



DYSFUNCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: NOTES FROM THE “DARK” SIDE

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Abstract

*“Some are born great, some achieve greatness,
and some have greatness thrust upon them.”*

-W. Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act II Scene v.

Leadership has various permutations, including transformational, distributed and integrated authority, to mention just a few. Although these forms of influence may be viewed positively, not all leadership is positive. This article addresses the “dark” or dysfunctional side of leadership. Dysfunctional leadership is inherent in all forms of leadership, and exists independently of leadership style. Dysfunctional leadership comprises an amalgam of contextual conditions, personality traits and specific situational circumstances. Consequently, “dark” or dysfunctional leadership may be ameliorated or exacerbated by the type of task, personality of the leader, or even a mismatch of leadership style to specific contexts. Philosophies of leadership or issues of power may also derail positive leadership. Additionally, mis-educative strategies, such as binary thinking, template approaches and “decision driven data-making,” as opposed to data-driven decision-making, reduce leadership to a dysfunctional enterprise. However, even dysfunctional leadership may not be entirely negative, as some experiences may be educative, although they may not be positive.

Keywords: Leadership, Dysfunctional Leadership, The Dark Side.

1. Introduction

Leaders can be found in every walk of life and, due at least in part to the great diversity inherent in human existence and experience; no two leaders are ever exactly alike. Some leaders are adored while others are reviled. Some leaders lead effortlessly while others struggle with their command. In every case, whether the leader is successful or unsuccessful, the task and the leader him- or herself are engaged in a project that is at once unique and also frequently taken for granted. We believe that we know a lot about leadership, as is evidenced by the plethora of books on this topic, particularly what it is that makes a leader successful.

However, leadership has various active components, some of which are under the control of the person in charge, while others depend on circumstance and, in some cases, luck. Perhaps it is because of this that one of the most difficult things in writing about leadership is coming to an understanding of what the term “leadership” means. It may be so because leaders can be motivated by any number of stimuli, including any point on the continuum between equitable goals associated with social justice to goals congruent with a search for personal power (White & Cooper, 2017). Further, the search for a suitable definition tends to include formal, as well as informal, leadership. Indeed, the very concept of leadership is not without its issues, as it refers not only to a research area, but to a practical skill as well (White & Cooper, 2017). As Gardner,

(2013) opines, “Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 17). There are, however, many leadership styles Conger, (2015) that distribute or share leadership, develop objectives democratically and build capacity among “followers.”

2. Leadership Styles

To recapitulate just a few of the various forms that formal leadership can assume would constitute the bulk of this discussion. Consequently, a few of the more prevalent forms of formalized leadership are identified very briefly. Distributed leadership is a conceptual and analytical approach to understanding the work of leadership among the people in a complex organization (Leithwood, et al., 2009; Spillane, et al., 2001).

Transformational leadership refers to the leader who works with faculty and staff to identify needed change, create the vision to guide the change and execute the change in tandem with committed group members (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). Emancipatory leadership attempts to honor the voices and perspectives of all stakeholders Corson, (2000), whereas spiritual leadership attempts to lead others effectively through their own understandings of spirituality (Nouwen, 1972).

Critical leadership places emphasis on inclusivity and the dismantling of oppressive hierarchies of power (Gunter, 2001; Ryan, 1998). A similar type of leadership strives for social justice Waite, et al., (2007), and is related to race and ethnicity, gender, social class, understanding oppression and students with disabilities or exceptionalities.

Yet another brand of leadership pertains to instructional leadership, which refers to the learning-centered development of curriculum and instruction (Chitpin & White, 2015). Sustainable leadership recognizes the ecological expression of conservation and sustainability in educational leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005), while motion leadership is concerned with creating and leading movement in the right direction at the right time (Fullan., 2014). Charismatic leadership (Conger, 2015) has been recognized as an ability to inspire and motivate followers to perform at high levels and to be committed to the organization or the cause. Moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), characterized by a deep sense of ethics and motivated by the pursuit of a higher purpose, and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, tend to focus on capacity building and work towards the development of a more just and inclusive society.

