

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP OF CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

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Scholarship aims to advance the understanding and application of concepts based on rigorous inquiry and disciplined principles. The ancient cities of Athens and Sparta provide a great context for understanding the role and value of scholarship. Both societies were relatively successful, but had starkly different approaches to achieving success. Athens was the home of some of the most sophisticated philosophy, art and music of its day. They emphasized strengthening of the mind as a means to maintain their competitive edge. In contrast, Sparta was the most feared military might during their time, because they placed a premium on enhancing physical skills and propagating a warrior spirit.

Scholarship provides for both the Athenians and the Spartans. It could serve to expand intellectual capacity for the advancement of the Athenian society as well as equip the body and spirit of the Spartans for defense of their society. However,

we contend that in a global environment, successful societies should consist of elements from both Athens and Sparta. As such, emphasis should not be disparate, but should synergistically develop both understanding and application. In this article we advance a framework that will guide the theoretical and practical synthesis of character and leadership. The aim is to generate new knowledge and practice of leadership and character for scholars and practitioners in contemporary societies.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

One of the challenges we face when studying any two constructs (e.g., character and leadership) is that the knowledge surrounding each of the topics is often developed in isolation. This makes sense as those who are studying the two topics are often in different domains or come from different educational backgrounds. Each is involved in trying to develop and understand the nomological

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net surrounding its particular topic or area of interest. While understandable, this often creates a challenge since different literatures need to be referenced, accessed, and understood.

The model proposed in this paper is an attempt to bring together those who study leadership and those who study character by creating a single space in which these related constructs can be discussed not in isolation, but in a synergistic way. However, in order to do this, it is imperative to at least briefly discuss what is known about the constructs of leadership and character. This will serve as a point of departure from the separatist approach mentioned above to the synergistic approach proposed by the present model. While not intended to be an exhaustive review of both the leadership and character literatures, it will serve as a review of some of the major issues and themes that have been developed in each of the literatures. Where possible, seminal reviews of the respective topics will be included for those who are interested in gaining more insight and detail into each construct.

LEADERSHIP

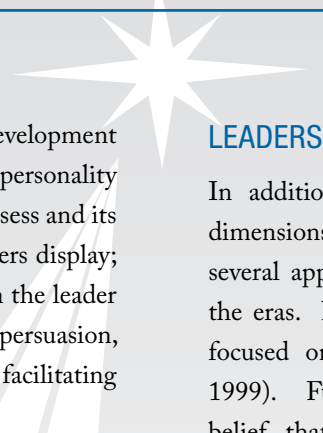
DEFINING LEADERSHIP

In pursuit of acquiring and providing understanding, scholars from multiple disciplines have studied leadership (e.g., Bass, Daft, Day, Hackman & Johnson, House, Nhavandi, Northouse, Rost, Stogdill, and Zaccarro).

These scholars have introduced multiple factors attendant to leadership to include the characteristics, behaviors, and competencies of the leader; the perceptions of the follower; and the impact of the situation (Daft, 1999). These studies have produced numerous definitions and descriptions that have served as the bases of leadership theory for over half a century.

Although scholars contend that the phenomenon of leadership is a universal concept that can be experienced by everyone, a universally agreed upon definition of leadership has proven to be elusive. Even the most casual review of the literature will reveal that there is no shortage in definitions of leadership. As Stogdill (1974) noted, "There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define the concept." Of note here is that quote was from over 30 years ago and definitions surrounding leadership are still being added to the literature. There seems to be a predominant belief and practice that merely adding another definition will lead to a clearer understanding of the construct of leadership (Avolio, 2007).

In his seminal work, Bass (1990) provided a framework to help classify the myriad of leadership definitions. Based on his extensive review of nearly 5,000 studies, he concluded that leadership could be classified in at least five different ways: 1) a process which places the




leader at the center of the group's development and commitment; 2) a combination of personality traits or characteristics that leaders possess and its effects; 3) an act or behavior that leaders display; 4) a power-based relationship between the leader and the follower to include influence, persuasion, and coercion; or 5) an instrument for facilitating the achievement of group goals.

