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The Paternalistic Relationship:

Authenticity and credibility as a source of healthy relationships



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Abstract

This article explores the how the Paternalistic Leadership model can be viewed as part of a relationship-based paradigm of leadership, and can incorporate concepts such as credibility and authenticity. The review highlights the need to understand paternalistic leadership as an approach to establishing productive relationships within a cultural context, with implications for researchers and practitioners in both collectivist and individualistic cultures.

Introduction

Globalisation of business presents a range of challenges to organisations, and generates the need for new ways of understanding organisational dynamics. Researchers and theorists increasingly need to address concepts in a cultural context, rather than assuming theories or models can be applied universally. In the area of leadership, this can be seen in the increasing attention given to Paternalistic Leadership (PL), particularly within collectivist cultures (Aycan, 2006; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Erben & Güneşer, 2008; Irawanto, 2008; Martinez, 2005).

Paternalistic Leadership is a response to the need that has been expressed for new and more powerful ways of understandings of leadership (Rost, 1991). However,

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when exploring new models of leadership, such as PL, care needs to be taken to see it in the context of a new paradigm of leadership. Without this context, key lessons or implications of the model may be overlooked or misapplied.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the PL model can be understood as a multi-dimensional approach to leadership based on the relationship between leader and followers. Leadership theories and models originating in individualistic cultures have traditionally taken a “top-down” perspective that emphasises the behaviour of the leader, rather than the relationships that are created. The intention of this review is to discuss the following issues: (1) the need for relationship-based models of leadership; (2) the psychological contract of paternalistic leadership; (3) the authenticity and credibility aspects of leadership as a source of healthy relationship in paternalistic leadership; and (4) the theoretical as well as practical implications to the leadership knowledge. Only one theoretical model will be examined: the Cheng *et al.* (2004) model. These are the most fully elaborated explanations of the paternalistic leadership in the literature as it is been duplicated in several countries outside the country of origin (i.e., Erben & Güneşer, 2008; Irawanto, 2008).

Relationship Based Explanations of Leadership

Rost (1991), in discussing the development of leadership theory, points out that common “schools of thought” regarding leadership all share a common view that the best way to understand effective leadership was to focus attention on what the leader does. He defined leadership as “...an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102).

The use of the term “leadership” to refer to the relationship between leaders and followers can act as an impediment to having people focus attention on the relationship; the term has the word for one party, the leader, embedded in it, which implies that this role is the critical one for understanding what it takes to make the relationship work. Rost (1991) has warned that leadership cannot be viewed from one side only, but that most leadership theory utilises a conservative approach which considers only how the leaders acts. The consequence for leadership scholars to date is that their efforts for improvement simply involve “tuning-up” what the leaders do in organizations (Rost, 1991, 1993).

To see the extent to which the use of the term “leadership” affects people’s thinking, it is useful to imagine the impact that would result if the relationship between a husband and a wife was named “husband-ship” or “wife-ship.” Such terms would suggest that the party named was the key to understanding the relationship, the party most likely to affect the quality of the relationship, and the party most worthy of further research. Using the term “marriage” makes it easier to adopt a relationship-based view, rather than focusing on the behaviour of one or another of the parties to the relationship.

The shift in attention from the role of the leader to the relationship between the leader and followers reflects the “systems view” promoted by advocates of the “learning organisation.” One of the fundamental guiding ideas of systems thinking is “the primacy of the whole.” This is the view that, in order to understand how a system

works, it is necessary to look at the *whole* system, rather than assuming it can be understood through an analytical view of its composite parts (Senge, 1990). The relationship and interactions between the parts of a system are more important in understanding the “whole” than the parts in their segregated form (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994). For those used to operating within an analytical culture, relationships are often hard to discern, understand, or change (McLain Smith, 2008). It takes a “shift of mind” (Senge, 1990, Wheatley, 1992) to see a dynamic relationship rather than the behaviour of one party. Rost (1991) called for a shift in the way models of leadership were constructed that would reflect this systems view by giving attention to what needs to happen in order to create and maintain relationships wherein “real changes that reflect mutual purposes” are possible.

A number of more recent contributions to leadership literature reflect this shift. Rather than emphasising leadership behaviours that precipitate change, some scholars are focusing attention on what can be done to create and maintain healthy relationships from which change can emerge.

Kouzes and Posner (1993) suggest that leaders need to give attention to credibility: the trust or belief in a leader that is the foundation upon which others willingly decide to follow. Leaders can act in ways that either build or deplete credibility, and therefore, the quality of their relationships with constituents. “Transformational” behaviours of a leader with little credibility will not have the same impact as the same behaviours where credibility is high.