Many of these forms of leadership, while they may share some characteristics, or “family resemblances,” are not necessarily interchangeable. In fact, many of these forms of leadership presuppose that the leader has a specific skill set or a particular mindset that allows for an effective execution of responsibilities. Additionally, it stands to reason that no leader can reside within one particular leadership style and, as such, the effective leader must put on numerous leadership “hats” during the course of any day. This has led to a view that leadership styles are really an amalgam of behaviours. To this end, integrated leadership White & Cooper, (2017) has been identified as a combination of any or all of the above-mentioned leadership styles, recognizing, of course, that the list presented above is by no means exhaustive.

The effective, efficient educational leader of the twenty-first century will need to be an “integrated” leader, one who is able to attend to numerous influences from both within and from outside of the school organization in order to be able navigate any and all contested and taken-for-granted positions. Thus, the model for the future may well be an amalgam of past, present and future iterations of educational leadership—the integrated leader (White & Cooper, 2017).

2.1 Problematizing Leadership

However, the notion of what it means to be a leader has not been unproblematic. Leadership, as can be seen by the above précis of leadership styles, is an area of study that has been subjected to fads, has been subjected to intense scrutiny and has developed an almost iconic glow of the leader as all things to all people. Globalization's push has spurred new thinking in numerous directions as it pertains to leadership in general and educational leadership specifically. Among some of the greatest influences are global views that are generally corporatist in nature (Waite & Waite, 2010). This tends to guide leadership towards a much more managerial aspect (White & Cooper, 2017).

Before moving forward, however, it must also be noted that management can also be considered a leadership style. While it may not be held in high regard during our current era, it is beginning to find its way back into respectability due, in large part, to the current neoliberal climate that has become a globalizing force in today's world. At best, however, this form of leadership can be seen as a passive form of control, rather than an active leadership style that tends to presuppose the existence of varying degrees of emotional intelligence (Nazarpoori, 2017) among the cadre of leadership styles.

2.2 Dysfunctional Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

Although many of these forms of leadership may be viewed positively, not all leadership is positive. Nazarpoori, (2017) identifies the issue of emotional intelligence as being essential to positive leadership. What happens when emotional intelligence is in short supply? It is likely then that the dark side of leadership emerges. That is what this article addresses—the dark side of leadership. As Giroux, (1992) lamented, There is enormous evidence indicating that the issues of democracy, leadership, and schooling are increasingly being incorporated as part of a reactionary political agenda. This agenda furthers the fortunes of narrow social interests that are at odds with any emancipatory definition of substantive democracy (p. 5).

It is unfortunate that leadership, particularly educational leadership, for the most part, has reflected the self-centered character of politics in this broader postmodern society. However, given that the level of emotional intelligence so necessary to effective leadership has been missing with regard to the leadership of entire countries, it is unsurprising that self-centered leadership, devoid of emotional intelligence has become so commonplace. As a result, dysfunctional leadership seems to have become inherent in many forms of leadership, and may exist independently of leadership style. Dysfunctional leadership, as a result, comprises of an amalgam of contextual conditions, personality traits and personal agendas that seem to override positive, active leadership and render it subject to some of the baser of human emotions.

As such, the epigraph that begins this article is telling. In truth, although some individuals *are* fortunate enough to be able to obtain greater status than their proletarian counterparts, at what expense are these honours won? Who suffers at the hands of dysfunctional leaders? What cost do dysfunctional leaders exact from captive followers? The remainder of this article is dedicated to identifying some of these darker conditions that mark a leader as dysfunctional. Some may be beyond the leader's grasp, while others may be habits that cause discord, anxiety and disloyalty. Whatever the contextual conditions, the end result is the same—the leader is less effective than need be and the followers are rendered functionally, albeit not nominally, leaderless.

2.3 Contextual Conditions

As Jacques Derrida, (1976) said, or was said to have said, nothing is without context. This is as true of leadership, as it is of anything else. Perhaps it is context that is responsible for the frequent interchanging of leadership styles, calling upon the responsive leader to adjust his or her style to the situation or context at hand. While contextual conditions are not necessarily

predictive of leadership dysfunction, contextual “rip tides” may create dilemmas by which there is no good choice and the leader must choose between the lesser of two evils.

