CHAPTER

# 3 Ethical Leadership Through Transformation

THE FOCUS OF THIS CHAPTER IS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- The need for ethical leadership
- Definitions of leadership
- Two leadership paradigms: transactional and transformational
- The moral dimensions of leadership
- The moral responsibilities of leadership
- Characteristics/attributes for ethical leadership

Leadership is in the literature spotlight in business and in the public professions. As we move into the new millennium, there is an emphasis on the need for leadership and the complexities of developing effective moral leadership. In our postmodern society, chaos and corruption prevail. Organizations are created while others go out of business. Programs that are effective and necessary are eliminated, while profit-making programs that serve those who have the least need find a solid market share. Social policy initiatives that have great promise fail. Leaders, even with "good intentions, and moral convictions, even with technical competence," do not always achieve success (Dobel, 1998, p. 74). From a realist perspective, it is argued that leaders cannot afford ethics in this world of increasing responsibilities, political and economic intimidation, and competitive interests. However, an alternative view would argue that leaders should follow the requirements of ethics. Improvement in ethical decision-making can reduce costs associated with unethical workplace conduct, can prevent the erosion of integrity, and can contribute to increased profitability and a better organizational culture (Petrick & Quinn, 1997). Further, ethical leadership leads to the development of quality human services, empowered consumers and community citizens, and committed employees.

Leadership is a somewhat amorphous concept that is often inclusive of many different types of roles: administrative, managerial, political, and activist, among



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others. Most of the roles connected to leadership have a degree of authority or power that is attached to leading. It is the use, and/or the abuse, of that power and authority that adds an inherent ethical implication to leadership (discussed extensively in Chapter 4). The ethical aspects of leadership are more than power holding and power wielding; also important to the leader are the motives, aspirations, and higher needs of constituents that are necessary to engage the full person in meaningful contributions to self, organization, and community.

Two major paradigms of leadership theory are discussed in the literature, transactional and transformational, each with related assumptions, values, and philosophies. The transformational paradigm offers a congruence with the previous elements of social work leadership (discussed in Chapter 1) and offers the promise of moral and ethical leadership, or leadership that ". . . Can produce social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs" (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Transformational leadership will be the lens for all the subsequent chapters. The concepts, values, and assumptions that are discussed here will reappear throughout this book, in relationship with the critical responsibilities of leadership.

## Definitions of Leadership

Leadership has been defined in the leadership literature in many ways, based on many different theories that have evolved over several decades. Further, as leadership theory has become more pronounced, a blurring of the terms—leadership and management—has occurred. Sometimes one is used in place of the other. The concept of leadership has evolved from the "functional task" focus of management to a "transforming personal" focus. Ritchie (1988, p. 171) states, "I regard management as taking care of things—money, inventory, equipment, production processes—while I define a leader as one who develops people. Things are managed; people are led."

Burns (1978) comments that more than 130 definitions are found in one study on leadership alone. Two contemporary definitions capture the essence of ethical leadership based on the emphasis of relationship and use of power between leader(s) and constituents. First, Gardner (1990, p. 1) defines leadership as ". . . The process of persuasion or example by which an individual or team induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and constituents." Persuasion implies the use of argument, or reasoning, to achieve commitment to the purpose or objectives. A reasoning process has implicit within its definition the possibility of logic, such as sharing of the facts, discussing the purpose, relating the issue to a contextual background, and identifying potential negatives and benefits of the objectives. Persuasion also implies the dialogue necessary for "voice," the *speaking and listening* referred to in the discussion about vision later in this chapter. Leaders who persuade are acknowledging constituents' *choice* to pursue objectives, or a more equal distribution of power. The use of "example" provides for leaders as role models, demonstrating important values and behaviors by "walking their talk." Ethical standards and values are more easily learned through a leader creating the opportunity for reflection and analysis, as well as modeling the desired values and behaviors (Joseph, 1991).

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The second definition, a social work definition of leadership, includes the elements necessary for social work in the new millennium: "Social work leadership is the communication of vision, guided by the NASW Code of Ethics, to create proactive processes that empower individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities" (Rank & Hutchison, 2000, p. 14). This definition accentuates the elements necessary for social change from a social work perspective, including an ability to anticipate, communicate and shape future directions; an ethical distribution and use of power; and the importance of collective goals. The social work definition of leadership is congruent with a transformational theory of leadership. However, for the sake of comparison, and to help readers make distinctions about the leadership theories they have learned, a brief discussion of both transactional and transformational leadership paradigms follows.

## Leadership Paradigms

There are extensive amounts of literature on leadership theories, models, and characteristics. The following discussion does not provide detail about specific theories, but instead describes two paradigms of leadership that can be compared and contrasted in relation to moral and ethical issues of leadership. The two paradigms encompass many theories and models. The point is to bring forward the important underlying values and assumptions of each paradigm. Readers must evaluate how these paradigms fit with their own leadership approach and the integration of ethics into that approach (see Table 3.1).

The transformational paradigm is presented as a leadership paradigm that holds great potential for incorporating values and ethics into the daily process of leading. However, first the transactional paradigm will be discussed. This paradigm contains some of the early, landmark theories of leadership and is still prevalent in organizations today.

### Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional theories are "*means-oriented*" theories (Burns, 1978). The focus of the theory is on the transaction, or the "means" to arrive at a particular goal or objective within an organization. A transactional mode of leadership is ". . . The reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers" (Burns, 1978, p. 425). Transactional leaders are focused on creating a bargain for individual interests who eventually go their separate ways, rather than the mutual effort of people who are interested in collective interests and have a common purpose.

