

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Philanthropic Leadership

by

Lisa Marie Sweetie Burks Barrow

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PHILANTHROPIAN LEADERSHIP

by
Lisa Marie Sweetie Burks Barrow

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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May 2004

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Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored leadership by means of accessing the lived experiences of leaders perceived as being philanthropic in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations in Canada and the United States. Philanthropic leaders display the following characteristics: (a) love, (b) compassion, (c) caring, (d) altruism and (e) perceptive listening. The selection process relied on the criterion and snowball sampling techniques as means for choosing thirty participants for the in-depth interviews. After the transcription of the interviews, an analysis of the data occurred using Atlas.ti, a software program. Three themes emerged. These themes centered on the leaders' mindsets, leadership tools and the emergence of the philanthropic leadership phenomenon. The implication was that employees responded positively to attitudes and behaviors of leaders who acknowledged and emphasized the value of employees.

Dedication

To the memory of my parents, John Will and Lois Iona Burks, who knew the value of
knowledge, perseverance and hope.

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First and foremost, I thank my Heavenly Father for giving me the wisdom, the guidance and the strength to travel this journey. To my dear husband George, thank you for your support, patience and understanding. Thank you for your willingness to sacrifice some of our precious time together so that I could pursue one of my dreams. Dr. Kolberg, thank you for believing in my vision and for being willing to explore the vision with me. Throughout this journey, you remained by my side and at the times when you believed it was necessary, you were willing to walk before me and lead the way. Through both the challenging times and the times of celebration, you were there; I am forever grateful. You are not only a terrific mentor, but you are also a terrific friend. Dr. Salerno, thank you for keeping me on the straight and narrow. I truly appreciate your guidance, encouragement and support. Dr. Grant, thank you for your support and encouragement and for your willingness to share your knowledge. Dr. Rindfuss Ellis, thank you for traveling with me on yet another journey. I appreciate your willingness to share your insights and knowledge. Dr. Dale Vaillancourt and Leona Enns, I am so very grateful that our paths crossed during this journey. Peggy Biggar, Lynne Maukonen, Dianne Oster and Alice Wrisley, thank you for your daily prayers, words of encouragement, support and for believing in my vision. Our friendships are a blessing. To my sisters, Iona, Maureen, Earli and Mary, thank you for your prayers and for regularly checking in on me in order to make sure that I was remaining faithful to the cause. To my family at Port Colborne Baptist Church, thank you for your prayers. To my dear friend and peer coach Ann Spjut- at the beginning of this journey, we promised to support one another and to be there for one another and we have kept that promise. To my classmates, thank you for your friendships, for sharing your knowledge and for being there when I needed a good laugh or needed to be encouraged. Finally, to my hero and dear friend, the late Mario Nunziato-your dedication to your dream inspired me to remain dedicated to my dream.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The recent exposure of corporate executive corruption in organizations, such as Adelphia, Enron, Tyco and WorldCom, has caused the public, along with affected employees, to question the attitudes and behaviors of leaders in organizations (Gibbs, 2002; Hollingworth, 2002; Meisinger, 2002; Sonnenfeld, 2002). The public and employees are trying to understand how leaders can participate in activities that jeopardize the welfare of the organization, their employees and members of society (Carney, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Paine, 1997). The intentions of some leaders have shifted from being concerned about their organizations to being concerned solely about their personal advancement and pleasures (Albert, 2002; Byrne, Arndt, Zellner, & McNamee, 2002; Webber, 2002). Such a shift has created havoc and uncertainty for many innocent victims of corporate corruption, especially because so many people rely on the choices that leaders make; choices on which the well being of many others depends.

Due to the unethical behavior of some leaders, the moral compass for their organizations is broken and is in need of replacement with a stronger, more durable moral compass (Gibbs, 2002; Hollingworth, 2002; Meisinger, 2002; O'Toole, 1996; Sonnenfeld, 2002). These leaders have used their unethical behavior to conduct their business with little or no regard for the negative consequences that may occur. They have ignored their responsibility for being accountable to their employees and to society when making decisions (Badaracco, 1992; Paine, 1997). This has created a gap between organizational stakeholders and corporate leaders; it is a gap that leaders must close so that employees do not become the victims of unethical behavior (Meisinger, 2002; Webber, 2002). Some leaders are seeking to change how they conduct themselves in their organizations (Hollingworth, 2002). These leaders are recognizing that there is an interdependent relationship between themselves and their employees. This relationship

requires that all parties have a clear understanding of correct behavior. McCoy (1997) wrote, “Because corporations and their members are interdependent, for the corporation to be strong the members need to share a preconceived notion of correct behavior, a ‘business ethic,’ and think of it as a positive force, not a constraint” (p. 58).

