



Ethical Leadership: Implications for Enhancing Quality in Higher Education

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Abstract: In a globalized, competitive world dependent on human ingenuity, the need for quality education has occupied the center stage of attention for public officials, professionals, and communities at large. Yet, the focus of stakeholders has largely been on the material rather than ethical factors in the change process. Departing from this conventional approach, this paper seeks to highlight the importance of ethics in the success of organizations, particularly the ways in which instructors' ethical leadership can stimulate change and enhance quality across universities in Morocco. The paper draws on the theoretical and empirical literature to address a number of questions related to the nature of ethical leadership, its processes and outcomes. The situational and individual characteristics affecting the perceptions and development of ethical leadership are discussed with an emphasis on the implications for language teaching and learning. What ethics are important and how ethical leadership affects attitudes and performance are also explored in this paper. By underlining the role of ethics rather than simply technical competence in driving success and teaching/learning quality, this paper provides insights and perspectives often overlooked but critical to the understanding and achievement of change.

Introduction

In a competitive world increasingly dependent on innovation and knowledge creation, Moroccan universities are facing immense pressure for delivering better outcomes. To address the challenges, the Moroccan government has undertaken several initiatives to increase the material support for universities, whereas the moral aspects in the change process have received little attention. Given that change is essentially driven by the values and ethics prevailing across organizations, it is time for Moroccan universities to shift the focus towards the ethical domain to turn into centers of innovation driving social and economic development in the country. Language teaching has an important role to play in this process, but it can only do so if its focus is redirected towards the ethical rather than merely the technical sphere of change. What stands in the way of change is often the lack of *will* and strong ethics rather than *skill* or technical competence since organizations rife with conflict, egoism and negativity will not likely achieve the expected results regardless of the resources at hand. This study, therefore, builds mainly on Trevino and Brown's (2007) research to explore what ethical leadership is, why it is important, what situational and individual characteristics influence the emergence of ethical leadership, and what each aspect implies for language teaching and quality across Moroccan universities.

Definition

Brown et al. (2005) describe ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to flowers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (p. 120). In other words, ethical leadership involves a) modeling conduct that is considered appropriate in a particular context, b) promoting ethical conduct by setting, communicating, and ensuring respect for ethical standards, and c) making appropriate (principled and fair) decisions that followers can observe and emulate (Trevino & Brown, 2007, p. 106). Ethical leaders were described as concerned about and caring toward their people, honest and trustworthy, principled, persuasive, committed to doing what is right in

their personal and professional lives, fair, open and ethically aware, and showing concern for multiple interests, long-term outcomes, and means not just ends (Trevino & Brown, 2007).

Implication 1:

Leadership lies in influence over one's social setting rather than in positions of power and status. What makes someone an ethical leader is not simply his or her position, personal traits, the results achieved, or the process in which they are achieved (Grint, 2010). Rather, ethical leadership is a combination of some or all of these components, which implies that language instructors across Moroccan universities can and should act as ethical leaders in their interpersonal relationships, whether with colleagues, students or administrative staff.

Generating the much desired change in language teaching, or any other discipline, across universities hinges primarily on the extent to which instructors exhibit ethical behavior, such as caring, trustworthiness, fairness, and other forms of prosocial behavior. Certainly, actors at all levels of the decision-making hierarchy have a role to play in the emergence of ethical leadership, particularly government officials who need to work on providing the moral and material support that is likely to encourage ethical behavior across university organizations.

Importance of Ethical Leadership

Trevino and Brown (2007) maintained that ethical leaders were key to the success of organizations. Acting as a moral leader is important because followers often identify with and emulate ethical role models, particularly when rewards are provided for doing so. By being trustworthy and treating followers with care, concern and fairness, ethical leaders will create social exchange relationships, i.e. followers will reciprocate the care and fair treatment they receive by engaging in ethical prosocial behavior and refraining from unethical antisocial conduct (Trevino & Brown, 2007). As noted by Trevino and Brown (2007), ethical leaders are "moral managers," not simply moral persons, who try to proactively influence followers on ethical matters.

Ethical leadership is also the driving force of transformational leadership and change across organizations of all kinds. Studies have found that transformational leadership is positively related to perceived leader integrity (Tracey & Hinkin, 1994; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002) and the leader's cognitive moral development (Turner et al., 2002). In other words, the more integrity and moral reasoning leaders exhibit, the more transformational they are likely to be. Similarly, leader honesty, integrity and trustworthiness have been associated with perceived leader effectiveness (Craig & Gustafson, 1998; Den Hartog et al., 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2011; Trevino & Brown, 2007). Transformational leaders are perceived to be ethical because they encourage followers to transcend their self-interest, satisfy followers' lower-level needs to focus on higher-level needs, and bring followers to higher levels of moral development by directing attention to important values (Trevino & Brown, 2007). Research has shown that transformational leadership has a powerful impact on followers' motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Lowe et al., 1996). Thus, ethical leadership as an antecedent of transformational leadership is elemental to the success of organizations.

