Observations on Leadership, Problem Solving, and Preferred Futures of Universities

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A focus on enrollments, rankings, uncertain budgets, and branding efforts to operate universities could have serious implications for discussions of sustainable solutions to complex problems and the decision-making processes of leaders. The Authentic Leadership Model for framing ill-defined problems in higher education is posited to improve the process of ethical problem solving and the creation of sustainable solutions to complex problems faced by university leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Use of a business model to frame thinking about running universities is so engrained in our culture that a widespread acceptance of the idea that a university is a business has occurred. The acceptance of this idea has reached the status of being a non-conscious, permanent part of our thinking about universities. The Authentic Leadership Model by Robert Terry (2001) offers leaders a way to frame solutions to difficult problems by articulating decisions through a lens of mutual goals and shared values of the academy.

DEFINING A PROBLEM

People become cognizant of problems when a need motivates people to search for a solution to eliminate discrepancies (Arlin, 1989). Leaders lead people to a solution to the problem. Consequently, an unknown cause of a problem presents a tremendous opportunity for leadership. As shown in Figure 1, a problem is a deviation from SHOULD for which there is CAUSE, and the cause is UNKNOWN (Kepner & Tregoe, 1981, p. 37).

Figure 1. Definition of a Problem Illustrated (See Kepner & Tregoe, 1981)

STRUCTURE OF A PROBLEM

Performance   Performance
SHOULD

Change

Deviation

Performance
ACTUAL

Before   Now

Adapted from Kepner, C., & Tregoe, B. (1981). The new rational manager.
Princeton, NJ: Kepner-Tregoe, Inc., p. 37.

A critical attribute of problem solving is that the solution to the problem is not readily apparent in the problem, so the problem solver must identify the nature of the problem and a process for arriving at an acceptable solution. The problem-solving process depends upon the problem solver's understanding of the problem and the goal. The solution to the problem represents the leadership goal.

General problems are ill-defined or well-defined. Ill-defined problems are domain- and context-dependent (Bransford, 1994), whereas well-defined problems usually involve skills and solutions suitable to most classroom content domains (e.g., statistics). Solving ill-defined problems may necessitate specific skills or require a different way to frame solutions to problems (Jonassen, 2000). Well-defined problems, such as most problems taught in classroom settings, may have limited transferability to solving ill-defined problems in the academy.

Examples of ill-defined problems found in the real world of universities include critical incidents such as bullying and prejudice (Puncochar, Choi, Khan, & Strom, 2003) and emergent dilemmas such as pollution (Jonassen, 1997). Information needed to solve ill-defined problems is not contained in the problem statement (Chi & Glaser, 1985). Ill-defined problems have unknown problem elements and an associated lack of confidence in the known elements (Wood, 1983), domain knowledge (Alexander, 2010), undefined goals and unstated constraints (Voss, 1988), and possess multiple solutions, solution paths, or no solution at all (Kitchner, 1983). Typically, no consensual agreement is available for any single solution to an ill-defined problem.