While contexts may be neutral, rather than active, they create or represent the backdrop against which the leader must act. As such, the context may influence, rather than cause, perceptions of leadership to be positive, negative or somewhere in between. Thus, according to Antonakis, et al., (2003), in their examination of leadership theory, using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, evaluations of leadership may be affected by the context within which leadership is observed and evaluated. In addition, Hallinger, et al., (1996) explored the nature and extent of selected school principal's effects on reading achievement by testing a multidimensional model of the principal's effect on student learning. Although results showed no direct effects of principal instructional leadership on student achievement, the researchers found that principal leadership itself is influenced by contextual variables, as well as by personality traits. Cooper & White, (2011) in their study of context and leadership within political parties, ascertained that the institutional context influences leadership power and style, and that there is no straightforward relationship between leadership style and effectiveness; rather, style and effectiveness are contingent on the situation. Thus, when in a position of strength, leadership behavior is task- or goal-oriented, whereas when leadership strength is low, power is dispersed and leaders are oriented toward bargaining and maintaining relationships. In short, “dark” or dysfunctional leadership may be either ameliorated or exacerbated by the type of task, by the personality of the leader, or even by a mismatch of leadership style to specific contexts. The following section looks at personality traits that may help to incur or aggravate dysfunction among leaders.

2.4 Philosophies of Leadership

One area of leadership study that has not been developed to its full potential is the area of philosophy. One's philosophy of leadership and, indeed, philosophy of living is, to a greater or lesser extent, a function of lived experiences, culture and education. Because individuals are unique, with unique experiences and backgrounds, it is little wonder that philosophies of education are as varied as the people who believe in them.

A variety of educational philosophies abound: from traditional philosophies, such as idealism, realism and neo-scholasticism; to modern and postmodern philosophies, such as pragmatism and existentialism; as well as contemporary philosophies, such as progressivism, perennialism, essentialism, reconstructionism and behaviourism (Knight, 2008). While these philosophies are too numerous and complex to identify, define and discuss in this time and place, it is important to recognize that not all educationists will adhere to the same credos. It is this complexity of philosophy and its various permutations that bring an air of experimentation, of search, of examination to the classroom. As such, the wise leader will be conversant with, recognize and understand numerous educational philosophies, without necessarily having to accept all within his/her own belief system.

However, the dysfunctional leader may also recognize a variety of philosophies but may not wish to accept, maintain or even tolerate a philosophy of education that runs contrary to his or her own perspective. This is a grievous issue because philosophies are often deeply ingrained, as they tend to reflect a specific point of worldview. The leader who is unwilling to make allowances for philosophical difference may become intolerant of philosophies that deviate from the specific worldview held by that leader. The tension that may result from this act is significant. Educators in the employ of this leader may resort to teaching in ways that are inauthentic to them in order to “fly under the radar.” Others may openly confront the leader in order to have their voices heard. Still others may quietly “perform” education in the way they always have and hope that their efforts to educate students in ways that are meaningful will go unnoticed. In essence, the only ways to avoid censure are to accept, block or co-opt the dysfunctional leaders' dictum in

order to be able to continue to teach. Such tension increases stress, mental health issues, depression and the morale of the entire institution.

2.5 Social Skills

It is well known that effective leadership behaviour depends, in large measure, upon the leader's ability to solve complex social problems that arise in organizations (Mumford, et al., 2000). Also, it has long been known that employees with weak or lower levels of social adaptability report heightened job tension, including emotional exhaustion. This malaise extends, as well, to lessened job satisfaction and to lower work effort when abusive or dysfunctional supervision increases. The reverse is also true. Employees with greater social adaptability skills were less strongly affected by perceptions of abusive supervision (Mackey, et al., 2013). Thus, strong social skills are essential for effective leadership

According to Guerin, et al., (2011) the relation between adolescent extraversion and adult leadership potential is completely mediated by adult social skills. Despite much research into successful leadership skills, little seems to have been reported regarding the leader who is bereft of social adaptability and positive social skills (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). Consequently, in their research, Riggio & Reichard, (2008) identified three social skills; social expressiveness, social sensitivity, and social control. Social expressiveness refers to one's ability to communicate verbally and one's skill in engaging others in social interaction. Social sensitivity is not only about verbal listening ability, but also an ability to "read" social situations, along with general knowledge of social rules and norms. Social control refers to sophisticated social role-playing skills and tact in social situations. While these abilities are, to a greater or lesser degree, essential in performing leadership activities, less is known about how leaders express negative emotions such as disapproval, anger or disappointment, and what the expression of negative emotions may mean for employee performance or work climate.