Implication 2:

Language teaching across Moroccan universities needs to be driven by ethical leadership in order to be effective. Relying on the development of technical expertise alone to address largely ethical challenges is unlikely to result in much improvement. In order for language instructors to be transformational, they need to act as ethical leaders in the first place. Similarly, policy makers need to behave ethically in order to be transformational and increase motivation, satisfaction and performance among instructors across university institutions.

Ethical Leadership from a Descriptive Perspective

Brown and Trevino (2006) emphasize a descriptive and predictive approach to ethics and leadership rather than simply a prescriptive approach (what *should* leaders do). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), individuals learn by paying attention to and emulating the attitudes, values and behaviors of attractive and credible models (Brown & Trevino, 2006). That is, for leaders to be seen as ethical by their followers, they must be attractive and credible role models. While power and status make ethical role models more attractive and more likely to be emulated, attractiveness extends beyond power and status to include care and concern and treating others fairly (Brown & Trevino, 2006). On the other hand, credibility includes being trustworthy and practicing what is preached, which are important characteristics that make leaders more credible and ethical role models (Brown & Trevino, 2006). As a result, credibility enhances leaders' effectiveness as followers pay more attention to and try to emulate ethical leaders' modeled behavior.

Implication 3:

Effective teaching of languages across Moroccan universities does not simply depend

on techniques and methods but more importantly on attitudes, values and behaviors. To achieve success in their work, language instructors need first to demonstrate ethical leadership, i.e. attractiveness (care, concern and fairness), and credibility (trustworthiness and practicing what is preached) in their relationships with students, colleagues and staff. The same is true for public officials and policy makers, who need to act as attractive and credible leaders in order to influence language teaching across universities.

Situational Influences and Ethical Leadership

Brown and Trevino (2006) identified three situational factors influencing followers' perceptions of an ethical leader: Ethical role modeling, the organization's ethical context, and the moral intensity of the issues faced by the leader. First, ethical role modeling implies having an ethical role model in one's professional experience, which contributes to the development of ethical leaders. Brown and Trevino (2006) found that "leaders who said that they had previously had an ethical role model at work were more likely to be identified as ethical leaders by their followers" (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p. 601).

Second, the ethical context of an organization concerns mainly the ethical climate (Victor & Cullen, 1988) or ethical culture (Trevino et al., 1998), i.e. the characteristics of the organization that support or undermine ethical attitudes and behaviors (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Victor and Cullen (1988) identified nine types of ethical climates based on three philosophical approaches (egoism, benevolence and principle) and three levels of analysis (individual, local and cosmopolitan). Studies have found that a benevolent ethical climate influences organizational commitment (Cullen et al., 2003) and ethical decision-making (Flannery & May, 2000). Thus, Brown and Trevino (2006) propose that stronger ethical contexts that support and encourage ethical conduct also support the development and maintenance of ethical leadership in organizations.

The third factor influencing ethical leadership consists of the moral intensity of the issues faced, encompassing mainly moral awareness or "recognizing an issue as having moral content," which is vital for activating processes of ethical judgment (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p. 602). There are two dimensions of moral intensity that influence moral awareness: the magnitude of consequences or the potential harm that might result from the situation, and the social consensus or the existence of strong ethical norms in a situation (Flannery & May, 2000). Brown and Trevino (2006) propose that "leaders who work in strong ethical contexts that support ethical conduct will be better prepared to handle morally intense situations and demonstrate their ethical leadership, and vice versa" (p. 602).

Implication 4:

Ethical leadership develops in situ rather than in vacuo, i.e. in context, not apart from it. For the teaching of languages to meet its targets, Moroccan universities need to go beyond providing equipment and infrastructure to building strong ethical climates or cultures. To achieve this goal, actors at all levels have a role to play in the process. Language instructors in particular need to act as role models for each other as well as for students; their actions need to be driven by benevolent rather than selfish motives. Without role modeling and ethical climates where action is driven by benevolence and principles, actors across Moroccan universities, and language instructors in particular, will not likely develop the moral awareness necessary for ethically handling the issues they face in their everyday work. To develop ethical leaders and transform learning and teaching, there is need for instructors who role model ethical behavior, university contexts supporting ethical attitudes and behaviors, and ethical handling of morally intense situations. These three situational factors are closely interdependent, implying that the emergence of ethical leadership, as a vehicle of change, depends on the level of involvement of all different actors across the system.

Individual Characteristics and Ethical Leadership

There are five individual characteristics influencing the perceived attractiveness and credibility of leaders and thus ethical leadership. To start with, there are personality characteristics, namely agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism, which all influence the level to which leaders are viewed as ethical or less so. Agreeable leaders are altruistic, trusting, kind and cooperative; conscientious leaders are dependable, responsible, dutiful and determined while neurotic leaders are anxious, hostile, impulsive and stressed (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Brown and Trevino (2006) proposed that agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively related to ethical leadership while neuroticism was negatively related.

The second individual trait is motivation. McClelland's (1985) theory of motivation posits that individuals are driven by three main motives: The power motive or the need to influence others, the achievement motive or the desire to achieve something better than has been done, and the affiliation motive or the desire to have positive relationships with others.

