BEYOND AUTHENTICITY: CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP FROM A WORLDVIEW PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

The ongoing development of appropriate leadership in the 21st century is dependent upon it being informed by a relevant and suitable leadership theory. To be able to envisage what this relevant and suitable leadership theory might look like, we need to appreciate how our understanding of leadership has evolved over time (Wilber, 2000b). Furthermore, to understand how leadership theory has evolved over time, it is necessary to see how it is linked to the prevailing worldview, the prevailing “mythical cultural consensus” (Arbuckle, 1993, p. 45), and, ultimately, to human evolution.

Human evolution has been described as being based on the “principle of order out of chaos” since it has a “broad and general tendency to move in the direction of: increasing complexity, increasing differentiation/integration, increasing organizations/structuration, and increasing relative autonomy” (Wilber, 2000a, p.74). Applying this understanding of human evolution to the development of worldviews suggests that they, too, maintain direction. There is a transcending dimension to the evolution of worldviews whereby each subsequent worldview includes but goes beyond its predecessor. “As the higher stages of consciousness emerge and develop,” claims Wilber (p.60), “they themselves include the basic components of the earlier worldview, then add their own new and more differentiated perceptions.” Rather than each subsequent understanding being a distinctively separate perspective, it is possible to see that each incorporates, integrates and then transcends its predecessor. Each perspective treats its predecessor with dignity by incorporating and integrating its beneficial dimensions but transcends its predecessor by redressing its perceived deficiencies.
However, while there is a clearly distinguishable transcending dimension to the evolution of worldviews, there are two important points of clarification about this process that need to be acknowledged. First, the establishment of a new worldview supersedes but does not eliminate its predecessor (Wilber, 2000a). Indeed, by superseding rather than eliminating its predecessor, the new worldview actually preserves those views that preceded it (Hegel, 1971). Each newly emergent worldview includes its preceding worldview and then adds its own new and defining perspectives. This means that there are always elements of previous worldviews still generally evident. Secondly, although this article describes this evolutionary process in a systematic, logical, and sequential way, the reality is not as simple and clear cut. Just as worldviews can evolve, they can also regress (Wilber, 2000a). In following the pattern of emergence of worldviews, we have to also accept that “repressions and dissociations have occurred, and are still occurring, in the historical process” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 61). In other words, there is ebb and flow in this evolutionary process. Evolution meanders more than it progresses but the predominant movement is always towards the more adequate worldview (Murphy, 1992). Hence, while it can be claimed that there is a discernable pattern of direction in the evolution of worldviews, this pattern is far from clear and distinct at any given point in time. It is only by examining the origins of worldviews in human history that this pattern becomes discernable.

In accepting the existence of this discernable pattern of direction in the evolution of worldviews, and given that a worldview impacts on the way people view and understand all aspects of their lives including leadership, this means that the same pattern can be applied to leadership theory. If human evolution has a perceivable direction towards increasing complexity, integration, organization, and relative autonomy, then so, too, does leadership. This means that each subsequent theory of leadership incorporates and integrates the perceived beneficial dimensions of the previous theory and then transcends it by modifying or eradicating perceived deficiencies. This view assumes that the earlier theory of leadership was not wrong but, rather, was adequate and relevant for its time whereas the subsequent theory is more adequate and relevant for the new worldview. In other words, leadership theory has evolved with each new worldview in a continuous process of incorporating, integrating and then transcending the previous theory.

This article utilises an acceptance of an evolutionary pattern in how humans have understood the nature of leadership in order to extend this pattern into the 21st century. Based on the works of numerous writers, such as Gebser, Sorokin, Bellah, Habermas, Foucault, Berger, and Wilber, it is possible to outline the origins of predominant worldviews where some form of leadership was noted. These origins of worldviews are summarised as the magical context, the mythical context, the agrarian context, the modernity context, and the post-modernity context. By examining how the nature of leadership has evolved from these contexts, a pattern becomes perceptible. This perceptible pattern can then be applied to our contemporary theory of leadership to ensure it more accurately guides our current leadership research and practice.