Dysfunctional leaders can benefit from understanding that [C] on trolled expression of negative emotions is particularly important for leaders in the workplace to avoid "demotivating" workers or preventing the build up of resentment and resistance. While skilled emotional expressiveness may be the key, effective expression of negative affect likely involves skills in expression, emotional regulation/control, and emotional sensitivity (in order to gauge how the negative affect is being received by followers) (Riggio & Reichard, 2008).

Perez, et al., (2007) suggest that an "imbalance" in the possession of emotional and social skills is related to poorer psychosocial adjustment in clinical groups. Riggio & Reichard, (2008) expect that "the same relationship exists between social skill imbalances and poor leadership" (p. 178), and point out that, [W]hen it comes to possession of emotional and social skills, we propose that a balance among the various skill dimensions is important. For example, one study with a clinical population found that it was the imbalances among the various skill dimensions that are most predictive of psychopathology and social adjustment problems more so than the total amount of emotional and social skills. (p. 179-180)

All is not lost, however, should employees discover that the boss is a psychopath. Riggio & Reichard, (2008) suggest that both emotional and social skills can be further developed and should comprise an important component of any leadership development program, particularly since research suggests that emotional and social skills are related to leader effectiveness and can be improved through training, intervention and effective mentorship.

2.6 Personality Traits and Leadership Behaviours

Each leader is unique with a unique set of skills and personality traits. Skill sets and personality traits that auger success for people in positions of responsibility have been well-documented in numerous studies and will not be attended to here. However, it is important to note how

personality traits can serve to derail otherwise positive leadership. Individual personalities are paradigmatic in the sense that they represent an individual's perspective on the world and its workings.

Although cognitive abilities are threshold requirements for most leadership positions, personality characteristics and the behaviours exhibited by the leader are key ingredients to a successful tenure as leader. While no specific personality type represents a "best fit," the right behaviours at appropriate times tend to predict success. Although extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness have frequently been correlated with leadership success, not having these traits is not disqualifying, as there are thresholds and ways to compensate (Houpt, et al., 2015). The most important issue seems to be whether the would-be leader understands his/her traits and whether (s)he can compensate for weaknesses, being bound to preferred ways of processing information, and being committed to finding a way to enhance contributions of others. In separate studies by Nga & Shamuganathan, (2010) and by Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, (2009), leader personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively related to direct reports' ratings of the leader's ethical leadership. This relationship was partially mediated by followers' perceptions of psychological safety. In a similar study, Eeden, et al., (2008) conceptualized leadership in terms of behaviours associated with various leadership styles. While this inquiry explained personality traits of managers exercising different leadership styles, the study identifies the difference between behaviours and personality traits or characteristics.

The ongoing impact of worldwide financial turmoil demonstrates enormous depreciation of global national wealth, social livelihood and environmental degradation. Nga & Shamuganathan, (2010) claim that unbridled commercial entrepreneurs, pursuing short-term opportunities, regardless of the consequences, must adopt a more integrative view of business that blends economic, social and environmental values. In short, personality characteristics define behaviours. Personality traits are partly developed by innate nurturing, socialization and education. These tacit traits are also formed values/beliefs held and play an important role in driving social entrepreneurial decision making. Thus, personality traits may influence the intentions and the manner in which the individual acts. (p. 259)

The study implies that appreciation of social responsibility, sustainability and character development need to assist social entrepreneurs in realizing genuine value and impact related to the causes and communities they serve. In other words, it is the actions, borne of personality characteristics, that can be addressed in order to develop functional leadership attributes. This does not mean to say that dysfunctional leadership is merely leadership that one does not like or appreciate; it may refer to leadership that is effective, but destructive. Thus, the actions that accompany such leadership may benefit from being addressed. The next sections identify several dysfunctional leadership behaviours that render leadership "dark" and, ultimately, destructive.

