
MORAL LEADERSHIP

USING THE METHOD OF FRANCIS DE SALES

实践圣方济各· 沙雷氏的道德领导力

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ABSTRACT

Moral Leadership implies that the exercise of leadership should be carried out according to identifiable moral values. The exercise of responsible leadership can be an instance of moral leadership. This includes the identification of stakeholders, and the provision of opportunity for stakeholders to participate in the ongoing processes of the organisation. Francis De Sales, who was lawyer, religious leader and founder of a religious order, writer and mentor, offers a practice or method which can be used for working with stakeholders. Although apparently simple, this practice is complex and rich with possibilities. De Sales introduces his practice in the context of buying and selling, but it can be extended for use in more complex transactions. This paper introduces the practice, here called “exchanging places”, explains how it functions, and notes some limitations.

In the *Analects* we find this teaching: “He who rules by virtue is like the polestar, which remains unmoving in its mansion while all the other

stars revolve respectfully around it” (Confucius, 1997, 2.1). Moral leadership, grounded in virtue, is not limited to any particular culture. The initial purpose of this article is to link moral leadership with another commonly used term, responsible leadership, and to apply responsible leadership in the educational sector. The second purpose of

RELIGION 宗教

this article is to introduce one contribution of a Renaissance Catholic mentor, Francis De Sales, as a practice which can be used in exercising moral leadership in a responsible way. This is the practice of “exchanging places”.

Responsible leadership is defined by the *Financial Times* in its Lexicon:

“Responsible leadership is about making business decisions that, next to the interests of the shareholders, also takes into account all the other stakeholders, such as workers, clients, suppliers, the environment, the community and future generations.” (Financial Times, nd)

But the concept of “responsible leadership” eludes such a simple definition. Does this definition incorporate a specifically moral dimension? Reflective scholars have noted that leaders can be immoral or amoral, just as they can act in accordance with morality (Graham, 1991). Ciulla argues that the notion of leadership itself contains an ethical dimension (Ciulla, 2006). For Ciulla, this is a core aspect of leadership, and should not be marginalised. But Ciulla also makes the point that people will follow leaders who are not simply immoral but also destructive – her choice of word is toxic. Bass and Steidlmeier, in an argument which looks to both western and eastern philosophies, describe immoral leadership as inauthentic, and thus not real leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Responsible leadership is an evolving concept. Alan Burton-Jones, who has noted studies that examine the tasks of leaders, or their traits, or their behaviours, or their context, has charted some of that evolution (Burton-Jones, n.d., p.3). For example, studies show that some leaders evidence strong motivation, drive, and charisma, but many effective leaders may be strong in some traits and not in others. Different traits, such as ability in planning, may be more effective in some contexts.

While studies within an individual culture can be helpful, cross-cultural studies remind us that no broad approach to responsible leadership can be through the prism of only one culture (Witt

and Stahl, 2015). The case of a Pepsi joint venture in China reminds us how a relationship may be misunderstood in a cross-cultural situation (Rothlin and McCann, 2016).

RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP AND STAKEHOLDERS

Although very limited, the *Financial Times* definition of responsible leadership does bring out an important point: the responsible leader must not only work with people directly in her organisation, but also with stakeholders (Financial Times, nd). Maak and Pless stress that the responsible leader must relate to stakeholders:

“We understand responsible leadership as a social-relational and ethical phenomenon, which occurs in social processes of interaction. While the prevailing leadership literature has for the most part focussed on the relationship between leaders and followers in the organization and defined followers as subordinates, we show in this article that leadership takes place in interaction with a multitude of followers as stakeholders inside and outside the corporation.” (Maak & Pless, 2006, p.99)

There is an alternative view: that the only business of the business leader is the maximisation of return to shareholders (Friedman, 1970). Others, even employees, are not the owners of the organisation and do not require the same consideration from the leader. Of course, the leader will be considerate towards the interests of others while seeking the interests of shareholders. Of the two approaches, stakeholder theory has gathered many supporters (Zhang, 2014, p.6).

While the *Financial Times* definition understandably refers to business, leadership is found in every aspect of human endeavour, not just in business (Stückelburger & Mugambi, 2007). Sometimes it is the experience of major scandals which alerts us to the need for responsible leadership. Scandals of corruption and doping in sport, scandals of maladministration and cover-up in religious organisations, political scandals

of abuse of power and private appropriation of public funds, scandals of plagiarism and false qualifications in education are all examples. Scandals, which are the signals of vice at work, are also signals of the need for virtue.

WHO WAS FRANCIS DE SALES?

Francis was a nobleman of the Sales family in the Duchy of Savoy. His father was Lord of Boisy. Francis was first-born, in 1567, and his father planned for him a career in civic leadership, beginning as a magistrate. After local schooling, Francis was sent for advanced study, first in Paris and then in Padua where he graduated with his doctorate in law in 1591. He was admitted to practice law as an advocate in the Senate of Chambéry, and his father arranged for him to receive various appointments, including as a senator, in 1592.