Consistent with these classifications, Northouse (1997) conceptualized several components that seem central to leadership definitions. He said that leadership is first and foremost a process, which implies that there is interplay of multiple factors that exist in a complex yet fluid relationship. Secondly, leadership involves influence, which speaks to the leader's ability to effect change in followers. Next, leadership occurs in the context of groups, which can vary greatly in size and scope of responsibility. Finally, Northouse suggested that leadership consists of goal attainment in which leaders direct their energies and the energies of the group toward accomplishing a specific task or mission. As is apparent from above, leadership is a complex process involving not only the individual leader, but also the follower and organizational processes at work in the situation. With this in mind, it is not hard to see why a concise, universally accepted definition of leadership has been elusive.

LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

In addition to defining and categorizing the dimensions of leadership, scholars have advanced several approaches which have evolved through the eras. First was the "great man" theory that focused on the leader's personal traits (Daft, 1999). Fundamental to this approach is the belief that leaders are born and not made. Scholars have studied different characteristics of the leaders to include physical attributes, social traits, intelligence, personality, and work-related characteristics (Bass, 1981). As a result, traits such as self-confidence, determination, intelligence, and integrity have been shown to have a positive impact on leader effectiveness (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986; Mann, 1959; Zaccaro, 2007).

The next approach advanced by scholars was the behavior approach. It is different from the trait approach, in that the emphasis is on what the leader does and how s/he acts, not what s/he possesses. In essence, research to support this approach was concerned with indentifying leadership behaviors, determining if these behaviors had a positive relationship with effectiveness, and identifying ways to develop behaviors related to effectiveness (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1999). For the most part, leaders who managed to balance the focus on people and mission were considered most successful (Blake & McCanse, 1991).



A third approach to leadership was the contingency approach. The central focus of this approach is the situation in which leadership occurs, contending that the effectiveness of a leader's traits or behaviors will depend on the conditions of the situation (Hackman & Johnson, 2000). According to Fiedler (1967), a leader can increase effectiveness by matching one's style with the situation most favorable to his or her success. Blanchard (1985) suggested an alternate approach in which the leader could adapt his or her style to match the situation.

More recently, several other leadership theories have been proposed such as transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994), servant leadership (Spears, 1995), and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Each of these approaches tends to focus on the different behaviors that the leaders employ in their formal positions (i.e., individualized consideration). While these theories have all been validated in their respective studies, they again point to the often disparate approaches that individuals have taken in an attempt to understand effective leadership. At this point, it is important to note that these descriptions have not been intended to be all inclusive of the vast body of leadership literature. Instead, they were an attempt to start to describe some of the different approaches that scholars and practitioners have taken in an


attempt to understand the construct of leadership.

As can be seen from the above descriptions, there has been a tremendous amount of foundational work accomplished in the area of leadership theory and practice. However, these efforts have yet to yield an integrative and comprehensive understanding and disciplined practice of leadership (Rost, 1991). As a result, the literature is full of concepts and definitions of leadership that fail to provide access to meaningful advancement. The dilemma is that this additive approach fails to produce integrative strategies for moving the science of leadership forward (Avolio, 2007). In agreement, Richmon and Allison (2003) note that the increased attention given to leadership over the past half-century belies the conceptual incoherence that consumes leadership inquiry; further contending that leadership encompasses a wide variety of features and characteristics, depending on the scholar who is forwarding the understanding. Interestingly, a similar pattern can be seen with the construct of character.