2.7 Binary Thinking

Typically, we use a base-10 number system, simply because it is easier to count in this base, since we usually have ten fingers and toes. Time, in terms of seconds and minutes, is expressed in a base-60 system. The Sumerians, around 5500-3500 BCE, used small clay tokens of different shapes and sizes strung on a length of thin rope. Gradually, number signs replaced the clay tokens. Later on, these written numbers became abstract numerals. Eventually, the number 60 was considered a "superior highly composite number," as it has twelve factors, and can be readily simplified. As a result, it has been used to define time, angles and geographic coordinates (Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexagesimal>).

Another such system is binary code. In mathematics and digital electronics, binaries are numbers expressed in a base-2 numeral system. It uses only two symbols, typically 0 and 1. That

which is not 0, must be 1; and that which is not 1, must be 0. Because of its straightforward implementation in digital electronic circuitry, the binary system is used by computers and computer-based devices (Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binary_number). It is perhaps no surprise that, as we move forward through our technological age, we are being expected to think more and more like the computers that were originally developed to serve humanity. However, things seem to be turning on their heads, as humans are expected to be available at all times through cell phones and other automatic, autonomous devices. Like the machines, we are replacing (which, ironically, were developed to replace human labour) we must never be too tired to work; nor, increasingly, we may not even be required to be in the same location as the jobs that we do (White & Cooper, 2016). This is a mixed blessing because it means that we can always be available from any location. In fact, the four-day workweek that was envisioned at the dawn of the computer age has become a 24/7 treadmill, largely thanks to the successful application of binary code.

We may all have experienced examples of binary thinking from time to time. For example, on/off light switches allow us to recast our thinking in metaphoric ways in terms of yes or no questions, right or wrong answers, or good or bad solutions to problems. This type of thinking leads to polarization and becomes a simplistic knee jerk reaction. As a leadership behaviour, it can be disastrous, particularly because it leads to viewing decisions as dilemmas, where one of two possibilities are presented, neither of which may be an ideal solution. With only two alternatives available, it makes decision-making easy, reflexive and immediate. There is no room for a “best fit” initiative. It leads to quick, irrational decisions and action; when a dialogue is engaged between the emotional and rational parts of the brain.... We can come to believe that reality is defined by two mutually exclusive categories. (Baer, 2017).

As such, the dysfunctional leader may utilize such strategies as a result of anxiety that arises from a lack of toleration for ambiguity or uncertainty. The polarization that develops from indulging in binary thinking can be ameliorated by recognizing that there are few true binaries that exist. What may, at first, appear to be a binary, make be, in fact, merely the poles of a continuum that include innumerable variations upon the theme of the question or event under consideration.

2.8 Template Approaches

Another behaviour that appears common to dysfunctional leaders is the notion of “template thinking.” This type of thinking can best be compared to “thinking inside the box.” A common type of template thinking is the rubric that is often used by teachers to grade students. Within each cell of the rubric is supposedly objective language that will guide teachers to assign accurate marks to students, reflective of their abilities. However, we have heard of the popular “Superman Rubric.” For an “A,” Superman can leap tall buildings at a single bound. For a “B,” Superman can only leap short buildings. A “C” would allow Superman to recognize buildings, and a “D” suggests that he bumps into buildings. Let’s return to the “A” part of the assessment rubric for a moment. What, exactly, is a “leap?” How tall is a tall building? How would one define the term “building” to the satisfaction of all? And what, precisely, is a “bound?” Thus, within a single template, even within one cell of a single template, there lies a multiplicity of points that one may have thought of as self-explanatory, objective and straightforward. However, nestled with the so-called “objective” rubric lurks the notion of subjective language. Nothing can be truly objective and the best that we can achieve is a semblance of relative objectivity, as we go through the process of marking, whether we use rubrics or not.

