



Call for Papers

Special Issue on Philosophical Approaches to Leadership Ethics

Deadline for submissions: March 15, 2016

Guest Editors

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Overview

The field of business ethics has been evolving for decades “concurrent with and supportive of an era of rampant corporate power, greed, violence, scandal and mistrust” (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015, p.160). It is commonplace to read laments about the problems of ethics in the contemporary world. The proliferation of scandals concerning unethical behaviour in many sectors of society including business, government, sports, and even religious bodies makes it seem like we are in a state of crisis. In the early days of business ethics, scholars debated about whether a corporation could have a conscience (French, 1995, Goodpaster & Matthews, 1982). The more recent work on, CSR is, by its very name, about corporate social responsibility. Questions about moral agency of the firm and the individual have always been a part of business ethics (Bowie, 1994). Yet, the heart of many ethical problems in business is not corporation per se but the men and women who run them. This is why it is surprising that there is still little scholarly work on the ethics of leadership.

In leadership studies the ethical aspects of leadership have been explicit in some theories such as transforming leadership (Burns 1978), or in other works about the moral mistakes of leaders (Price, 2005) and the relationship between ethics and effectiveness (Ciulla 1995, 2011). In other theories such as Bass’ authentic transformational leadership (Bass and Steidlmeier, 2004) and authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), theorists assert that their models of leadership should be ethical but do not really offer much detail on what this would mean. More recently, the work of Brown, Treviño, Harrison (2005) on ‘ethical leadership’ has stimulated interest in ethics and leadership and inspired an extraordinary number of similar studies. Through empirical research they have used their ‘ethical leadership’ construct to show how leaders who are rated as ethical correlate with a range of positive outcomes for organizations, including ethical decision-making, pro-social behaviour, and follower commitment (Brown and Trevino, 2006). The ‘ethical leadership’ construct uses 10 questions to measure followers’ perceptions of a leader’s ethics. These questions do not (and probably were not intended to) constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for a leader to be ethical. While such studies have a role to play in the literature, they do not treat the many ethical challenges and issues related to leaders and leadership.

The Brown, et. al construct has become so dominant among management researchers that the words ‘ethical leadership’ often refers to their construct rather than the general idea. Calling the study of ethics and leadership “ethical leadership” is problematic because understanding the ethics of leadership is also about unethical leadership – note that we do not call the study of ethics in business ‘ethical business’. The ethical problems of leaders often stem from abuse of power, excessive privileges, ego, and greed. The ethical challenges of leadership include familiar philosophic issues such as the dirty hands problem and moral luck, questions

about agency, accountability, public and private morality, honesty and transparency, the legitimate use of power, the rights and responsibilities of followers, and perhaps a few less familiar ones such as problematizing conventional conceptions of ethics and challenging the masculine character of some leadership discourses and practices. These kinds of questions are familiar to philosophers, critical theorists and business ethicists but they have not been fully explored in relation to leaders in organizations.

When the field of business ethics started, most of the literature was by philosophers. As the business ethics developed, it was enriched by empirical research and literature from other disciplines. In Leadership Ethics, most of the literature comes from management and the social sciences. Because of the constraints of doing empirical research and the disciplinary backgrounds of the researchers, the ideas about ethics are often not fully developed or discussed. To address the need for more philosophic literature on ethics and leadership, this special issue will give priority to philosophical and critical papers that examine or offer new insights into the ethics of leaders and leadership and/or the leadership literature.

This special issue welcomes papers on all aspects of ethics and leadership that fall under the umbrella of leadership ethics. Like business ethics, leadership ethics refers to a field of study that includes all empirical, philosophic, and interdisciplinary work on leadership and ethics (Ciulla, Uhl-Bien & Werhane, 2013). Papers may be about the ethics of leaders, followers, power, and the processes of leadership. They might explore the ethical challenges and problems of leaders and leadership, what makes leaders ethical or unethical, or critical papers about the theory and practice of leadership and leadership ethics.

Philosophical papers may be from any theoretical perspective and may look at any aspect of leadership. Critical perspectives may come from areas such as critical management studies, which examines ethics in terms of identity, work, struggle, and regulation (Crane et al., 2008; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Knights and Willmott, 1992), feminist critiques (Knights, 2015; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015), etc. The goal of this special issue is to expand the variety and scope of literature on leadership ethics and open up space for discussion about existing perspectives on leadership. These sorts of papers will enrich the field and hopefully aid in the development of empirical and theoretical literature in leadership ethics and business ethics.

In summary, our objectives for this special issue are to:

- Encourage scholars to engage critically and constructively with issues in leadership ethics - including questions regarding ethical problems in business leadership that result in new theoretical contributions to leadership ethics;
- Promote alternative approaches to leadership theory that avoid ethical problems with existing research and facilitate novel theoretical contributions;
- Consider challenges to alternative approaches to the study of leadership that result in new theoretical insights into leadership ethics
- Foster dialogue on commonalities amongst apparently different philosophical positions, i.e., reflect on what philosophy might offer in general, as well as what individual philosophical allegiances might contribute and so develop new theoretical perspectives on leadership ethics

Manuscripts should be submitted by March 15, 2016

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More Information

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Leah Tomkins was formerly Director of People Strategy for the UK Civil Service, and a senior leadership and change management practitioner with Accenture and KPMG. Her academic research interests include philosophical approaches to organization and leadership, drawing principally on phenomenology to make sense of organizations and the people who inhabit them. Her current research priorities are the examination of the constructs of 'authentic leader' and 'caring leader', using ideas from Heidegger, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty. Her aim is to try to make sense of organization in ways that chime with organizational practitioners, using her own corporate experience, as well as that of her research participants, to reflect on the lived experience of leadership in its less heroic moments, including where there is no or little 'sense' to be made. Her work has appeared in a range of leading journals, including *Organization Studies*, *Organization*, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Management Learning*, and *The Humanistic Psychologist*.

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