CHARACTER

DEFINING CHARACTER

Like leadership, the theory of character is a complex concept that has been observed and studied for years. In fact, its genesis can be traced all the way back to the ancient Greeks. The term character is derived from the Greek



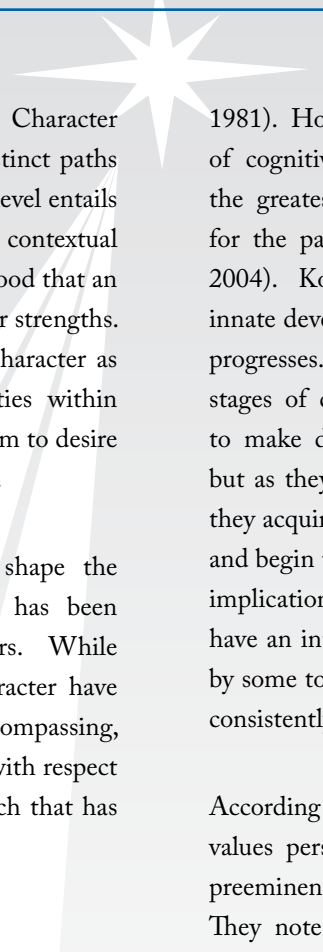
word *kharassein*, which meant to engrave or inscribe (Klann, 2007). When applied to people, it refers to the human qualities that have been internally engraved in an individual (Sheehey, 1988). The Greek notion of character evolved to mean moral goodness as a function of an individual's essence. The Greeks further noted that this good is not automatic, but must be socially cultivated. While Plato believed that a person who knows good will subsequently do good, his student, Aristotle, departed from this view. Aristotle believed that we become good by practicing good actions, and that a person may have knowledge of what is good, but lack the disposition to do good based on that knowledge (Wakin, 1996). For Aristotle, to be virtuous was the ultimate pursuit of human fulfillment and reflected the excellence of a person's character (Sison, 2006).

Several years later German philosopher Emmanuel Kant saw character as the manifestation of an individual's moral duties. He reasoned that individuals should only act in a manner in which everyone could act (Hill, 1992). Further, he believed that contributing to the greater good of society was a categorical imperative, which extended beyond mere self-interest (Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Thus, from a historical perspective, character was based on the ingrained habits of an individual and served as a response to an obligation to contribute to the greater

good of society. The evolution of the concept of character has continued as contemporary scholars have built on this foundational understanding in an attempt to define and describe character in a holistic fashion.

According to Wakin (1976), the examination of character must be all-encompassing. It has been duly noted that character is best defined as a multi dimensional construct that is determined by personal and social factors (Peterson & Park, 2006). Additionally, Lickona (1991) asserts that character consists of "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good—habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action." In agreement, Berkowitz (2002) proposes that character involves an individual's capacity to think about what is right and wrong, experience moral emotions, engage in moral behaviors, and believe in the moral good. In essence, character relates to how we think, feel, believe, and act.

More recently, Peterson and Seligman (2004) assert that character is inherently plural and unpack it by distinguishing three levels of abstraction. At the top level are core virtues which consist of core universal qualities valued by moral and religious philosophers throughout history: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Character strengths reside at the next level. Peterson and Seligman (2004) refer to these as the "psychological ingredients"



or processes that define the virtues. Character strengths provide individuals with distinct paths for manifesting the virtues. The final level entails situational themes, which are the contextual elements that contribute to the likelihood that an individual will display certain character strengths. Wright and Huang (2008) sum up character as those interpenetrable habitual qualities within individuals that constrain and lead them to desire and pursue personal and societal good.

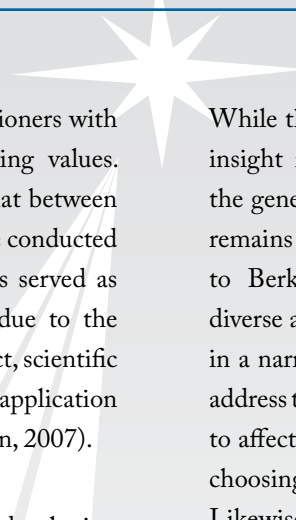
These definitions and descriptions shape the conceptual focus of how character has been studied and developed over the years. While attempts to define and describe character have been somewhat holistic and all-encompassing, much of what we know and practice with respect to character has emerged from research that has been steeped in isolated approaches.

