

Research Article

A Literary Discussion on Influence in Leadership

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Abstract

Influence serves as one of the main fundamentals of leadership which motivates followers toward common objectives. This study explores the essential elements of influence within a leadership framework, specifically focusing on the interaction between power and morality from a theological perspective. The research employs a literary discussion of leadership theology and theories, contrasting secular definitions of power as the potential to influence with a Pauline theological framework that views power through the lens of weakness. Also central to the discussion is the role of the leader's morality, which dictates the conduct and ultimate impact exerted on followers. The paper argues that without a grounded moral code, influence risks becoming forced, coercive or "pseudotransformational". Through an analysis of historical and biblical figures such as Nehemiah, Paul, and modern leaders like Neal C. Wilson, the study identifies that positive influence is best cultivated through spiritual formation and character development. The results suggest a three-step implementation process for leaders: personal introspection of core values, clear communication of principles, and maintaining firmness during "moments of truth" or high-stakes decision-making. Ultimately, the study concludes that effective leadership, especially in the Christian sense, requires the integration of spiritual disciplines and theo-centric goals to establish a transformation-based influence that persists even after the leader's term.

Keywords

Christian Leadership, Influence, Power, Weakness, Morality, Spiritual Formation, Transformational Leadership

1. Introduction

Influence is part of the leadership process that occurs within the group to reach a common goal. This implies that everyone collaborates under the guidance and leadership of one person. Thus, through it, the leader determines the team's direction, guided through common objectives towards a desired outcome.

Moreover, it is a crucial aspect of leadership, as Peter G. Northouse stated, "Influence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without influence, leadership does not exist [1]." This idea necessitates influence in leadership, such that it is the motivating factor that encourages action among the team members, even the leader himself. Action necessitates driving forces beyond themselves. Influence is one of those considerations.

Influence involves relationship and communication, whereas two people interact with each other, whether it be tasks, personal matters, feelings, ideas, and such that would initiate discussion on project/event management and necessitate coordinated action. Robert N. Lussier and Christopher F. Achua say, "Influencing is so important that it is called the essence of leadership. Influence has a direct effect on organizational performance [2]." Therefore, in order to improve organization importance in a certain group, influence is necessary. Relationship and communication are related to change and have respective details in how it affects interaction between the leader and his/her followers [3].

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When misused, it can have negative influence [4]. This is related to a certain kind of phenomenon known as pseudo-transformational leadership. Thus, leadership is one of the crucial factors that determines change and transformation, not just to the followers, but also to the leader himself/herself.

2. Components of Influence in Leadership

There are certain components that comprises influence in leadership. These elements include a) Power; and b) Morality. When properly used, they contribute significantly to one's exercise of influence in leadership.

2.1. Power

Perhaps one of the crucial components of influence in leadership is power, because it is one of the more compelling factors that persuades and moves to action. The amount of power a leader possesses determines the impact he or she produces in the followers. Proper utilization of power enables one to lead the followers, even in the context of diverse organizations, which in turn provides benefit. Whilst there are certainly challenges to this approach [5], there are benefits within diverse organizations compared to those organizations that don't comprise diverse individuals. Therefore, a leader should know how to navigate this area by utilizing power effectively. This would prove to be a substantial benefit in the long run.

Utilizing power is also an effective means for impacting followers positively. In relation to theology, power is rightly viewed as through weakness, rather than ambition, according to the framework provided in the first epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians. In this concept, the power of God is manifested through weak preachers, giving a weak message to the weak audience (1 Corinthians 1-2). Although the concept of power through weakness in leadership was basically absurd even in early Christianity, it is nonetheless undeniable that such powerful impact was felt and experienced throughout Christian and church history. Therefore, the weakness-based approach for leverage of power is fitting for the leader in order to bring a positive result upon the followers [6].

Contrariwise, misuse of power leads to coercion. It is understood that when one goes contrary to the follower's intentions or desires, it is already a forced leadership, which is not ideal [7]. Significant examples to this include dictators like Adolf Hitler who've exerted a negative influence and legacy. Though he has effectively utilized his power in influencing his followers, his ideals does not just lead to discrimination, but also disregard for human life in relation to Jews. Such ideals goes contrary even to the desires of the followers themselves.

2.2. Morality

Another factor that determines influence is the leader's morality, which I would say is one crucial component. This is

distinct from a leader's traits or attributes, which are perceived by the followers. Attributes are only but a reflection of the values and character of the leader manifested to behaviour, which in turn bring about influence to the followers.

Morality is significant in the relationship between values and behaviour. Without it, relating values with behavior will prove difficult. Therefore, morality determines the leader's conduct, which inevitably determines the kind of influence the leader exerts.

Within a group, trust is non-negotiable [8]. This is especially the case even in school contexts where establishing communities can be "substitutes" for leadership [9]. In order to establish trust, we have to understand that an influence is mandatory. This will be up to the leaders whether the influence would be uplifting or degrading, because it will also affect the followers' morale.

Within this dynamic, this is where morality comes in. For this to be possible, a leader should understand that, fundamentally, "love mixed with faith (the power of belief) can be his/her ultimate source of strength [10]. This significantly determines the leader's manner of how he/she exerts influence in leadership. Correct understanding on how to apply this idea helps the leader to gain strength and moral courage to not only accomplish tasks, but also to stand up despite challenging situations, where he/she needs to adapt by making difficult decisions and adjust his leadership styles as necessary.