The leader engages others (employees, agencies, or consumers) through *an exchange* of valued things—salary, rewards, perks, material resources, such as space or fixtures, furniture, status, promotional opportunities, incentives, and so forth—for

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**TABLE 3.1 Comparison of Transactional and Transformational Theories**

| | **Transactional** | **Transformational** |
|---|---|---|
| | *Means oriented based on exchange* | *Ends oriented based on transformational collective purposes through relationships* |
| *Assumptions* | Employees motivated by safety, security, and belonging | Employees motivated by growth, potential, self-actualization, moral purposes, ability to move to better selves |
| *Appeal* | Appeals to employee self-interest | Appeals to higher ideas and moral values |
| *Values* | Honesty, fairness, responsibility, honoring of commitments and reciprocity | End values of liberty, justice, equality, peace, and humanitarianism |
| *Goals* | Meets the individual goals of leaders and followers | Meets collective purposes and goals |
| *Leadership* | Discrete acts and behaviors | Visioning, relationship, communication of moral purpose, and critical values |
| *Problemsolving* | Found in leader | Focused on leaders and constituents; mutual responsibility |
| *Distribution of power* | "Power-over"—using rewards conceived and legitimate bases | "Power-with"—using expert, referent and inspirational bases |
| *Influence* | Unidirectional—leader to follower | Multidimensional—distributed among all in work environment |

accomplishment of tasks, responsibilities, or duties. The objective of the exchange or transaction is to get compliance (for example, from employees) to accomplish the objective through their particular job responsibilities and tasks. Each person recognizes the differences in the level of power and the attitudes of the other. Each has an individual purpose that is related to the other's by virtue of both purposes being advanced through the bargaining process. However, beyond this, the bargainers do not have an enduring purpose that binds the relationship.

An underlying assumption of this paradigm is that employees are motivated by *safety*, *security*, and *belonging*. The transaction appeals to employee self-interest (for example, pay and status is exchanged for work effort). The organization supplies the necessary environment and reward system in exchange for the employee's labor. The values relevant to an exchange are *honesty*, *fairness*, *responsibility*, *honoring of commitments*, and *reciprocity*, or what Burns (1978) refers to as "modal values." These are the values of "means" and ensure that transactional leading will work. This paradigm can contribute to human purpose by meeting the individual goals of leaders and followers (such as basic survival needs) that may then contribute to achieving goals that are higher in value (such as aesthetic needs).

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This paradigm can also appeal to fear, greed, hatred, and jealousy. These emotions are initiated through the individualistic and competitive assumptions of transactions. Transactions are made on the basis of self-interest and organizational interest. Reward systems such as incentives and "merit bonuses" can promote a sense of competition; employees work against each other for the limited rewards, rather than with each other for a common goal.

The functions of leadership within this paradigm take place through *discrete acts and behaviors*. The tasks, activities, and daily decisions become the stage for leading. Problemsolving in the organization is focused on the leader, rather than on the group. There is an overemphasis on power in this paradigm; leaders use reward, coercive, and legitimate bases of power to "perpetuate the status quo" (Petrick & Quinn, 1997, p. 219). Often total power or coercive power is associated with the leader. The leader exerts an authoritarian style of power—*power-over*—in relation to constituents. Often this power is vested through the authority assigned to the particular position of the leader in the organization. The use of influence is mostly one way from the leader to the constituent. Examples of transactional theories include trait theory, behavioral theories (for example, Blake and Mouton (1964), task and relationship; Hershey and Blanchard (1977), initiating structure and consideration), situational theories (Robert House (1971), path-goal theory; Fielder (1978), contingency theory), Weber's theory of bureaucracy (1947; 1978), and the decisionmaking theories of Herbert Simon (1976) and Vroom Yetton (1964) among many others. The characteristics and strategies of transactional theories are missing the dimensions of direction and ethics that are represented through a transformational approach.

## Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990) is a theory about ends rather than means. Transformational theories add the dimensions of *direction* (vision/purpose), *ethics/morality*, and *spirituality*. Transformational leadership has the capacity to ". . . shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers through the vital *teaching* role of leadership" (Burns, 1978, p. 425). An important underlying assumption of transforming leadership is that people can be united in the pursuit of higher goals. Realizing the goals results in significant change that represents the combined interests of leaders and constituents (Burns, 1978). Thus, a transformational definition of leadership provides for social change, implies a value for shared interests, and strives for a higher level of moral and ethical behavior within the organization. Important benefits result from this kind of leadership. The shared interests and collective vision support the decision process of the organization. Thus, ". . . the major decisions that move . . . organizations toward the greater good are those that create a new reality for both their clients and for the community they serve" (Nanus & Dobbs, 1999, p. 141). Employees, or constituents, also benefit from this new reality through the process of their work.

Transformational leadership focuses on engaging people through *relationship*; leaders and constituents, through the pursuit of goals, raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality. This engagement is directed toward *achieving a partic-*

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*ular end or purpose*, but the process of working toward the purpose also has the potential to achieve individual ends as well. This characteristic provides an *emancipatory* nature to leadership whereby there is the potential to change the status quo of individuals, the organization, and the community. The influence process occurs between individuals and also has an institutional level process, that is, mobilizing power to change social systems and reform institutions. On the institutional level, leaders are involved in shaping, expressing, and mediating conflict among groups of people, within and external to the organization.