**Leadership in the Magical Context**

In the earliest accounts of human experiences, life was centered on hunting and gathering in small tribal communities essentially based on family and kinship relationships (Wilber, 2000a). The role of leadership varies considerably within this context often with different individuals taking key roles depending on the specific needs and demands of the tribe at the time. However, arguably the most distinctive leadership type role is that of the medicine man, sorcerer, witchdoctor, wizard, or the like. Such a person is called upon to use their seemingly magical powers to provide clarity of purpose and direction to the activities of the tribe, predominantly in times of uncertainty and confusion. In this tribal context of human existence, such leadership is irregularly exercised by a particular individual whose special influential power and authority comes from some unknown source within their self. Rather than any overt actions, it is the character or the personality of these unique individuals that provides their credibility as a particular tribal leader. Their influence on the tribe is through advice and opinion often gained from some form of magic or ritual.

**Leadership in the Mythical Context**

The transition to the mythical era was brought about by the amalgamation of tribes into more organised social groups or villages (Wilber, 2000a). The key aspect of this transition was the need to overcome family and kinship allegiances and to replace these with loyalty to the social group. Consequently, it is during this era that a hierarchical social order was introduced into human existence. This social structure not only ensured order and purpose amongst the group but also aided the group in being able to defend itself against its neighbouring villages. Furthermore, this hierarchical social order went beyond just human existence as it also included an understanding of the influence of non-human, divine beings, in the form of gods and goddesses in the everyday affairs of humans. Being able to account for the unexplainable and the unpredictable as the intervention of such divine beings in human affairs helped to maintain social order.

Thus, an understanding of leadership aligned with a mythical worldview follows similar lines. Included from the magical view are the understandings that leadership is exerted by only a few individuals who possess special powers and
authority to be used to benefit the social group. However, these understandings are integrated into the new worldview such that these special powers are deemed to come from a divine source outside of the person rather than from a magical source within the person. Leadership in the mythical context is about controlling the everyday affairs and fortunes of human beings but it is an activity reserved for the role of divine beings. As described by Wilber (2000a, p.253),

The mythic worldview always situates miraculous power in a great Other (gods and goddesses), around which social cohesion is built beyond mere blood and kinship ties.

Such gods are believed to reside either beyond the earth, as in the heavens or the sky, or in the earth, as in the mountains or the rivers, but not on the earth alongside human beings.

Moreover, the influence of leadership changes from being character based to action based. Now that the role of formal leadership is aligned with certain divine beings, the people can only guess at the character and personality of the respective gods or goddesses. Often it is the nature of the respective experiences, that is, the supposed action initiated by a particular god or goddess, which is used to justify assumptions about the character of the god or goddess. Hence, people’s understanding about leadership is now aligned to practical outcomes, the actions of the god or leader, rather than the character or personality of the leader as is the case in the magical context.

The transcendent aspect of this new understanding of leadership as it moves from the magical to the mythical context is the role of the individuals placed at the top of the social hierarchies. In keeping with the general belief that human existence is ultimately led by divine beings, those at the head of these hierarchies depend upon some form of perceived link to the gods for direction and justification in their actions (Wilber, 2000a). The people believe that it is the will of the gods that is being passed onto them through the words and actions of those placed in the highest levels within the social, political and religious hierarchies. The gods are leading the people through the actions and proclamations of those key individuals who are able to communicate with them in some mythical way. Although certain key individuals give the orders and control the everyday experiences of the people, it is generally assumed that their authority to act in this way comes from a particular association with the gods. Furthermore, these particular people appear to gain the information from the gods through ritualised routines and sacrifices.

Leadership in the Agrarian Context

With the advent of the agrarian era, as villages became empires, rationality replaced mythology (Wilber, 2000a). The people looked for tangible reasons to justify their belief in the rules and regulations that controlled their lives. It was seen that rationality, rather than religious rituals, were more likely to lead to a better way of life. However, the application of rationality was predominantly limited to politics, religion, and economics. First, rationality was used to justify and consolidate not only the maintenance of a socio-political hierarchy but also the acceptance of social rules, roles, and responsibilities in order to sustain this hierarchy. Secondly, rationality became the cornerstone of formalised religious beliefs and practices through which an earth-bound Church replaced the previous mythological understandings associated with the relationships between humans and divine beings. Finally, within the realm of economics, rationality was used to achieve greater agricultural sophistication. Rationality led to the development of new inventions, such as the elementary plough, that not only provided a more productive and sustainable lifestyle but also meant that not every person had to be involved in the food collection or production processes. Those at the top of the social hierarchy were released from everyday demands whereby they could apply rational thinking to other social issues.