CHARACTER PERSPECTIVES

There are several perspectives that have guided our understanding and development of character. One of the most prominent approaches to understanding and developing character is the cognitive structural perspective (Berkowitz, 2002). This perspective focuses on an individual's ability to discern right from wrong, evaluate personal and social values, and make the appropriate decision. Several theoretical frameworks have served to bolster this approach (e.g. Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg,

1981). However, it is Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development that has had the greatest influence on research in this area for the past three decades (Treviño & Brown, 2004). Kohlberg (1981) describes six stages of innate development through which an individual progresses. He suggests that during the early stages of development, it is natural for people to make decisions based on personal interests, but as they advance in their moral development they acquire more sophisticated ways of thinking and begin to wrestle with the social and universal implications of their decision. While these stages have an intuitive appeal, they have been deemed by some to be impractical and too complex to be consistently applied (Leming, 2008).

According to Wright and Huang (2008), the values perspective of character has also gained preeminence in the domain of applied research. They note that several scholars (e.g., Barry & Stephens, 1998; Bass, 1981; Howard, 1985; and Rokeach, 1973) have explored the concept of values and their impact on the attitudes, judgments, decisions, and preferences of individuals, organizations, and society. Most notably, Rokeach (1973) described values as a mode of conduct or an end-state that is considered personally or socially preferable, providing a distinction between instrumental values (i.e., a means to an end) and terminal values (i.e., an end in and of itself). Based on this conceptualization,



researchers have sought to arm practitioners with strategies for developing and clarifying values. For example, Leming (1987) noted that between 1969 and 1985 nearly 150 studies were conducted in which values clarification strategies served as the independent variable. However, due to the subjective nature of the values construct, scientific inquiry and subsequently practical application have been stifled (Wright & Goodstein, 2007).

Another approach to studying and developing character has been through a social learning lens. Berkowitz (1997) asserts that character has to do with the manner in which an individual acts and how those acts are socially constituted. For instance, if an individual behaves in a manner that is “kind,” s/he may be deemed by others to have good character, but if s/he acts “cruelly,” others may conclude that the individual has bad character. The social learning perspective has focused on the examination of how character is cultivated and propagated the social context. Specifically, this approach has been concerned with how individuals acquire and manifest moral behaviors (Bandura, 1977). An explication of the mediating and moderating environmental variables, along with an emphasis on the impact of “modeling” on shaping moral behavior, has been the central focus of this approach (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002).

While these and other approaches have provided insight into their respective realm of character, the general state of character theory and practice remains fragmented (Swaner, 2004). According to Berkowitz (1997), each group from these diverse approaches views character as “flourishing in a narrow realm, embraces models that directly address that realm, implements programs designed to affect that realm, and uses different criteria for choosing labels for their respective realm” (13). Likewise, Rest (1984) asserts that our theoretical tendency to divide the character field into multiple approaches has been more of a liability than an asset. To address this duality of perspectives, both Berkowitz and Rest, along with others like Likona (1991), have advanced a more integrative perspective that synergistically incorporates components from several approaches. Swaner (2004) acknowledges that these pioneering efforts have been extremely useful in cataloguing the components of character, but suggest that these efforts have yet to produce an integrated understanding of how these components relate to each other. This limited knowledge makes it tough to put theory into practice in a meaningful way.

Of relevance here is that while the constructs of leadership and character have been studied in virtual isolation from one another, they have two striking similarities. First is the fact that they each lack integrated, conceptual definitions that

can be agreed upon by scholars and practitioners. It appears that much of the effort has been in looking at the constructs from differing, as opposed to unifying, perspectives. As previously mentioned, that has led to a fragmented literature that often leaves it up to the researcher to describe what s/he is examining versus consensus in the field.

The second is that even though people have a difficult time describing the concept, there is no shortage of practitioners who are available to help improve in these areas. This is not an indictment on these practitioners. Instead, it shows how important these constructs are to individuals and organizations that they are willing to do whatever they can to improve in these areas.