This approach dismantles the traditional hierarchy. The focus is on the *empowerment* of people to generate meaning in their work, and through their work to find meaning in their lives. Leadership is a *process* rather than a series of discrete acts. It is a ". . . stream of evolving interrelationships in which leaders are continuously evoking motivational responses from followers and modifying their [the leader's] behavior as they meet responsiveness or resistance, in a ceaseless process of flow and counterflow" (Burns, 1978, p. 440). In this process of relationship, power and influence are mutual and reciprocal; it is "*power-with*" rather than "power-over." Leaders use expert and referent power to implement change. The leader promotes the development of self-efficacy and internalized shared values by constituents. The result is cooperative networks of empowered constituents that have an investment in moving the organization forward (Petrick & Quinn, 1997).

Transforming leadership can be used by anyone in the organization, in any type or level of position. Thus, all employees, consumers of service, and others have the potential to lead in addition to the formalized leadership. People can influence their peers, supervisors, or supervisees through the relational component that follows the formal and informal lines of communication. Transforming leadership occurs in the day-to-day acts of ordinary people, but is not an ordinary or common way of being. Influence is exercised from a base of inspiration, rather than influence based on legitimated authority, respect for rules, and the traditions of the bureaucracy.

Leaders appeal to higher ideas and moral values. There is the assumption that we can move from our everyday selves to better selves. The values relevant to transformation are what Burns (1978) refers to as "end-values." They include *liberty*, *justice*, *equality*, *peace*, and *humanitarianism*. These values appeal to a *collective* purpose: the common good. The collective, rather than individual focus, generates commitment to the purpose. As Burns (1978, p. 426) notes, "Leaders and followers are engaged in a common enterprise; they are dependent on each other, their fortunes rise and fall together, they share the results of planned change together."

Finally, transforming leadership has impact at the institutional level, according to Burns (1978). Here leading is concerned with shaping, expressing, and mediating conflict through organizational culture and empowerment. Organizational values are defined and integrated into ethical cultures. Power is mobilized to change systems and reform the institution. Leadership at the institutional level has the potential to create a higher level of morality at all levels of the organization, as a result of everyone's influence.

Transformational approaches include charismatic, servant, visionary, and feminist approaches, among others. Transformational theorists include Burns, John

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Gardner, Bert Nanus, Warren Bennis, Houzes and Posner, Tichy and Devanna, Marshall Sashkin, Sally Helgesen, Margaret Wheatley, and many others. The assumptions, values, and concepts discussed by these theorists are congruent with the elements identified as necessary for social work leadership in the new millennium.

## The Moral Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership provides a coherent framework for the elements of the social work definition of leadership mentioned earlier: vision, ethics, proactive processes, and empowerment. All of these elements are considered relevant and necessary to transformational leadership. These elements are discussed in relation to the dimensions of transformational leadership. The dimensions that follow include the dimensions of *direction*, *assessed vision*, *proactive processes*, and *empowerment*.

### The Direction Dimension of Leadership Vision and Voice

Think of a vision as a road map for something desired for the future. Vision for an organization provides the ability to portray some definite possibility that has not yet been achieved (Green, 1987). The vision "invites entrance" into the future through the committed efforts of leaders and constituents. A vision is congruent with the organizational mission; working toward accomplishing a vision is taking a step closer to the mission. The vision provides leaders and constituents with a purpose to work toward: a preferred future. The vision becomes a tool to incorporate the moral and social responsibility of the leader, constituents, and the organization. The moral ends that people commit to achieving become a valued and meaningful purpose for work. The personal commitment and ownership in the organization's vision transforms the experience of work from a job to a calling.

Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998) build on the importance of purpose in a discussion about community. The clarity about the purpose changes the nature of relationships.

> This type of community does not ask people to forfeit their freedom as a condition of belonging. It avoids the magnetic pull of proscribing behaviors and beliefs, it avoids becoming doctrinaire and dictatorial, it stays focused on what its members are trying to create together, and diversity flourishes within it. Belonging together is defined by a shared sense of purpose, not by shared beliefs about specific behaviors (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998, p. 15).

This kind of community in an organization is founded on a passion to achieve a moral purpose and celebrates all of the unique contributions that unite people in accomplishing the vision.

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## Vision as Fields of Energy

Vision can be thought of as a destination, but Wheatley (1999) suggests vision is more conceptually powerful when considered as a metaphor of "fields." Fields of energy enable leaders to convey ideas and values; fields provide ". . . conceptual controls . . . it is the *ideas of business* that are controlling, not some manager with authority" (Wheatley, 1999, p. 57). Leaders can use the field metaphor to express and model meaning, seeking in the process a deeper level of morality and integrity through words and acts. The metaphor of a radio beacon tower transmitting information throughout the organization ". . . stating, clarifying, reflecting, modeling, filling all of the spaces with the messages we care about" (Wheatley, 1999, p. 57) is a helpful illustration of fields. However, transmission of ideas cannot be a one-way process.

Physicist Evelyn Fox Keller argues that metaphors of vision reflect the traditional western notions of science (Helgesen, 1990, p. 223). The metaphors of "illumination," "to see the light," a "clear view," and so forth convey an abstract perspective that is one-dimensional. That is, seeing is a one-way process that does not acknowledge the relationship component of leading. Helgesen (1990) introduces the idea of "voice" as necessary to relationship and interconnectedness with others. Voice, as a metaphor of speaking and listening, brings in the contextual issues related to the complexity of human beings. Speaking and listening are basic elements of interaction. "What is heard always influences what is said" (Helgesen, 1990, p. 223). Therefore, although vision can define the ends or purposes of an organization, it is voice that is "the means for getting it across . . . through voice, value for connectedness is nurtured" (Helgesen, 1990, p. 223). The vision conveyed by leaders, then, can be conveyed through fields of ideas *and* provide for feedback and involvement of others through voice by *speaking* and *listening* (see Figure 3.1).