Employees and the public are challenging leaders to consider their employees’ attitudes, behaviors and perceptions and how these affect the performance of the organization (Kim & Marborgne, 1997; Lundby, Fensalon, & Magnan, 2001). The revelation of unethical behavior among corporate executives has not been the only concern of the employees and the public. There is a related concern about the callousness and lack of compassion some leaders display and how this affects employees (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, & Kanov, 2002; Freed, 2000; Hunter, 2002). The unethical behavior of some leaders creates a climate that does not value employees’ needs and emotions (Sheehan, 1999; Webber, 2002). Leaders in such a climate tend to see and treat their employees as unfeeling, unemotional, inanimate objects; thus, leaders devalue their employees and their well being (Kimura, 2003; O’Toole, 1996; Wren, 1995). Leaders who adopt an uncaring, uncompassionate and detached leadership approach, display attitudes and behaviors that negatively affect the following: (a) the organization, (b) the employees, (c) the work environment and (d) ultimately, the economy.

Problem Statement

Many leaders in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations have chosen authoritarian and patriarchal leadership approaches and have not adopted a positive attitude towards their employees (Block, 1987; McGregor, 1960; Shafritz & Ott, 2001). These leaders continue to rely on authoritarian, controlling, impersonal, uncaring and unloving approaches to leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Morgan, 1998). The problem is that these approaches deny the value of

employees by suppressing and ignoring their emotions, feelings and knowledge. Despite the need to become more compassionate and loving, authoritarian and patriarchal leaders continue to treat their employees like machines and not like human beings with emotions, feelings and knowledge (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Morgan, 1998). To point the way to a solution to this problem, a hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the leadership approaches of individuals who were concerned about their employees' well being and who sought to bring a sense of humanness into the workplace.

Background

Many organizational leaders rely on leadership approaches that are patriarchal and exemplify McGregor's theory X management approach (Block, 1993; McGregor, 1960). The attitudes and behaviors that these leadership approaches produced have been largely negative and have prevented employees from performing at their highest potentials (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 1990; Shafritz & Ott, 2001). Such attitudes and behaviors strongly influenced the organization's culture and the attitudes, behaviors and performance of employees (DeConinck & Lewis, 1997; Schein, 1992). Oppressive leader attitudes and behaviors do not reflect what Lombardo and Eichinger (2002) referred to as competitive-edge competencies. Furthermore, the work environment these attitudes and behaviors created provides little opportunity for individuals to develop their talents and share their knowledge (Hatch, 1997). Responsibility, autonomy, risk and an entrepreneurial spirit are lacking in this type of environment (Hammer, 1996; Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Beckhard, 1997).

According to Block (1993), "[Patriarchy's] fundamental belief is that in order to organize effort toward a common goal, which is what organizations are all about, people from top to bottom need to give much of their attention to maintaining control, consistency and

predictability” (p. 23). Because patriarchal leaders seek to maintain control, consistency and predictability, they have failed to discover, have ignored or have discarded the value of employees. The attitudes and behaviors of these leaders have hindered employee growth and creativity, which ultimately affects the performance and success of their organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 1990). In a patriarchal environment, organizations fail to recognize and benefit from employees’ knowledge and employee participation in activities of their organizations is minimal (Lawler, 1986). In contrast, leaders who consider their employees’ knowledge and who genuinely care about their employees’ needs can begin to transform their organizations into knowledge creating, learning organizations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore a leadership model by means of accessing the lived experiences of philanthropic leaders in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations in Canada and the United States. For the purpose of this study, philanthropic leaders displayed the following characteristics: (a) love, (b) compassion, (c) caring, (d) altruism and (e) perceptive listening. The term *model* refers to a capturing of important elements of a reality (Bass, 1990). The term *lived experiences* refers to a person’s immediate everyday experiences (Morse, 1994; Van Manen, 1984).

Significance of the Study

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was significant in that it provided an understanding of philanthropic leadership through exploring the lived experiences of leaders who led in a philanthropic manner. The study shed light on how valuing and cherishing the emotions of employees influenced the leader/employee relationship (Cooper & Sawaf, 1996; DePree, 1992; Goleman, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Weisinger, 1998). The

knowledge this study generated provided insight into how leaders go about creating partnerships with their employees. The creation of such partnerships occurred when leaders relied on leadership approaches that valued employees and consciously considered employees' emotions.