A second issue lies with the creative student who hands in something that cannot be assessed or evaluated using the same template that appears to be working for everyone else. This may be the student who hands in the video of the assignment instead of the paper that was called for. It may be that the student hands in a paper that is clearly brilliant, but cannot be assessed using the

current rubric. What is the teacher leader to do? Ask for a rewrite? Or ask that the student try not to be so creative next time in order to conform to the rest of the class? Is this the difference between educating our students to explore and create, and training our students to follow rules and to not “colour outside the lines?”

A famous study that identifies and defines dysfunctional aspects of issues relating to template thinking occurred in the 1960s with the Milgram experiments. Stanley Milgram, a Yale University psychologist, conducted a series of experiments relating to the subjects' obedience to figures in authority. In preparation for the experiment, Dr. Milgram created an “electric shock generator” in order to study “the effects of punishment on learning ability.” Subjects were recruited from all walks of life and were offered a small remuneration for participating. These respondents were asked to administer increasingly severe electric shocks to the “learner” when questions were answered incorrectly. The learner was actually an actor and the 45-volt shocks were delivered to the teachers in order to give them a feeling for the jolts they believed they were discharging.

Shock levels were labeled from 15 to 450 volts and labelled from “slight” shock to “Danger: Severe Shock” and, past that, a simple but deadly “XXX.” The learner/actor would grunt at 75 volts; complain at 120 volts; ask to be released at 150 volts; plead with increasing vigor; and scream at 285 volts. Eventually, in desperation, the learner was to yell loudly and complain of heart pain. The learner/actor would eventually refuse to answer any more questions until, at 330 volts, he would remain silent, if any of the teacher participants went so far without rebelling. Silence was to be treated as an incorrect answer and the next shock level was applied to the learner/actor.

The experimenter would pressure the teacher/subjects to proceed with increasingly severe statements. While some teacher/subjects refused to continue with the shocks early on, despite urging from the experimenter, Milgram was surprised to find that almost two-thirds were willing to progress to the maximum voltage. In one variation of this experiment, teacher/subjects were instructed to apply whatever voltage they desired to incorrect answers. The average was 83 volts, and only 2.5 percent of participants used the full 450 volts, revealing that most participants were good, average people, rather than evil individuals. They obeyed only under coercion (Milgram, 1974).

Interestingly enough, Polish Social Scientists have recently replicated this study and have reported few key differences from the results of the original study (Fessler, 2017). Perhaps this macabre point underscores a rather pivotal movement in modern society, that of the movement to the right by many governments worldwide in these neoliberal times.

Although this infamous social experiment claimed to explain the rise of fascism, it is a fine example of template thinking, where people followed the plan regardless of the consequences. Perhaps, there is a tendency for leaders who are less than functional to demand allegiance and loyalty to a plan that is in-operational, under-strategized and, perhaps, unwarranted. Often history and/or tradition is called upon in order to support misguided applications with comments that may include, “We have always done it this way,” or calls to “get with the program.” Conversely, Opportune plans can be disengaged or dislodged with a “We tried that once and it didn't work.”

Such examples of template thinking abound in the workplace, kept largely intact by the leader's own preferences, or inabilities to think beyond the moment or to be creative in his or her thinking. Such types of template thinking may also be fraught with issues of power.

2.9 Power Issues

Leaders become leaders for all kinds of reasons. As discussed earlier, there may be any number of styles of leadership and each one may have been attained by a leader in its own special way. However, not all leaders are altruistic in the acquisition of power and authority. In these decidedly neoliberal times, with template thinking on the rise, individual, or personal power, may indeed be in short supply. For those who may wish to obtain more power, the power they seek may be legitimate power, but it may not be judicious power.

Legitimate power is positional power, replete with a title that signifies the parameters of authority to which the individual is entitled. Judicious power refers to the just, equitable and fair use and/or distribution of power by those in authority who lay claim to legitimate power. There are also many forms of informal power that lie beyond the realm of this current topic.