## Assessed Vision The Moral and Ethical Dimension of Leadership

Leadership from a transformational perspective is not value neutral. Instead, ethical considerations are intrinsic to the role and responsibility of the leader. Professional leaders have a contract with the public to successfully fulfill the mission of the organization according to the values and principles of their profession. For example, social work leaders must be able to envision and then enact the purpose and values of social work as intrinsic to their work. Professionals, to make sense of everyday practice, must understand the *point of the profession* (Green, 1987).

## The Point of the Profession

Assessed vision includes the point of a profession the ethical mandates that are embedded in the profession's values and mission. Professions that have ethical problems are reflecting a problem in conceptualizing the point of the profession. In fact, Green argues that the term, "professional ethics," is an oxymoron. The redundancy of the

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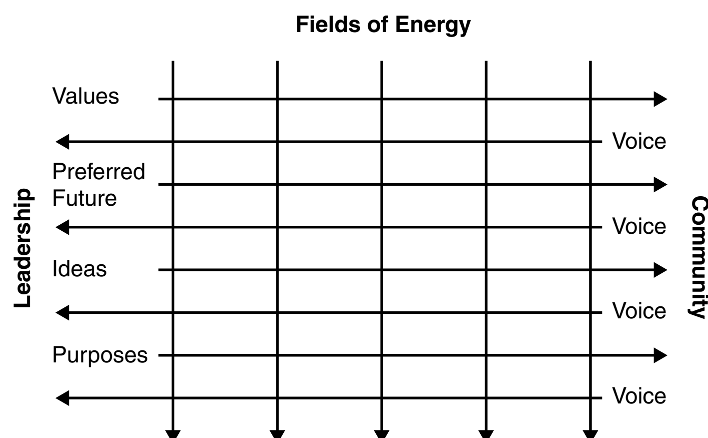


**FIGURE 3.1 Vision Through Fields of Energy**

phrase reflects a commitment to the "fallacy of displacement," a failure to see or understand the point of the profession. Professional education is focused on teaching the theories and skills of practice. However, the *point* of the skill(s) or application of a particular theory is sometimes not emphasized. For example, future managers and administrators are often taught the skills of budgeting and planning, but not *the point* of budgeting and planning, which is a principal means of making values concrete and distributing goods in an ethical manner.

To be a member of a profession implies a kind of practice that is not incidental, but essentially a moral enterprise. The norms and values of a profession must be derived from the moral purpose. Green (1987, p. 181) states ". . . (a profession) is always practiced in response to some fundamental human need or social good whose advancement is already a moral aim." The NASW Code of Ethics (1996, p. 1) puts forward the social work profession's moral aim in the form of a preamble that explicates the mission of social work:

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.
>
> Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients [individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities]. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice . . . Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems (see Appendix C).

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The previous mission is rooted in six core values that provide the foundation for the purpose of social work:

- Service
- Social justice
- Dignity and worth of the person
- Importance of human relationships
- Integrity
- Competence

The mission of the profession, combined with the previous values provides a moral framework for leadership in social service organizations. Leaders must conceptualize the *point* of their practice and draw from the mission and values of social work to develop and enact the moral dimension of their work. The visioning process and the metaphor of voice are part of the process of transmitting that conceptualization. However, the process of adhering to the mission and values of a profession is not as simple as it seems. Practice takes place within a social environment that has a profound effect on leadership and that effect is reciprocal.

## Proactive Processes of Ethical Leadership

Transformational leadership offers an approach that is centered on relationships with constituents. Membership in the organization as *community* becomes central to facilitating the moral development of individuals and the organization. In addition, the *processes of interaction* between leaders and constituents contain ethical impli cations. Leadership is always carried on within a community of some kind, and the leader is a member of that community. For leaders of human services, there are multiple communities (employees, consumers, and citizens) of membership. Memberships are a form of attachment that change over time. Some are temporary, and some are more durable. Membership in a community provides the context for creating a *conscience of community* (Green, 1987) and an *ethics of intimacy* (Toulmin, 1981).

***Conscience of Community.*** The ethics of organizations cannot be the responsibility of leaders by themselves. People from all levels and roles must take responsibility for ethical issues. People in the organizational community can develop "a way of thinking about organizations, leadership, and membership which respects and supports ethical relationships" (Ritchie, 1988, p. 181). The conscience of an organizational community starts with the *attachment* of membership. This attachment is always forged by social norms, which help us to determine the limits and constraints on behavior and to develop judgment about what is right or wrong and good or bad (Green, 1987). Social norms help individuals as *members* critically evaluate the behavior and processes of the community and themselves. Thus, social norms that develop as results of membership are critical to what Green calls "the conscience of membership." Leaders and constituents participate in creating, evaluating, and shaping the social

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norms of the organization toward increasingly more ethical behaviors, decisions, and policies (see Chapters 9 and 10 on organizational culture).