The moral leadership exercised and promoted by Francis De Sales is specifically grounded in two elements: a relationship with God, which he calls devotion, and a way of living which is virtuous.

However, Francis opted for life in the service of the Catholic Church. Despite parental opposition, he was able to begin this. Then in his new life he was quickly propelled into leadership. In 1593 he was appointed provost of the Cathedral in Geneva, and in the same year ordained priest. In 1602, he was consecrated as Bishop of Geneva, an office which he held until his death in 1622. He was not only a religious leader but also a founder, having founded (with Baroness de Chantal) the Sisters of the Visitation.

Francis is noted as a mentor, advising people through his letters and face to face. Some of his advice, especially to Marie de Charmois, was collected and published in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (De Sales, 2015). The book

was very popular, and with other works by Francis, has been translated into many languages (Boenzi, 2013, p.9). Francis himself revised the *Introduction* over various editions, and it continues to be published today. However, it is not a scholarly work, and not even very systematic. It shows evidence of being written in the midst of a busy life. Francis is surprisingly modern: he draws on his experience of advising women, including women who were involved in the business of their time, such as managing the family estates while their husbands were at court or at war.

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EXCHANGING PLACES IN BUYING AND SELLING

Francis De Sales expressed himself in the common language of his time: the language of virtue and vice. Of course, this language has once again become accessible with the growing revival of virtue ethics both in western and eastern ethics. Francis' language is modern enough to serve as counterweight to the "Greed is Good" mantra. Instead of succumbing to the vice of greed, Francis suggests that we promote the virtues of justice, gentleness, and charity. Francis certainly does not condemn wealth, neither does he propose withdrawing from the world of possessions: his concern is about our personal attitude to wealth, and how it is gained. Francis says to Philothea (the fictional recipient of his advice): "Yes, I wish that you have the care to increase your resources and wealth, provided it is done not only with justice but also with gentleness and charity" (De Sales, 2015, p.183).

In a chapter entitled "We must have a just and reasonable mind", Francis provides us with a practice which we can use. He introduces it in simple language:

"Philothea, be impartial and just in your actions. Put yourself always in the place of your neighbour, and your neighbour in

your own place, and thus you will judge him well. Make yourself a seller while buying and a buyer while selling: you will sell and buy with justice. All these acts of justice are small, and do not oblige us to restitution, since we remain strictly within the limits of what is advantageous to us. But they continue to oblige us to correct our attitudes because there are great defects of reason and charity. After all, these are simply deceptions. We lose nothing by living generously, nobly, courteously, and with a magnanimous, impartial, and reasonable heart.” (De Sales, 2015, p.242)

The practice is simple enough: it enables us to “exchange places” with the other party to a transaction of buying and selling. Nevertheless, we do not act only on the other party’s standpoint. The other party might be poorly informed, or rash, or unskilled in dealing. We cannot act on this, because doing so would be to act against

stakeholders (O’Brien, 2012, p. 101). The practice is based in a fundamental attitude to life, an attitude of virtue. This attitude is maintained through regular examination of the heart. Such an examination will be a constant check on the success of our use of the method.

One limitation of the practice is that simply “exchanging places” is not sufficient. Unless the whole transaction is grounded in virtue, “exchanging places” can be simply a device for abusing the other, when the other is lacking in knowledge, or in any weakened bargaining position.

CONTEMPORARY AND CROSS-CULTURAL RELEVANCE

As a Renaissance writer, De Sales’ ethics represent a composite of two wisdom traditions: one is the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and the other is the classical Greek tradition. Both wisdom traditions use the language of virtue, and

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the virtue of justice. The other party might be desperate to sell, but to take advantage of this would act against the virtue of generosity. Francis called on Philothea to begin from a standpoint of impartiality. So, while we exchange places with the other party, we do so justly, and we so “generously, nobly, courteously, and with a magnanimous, impartial, and reasonable heart.” (De Sales, 2015, p.242) Impartiality also requires a process with two steps: firstly, to put oneself in the other party’s place, and secondly, to put the other party in one’s own place.

This practice requires the trader to begin in a spirit of impartiality, then to apply the method justly, and then to act virtuously in carrying out the transaction. The practice is useful not only in the simple transactions of buying and selling, but also in more complex contemporary business transactions with multiple parties and

De Sales presented his ethics in terms of virtues (De Sales, 2015, p.28). In recent years, there has been a revival of virtue ethics, and perhaps the best-known contributor to this revival is Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 2007). New interest in virtue ethics is also fuelled by growing interest in virtues in Chinese traditional wisdom (Angle & Slote, 2013; Provis, 2017). De Sales’ work fits well into this modern, cross-cultural revival of virtue ethics: De Sales articulates the life of virtue as a key part of the devout life, and discusses the importance of particular ethics such as benevolence.