Koestenbaum (2002) highlights the need for leaders to act “authentically” in order to build leadership relationships. Authenticity refers to the degree to which a leader acts in keeping with a fully developed character. This “inner side” of the leader is seen as having a greater impact on the relationship with followers than the “outer side” of their behaviour.

Heifetz (1994) explains the link between leadership characteristics such as authenticity, credibility, respect, and the capacity of leadership relationships to produce real change. He contends that many of the changes that people make are technical, whereby there is no need to address basic assumptions that shape behaviour. “Adaptive” change, on the other hand, involves people examining and changing these basic assumptions which may be at the root of the problems we want to see solved. Adaptive change involves a high level of anxiety, so it needs to take place in the context of a relationship that provides people with the necessary psychological safety to effect such change.

Work on PL introduces an additional factor into the debate around what is required in order for leaders and followers to form healthy relationships. It raises the question of the degree to which the cultural context in which the relationship is formed affects the workings of the relationship and the degree to which real change is possible.

The Psychological Contract of Paternalistic Leadership

PL is often associated with a specific cultural context — that of collectivist cultures in which harmony is viewed as essential in maintaining the relationship between

leaders and followers (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Westwood, 1997). In this paper, we have argued that the central role of the leadership relationship can be lost where scholars support a paradigm focused on “what the leaders does.” PL, as described by Cheng *et al.* (2004), is, in our view, a theory that emphasises the importance of leader-follower relationships, rather than one which simply prescribes a set of behaviours that leaders can perform in order to achieve better results. In this section, we will consider PL more closely, from a relationship-based perspective.

PL is described as a leadership style that combines strong authority with benevolent acts, bounded in the moral integrity. As this leadership theory is developed on the basis of Confucian values, it places great emphasis on the hierarchical relationship between superior and subordinates, explaining the process through which the relationship between a leader and the followers can be built and maintained. Paternalistic leadership can be described as “...a leadership style that combines strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence and moral integrity couched in a personalistic atmosphere” (Cheng, *et al.*, 2004, p. 91).

This model is comprised of three elements; (1) **authoritarianism leadership**, which is characterised by the leader’s capacity to assert absolute authority; (2) **benevolent leadership**, which highlights the importance of concern for someone’s personal or familial well-being, and (3) **moral leadership**, which refers to someone holding and demonstrating superior virtues and a high degree of self-discipline in a dyadic relationship (Cheng, *et al.*, 2004).

Moreover, the triad model of Paternalistic Leadership also describes the psychological contract between the follower and the leader. This is comprised of three elements: (1) **respect and identification**, or the honourable recognition given to a leader who practices moral leadership; (2) **dependence and compliance**, in acknowledgement of the leader who practises authoritarian leadership, and (3) **gratitude and repayment**, as a reward for the leader who practises benevolent leadership.

People used to operating in a Western context often have a negative view of authoritarian leadership where they suspect it to involve coercive behaviour toward subordinates. Many associate authoritarian behaviour with ineffective leadership (Dorfman, *et al.*, 1997). However, in Eastern cultures—such as in Taiwan where the cultural values of Confucianism are still deeply ingrained in society—authoritarianism practiced by the leaders is not seen as a repugnant behaviour, but rather, from the point of view of the follower who has the “obligation” to comply, as a guiding hand. Further, in responding to authoritarian practices of a leader, subordinates’ dependence and compliance is not just responding as a symbolic act and as a part of their obligation, but it is deeply connected to the subordinates’ “heart” (Cheng & Farh, 2000).

Authoritarian leadership is also an established form of influence outside Taiwan. Even in the West, acting as an authoritarian leader is not automatically considered to be “bad” leadership. Many Western researchers, who are influenced by contingency models of leadership, regard the practices of authoritarian leadership in collectivist cultures as a positive catalyst capable of generating favourable results in situations

where most of the tasks are simple. This type of leadership is viewed as more effective in eliciting high levels of productivity (Westwood, 1997). In some South East Asian countries such as Indonesia, authoritarian commands may be delivered with minimal intrusion or “gentle hints.” The balancing of authority with gracious behaviour increases the respect followers feel for leaders, and is believed to be particularly effective in the Indonesian business environment (Antlöv & Cederroth, 1994; Sajogyo, 2002).