This is where intent comes in. The reasons for acquisition of any particular form of power may be known only to the seeker of power. Those who tend to seek power for its own sake, or who seek power to gain influence, or to abuse power in the form of bullying behaviours serve only themselves. It is self-serving power that leads to dysfunction, as decisions tend to be made in light of ones own “dark” needs. Perhaps the notion of power acquisition can be summed up by Korda, (1991) in noting that power is obtained in many seemingly innocuous ways, he offers advice for getting larger raises, for getting a better job and for exerting control over everyone else. In many venues, power is sought for its own rewards and is not necessarily utilized for promoting justice, equity and fair play. When a leader uses his or her power to maintain and accrue greater power, dysfunctional behaviours are often the result.

2.10 Decision Driven Data Making

One such behaviour that tends to reduce leadership to a dysfunctional enterprise is “decision driven data making,” a tongue in cheek misrepresentation of its reverse, data driven decision-making. Simply put, data driven decision-making is exactly that. Decisions are made impartially and on the basis of available data. There are a multiplicity of ways that data may be collected, too numerous to itemize here. However, once the data is compiled, there is a process of analysis that allows themes to be identified and which may even point to expedient and appropriate methods by which decisions can be made and operationalized.

However, the dysfunctional twin of this erudite process, decision driven data making, occurs far too often in the halls of the “dark” leader. Of course, there is a plan that is followed, albeit a plan that tends to promote the power of the leader at the expense of good policy initiatives. First in this process comes the decision. This decision may be made on a whim and often is, in order to support a policy, process or practice that the leader wishes to inculcate, develop or maintain. The decision is made for the benefit of the leader and, if others benefit from it, in a kind of trickledown effect, so much the better. Leaders may make decisions based on their perceptions of what is required and may even believe that what they are choosing to support is fair. However, the leader does not expect to consult others in order to arrive at a decision. The decision is his/hers and his/hers alone, even in an atmosphere where (s)he may agree that there are some decisions that are the purview of the leader’s minions, the leader, or both leader and minions.

Now that his decision has been made, it must be supported. This necessitates the data making part, simply because the decision drives the data making. It may be true that research can be used in a multiplicity of ways to justify and support any and possibly all decisions. The search for data, using this form, is purposive. Only data that supports the decision is used. All other data that may offer contrary perspectives is discarded. In this way, the dysfunctional leader can claim to lead, and to justify selected policy initiatives with support from the research.

One such example is the continuing debate about class size. One body of research suggests that class size does matter, while another body of research claims the opposite. At the heart of the debate lies a key issue, which so frequently remains unexamined. This is a question of the purpose of education. If the purpose of education is to furnish students with rhetorical information that requires a certain amount of memory work, then class size may not matter much, at all. This may be viewed as training, rather than as educating. However, if the purpose of education is to educate, to get students to think critically, to be able to make decisions and to advocate for themselves, then experts agree that class size really is an important factor in the teaching of students(Nespor, 2002).

Many other such questions abound that lend themselves to the excesses of decision driven data making. For example, debates swirl around the privatization of schools (Tooley, 2000), international testing (McNeil, 2000), and many other contentious issues around educative circles that seem to polarize opinion, offering fertile ground for both data driven decision-making and its evil twin, “decision driven data-making.”

2.11 Weighing the Balance: Mis-Educative Strategies

However, even dysfunctional leadership may not be entirely negative, as some experiences may be educative, although they may not be positive. While this may seem somewhat platitudinous, it is true that one can learn not only from one’s own mistakes but also from those of others. It may be true that dysfunctional leaders do not mean to be dysfunctional. It may also be true that many leaders, who lead on the “dark” side, do not see themselves as dysfunctional. However, it may also be that some dysfunctional leaders lead for their own purposes; purposes related to the accrual of power and domination. For this latter group, there may be little opportunity or chance of reversing their destructive paths. For the remaining leaders, there may be redress in the form of policy analysis protocols.

Policy analysis attempts to make sense of the process by which decisions are identified, made and implemented. The first phase of the process is to identify the resources that are available, including who will be making the policy. Additionally, this group would likely assess the need for a particular policy. Schedules, meeting times and dates are all a part of the considerations deliberated upon before actual suggestions are considered. Suffice it to say that, in most cases, leaders share the responsibility for policy considerations with a representative sample of the work force or with some of those who form the inner circle of power, whether it be legitimized authority or a more informal group of willing committee members(Cooper & White, 2011).