One of the historical examples of morality in leadership is Neil C. Wilson, one of the former presidents of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He says with respect to change, "Frankly, we believe that one of the responsibilities of leadership is to take the initiative and not just wait to evolve." One hallmark of his leadership was that he is remarkable. His followers have noted how influential his actions, behaviour, impact, and legacy were. George W. Brown, a former Inter-American Division president of the Seventh-day Adventists, noted the following about him, "He was a transformational leader [11]."

So far, there aren't any tangible criteria for morality with respect to influence in leadership. In actuality, there aren't yet evidence-based key performance indicators that determine whether a leader is acting morally or appropriately to the moral code of conduct or behaving ethically in leadership. Nevertheless, determining this area is a case-to-case basis that depends on situation, time, place, culture, and many other factors which cannot be described through empirical observation.

3. Theological Understanding of Influence

Theological basis for this is that fundamentally, one necessary characteristic in leadership influence is gentleness. Evidently, leadership according to the Bible is not forced but gentle. Other qualities in relation that define this characteristic are

openness and honesty, which produces positive relational dynamic between the followers and the leader. One of the ways to cultivate this kind of influence includes spiritual formation. In this way, staying firm to biblical morality brings positive results, which necessitates truthfulness of conduct. This means that it is a must to ground one's moral code of conduct in spirituality which results to openness and honesty between the leader and his/her followers.

Biblical examples for this influence include the prophet Moses, Nehemiah the leader, and the apostle Paul. These people have established and built up their character and moral authority as leaders. Moses was known for spiritually leading the people of God by staying firm to God-centered principles, though at times he would respond contrary to the dictates of the multitude. Nehemiah stood his ground despite threats given to counter his leadership in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He remained firm in his principles despite the opposing influences to undermine his leadership authority. Paul remained true to principles that led him to confront people in challenging situations. At one point, he confronted the apostle Peter in relation to inclusivity as a leader's responsibility (see Galatians 2).

Thus, character is a necessity to guarantee quality in successful leadership. Gary E. Roberts says, "Success without character is akin to a great house built upon a flawed foundation. Eventually the house collapses or is condemned, given the structural deficiencies. The cultivation of Christian servant leader character is a true labor of love that requires a lifetime of grace, patience, and sacrifice [12]." Certain actions and behavior can facilitate this character growth, but the most important thing here is to ensure that Christian character is constantly cultivated.

More importantly, character requires transformation, as Roberts says, "The first step in the character development journey is a genuine conversion of the heart, in which Jesus becomes our Lord and Savior with a genuine commitment from us to 'die to the self.'" Therefore, transformation from God is necessary because it produces the moral qualities essential for an effective Christian as he/she demonstrates Christ-centred leadership. The leader is to respond to this transformation by absolute surrender of self.

4. Process of Implementing Morality in Leadership

The following is a suggestion on the process of implementation as the concepts evolving influence, morality, and power are synthesized and applied in addressing some fundamental concerns regarding influence in leadership. First, a leader is to know his or her own values, which involves introspection. He cannot communicate his values to the followers if he/she isn't aware of it. Hence, he cannot stand for that which he/she doesn't know himself/herself. Second, the leader is to properly

and firmly communicate his or her values to the team, and especially to the followers at the beginning of the term (especially when needed), so as to clarify the leader's intentions and moral principles in leadership. This helps prevent future unnecessary misunderstanding regarding the leader's motives and intentions. Finally, the leader is to maintain his stance at all costs, even in high-stakes situations. This applies in moments of truth, where the leader interacts with the followers to make a high-value decision which leaves a long-lasting effect on everyone within the organization/group. These do-or-die scenarios require firmness of principle and moral courage demonstrated by a leader's strengthened Christian character.

In strengthening this kind of character, Roberts has suggested a seven-component models of the elements of Christian servant leader. These elements can be cultivated in order to bring out a strong moral compass, which include a) Spiritual disciplines comprising of prayer, personal Bible study, and fellowship with other believers; b) Knowledge about God and our response to this kind of knowledge, called humility; c) Belief in the fundamental truths of what the Bible teaches, and the willingness to act upon it; d) Motive, whereby we establish the foundational biblical principle, which is love; e) Integrity, whereby we use whatever means in promoting "the greater good"; f) Theo-centric Goals where one is to establish the direction of his/her leadership according to God's will; and g) God-given Wisdom, where one continues to seek for God's guidance in critical moments of decision making. Once followed, there is an increased certainty of establishing moral courage in facing high-risk situations. This eventually helps the leader in exerting a greater influence towards the followers as they venture in attaining toward a common goal. It is to be understood, however, that there are external factors which would affect one's leadership dynamic between the leader and his followers.

5. Conclusion

Influence is a must in leadership, especially in Christian-based leadership. The impact for this kind of leadership could be either positive or detrimental. One of the crucial elements of influence in leadership is power, and theologically, a correct perception of power is viewed in the biblical model of power through weakness. This is an effective way where power is better exercised for good.

Implications in the context of leadership require a proper demonstration of morality that would lead to positive change. The leader is to realize that, in the practical setting, emphasizing the moral aspect of leadership helps in establishing the foundation for a transformational influence. This is possible by establishing key behaviors which highlights spiritual formation rooted in core values that morally uplifts the leader and then the followers, all in order to achieve a common goal.

Author Contributions

Mark Jacob Garao: Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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