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP MODEL

The Authentic Leadership Model (Terry, 1974; Terry, 1993; Terry & Cleveland, 2001) provides a leadership framework for human action involved with achieving solutions to ill-defined problems. According to Terry (1993), leadership is a type of action that has the potential to convey enormous consequences. Dr. Terry posits the central organizing foundational principle of effective leadership is authenticity, which takes into consideration
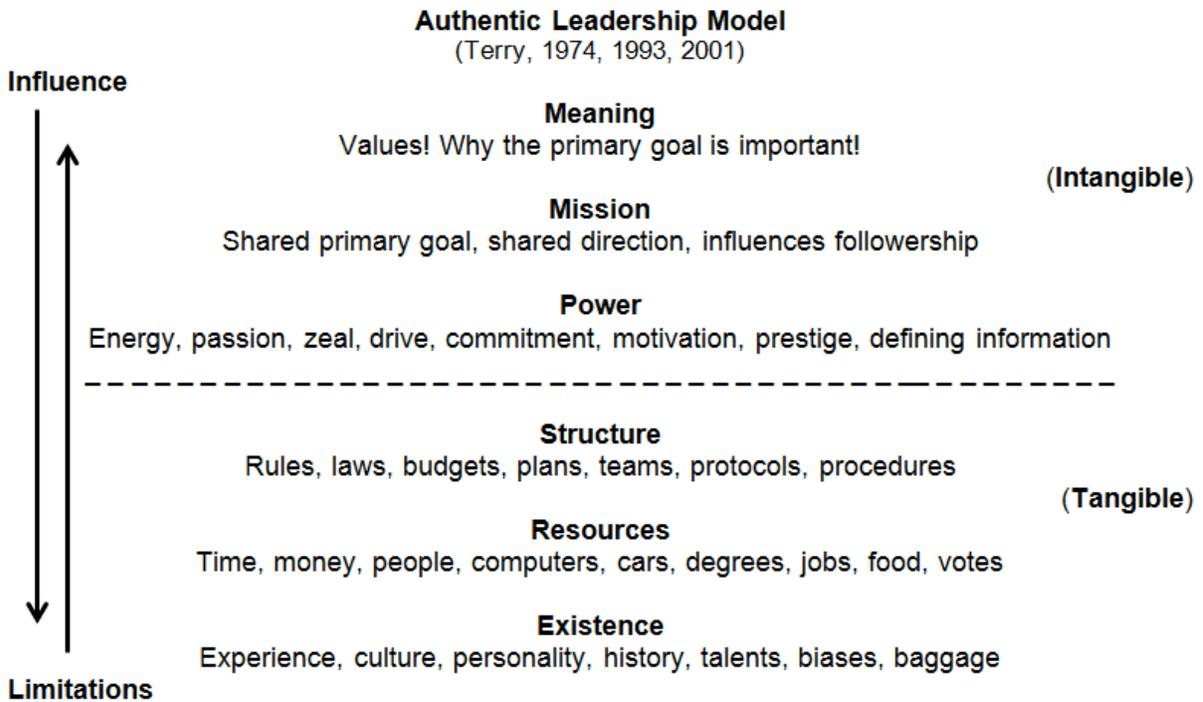
courage, vision, and ethics. His model offers a tool for selecting strategic actions necessary to achieve sustainable solutions to ill-defined problems in universities.

The Authentic Leadership Model has six hierarchical dimensions that provide a framework for leadership actions.

Meaning	Values, ethics, principles, why people maintain the mission
Mission	Primary goal, stated direction, purposes, influences followership
Power	Energy, commitment, influence, conflict, morale, defining information
Structure	Rules, laws, plans, policies, budgets, bureaucratic processes, schedules
Resources	Materials, time, food, information, water, land, votes, people, assets, supplies
Existence	Basis of knowledge, culture, history, limitations, possibilities, biases, capabilities

According to the model, leadership has influence from the top down and limitations from the bottom up. The significant concept of the model is that, wherever people frame an issue, the solution to the problem lies at the next level above or higher, and people typically and mistakenly look for solutions at the next level below or lower. When leaders attend to all six levels of the model, the result is a sense of fulfillment with the leadership role *and* follower satisfaction (Terry & Cleveland, 2001). According to the model, an effective leader would show competence at all six levels and would emphasize the top two levels for moving people toward a specific goal. Figure 2 depicts a schematic drawing of the model for framing ill-defined problems.

Figure 2. Authentic Leadership Model Adapted for Hierarchical Problem Solving by the Author

Authentic Leadership Model
(Terry, 1974, 1993, 2001)

Influence

Meaning
Values! Why the primary goal is important!

(Intangible)

Mission
Shared primary goal, shared direction, influences followership

Power
Energy, passion, zeal, drive, commitment, motivation, prestige, defining information

- -

Structure
Rules, laws, budgets, plans, teams, protocols, procedures

(Tangible)

Resources
Time, money, people, computers, cars, degrees, jobs, food, votes

Existence
Experience, culture, personality, history, talents, biases, baggage

Limitations

Key. Wherever people frame the issue, the solution to the problem lies at the next level above or higher, and people typically and mistakenly look for solutions at the next level below or lower.