Similarly, leadership within the agrarian context becomes a rationalised phenomenon rather than one based on mythological beliefs. Included from the mythological context is the understanding that leadership is still associated with particular individuals who have recognised status within the social hierarchy that enables them to wield power and authority in order to influence the lives of others. However, these understandings that carry over from the mythological context are integrated into the new rational worldview of the agrarian context. First, leadership is seen to reside in certain human individuals, rather than in any divine being. Leadership is a human, rather than a divine, trait. A link to the mythological perspective remains, however, through the acceptance of the concept of ‘divine right’ as the key factor in determining which individuals can lead. Secondly, as these individuals are already at the head of the social hierarchies, leadership is aligned with their respective social roles. Hence, leadership is considered to be solely for the likes of people in roles akin to the positions of nobles, land-owners, army generals, or first-born males.

The transcendent component of leadership within the agrarian context is that leadership is not only about the actions or behaviours of the leader; it now also includes an awareness of the important part played by the people under the influence of the leader. Leadership now incorporates an awareness of the actions of the leader and an acknowledgement of the important part played by those that follow a particular leader. Hence, the most successful social hierarchies are those that
include the largest population. The most famous army generals are those who have the strongest army. The most powerful land-owners are those who are able to get the most out of their workers. In other words, while the action of the leader is still by far the most important dimension of leadership, their actions are pointless without consideration being given to the role of their followers. This means that within an agrarian understanding of leadership there are two fundamental dimensions; the actions of the leader and the role of their followers. Moreover, these two dimensions are considered to be interdependent. Successful leadership not only depends on the nature of the leader’s actions but also it depends on the nature of the involvement of their followers.

**Leadership in the Context of Modernity**

The era of modernity, also referred to as the era of Enlightenment, heralded the introduction of scientific reasoning upon human endeavours that ultimately led to the widespread industrialisation of human existence. Although rationality and reason had been influential in the agrarian era these were confined to use within the roles of the predetermined social elite, whereas, in modernity it infiltrated all aspects of human life (Wilber, 2000a). In particular, scientific reasoning infiltrated human life through its ability to bring about widespread industrialisation, which “was first and foremost a technological means to secure subsistence not from human muscle working on nature but from machine power working on nature” (Wilber, 2000b, p.48). The impact of human rationality was now endemic throughout society. Within the modernity worldview, and its emphasis on scientific reasoning, all aspects of human existence were considered potentially able to be made more efficient and productive either through the invention of a more efficient machine to do the work or the refinement in how the practice was completed by humans.

One of the most important outcomes of modernity was the establishment of human individuality and autonomy. The widespread use of scientific reasoning brought “forth an ego identity from the previous role identity” (Wilber, 2000a, p.389). In modernity, it was expected that the individual would be able to rationally think for themselves rather than relying upon socially given rules or dogmas. Also, in moral decision making it was expected that the individual would assume responsibility for his or her own relative autonomous choices. In political theory, it was accepted that the individual person was an autonomous agent, a free and equal subject of civil law and a politically free subject or democratic citizen of the state.

Another key outcome of modernity’s commitment to scientific reasoning was the differentiation of all that constituted human experiences (Wilber, 2000b). In

endeavouring to seek truth, control, and predictability through scientific methods of observation, measurement and analysis, reality was particularised and differentiated as the individual components of whatever was being examined were isolated, separated and dissected in order to be more thoroughly studied, scrutinized and evaluated. Ultimately, this led to a heightened emphasis on those aspects of human experiences that readily or partially lent themselves to analysis by scientific reasoning but, at the same time, a devaluing of other aspects of human experiences that defied analysis by scientific reasoning. This outcome resulted in the formation of clear distinctions and perceived levels of importance between human qualities that had previously been considered united as one within each person. This fragmentation included: “body, mind and consciousness; science, culture and self; science, morals, and art; facts, values, and consciousness; It, We, and I” (Wilber, 2000a, p.404).