Another interest across cultures is reflections on the Golden Rule (Gensler, 2013). In the Chinese tradition there is an example in the *Analects*: Zigong asked, ‘Is there any single word that could guide one’s entire life?’ The Master said, ‘Should it not be reciprocity? What you do not wish

for yourself, do not wish for others' (Confucius, 1997, 15.24). The link with the Golden Rule in other cultures has been explored elsewhere (Wang, 1995, p. 415). De Sales' contribution is, in effect, a complex tool for reciprocity, which deals with some of the criticisms of the Golden Rule. It is based in reciprocity, but the method for exchanging places is not simplistic.

The president seeks to place herself in the shoes of the identified stakeholder. For the purposes of this paper, we will use only one example, that of the alumni, and assume that they have been identified as stakeholders. Alumni have already completed their degree, and rely on it for their employment and for their status in the community. Alumni are potential candidates for a

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APPLICATION: EXCHANGING PLACES WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The practice or method of Francis De Sales can not only be applied to complex business transactions, but also beyond business into responsible leadership in other fields. The practice can be regarded a useful tool among many in the ethical tool box of the moral leader.

This paper will use the field of education as a hypothetical example. This example is centred on the president of a university. The university is privately owned by a foundation operated by a group of philanthropists. Funding is partly from the foundation, partly from governments, partly from public donations, and partly from student fees. The president is faced with an increasing problem of “contract cheating”, or ghost-writing (Zheng & Cheng, 2015). Considerable research exists to enable the president to identify stakeholders, to rank their importance for the university, and to suggest strategies for dealing with them (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997, p.853). Then, having identified each potential stakeholder, the president must work out how to deal with that stakeholder. Literature on this process suggests that the president must at least deal with the stakeholders notionally, and perhaps directly (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 65).

It is at this point that the method of De Sales described above becomes a useful practice for the president who seeks to be moral leader.

higher degree. And for many universities, alumni are potential donors. Standing in their shoes as a graduate and as a potential future student and donor, the president may see the need to strongly resist contract cheating.

But De Sales' method also imagines an exchange of places in the other direction. Thus the president must imagine that alumni had the opportunity to be the president. How would they choose to deal with this situation? This second step serves as a check and a feedback mechanism for the first step. This second step also serves to ensure that the president is acting justly, and not causing disadvantage to the stakeholders, or not taking advantage of their generally powerless position.

Finally, when making the decision on the action which can be taken, the university president must remember to act according to virtue: De Sales would have her act “generously, nobly, courteously, and with a magnanimous, impartial, and reasonable heart” (De Sales, 2015, p.242). It is important to note that De Sales does not think in terms of a single virtue, but in terms of these virtues as a cluster providing a balanced approach to the task.

Some alternative strategies may seem to be easier, but will not provide a successful solution. Strategies of denial, or of prevarication, or of legislation without enforcement, or shifting responsibility to teachers without giving them any resources, are possible but such strategies will not be successful for long. The university president who embodies moral leadership will guide those

involved to the optimum available solution to the problem of contract cheating or ghost-writing. This is leading responsibly.

CONCLUSIONS

Moral leadership may be described using the terms of virtue ethics. The concepts of virtue ethics are known not only from Greek wisdom and Judaeo-Christian teaching, but are also known to eastern philosophies including Confucianism. Virtue ethics is experiencing a contemporary revival, and mentors like Francis De Sales may be more readily understood now than a century ago. Stakeholder theory may have been developed in explaining business leadership, but it also provides us with an approach which enables us to live in an interconnected way, in a complex society. It is too simplistic to say: “the business of business is only business”, or “the business of education is only teaching”.

The practice described by Francis De Sales in his mentoring is not restricted to his particular example of buying and selling. It can be extended to more complex transactions, and it can be applied in non-commercial situations. Clearly Francis De Sales intends his Philotheas to live responsibly, and to act morally. His practice can serve in the “tool box” of responsible leaders who also desire to live responsibly and

act morally. It does not cover the whole field of moral leadership, but is to be used at the point where the responsible leader must determine the most moral method to act in relation to others,

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such as stakeholders. The practice described by Francis De Sales is not simply mechanical. It is to be applied within a general approach of virtuous decision and action by the responsible leader. De Sales has identified virtues such as generosity, nobility, courtesy, magnanimity, impartiality, and reasonableness.

Just as we can begin with a quotation from Confucius, so we can end with a quotation from De Sales himself: “Be aware that only virtue and devotion can make you happy in this world. See how beautiful they are” (De Sales, 2015, p.318).

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