As the first of two examples, consider a university lecture where students lead a walkout against a guest speaker invited to the class by the instructor. The Department Head, Grievance Officer, and instructor become involved and try to suggest solutions to the problem. Assume their first solutions typically and mistakenly are at the lower levels of the Authentic Leadership Model, and in the style of fundamental attribution errors (Ross, 1977) hold the instructor, guest speaker, or students accountable for the problem. Suggested solutions might include disciplinary action for the students, monitoring the instructor's teaching plans, hiring a different instructor, requiring permission for guest speakers, and obtaining help from academic counselors for the students.

According to the Authentic Leadership Model, leadership frames issues and management solves problems. The issue is at the level of Power. The leader should begin a discussion at the levels of Mission and Meaning before jumping to solutions. For example, "What values do persons involved in the situation share?" "What common goal does everyone have?" "What is lost without collaborating with shared values and goals?" The leader must act authentically and use the higher levels of the Authentic Leadership Model to build core competencies, affirm a shared identity of the problem, and create ownership before the leader proposes solutions.

As the second of two examples, consider using the Authentic Leadership Model as a framework for understanding branding of universities through lenses provided by the various levels of the model. A brand should describe a university's vision (Mission), reveal a promise to customers (students and parents) about a university's services (Structure) and assets (Resources), differentiate one university from another (Existence), and include established perceptions of the university (Existence). At the level of Structure, debates about branding include procedures for obtaining a competitive edge in the market, such as ranking colleges by acceptance rates or according to students' desirability to select an acceptance from one institution over another (Hoover, 2013). At the level of Resources, branding discussions include numbers of expected high school graduates, completed applications for admission, financial aid, tax dollars, donors, expenses, and tuition. Explication of various ideologies associated with branding is an essential starting point for solving the ill-defined problem of marketing a university. A leader must articulate the brand as a shared value (Meaning) and necessary direction (Mission) of the university before a leader can attract sufficient followership toward a single concept of branding. Leadership influences people's energies (Power) toward a shared direction (Mission), whereas the lack of leadership can result in a cacophonous environment filled with a multitude of divergent and perhaps conflicting parochial concerns.

Leaders would start a discussion with questions related to the top two categories of the Authentic Leadership Model, as depicted in Figure 3, and would continue to frame questions at each level of the model. Use of all six levels of the Authentic Leadership Model suggests a higher likelihood of realizing the attainment of a shared solution to ill-defined problems.

Figure 3. Prospective Questions for Hierarchical Problem Solving at the Six Levels of the Authentic Leadership Model (Terry, 1990, 1993, 2001)

    Meaning: **Values, Ideals, Ethics**
       _____ Are values associated with the goal shared by a critical mass?
       _____ Are people understanding why the primary goal is ideal?

    Mission: **Moving People toward the Primary Goal**
       _____ Are people working collaboratively to accomplish the goal?

    Power: **Action, Energy, Effort, Apathy, Motivation, Conflict**
       _____ Are people engaged enthusiastically and proactively in work toward the primary
       goal (or are people engaged in conflicting individual or group goals)?

    Structure: **Procedures, Rules, Plans, Curricula, Methods, Protocols, Budgets**
       _____ Are rules and interactions fair and just?
       _____ Are methods impartial to diverse perspectives?

    Resources: **Personnel, Students, Alumni, Technologies, Collections, Time, Money**
       _____ Are personnel and resources accurate and equitably available to everyone?

    Existence: **History, Experience, Talents, Biases**
       _____ Do I identify with *each* person and ask, "How would I feel in this situation?"
       _____ Is talent congruent with institutional ideals and values?