***Ethics of Intimacy.*** The work of leaders in creating community within the organization helps to facilitate moral relationships that can be based on *discretion*, rather than dictated by rules. Toulmin (1981) argues that there is a sharp difference between the *ethics of relationships with intimates* or associates and the ethics of strangers. Ethical dilemmas with people who are less known or out of our circle of intimates prompt a return to general ethical principles for guidance. Ethical issues with associates allow for reasonableness or responsiveness rather than the imposition of uniformity or equality. He describes a view posited by Tolstoy of the moral universe as "Only as far as a person can walk . . . by taking the train, a moral agent leaves the sphere of truly moral actions for a world of strangers" (Toulmin, 1981, p. 34). Working in a community of intimates provides for allowances for personalities, situations, and preferences; there is the potential for the use of discretion and judgment in ethical choices. Relationships between strangers require respect for moral and ethical rules, rather than discretion, in order to ensure equity and trust.

The leader's focus on developing community through the relationships of the organization provides an opportunity for the development of ethical cultures. In this developmental process, members are educated and informed about the nature of moral and ethical behaviors and decisions, which increases their moral development and the ethical climate of the organization. Further, leaders and constituents can model the balancing of conflicting values and situational characteristics through the use of judgment and discretion. The resulting empowerment of members and ethical impact on the organization reinforce the nature of community.

The postindustrial model of leadership developed by Rost (1991, 1993) builds on transformational leadership and emphasizes the *partnership* between leaders and followers. The focus of this approach rests on the choices of the community in pursuit of the common good. Rost argues that leaders must be attuned to ethical decisions, policies, and programs, but must also have an *ethical process* in doing so. An ethical process would include the following criteria. First, the influence that is exerted with constituents should be based on persuasion, not coercion, and should flow in both directions. The element of choice should be a part of participation, that is, people must be able to choose to participate. Finally, goals are created jointly through open discussion, with the opportunity for disagreement and debate. Rost (1991, p. 161) offers an ethical standard of the process of leadership as ". . . ethical if the people in the relationship (the leaders and followers) freely agree that the intended changes fairly reflect their mutual purposes." This standard represents an implied value of empowerment for leaders as a process and as an outcome for the organizational community.

## Empowerment

Empowerment as a concept has been elucidated and applied in almost every field from business to mental health and from social work to community psychology. Torre

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(1985, p. 180) defines empowerment as "... a process through which people become strong enough to participate within, share control of, and influence events and institutions affecting their lives . . . ." A philosophy of empowerment on the part of leadership can enhance the competence and contributions of employees and service consumers. More important, empowerment as a part of leadership has ethical implications.

The transformational influence process as noted in the section on proactive processes involves relationships among and between people. Most religious traditions support the ideal of love your neighbor (Kanungo & Mendoca, 1996). Love in this sense is the affirmation of other people and the ability to give the gift of the self. This love, through giving, is also self-affirming. Leaders affirm others through *promoting the growth and development* of constituents, and through creating working conditions and cultures that promote empowerment. Further, the nature of work contains an ethical imperative. Work is not just a way to support oneself and one's family. Work is . . .

> ". . . an essential means of self-development and the development of society—its science, technology, and culture. It is a free, conscious act of a human being and, as a consequence, work acquires its value from the dignity of the human being as a person. Work—its content and context—should, therefore, promote rather than damage the dignity of the human being (Kanungo & Mendoca, 1996, p. 70).

Transactional leadership may view work as a social exchange commodity, with the employer holding the right to treat employees as instruments of production or service. However, from an ethical perspective, the organization must treat employees as autonomous persons working for themselves, which is consistent with the dignity of human beings (Kanungo & Mendoca, 1996, p. 70).

Empowerment represents a psychological sense of oneself and a developmental process (Gutierrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). The process of empowerment integrates a sense of greater self-efficacy and competence, interpersonal and coping skills, and a capacity and willingness to act on individual or shared problems in the work environment.

Empowerment is both a relational and a motivational construct (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). From a business perspective, the relational view of empowerment is directly related to the delegation, or *sharing*, of formal authority in the organization. Transformational leadership incorporates *sharing power* as a core assumption for the leadership process, but empowerment is more than delegating authority and decisionmaking opportunities to constituents. Empowerment can only happen through full *participation and self-determination*. The techniques of delegating power are not enough. The psychological mechanisms that underlie empowerment are not included in this approach (Kanungo & Mendoca, 1996).

Thinking about empowerment as a motivational construct allows leaders to promote the benefits to employees and consumers of service of a sense of *self-efficacy*, or a perception that they can adequately cope with the demands of their work environment. In addition, individuals are motivated to be self-determining, that is, to have the self-efficacy to cope with the demands of the workplace and to experience the control

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and influence that is possible through choice. The leader's role is to create the conditions necessary to enable and enhance employees' and consumers' opportunities for self-efficacy and self-determination through the structures and processes of the organization (see Chapters 9, 10, and 11).

Empowerment will flow from the values and norms of the organizational culture if the values and norms are congruent with empowerment. Values such as self-determination, collaboration instead of competition, excellence in performance, nondiscrimination, and participation all are consistent with the empowerment of constituents. The most powerful mechanism for leaders to use in empowering constituents is their own *consciousness*, an awareness of the differences in the distribution of power and a heightened understanding of the processes necessary to promote empowerment. The leader's responsibility to shape an organization that is empowering has moral implications. The following discussion highlights some other moral responsibilities for leaders.