With respect to the understanding of leadership within a modernity context, “most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation” (Yukl, 1994, p.3). Hence, it can be seen that this understanding includes the previously existing belief that a leader is a person who exercises special influence over others through particular power, authority, or some other form of social influence. As a result, acknowledged leaders maintain an exalted place within society. However, in keeping with its modernity foundations, rationality and scientific reasoning are integrated also into the characteristics of this new understanding of leadership. This means that any individual has the freedom and autonomy to become a leader. Leadership is available to any person who can demonstrate accepted leadership traits regardless of their previous social standing.

The transcendent aspect of modernity’s impact on leadership is that it expands and differentiates the agrarian understanding that leadership includes the two interwoven fundamental dimensions of the leader and their followers. First, the modernity perspective expands on this understanding by also including the dimension of the self of the leader. For example, the Trait Theory is one of the earliest examples of modernity’s investigation of leadership and includes an attempt to isolate the character traits that helps certain individuals to be accepted as leaders (Shriberg, Shriberg, & Lloyd, 2002). In other words, this theory acknowledges that there is something about the person, the self of a leader, which enables him or her to be accepted as a leader. Within the context of modernity, the accepted understanding of leadership is that it includes the fundamental dimensions of the It, the leader’s behaviours, the I, the leader’s self, and the We, the leader’s followers.
Moreover, within a modernity context these three dimensions of leadership are differentiated. Rather than seeing them as interwoven dimensions of leadership, the modernity perspective distinguishes each dimension but then isolates them in keeping with modernity’s universal way of studying, scrutinizing and evaluating phenomena. Unfortunately, the It of leadership, the leader’s behaviour, lends itself more readily to scientific reasoning such that this dimension easily dominates leadership research and theorising. Hence, much of the focus of leadership literature within this context is “about particular approaches to, or models of leadership – servant leadership or strategic leadership, for example” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinback, 1999, p.5), that is, the It of leadership, with little attention to the I or the We of leadership as these dimensions are inherently more subjective than objective and, thereby, far less suitable for the application of scientific reasoning. Although leadership within a modernity context differentiates these three integral dimensions of leadership, its propensity for favouring phenomena that can be analysed, measured and objectified results in an emphasis on what leaders should do to improve their leadership at the expense of what they should know about themselves and what they should know about how they are interacting with those that they are leading.

Leadership in the Context of Postmodernity

Since the 1960s, the world has witnessed the transition from an industrial society based on a heavy input of energy, capital, and labour to a highly technological society reliant upon information and innovation (Jensen, 1999). This change has resulted in a social reality where disorder, instability, diversity, disequilibrium, nonlinear relationships, and temporality seem to be the norm. As these outcomes are contrary to those promoted by modernity there has been widespread acceptance that a new worldview, postmodernity, is forming (Crotty, 1998; Hodgkinson, 2003; Wilber, 2000a, 2000b; Thornhill, 2000). Although the term, postmodernity, itself, is not free from ambiguity and contradiction (Hodgkinson, 2003; Maxey, 1994), it has generally come to designate the seemingly unpredictable and ever changing, if not chaotic, world of today (Cameron, 2003; Wallace, 2003).

Given that the postmodernity worldview is still evolving, its true nature is yet to be fully realised. Arguably though, its epistemological perspective can provide some significant insights. Postmodernity presents the search for knowledge, not as a rigid process that seeks to uncover a pre-existing reality, but rather as an interactive process in which knowledge is created (Schwandt, 1994). Moreover, it is proposed that the reality created through this interactive process is specific to each individual. Each person constructs their own reality as they interact with their part of the world.

The [person] is not some detached, isolated, pregiven, and fully formed little entity that simply parachutes to earth and then begins innocently [recognising] what it sees lying around out there in the real world, the real territory, the pregiven world. Rather, the [person] is situated in contexts and currents of its own development, its own history, its own evolution, and the pictures it makes of the world depend in large measure not so much on the world as on this history. (Wilber, 2000b, p.55)

Each person develops their own unique and individualised working understanding of reality and life, one that suits their purposes. Since purposes and context vary from individual to individual and from group to group, what knowledge each person arrives at is in part autobiographical and reflects their own personal narrative and their own particular site in the world. Reality is not assumed to have a certain pregiven form but rather it emerges from the employment of each person’s sense of reason as well as their feelings, intuitions, and social influences.