Research suggests that effective leaders often have a high need for *socialized* power, a moderate need for achievement, and a moderate to low need for affiliation (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Thus, leaders who use power with greater inhibition for the benefit of others (socialized power) rather than for self-aggrandizement (self-serving power) will be more attractive and credible ethical leaders (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

Third, there is the trait of Machiavellianism or “the use of guile, deceit, and opportunism in interpersonal relations” (Christie, 1970, p. 1), which has been negatively associated with ethical leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Machiavellian leaders use manipulation and coercion to achieve personal goals, which are behaviors that are not considered ethical sources of influence. Machiavellian leaders are therefore unlikely to be viewed as attractive ethical leaders (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

There are other individual characteristics influencing ethical leadership, such as the level of moral judgment, locus of control, and self-monitoring. With regard to the level of moral judgment, Kohlberg’s theory of cognitive moral development posits that individuals reason about what is right based on three major criteria: obedience and fear of punishment or exchange in relationships at the pre-conventional level, the expectations of significant others or rules and laws at the conventional level, and internal values and standards or universally held deontological principles of justice and rights at the principled level (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Turner et al. (2002) found that those with higher levels of moral reasoning were more likely to be perceived as transformational leaders by their followers. Blasi (1980) and Ashkanasy et al. (2006) found that those who reason at principled levels are more likely to behave ethically to achieve consistency between thoughts and actions. Similarly, those who demonstrate *moral utilization*, i.e. the extent to which individuals utilize (not simply have) the capacity for principled thinking in ethical decision making, are more likely to be perceived as ethical leaders (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

On the other hand, locus of control (LC), or one’s perceived control over events in life, has also been found to influence ethical leadership (Hegarty & Sims, 1978; Miller & Toulouse, 1986; Trevino & Youngblood, 1990). Those with internal LC perceive greater control over their lives while those with external LC perceive that fate or powerful others exert greater influence on events. Internals, as Trevino and Youngblood (1990) found, are more likely to behave ethically compared to externals. Studies have found that the internal locus of control is positively related to effective leadership (Miller & Toulouse, 1986) and transformational leadership (Howell & Avolio, 1993).

The other individual characteristic influencing ethical leadership is self-monitoring, which consists of individuals’ attentiveness to and control of how they present themselves to others (Brown & Trevino, 2006). High self-monitors act as chameleons, adjusting their self-presentation to fit their social environments while low self-monitors act consistently across social settings without much concern for fitting into a given situation. High self-monitors are more likely to act as leaders (Day et al., 2002). Brown and Trevino (2006) contend that high self-monitors should demonstrate more ethical leadership in strong ethical contexts. That is, high self-monitors will more likely be influenced by contextual support for ethical or unethical leadership behavior.

Implication 5:

Individuals influence the situation just as they are influenced by it. Language instructors across Moroccan universities have a level of responsibility in building ethical leadership across organizations, mainly through exhibiting desired individual traits such as agreeableness (being altruistic, trusting, kind and cooperative) and conscientiousness (being dependable, responsible, dutiful and determined). Conversely, it is important to understand that neurotic behavior such as being anxious, hostile, impulsive and stressed, and the use of deceit, manipulation and coercion in interpersonal relationships, i.e. Machiavellianism, are detrimental to language teaching regardless of individual expertise. To meet the targets of language teaching across Moroccan universities, instructors’ actions need to be driven by a high need for *socialized* power, a moderate need for achievement, and a moderate to low need for affiliation or positive relationships with others. These motivations are of primary importance because they are what makes instructors effective leaders in the eyes of their students and colleagues. Technical expertise alone is not enough to transform learning and teaching across Moroccan universities. For language instructors to transform their organizations, they have to think about what is right at the principled level, i.e. based on internal and deontological universal values rather than fear and punishment, relationships of exchange, and the expectations of others. Even if the situation in which they function may not be conducive to the emergence of ethical leadership, instructors can still make a difference by role modeling ethical behavior, which will give them more control over events and thus help them develop an internal locus of control. Waiting for the situation to change is fatalism, and

therefore language educators need to demonstrate a degree of flexibility, adjusting to the social settings where they operate in ways that are productive. In this sense, ethical leadership is a responsibility of all actors at all levels, starting from instructors in the classrooms and moving up to those at the top of the decision-making hierarchy. These actors need to understand that what drives quality and change across organizations of all sorts is not technical know-how, per se, but rather ethical behavior.

Conclusion

The challenges facing social and economic development in Morocco are primarily ethical in nature, necessitating an ethical rather than technical approach to change across all different domains, including language teaching and learning. Ethical leadership, as shown by the research, is key to transformational leadership and effectiveness. In other words, language teaching must be driven by strong ethics or ethical leaders in order to achieve the desired outcomes. On the one hand, language instructors shoulder part of the responsibility for the emergence of ethical leadership across Moroccan universities. Language educators' attitudes and behaviors, or more specifically their individual characteristics, play an important role in the change process across organizations. On the other hand, the characteristics of Moroccan universities do influence how instructors think and behave. As a result, those at the top of the decision-making hierarchy must extend their efforts beyond providing material support to universities to building ethical climates or cultures. A shift in policy from the technical to the moral or ethical aspects of change is essential for the transformation of education and society as a whole.

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