## The Moral Responsibilities of Leadership

Leaders have responsibilities as a result of their actions. Leaders make decisions and take actions that result in change. Leadership, whether from formal authority or from charismatic or spontaneous actions at any level or role, makes a difference in the lives of others in relation to benefits and harm. The moral responsibilities discussed in the following sections (see Figure 3.2) are congruent with a transformational approach to leadership. These discussions provide a perspective for leaders about the broad ethical responsibilities of leadership.

### Responsibility to Constituents

Gardner (1990) in his examination of leadership today argues that there is a moral dimension of leadership that is related to the responsibility to constituents. He said, "We believe, with Immanuel Kant, that individuals should be treated as ends in themselves, not as a means to the leader's end, not as objects to be manipulated" (Gardner, 1990, p. 73). The responsibility to constituents is characterized by the objectives of a leader in four areas: the release of human possibilities, shared purposes of individuals and group, regeneration of values, and encouragement of individual initiative and responsibility.

***The Release of Human Possibilities.*** The *release of human possibilities*, according to Gardner (1990), is directly connected to the fulfillment of possibilities. The release of human possibilities is the greatest asset to society and one of the most important and fundamental of leadership goals. Human beings bring with them a myriad of unsuspected strengths and capacities, undiscovered gifts, and infinite talent and energy to

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**Responsibility to constituents**
- Release of human possibilities
- Shared purposes of individuals and groups
- Regeneration of values
- Encouragement of individual initiative and responsibility

**Sacrifice**
- Dancing with pain and injury
- Gravity of duty above self-interest

**Voices of conscience**
- Moral imagination and memory
- Member of organizational community
- Nurture voices of conscience through culture and structure
- Critical imagination

**Craft and competence**
- Required expertise, training, and abilities to lead
- Attention to competence of others

**Proactive processes of leadership**
- Organization as community
- Process of interaction
- Conscience of community
- Ethics of intimacy
- Ethical process

**Empowerment**
- Love your neighbor
- Promote growth and development
- Share authority
- Participation and self-determination of constituents
- Consciousness of conditions to promote empowerment

**FIGURE 3.2 Moral Responsibility of Leadership**

invest in the enactment of a meaningful purpose. Often, individuals have been stymied by a lack of opportunity or challenge or their capacities have been hidden by earlier defeats. Gardner (1990, p. 74) argues this:

> It is a matter of self-interest for every society to remove obstacles to human growth and performance. The battles we wage against physical and mental illness, prejudice, ignorance and poverty are not just exercises in compassion. They are battles for the release of human talent and energy.

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This objective conveys an attitude on the part of leaders to promote and enhance personal growth, development, and learning on the part of constituents: employees, consumers of service, and community citizens.

***Shared Purposes of Individuals and Groups.*** The *shared purposes of individuals and groups* are also the moral responsibility of leaders. People become fully who they are in relationship with others. Even as individuals discover hidden talents and are motivated to use them, there is the necessity of belonging and finding support within a group. As Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1999, p. 62) note, "Ethics is how we behave when we decide we belong together." Individuals who involve themselves in a group, through the nature of their work, have an investment in the nature of the group. The leader has an important responsibility to nurture the individual and group relationships and the ethical nature of those relationships. In order to develop ethical behaviors among people, agreements have to be made between people. As Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers say, ". . . Behaviors are rooted in our agreements" (1999, p. 63). The implicit and explicit norms and values—the agreements—that develop in an organization's culture are the embodiment of this moral responsibility (discussed further in Chapters 9 and 10).

***Regeneration of Values.*** The *regeneration of values* is a result of the ". . . mysterious community-building impulse of the species" (Gardner, 1990, p. 78). Human beings have been in the process of creating and re-creating value systems over time. These value systems are made up of norms and standards, myths, legends, shared symbols, and shared assumptions. Many of these values, norms, and standards become a function of law or culture, which helps to channel human talent and energy toward a common good, rather than toward evil purposes. Gardner argues that the power of ideas in human conduct is basic, ". . . to keep alive values that are not so easy to embed in laws . . ." (1990, p. 77). Leaders are responsible for promoting values, such as moral responsibility, care for others, celebration of differentness, mutual respect, honor, and integrity. These are the values that are critical to multiculturalism, empowerment, and community building. In turn, leaders must also make room for dissent; they must provide for the process of value generation through ". . . the scene of conflict . . . ," such that dissensus and dialogue lead to consensus and agreement (Gardner, 1990, p. 77).

Value regeneration also is important in regard to the organization's contribution to public philosophies (Jennings, Callahan, & Wolf, 1987). Leaders and organizations participate in the public sphere, and the values and actions of leaders and organizations become part of the moral discourse of society. Professional values become a part of the public debate and contribute to the necessary process of a society determining its character. In particular, human service leaders help to shape the culture in regard to how society thinks about social problems and what are necessary solutions. As Jennings, Callahan, and Wolf, 1987, p. 10) noted in an article on the public duties of

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the professions, "... today's moral aspirations may become tomorrow's expectations, and society's demands." Frederick Reamer, a well-known social work ethicist, responded in the same article that there was a decline in the profession's advocacy of public welfare issues in favor of an emphasis on professionalism, licensure, and insurance coverage. Reamer (1987, p. 15) recommends a renewal of the promotion of the public good by social work, "Both the public and private sectors must reawaken their commitment to the concept of [public] welfare, viewed in its most noble form." This is a regeneration of values.

