stages without skipping stages. A person progresses up the stages upon encountering moral dilemmas, assuming he or she seeks to solve the moral dilemmas while a person in the lower level cannot comprehend the reasoning of the next level.

How is integrity in anyway involved in these 6 stages?

Other than stage 1 where there is clearly no need for the application of integrity, we can say that integrity is achieved so long as ethical behaviours, decisions and actions are being made/performed in each of these 5 stages. In supporting the previous argument of the euthanasia case, it does not matter what level of moral awareness a person or a leader has attained, as long as he or she act according to the result of his or her moral reasoning, it is ethical. Therefore, it is suffice to say that integrity is the backbone of ethical behaviour/ ethical leadership, that a person or a leader does what he or she feels is right.

“ Uncompromising integrity is the most important quality. All of the other characteristics stand upon this steel-reinforced concrete foundation”- Danny Cox, 2002

Moral person moral manager leadership(Figure 2&3)

A leader's reputation for ethical leadership are based on perceptions of the public or followers of the leader both as a moral person and a moral manager(Trevinio, L. K., Hartman, L. P., Brown, M. 2000). To put it into a clearer perspective, ' moral person' represents ethics while ' moral manager' represents ' leadership' so it is the combination of these two ' morals' that forms the reputation for ethical leadership.

We look at the scandal of City Harvest Church involving several senior members charged with the misappropriation of S\$24 million to allegedly fund the music career of Sun Ho, wife of the church's founder. Before the emergence of this scandal we can easily assume that head pastor Kong Hee with his fellow executives are ethical leaders based on the fact that they displayed behaviours of a moral person and acted in accordance to a moral manager. We can safely say that they are definitely moral managers but it is not fully accurate for us, as third persons or even some followers to deem Kong Hee and his executives as ethical leaders as we do not know them personally, we do not see or experience them in all aspects of their life. So how can we know if they are genuinely moral persons or if it is just a show? We may never know until they are tested in the presence of the public, that's where people with no integrity says “ do anything but don't get caught”, while people with integrity says “ its only matter of time before the truth

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gets out". Kong Hee and his executives, while still on trail, now has a reputation as hypocritical leaders due to the scandal(test), we are now aware that although they are moral managers performing their duties, they are not moral persons as they personally do not believe or practice what they preach to the congregation.

The case is an example that integrity cannot be faked, it is attribute that circumscribe the traits of honesty and trustworthiness. One may argue that Kong Hee is an ethical leader until certain bad apple or bad barrels comes in and corrupts him. To this, the answer is very simple, integrity is a trait of a leader that automatically resists temptations, a leader with integrity is therefore incorruptible. Integrity is the clear line between a ethical leader and a hypocritical leader.

Lead by example

Leaders have the ability to influence the followers, therefore, the leader have to responsible for the behaviours and actions of his or her followers.

Compromise of integrity can lead to followers behaving or acting in disregard to ethics, after all the leader is the model example of what behaviour, actions and decision are expected. In cases where followers have a higher stage of moral awareness(figure1), compromise of integrity can cause followers to lose faith in achieving their ambitions or aspirations. When nurturing a child, how can parents expect their child to develop ethical moral values and living by them if they fail to do so themselves? In developing future leaders, how can a mentor teach integrity to his or her students and expect them to believe in it if he or she compromises in integrity? They can

state themselves as bad examples, a child can be corrected but integrity probably will be the last lesson the mentor ever teach the students.