The second, or middle stage of policy analysis is tasked with framing the need for a particular policy. This is framed in general terms so as not to create parameters around the need for a policy that may reduce effective policy-making. One of the most effective ways of developing policy is to generate alternatives or policy suggestions in the form of processes that may or may not be easily implemented. All suggestions are accepted, with some suggestions being expanded and developed by other committee members.

Critiquing individual policy suggestions is unnecessary at this point and may even serve to limit possibilities, and even policy suggestions. Finally, when saturation has been achieved, recognized by repetition or general agreement, the nascent policy alternatives are discussed one by one. Some policy possibilities may be discarded as unworkable, too expensive, too time intensive to implement, or they may be discarded for other suitable reasons. The policy alternatives that remain require testing. Pilot studies, time period implementation or limited venue implementation may work. Simulation is also a possible means by which policy may be tested before it is implemented(White & Cooper, 2012).

Once the results of the testing of alternatives have been accomplished, the “best fit” is sought from among the existing possibilities. It is possible that anywhere along this process a new idea

may be presented, causing the entire process to revert to an earlier stage. However, in the absence of any surprises, a “best fit” may be achieved that answers most of the issues posed that caused the policy to be created in the first place.

The third and final stage of the policy analysis structure is the implementation of the policy. Interestingly enough, policies are rarely implemented by the people who create them (White & Cooper, 2012). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why war still exists. Imagine a world where world leaders are not only tasked with the creation of policies, but are also expected to implement those policies, themselves. Were this the case, war-mongers would be expected to fight their own battles, rather than sending youngsters to give life and limb and whatever else they have to offer the war effort. However, in this day and age of push-button warfare, such policy implantation by the makers of policy would have little effect in the face of mass destruction. Dysfunctional? Yes. Leadership? Not likely good leadership.

Policy implementation is generally left to the people who are in the middle management ranks, such as teachers or other individuals who wield a modicum of power. Some policies, like flowers, founder and die a slow death if they are not nurtured. Others may be exactly what the situation has called for. At any rate, most policies take up to seven years to become a part of the fabric or the culture of the institution for which it was designed. In educational settings, this is interesting in that many school systems rotate their school leaders every five to seven years, barely giving policies time to blossom and to become a part of the ethos, atmosphere and culture of the school.

Some final notes on policy development include the notion that policies that advantage one group of people or individuals over another group are not good policies because they lack equity and, therefore, are unjust. Policies that benefit those in power over others less powerful are, likewise, unjust. A final note on policy development is the idea that policies require periodic review. For example, in Toronto, Canada, one still cannot hitch one’s horse to the front of Victoria College, even though it is fine to hitch them at the rear of the building. The fact that horses have not been in common use since the first part of the 1900s attests to the fact that here is a policy that may benefit from review in order to take it off the books, as it is no longer relevant. It is this periodic review that may allow some policies to be tweaked in order that they do not become abusive, out-dated or redundant policies. In this way, it is hoped that “dark” leadership, assuming good intentions from the dysfunctional leader, may find its way into the light.

Conclusions

This treatise has discussed some of the major considerations related to leadership when it becomes dysfunctional. Leadership styles and selected problems with leadership were discussed and problematized. Dysfunctional leadership and its association with emotional intelligence were introduced as factors, along with contextual considerations. Additionally, weak social skills, or the lack thereof, as well as misalignment or incompatibility of philosophies of leadership support the notion of dysfunctionality. Behaviours, such as binary thinking, template thinking and “decision driven data-making” are also identified as problematic to effective leadership. Power issues within the leadership coterie and institutional members can have deleterious effects on leadership, no matter what style is chosen. However, even mis-educative experiences with dysfunctional leadership can be informative. A policy analysis model was identified as one possible means to address ineffective leadership and to allow leaders to benefit from positive well-thought out strategies that may help leaders move from the dark side into the light side of leadership.

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