***Individual Initiative and Responsibility.*** Constituents must take *individual initiative and responsibility* in order to participate in the creation of ethical purposes, work cultures, and services to clients. Through this dimension, leaders can "bring alive" the interest and willingness of constituents to share the leadership task. Leaders' motivation and ability to nurture active involvement of others provide for a stimulating work environment and the development of constituents' sense of responsibility for the goals and mission of the organization. This moral dimension is directly related to the distribution of power in an organization, and the level of participation that is possible for constituents (see discussions in Chapters 4, 8, and 11).

Active constituents—those who are involved in the decision processes and feel responsibility for the results of decisions—help to prevent an abuse of power in the organization. Secrecy is reduced, while the burden of difficult ethical dilemmas is shared. Also, when people are informed of relevant information and participate in the decision, they are invested in the results. Active constituents are the safety valve for unethical practices. Through participation they can give feedback and feel the responsibility to do so. Gardner (1990, p. 79) argues the following:

> Unrelenting autocracy down the chain of command undermines initiative. It says by implication that your responsibility is not to identify problems beyond those implicit in your orders, not to think about solutions . . . The disclaimer in the Navy used to be, 'it didn't happen on my watch.' Followers who are passively awaiting orders have lost much of their capacity to be of help.

Leaders, according to Gardner (1990), improve the vitality of the organization through inviting participation and initiative. Delegation of authority and responsibility, valuing individual uniqueness and capacity, and respecting constituents through consulting and listening are just a few of the mechanisms that nurture initiative.

The development of individual initiative contributes to the empowerment of all constituents, employees and consumers of service. Participation in decisions, taking action, providing critical feedback, and contributing to the well-being of the organization and public good are factors that support a process of empowerment (Gutirrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). Further, human service organizations are often a haven for the disenfranchised and powerless. Leaders who facilitate constituents to conceive of

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themselves as actors rather than victims provide an opportunity for them to be change agents in their communities (Nanus & Dobbs, 1999).

## Attributes and Characteristics for Ethical Leadership

The arrival of charismatic leaders on the heels of the great man theory promotes the myth that there are particular characteristics a person must be born with or develop in order to lead. Ethical leadership does not require a particular personality, gender, or bent; it does require that a person be willing to sacrifice, act as the voice of conscience, and have the craft and competence to do the job.

### Sacrifice

The leader's willingness and ability to sacrifice provides the most clear and evident moral voice to constituents. Facing and resolving ethical dilemmas from the position of leadership is often painful and uncomfortable. Ritchie (1988, p. 181) uses the metaphor of the dancer who ". . . always dances with pain, and usually with injury . . . the burden of resolving a variety of paradoxical demands and choosing defensible strategies will always be painful if one is really sensitive to the ethical considerations in organizational life." Leaders who hold responsibility for complex issues and mul-tiple constituencies have to manage with pain and sometimes injury.

Leaders are frequently challenged by dilemmas that position duty or obligation against their own self-interest. It is in this conflict that the "gravity of duty" is most prominent (Green, 1987). Leaders must grapple with the question, "Under what conditions would I find it imperative to resign, rather than participate in an unethical practice or situation?" In a study on the ethical decisions of social work administrators and managers (Manning, 1990), participants discussed the bottom line as the place where they would give up their position over the ethical quandary in question. One administrator, in response to decisions about placement of clients on the basis of funding instead of need, said, "I sort of got my high horse up and said, 'hey, if you're going to make my decisions for me, then I can't work here'" (Manning, 1990, p. 269). This leader reported a positive response to her willingness to sacrifice her own employment. Her superiors acquiesced and respected her ethical judgment. A nursing professor, in her address to graduating master's students, reminds them, "there is no shame in being fired or resigning for ethical reasons" (Gregg, 1985). The role modeling that results from sacrifice in the name of duty is a powerful indicator of the moral message being communicated throughout the organization. The leader articulates and represents the moral responsibility that must be taken, even in the face of potential personal and financial loss.

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## Voice of Conscience

The work of the leader in communicating a moral vision is located in a developmental process for the organization and constituents. Green (1987) discusses the importance of *social memory*. Social memory is made up of *moral imagination* and *memory*. The interdependence of the two composes the voices of conscience for the organization. Memory is critical to moral leadership because leadership is rooted in the history of the organization. Change results from examining the traditions, expressing dissatisfaction with the traditions, and creating new traditions. Therefore, critique of "what is" or "what has been" is always an important factor in change. However, it is difficult to criticize the current state of affairs without standing somewhere (see Figure 3.3). The voice of conscience must be as a member of the organizational community, not as an outsider. Therefore, although the critical observer, the voice for moral change, may speak out against the ". . . lived life of the community, they still speak always from within it" (Green, 1987). The leader or constituents who want to initiate moral leadership must be viewed as an insider. Thus, it is especially important to keep close ties with all constituents and with the work of the organization. Distance creates an outsider status that reduces the power to critique and lead.