In the PL model, the combination of authoritarian leadership with moral and benevolent leadership allows subordinates to be responsible for their tasks while following the leader’s directions. Thus, they will reward such leadership with gratitude, obedience, respect, and identification. In effect, these behaviours strengthen the relationship between leaders and followers and additionally form a basis for productive work.

Authoritarian leadership in the West seems more oriented toward the personal exercise of power. In an individualistic culture, it is the leader’s obligation to ensure that employees accept their exercise of authority and do the job without protest to achieve the best performance. In such a cultural context, leaders can be considered effective in the use of an authoritarian style if they are able to exercise it in a way that produces desired results.

Eastern leaders, on the other hand, typically believe they should focus attention on maintaining their relationships with followers (Gani, 2004). The leader needs to show concern for their employees, deal with the current issues, and maintain harmony in the work environment. This could be viewed as a critical main difference between Western and Eastern cultures in the application of authoritarian leadership. As practised in the West, authoritarian leadership is often thought to have a destructive impact on relationships while the leader is striving for results. In the East, authoritarian leadership is one of the cornerstones upon which workplace relationships are built.

Authenticity and Credibility in PL

To further establish that PL needs to be viewed as a multi-directional relationship based theory rather than a top-down approach to leadership, we will consider the key roles played by concepts of authenticity and credibility. These concepts are at the core of the Confucian values upon which PL is based.

The need for credibility is strongly implied by models of PL in a number of ways. Relative to the original concept of PL, the Chinese term describing authoritarianism is *li-wei* which means “awe-inspiring” (Cheng, et al., 2004). Kouzes and Posner (1993) note that inspiration is one of the sources of credibility that leaders should develop in order to build their leadership capacity.

The credibility of the leaders can be viewed as a central element in building and maintaining a leadership relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 1993). In regard to PL, this element is evident in the way leaders are encouraged to be “father-like” figures. Implied in the Father–Child relationship is the deep sense of credibility that is automatically granted to a father who is readably credible. In such a relationship, the

child naturally assumes that the father will act in a trustworthy manner, and the father deeply feels the responsibility of living up to the trust placed in him by the child. Goodell (1985) describes this leadership relationship as incorporating the use of non-coercive exploitation which is part of the requirement in a healthy relationship. Therefore, the use of this approach may be seen as a source for acting credible.

Also, the “father-like” position of the leader in PL encourages followers to assume that their authoritarian leader is knowledgeable and therefore, credible. Being a “father” in Eastern cultures is associated with integrity and confidence which can be relied upon by children, or in the case of PL, by followers (Gert & Culver, 1976; Westwood, 1997).

The practise of moral and benevolent leadership, as well as the consequences for followers (respect and identification, and gratitude and repayment), can be viewed as the extension of authentic leadership as described by several Western scholars. Ilies, Morgeson and Hargang (2005) explain that “...the authentic leadership process positively influences self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviour on the part of both leaders and followers” (p.376).

In their description, authenticity is viewed as a positive behaviour, which in several ways plays the same role as the authoritarian and moral leadership of PL. Leaders who display moral and benevolent behaviours associated with an “inner greatness” of character (Koestenbaum, 2002), often impact positively on the work of their organizations in several ways, as suggested by the Confucian values upon which PL is based. The value of *shuh-der* in moral leadership expresses the need for leaders to have the inner qualities necessary to set an example at all times. *Shuh-der* thus encourages both the leaders and the followers to sustainably generate positive outcomes for their organisations –not letting the organisation down with temporary lapses in judgement or behaviour.

The close link between PL and authentic leadership models developed by Western scholars can be seen in the work of Avolio, Luthans, and Walumba (2004). They define authentic leaders as:

“...those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character” (p. 4).

In line with PL, particularly the aspect of moral leadership, authentic leaders are trusted by their subordinates because of their moral deeds. As we will discuss later, it is important that those seeking to develop leaders using the PL model of leadership emphasise the need for authenticity in how morality is exercised or displayed.

Because in collectivist cultures, such as Taiwan and Indonesia, the value of harmony is considered the key concept in maintaining relationships, subordinates feel they are obligated at all times to comply with the directives of their leaders. This, in turn, places an obligation on leaders to act in a trustworthy or credible way in dealings with their followers. Further, it could be argued that without the need to work hard to appear credible in the eyes of followers, leaders in collectivist cultures are free to act

with greater authenticity, rather than adopt artificial or “faddish” styles or approaches to the role of leading.