The challenge for postmodernity is in redressing the two key perceived deficiencies of modernity. First, while scientific reasoning brings immense benefits to the world it also creates dissonance and dissociation. In its endeavour to isolate and differentiate in order to observe, measure, analyse, and predict, modernity unexpectedly creates a disharmonious and imbalanced view of reality. The objective world dominates the subjective world. Therefore, the first challenge for postmodernity is to bring back harmony and balance to the world by integrating what modernity has differentiated (Wilber, 2000a). The second challenge for postmodernity is to promote a new way of understanding the world, a new consciousness, a new awareness of how to synthesise and integrate a seemingly chaotic world. Modernity depends on a kind of dichotomised consciousness, a consciousness associated with either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, true/false type perspectives, but this form of thinking can not lead to synthesis and integration. Furthermore, it is a consciousness that tends to objectify, externalise and specialise decision making by striving to limit any subjective influence by the decision maker. Hence, it is argued that a new consciousness is required that not only frees the decision maker to be more actively and holistically involved in the process but also encourages their development of a more “integrated personality” and enables them to develop a more “global perspective”. (Wilber, 2000b, p.174) This is about seeing the world not in dichotomies but as harmonious, united, and interdependent. It is about having a vision of one’s self as an integral part of this harmonious, united, and interdependent world. It is about seeing the world through vision logic (Foucault, 1970) or centaur consciousness (Heidegger, 1968) where the body and mind, the objective and the subjective, are reunited and transcended through one’s consciousness so as to not only create a more integrated self with one’s reality but also, ultimately, to create a better world.
By applying to our understanding of leadership not only the previously established transitional pattern of inclusion, integration and transcendence but also these two perceived challenges for the enhancement of all phenomena when moving to a postmodern worldview, it is argued that it is possible to theorise what leadership should be like in a postmodernity context. The following figure provides a diagrammatical representation of this theory.

Figure 1. A diagrammatical representation of leadership in a postmodernity context

This diagrammatical representation of leadership in a postmodernity context shows that it includes modernity’s three fundamental dimensions of the It, the leader’s behaviours, the I, the leader’s self, and the We, the leader’s followers. However, these have been modified somewhat in order to align them more appropriately with a postmodernity worldview. First, ‘We’ has been changed to ‘Community’ since the new worldview supports the concept of an integrated self. That is, the leader does not stand alone from his or her followers but is an integral part of the ‘We’, the group of people being led. Hence, the use of the term ‘Community’ was chosen to convey this understanding. Secondly, the circles drawn to represent each of the three fundamental dimensions of leadership are of equal size. Within a postmodern understanding, each dimension is as important as the others. How well the leader knows and understands their self, and how able and willingly he or she is in associating with those they work with, are as important in determining leadership quality as is the leader’s actions and behaviours.

Integrating these three dimensions not only maintains a commitment to the previous established pattern but also meets the first acknowledged challenge of moving from a worldview aligned to modernity to a worldview aligned to postmodernity. The diagrammatical representation shows this outcome via the overlapping of the three circles.

Moreover, this representation endeavours to show that this process of integration incorporates a practical as well as a cognitive change in leadership behaviour. It is not just expected that a postmodern leader is able to consider their role from each of the perspectives of behaviour, self, and community but, more importantly, that the leader can consciously integrate and synthesise these considerations in order to maximise his or her leadership influence regardless of any competing or conflicting demands.

It is only in this way, that the leader is able to be true to their self, true to others, and true to the world in which they live. This is about achieving authenticity in leadership. As Taylor (1999, p.29) explains,

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me. … Not only should I not fit my life to the demands of external conformity; I can’t even find the model to live by outside myself. I can find it only within. Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realising a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern idea of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment or self-realization in which it is usually couched.