The leader's moral responsibility is to nurture, through relationships, organizational culture and structures. The culture and architecture hold the potential of the organization to develop the voices of conscience. The work of Hannah Arendt (1963, 1978), a Jewish zionist political philosopher, and Paul Tillich (1952), a Lutheran theologian and philosopher are useful here. Arendt argues the importance of thinking in order to combat the banality of evil. She argues that the banality of evil is a result of moral thoughtlessness; we simply do not think about our specific actions in terms of the moral consequences. She developed an orientation that includes three concepts: 1) the importance of developing a habit of independent thinking and judgment, 2) the

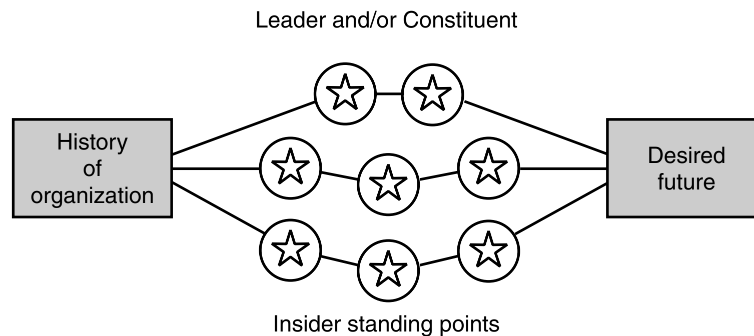


**FIGURE 3.3 Voice of Conscience**

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need to understand and resist individual and organizational phenomena that is evil, and 3) the importance of acting civically, as a citizen with others. The task of leaders and constituents is to be thinkers for the organization. Each must not only judge how to act, but also persuade each other on the best moral course of action. Arendt (1978) argues that thinking is an end in itself, not just for the rational knowledge that results, but for the meaning that can be inferred about the moral nature of the situation. As leaders and constituents think and shape each other, the moral functioning of everyone is *transformed*.

Tillich (1952) adds to this conceptualization by adding the dimension of courage. The courage to be authentic to oneself is the ability to follow one's own reason and to stand up to irrational authority, whether it is a superior or the authority of a group. There is a danger that, in order to be a part of the larger group, there can be a loss of self, but we also have to have the courage to be a part of the larger community (Tillich, 1952). Participation in the group is part of how the self is affirmed. Thus, the threat of exclusion from the group, because of expressing the voice of conscience, can impair both the leaders' and constituents' expression of conscience.

The development of opportunities for voices of conscience rests, then, on the ability of individuals to resist the organization's pressure to act or be immoral. It also rests on the ability of constituents and leaders to act as "institution citizen," that is, the ability to be in loyal opposition to the organization for moral purposes (Arendt, 1963). Loyal opposition is acting in the best interests of the organization from the individual's moral point of view, which helps to promote the visualizing of a moral future. In turn, the vision of a moral future requires *critical imagination*.

*Critical imagination* is the ability to see beyond the present into the future (Green, 1987). In the earlier discussion about vision, the future is presented as a preferred future. The criticism of the present allows both leaders and constituents to consider new beginnings of an ethical and moral nature that invite all in the organizational community to participate in creating a better moral culture and purpose.

## Craft and Competence

Ethical leaders are also competent leaders. It is readily apparent from clinical practice that it is unethical to practice outside of a person's *expertise*, *training*, and *abilities*. The same can be said for the skills and expertise needed for leadership in organizations. Green (1987, p. 182) notes that the ethics of leadership are not fundamentally drawn from technical competence, but ethical leadership: ". . . cannot be exercised without it . . . Only in the modern world do we think excellence in such practical matters as planning, motivating, and managing budgets are not moral demands." The ancient Greek philosophers agreed with this contemporary idea; they taught that a moral life is a life of skill. Leaders, then, who are also administrators and managers, have a variety of complex skills and specialized knowledge that are necessary to be moral leaders.

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There are two consequences to the mistaken assumption that inept people are not immoral (Green, 1987). First, if we believe that technical knowledge and expertise are not moral demands, competence is easy to ignore as a requirement of ethical leadership. Conversely, when management and technical skill are the only important considerations, leadership is viewed as having little to do with ethics. It is easy to see that moral competence requires both technical knowledge and expertise and ethical knowledge and expertise. Leaders must acquire both as an intentional building of competence and craft.

Attention to *the competence of others* is also part of a leader's commitment to craft. It is necessary to develop a "conscience of craft" that sets the expectation for excellence in the work of others (Green, 1987). This is especially important in human services because the activities take place through relationships with others and have profound impacts on the recipient of services. The leader consciously communicates an unwillingness to accept inept or incompetent performance from constituents in the organization. The work with constituents through the relationships and interactions of the organizational community influences leaders and constituents to develop a consciousness of craft in the organization.

## Conclusion

This chapter introduced the reader to the need for ethical leadership, particularly in human service organizations. Leadership was defined, and a social work definition of leadership was presented as a lens for the book that is congruent with the transformational leadership paradigm. Two paradigms of leadership—transactional and transformational—were discussed. Transformational leadership was recommended as the approach most congruent with the moral and ethical imperatives of leadership and with social work. The moral dimensions of leadership—direction, ethics, proactive processes, and empowerment—were brought forward for consideration. A conceptual framework for leadership should include more than particular theories. The moral responsibilities of leadership were examined, as well as several important characteristics that are necessary to be a moral leader.

The transformational approach is a framework to guide the leadership of individuals. This approach emphasizes empowerment and participation of constituents. However, not all leaders share power, but power is at the heart of ethical and unethical actions and behaviors, particularly for people in leadership positions. The next chapter takes a look at the use and abuse of power in leadership.

## QUESTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

1. Conceptualize your own leadership approach. How do the transactional and transformational paradigms apply to your leadership? In what way are morality and ethics embedded in your leadership approach?

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- What would you add?
- What would you change?

2. Think about moral vision and the moral responsibilities of leadership. Develop a moral vision for your leadership and your work. How are the mission and values of social work (or your profession) enacted through your vision?

3. Assess your actions and attributes as a leader from the perspectives of sacrifice, craft and competence, and as a voice of conscience for others. What attributes should be strengthened?

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