What we propose is that, instead of continuing to examine these two constructs in isolation, we start to address the two constructs together and leverage that understanding to gain greater insight into each of the constructs. However, in order to do this, we must determine a framework that will help us to synthesize the aforementioned research. It is at this point that we propose the following integrated framework.

A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TO CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

Due to the daunting challenge of attempting to integrate the theory and practice of character

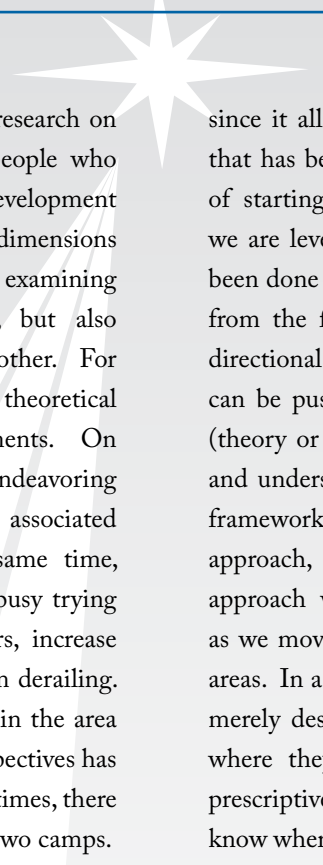
and leadership, it is perhaps useful to examine it with respect to a guiding framework. Figure 1 represents such a framework.



Figure 1: An Integrative Framework to Study Character and Leadership

As mentioned previously, one of the challenges with examining these constructs of leadership and character is that the vast majority of the research that has examined them lies in disparate literature. This is represented in the framework as the distance between the constructs of character and leadership, and can be viewed as the vertical dimension of this model. This makes sense since character and leadership are separate but related constructs.

In addition, there is another dimension that exists. This can be viewed as the balance between theory and practice. Again, as represented in Figure 1, these are represented as opposite ends of the vertical continuum. This also makes sense



since, typically, the people doing the research on these constructs are not the same people who are implementing the training or development programs. The result of these two dimensions is a diagram that represents a way of examining not only character and leadership, but also how these constructs relate to each other. For example, leadership research has both theoretical components and application components. On the one hand, leadership scholars are endeavoring to define leadership and other factors associated with effective leadership. At the same time, however, leadership practitioners are busy trying to figure out how to develop leaders, increase their productivity, and keep them from derailing. Concomitantly, this is also going on in the area of character. While each of these perspectives has value that can support the other, oftentimes, there is very little discussion between these two camps.

What is immediately noticeable from this framework is that there is a point of intersection at which these two dimensions converge. It is at this convergence, that we can start to understand the interrelationships between character and leadership. The arrows serve as a visual indication that all we have learned about leadership theory and practice and all that we have learned about character theory and practice can be brought to bear to help us understand how character and leadership are related. This is a critical approach

since it allows us to benefit from the past work that has been done in each domain. So, instead of starting from scratch in our understanding, we are leveraging all of the great work that has been done in the past. What you will also notice from the framework is that the arrows are bi-directional. What is learned at this intersection can be pushed back out to the respective fields (theory or practice) to continue to help develop and understand these two domains. While this framework may seem relatively simplistic in its approach, it is hoped that this straightforward approach will serve as an unifying framework as we move forward toward integration of these areas. In a way, a model such as this becomes not merely descriptive in showing interested parties where they are currently operating; it is also prescriptive in the sense that it lets organizations know where they need to be in order to stay at the nexus of character and leadership.

CONCLUSION

A vast amount of literature exists regarding the constructs of character and leadership. In addition, there is also significant work being done on both the theoretical and the practical sides of these domains. What is lacking is a coherent framework by which one can integrate this information to synergistically understand the how they relate. The proposed framework is a first step toward this idea of integration. The value of such

a framework is that, due to the two dimensions represented (character & leadership and theory & practice), the previous disparate work done in these two domains serves as a rich starting point in this endeavor. It is hoped that this framework will facilitate continuation of the great work that has been done with respect to these two constructs.



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