The concept of authenticity proposes that a leader does not just do things because that is what is expected, or because that is what he or she likes to do, or because others want him or her to do it. Rather, authenticity is about developing a more self-responsible form of leadership (Starratt, 2003). Authenticity in leadership is about making choices based on being fully conscious of the impact of these choices on one’s self, on others, and on what can be done, and to always act to maximise the dignity, integrity, and accomplishments of all.

Finally then, the transcendent aspect of a postmodern understanding of leadership is the introduction of the important role played by the leader’s consciousness and, in so doing, addressing the second challenge of moving from a worldview aligned to modernity to a worldview aligned to postmodernity. A key understanding of the role played by a postmodern leader’s consciousness is conveyed in the
diagrammatical representation of Figure 1 by the dashed circumferences of the circles that distinguish the three dimensions of leadership. This is meant to indicate that consciousness can occur both within these circles as well as outside these circles. In this way, it can be seen that consciousness within a postmodern understanding of leadership can occur at two levels. First, consciousness can occur inside the circles. The self at this level of consciousness is aware of both the mind and the body as experience. That is, the leader is able to observe and reflect on what they are doing, how they are feeling, and how they are relating to others as they go about their role. Moreover, this level of consciousness is an important source of self-referential and self-assessment data that guides the leader’s preferred behaviour. The second level of consciousness is that which can occur outside of the circles. This is the “I that stands above” (Frattaroli, 2003, p.305). This is the “observing self [that] transcends both the mind and the body and thus can be aware of them as objects in awareness. It is not just the mind looking at the world; it is the observing self looking at the body, the mind, and the world” (Wilber, 2000b, p.174).

At the first level, consciousness adds depth to the leader’s normal patterns of thinking. As explained by Frattaroli (2003, p.343),

> The mind can account for the contents of consciousness – thoughts, impulses, emotions, memories, fantasies, personality patterns – but not for the consciousness that experiences and finds meaning in these contents and can discern the difference between thought, impulse, emotion, fantasy, and personality. This is the consciousness of the soul and where the person finds their true self.

Consciousness at this level ensures that the leader is not controlled by their personal desires, the influence of others, or the need to do everything asked of them in a perfect way. This level of consciousness nurtures the possibility that the leader can make autonomous conscious choices so that they will be free to direct their lives from the very centre of their self-reflective moral consciousness.

At the second level, the leader’s consciousness becomes the vehicle not only of self-discovery but of self-actualisation. The simple act of paying attention to their inner world, to the finely differentiated layers and qualities of their private experiencing, becomes a dawning recognition that each moment of that experiencing crystallises the core meanings of their role as a leader (Frattaroli, 2003). The result is a unique experience of consciousness in the act of expanding itself that is the heart and soul of understanding, accepting, and affirming their self as a leader. This level of consciousness enhances leadership because it opens the leader to a more genuine sense of community with their fellow human beings and inspires them to live in accord with their higher values and aspirations. By generating an awareness of the discrepancy between what they are doing and what they would like to achieve, such consciousness gives the leader the self-knowledge of how they can grow towards becoming a better person and a better leader.

**Conclusion**

This article has presented the view that in order for our understanding of leadership to keep up with human evolution and, hence, the prevailing worldview of postmodernity, it needs to reflect certain essential characteristics. First, it needs to establish a balance amongst the three fundamental dimensions of leadership: behaviour, self, and community. This is necessary in order to redress the imbalance created by modernity. Secondly, leadership in the context of postmodernity needs to integrate these three dimensions in order to reflect a commitment to the individual uniqueness that each leader brings to their role. Through the integration of these three dimensions, the leader is free to develop their leadership role in a way that is authentically and meaningfully their own. Finally, this article stresses the essential role played by consciousness within a postmodernity context of leadership. The inclusion of consciousness is not just as another inherent dimension. Rather, it is the essence of postmodernity leadership. It is only through the authentic application of consciousness that leadership can rise above the over emphasis on the practical, which invariably blossoms within a modernity context. Consciousness provides the leader with the most appropriate knowledge, wisdom, sensitivity, and insight for ensuring that they can successfully lead with dignity, integrity, and confidence in a seemingly ever-changing, unpredictable, and chaotic world.

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