It is important to keep in mind that PL is a relationship-based model of leadership and it is this understanding that needs to permeate how PL is practiced. In essence, PL has three major emphases: leaders must provide *support*, *protection*, and *care* to their subordinates (Redding, Norman, & Schlander, 1994). On the surface, PL might be viewed as similar to leadership theories that adopt a “top down” approach. However, close examination of the original triad model of PL reveals that this leadership approach encourages leaders to take up the role of a “father,” assuming that the combination of paternal authority and benevolence with moral leadership will foster heightened credibility. Subordinates will regard their leaders as having their best interests at heart (Cheng & Farh, 2000; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). The PL process is inherently authoritarian, but the process by which the subordinates accept the leader’s authority is not based on the coercive use of force. Therefore, PL is congruent with what Rost describes as a relationship-based model of leadership.

We have suggested that, to a large extent, credibility and authenticity are already integrated within the PL model. This integration has occurred naturally because PL fits within the relationship paradigm for understanding effective leadership. The principle of *li-wei* (awe-inspiring), emphasised within the PL model of authoritarian leadership, encourages credibility within the leader-follower relationship. Similarly, the principle of *shuh-der* (setting an example) is associated with high levels of credibility: they gently, yet powerfully, influence followers by modelling appropriate ways to behave. With this capacity, Kouzes and Posner (1993) argue that leaders and followers can transform organizations through joint action as confirmed by Rost (1991). We believe that the PL model is particularly useful as it addresses the need for healthy leadership relationships. Further, it is an important contribution to leadership scholarship because it introduces the element of cultural context to the relationship paradigm of leadership.

Implications for Theory and Practice

A major proposition of the earlier discussion is that the triad model of paternalistic leadership model (PL) encourages healthy relationships as the basis for successful work. Credibility and authenticity can be viewed as major contributors to the successful implementation of the model. This review of the PL model and its relationship to Rost’s (1991) call for relationship-based models of leadership has important implications for leadership scholars and practitioners in both Eastern and Western cultural contexts.

The review highlighted that there is a close link between PL and concepts such as credibility and authenticity that have emerged relatively recently in Western leadership literature. Traditional Western leadership research and theory have been influenced by cultural values that emphasise individualism and analysis, and have suppressed Eastern values of collectivism and integration which more naturally encourage a systems view based around relationships (Hampden-Turner, 2000). More recent Western efforts to explore previously repressed values can be viewed as

a natural balancing of a previously unbalanced approach to theory-building (Ramsey, 2001).

Western scholars can be encouraged to view PL as a model of leadership that has emerged naturally from cultural values that more directly encourage the relationship-based approaches they are beginning to see as important. By examining how PL is practiced in countries such as Taiwan and Indonesia, they are better able to see how the road to change can be smoother when attention is given to relationships by leaders who are deeply concerned with providing support, protection, and care.

Further research of the PL model will help examine the link to ideal leadership models emerging in Western research. By doing so, such scholars will be able to link their work to other ways of understanding the psychological dispositions involved in healthy leadership relationships, giving added richness to theory in the area.

For Eastern scholars and practitioners, it is also important to acknowledge the role of relationship-based leadership as it is identified in Western research. In this review, we have given particular emphasis to credibility and authenticity. While these elements may be more naturally-occurring in leader-follower relationships in a collectivist culture, it is important to keep in mind that these provide a crucial link in the means by which results are produced. Leader behaviour associated with the PL model needs to be an expression of the inner state of a leader who is trustworthy and authentically interested in followers; otherwise relationships will be built on a fragile or false foundation.

Just as Eastern values encourage leaders to adopt the relationship-based approach emphasised by Rost (1991), it could be argued that Western values encourage leaders to pursue “real changes.” Some aspects of PL are associated with stability and compliance rather than change and further work may be needed to develop the PL model to ensure that the practises it encourages do, in fact, generate the kinds of change that organisations need.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the emerging model of paternalistic leadership (PL) which helps to explain the relationship-based leadership model practiced within collectivist cultures. Also we have considered how concepts of authenticity and credibility can positively impact the implementation of this leadership approach.

First, our review suggests that PL is a leadership model which can be effectively implemented in the collectivist culture. Viewing the model through a relationship-based paradigm provides a clear understanding of how PL needs to be practiced in this type of culture. PL incorporates an approach to leadership that encourages behaviours and thinking advocated by researchers who see them as missing from traditional Western approaches to leadership. Thus, further exploration of the PL model should not be limited to the countries in which it has already been developed.

In summary, we believe that further research in this area has considerable potential for developing approaches to the practice of leadership that incorporate an

enhanced understanding of the role cultural context plays in the building and maintenance of healthy relationships that promote real change.

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