       Numerous issues can create ineffective problem solving by leaders who face ill-defined problems (e.g., the leadership candidate pool, a relative lack of coherence between training of university leaders and the problems they face, and university culture). At the outset, one should not expect inexperienced leaders to advocate strongly for the maintenance of shared values, although some leaders emerge with a values-advocacy platform (e.g., a new university president who charges a university-wide committee to place diversity as a core value of the university). Because of limited leadership experience and training, most new university leaders would reflect a tendency to seek solutions to ill-defined problems at the lower three categories of the Authentic Leadership Model. Solutions at the lower three categories are tangible, ordinary, and typical of discussions (e.g., suggestions for resource allocation and structural changes). Over time, experienced leaders should reflect wisdom in their discussions of solutions by addressing the upper two levels of the model.

       The leadership question university leaders should ask when faced with ill-defined problems is, "What is *really* going on here?" (Terry, 1994). The question helps leaders assess what *really* needs to happen when solving complex university problems and allows leaders to frame discussions of problems using multiple levels of the model, rather than relying only on customary structural and resource levels to frame solutions to problems.

       The choice of models employed by leaders to frame ill-defined problems affects the quality and effectiveness of solutions. Any difference between models (e.g., a business model and the Authentic Leadership Model) is *not* with their use of evidence and evidence-based methodologies (Faust, 2000, pp. 478-479), but is rather a difference of focus when solving ill-

defined problems. For example, a typical business model emphasizes an economic focus with business plans and resource sheets to help solve ill-defined problems. The Authentic Leadership Model emphasizes mutual goals, shared values, and common ideals to influence followership to help solve ill-defined problems.

When leaders face ill-defined problems, uncertain knowledge, and uncertain followership, leaders must articulate mutual values and shared purposes before promoting solutions to ill-defined problems. Leaders who use the Authentic Leadership Model as a problem-solving framework would influence a discussion of complicated issues by drawing people's attention to collectively shared values and urging collaborative efforts to achieve mutually shared goals.

According to the Authentic Leadership Model, the university's mission is limited from the bottom up, so leaders must articulate a university's intangible values to channel the energies of the university community toward sustainable solutions to complex problems. A typical business model by its nature focuses on solutions at the lower levels of the model. These solutions are *not* sustainable without constant vigilance and resources. When the six levels of the Authentic Leadership Model work synergistically, universities are posited to be more likely to achieve sustainable solutions to ill-defined problems.

THEORETICAL IMPORTANCE

The Authentic Leadership Model appears to show great promise as a leadership development tool to increase effective leadership behaviors in universities. Future research on the model could examine whether training in the Authentic Leadership Model would promote self-perceptions and behaviors of university leaders as authentic leaders with a clear focus on ideals and values, rather than a business focus on structure and resource topics. Such training might include practice discussing and suggesting solutions to university case studies and critical incidents. Leaders trained to use the Authentic Leadership Model should show a tendency to employ the upper two dimensions of the Authentic Leadership Model. Conversely, university leaders without leadership training in the Authentic Leadership Model should show a tendency to focus on the lower three categories of the model. The Authentic Leadership Model should provide university administrators and institutional researchers with an effective leadership tool to keep a focus on values and ideals when responding as effective leaders to ill-defined problems of universities.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The Authentic Leadership Model developed by Robert Terry's (1993) is posited to serve as a hierarchical problem-solving model to generate sustainable high quality solutions to ill-defined problems. When an individual identifies a solution at the lower levels of Existence, Resources, or Structure, a solution likely would reflect existing frameworks, measurable entities, laws, or rules. When an individual uses the higher levels of Mission and Meaning on the model, a solution likely would become more collaborative, sustainable, and integrative with the university's values and ideals.

Operational use of all six levels of the Authentic Leadership Model situates hierarchical problem solving as a leadership tool. The three lower levels of the model (Existence, Resources, and Structure) are concerned with concrete experiences, materials, and

laws, and usually benefit individual or group concerns. The middle level (Power) is concerned with influence and energy to affect an outcome. The top two levels (Mission and Meaning) are concerned with shared values and ideals that tend to benefit the entirety rather than an individual or one group and tend to be sustainable (e.g., education of the citizenry and respect for human dignity and cultures). To achieve preferred futures envisioned by university leaders, efforts to solve ill-defined problems should begin with a focus on shared values and the shared primary goal of the academy.

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