Significance of the Study to Leadership

This study was significant to leadership in that it provided a different perspective to consider as leaders sought to lead their employees in the twenty-first century. The philanthropic leadership model contained the components necessary for a new management style to emerge. This management style included the following characteristics: (a) love, (b) compassion, (c) caring, (d) altruism and (e) perceptive listening. Sheehan (1999) wrote, "There is a need for a new compassionate, caring and capable management style" (p. 60). The characteristics of philanthropic leadership enhanced the leadership role, as well as the leader/employee relationship. The attitudes and behaviors of philanthropic leaders provided organizations with a way to identify the skills and experiences needed to lead employees in the twenty-first century. Byham, Smith, & Paese (2002) noted, "The demand for leadership talent far outstrips the supply" (p. 3). This study added to the knowledge of leadership by presenting a leadership approach, which focused on the humanness and the emotions of leaders and their employees and provided a foundation for facilitation of effective leadership development and succession.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative research focuses on meaning and making sense of people's lives and experiences (Creswell, 1994; Maxwell, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This study sought to make sense of the lives and experiences of 30 leaders in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations. These leaders were leaders who displayed attitudes and behaviors described in this study as philanthropic. The researcher asked selected philanthropic leaders to participate in individual

in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview process yielded a description of leadership experiences and an understanding of what those experiences meant to those individuals (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then analyzed the data these interviews generated for themes using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. The themes that emerged delineated the phenomenon of philanthropic leadership. The outcome was the discovery of the essence of philanthropic leadership.

To understand philanthropic leadership and discover its essence, the researcher relied on an analytic approach that yielded a correct understanding of the phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenological research provided the opportunity for this to occur by focusing on the text that resulted from in-depth interviews of selected participants. Moustakas (1994) said, “Hermeneutic analysis is required in order to derive a correct understanding of a text” (p. 9). Because this study sought to gain a greater understanding of philanthropic leadership, it was appropriate to employ hermeneutic analysis as a research tool. Studying the lived experiences of philanthropic leaders by analyzing the in-depth interview texts allowed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to emerge.

This study was a phenomenological inquiry that sought to capture the phenomenon of philanthropic leadership. Van Manen (1984) wrote the following regarding phenomenological inquiry:

When a phenomenologist asks for the essence of a phenomenon—a lived experience—then the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavour, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and eloquent. (p. 6)

The researcher encouraged participants to reconnect with some of their original human experiences by recalling experiences they had as philanthropic leaders. By adopting a

hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the researcher set the stage for philanthropic leaders to rediscover their original experiences. This, in turn, helped reawaken leaders to the meaning of these experiences in their lives.

The study used the phenomenological research method to gain a greater understanding of philanthropic leadership. Because lived experiences were the focus of the research, it was important to employ a research method that illuminated the essence of these experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenological research was the research approach best suited for this task. This research approach cultivated the most useful human capacity, the capacity to learn from others (Patton, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenological research provided the opportunity to orient oneself to a phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). In this study, hermeneutic phenomenological methods helped to orient the researcher to the phenomenon of philanthropic leadership through exploration of the lived experiences of individuals who practiced philanthropic leadership philosophies.

Research Question

This study sought to gain a clearer understanding of the essence and meaning of the phenomenon of philanthropic leadership through exploring the lived experiences of philanthropic leaders. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher considered the following central question: What is the nature of the lived experiences of leaders who display philanthropic attitudes and behaviors?

Van Manen (1984) posited, “To ask for the nature of [something] is to ask for the whatness of [something]” (p. 8). This study sought to discover the *whatness* of the philanthropic leadership phenomenon. As the researcher explored the lived experiences of philanthropic

leaders, she remained mindful of the central research question and oriented herself to it throughout the in-depth interviewing process.

Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997) suggested, “For the interview to be a path or way of understanding the life-world of a [participant], it must be allowed to emerge freely rather than to be constrained by predetermined injunctions” (p. 33). The researcher in this study, by asking philanthropic leaders open-ended questions about their experiences, assisted individual participants in recalling essential aspects of their experiences as philanthropic leaders. This, in turn, allowed an understanding of the phenomenon of philanthropic leadership to emerge. Van Manen (1984) wrote the following regarding recalling experiences:

To do a phenomenological study of any topic, therefore, it is not enough to simply recall experiences others or I may have had with respect to a particular phenomenon. Instead I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structure of this experience as lived through, are brought back, as it were, and in such a way that we recognize this description as a *possible human experience*, which means as a *possible interpretation* of that experience. (p. 7)

To ensure that participants had opportunities to recall their experiences as philanthropic leaders, the researcher constructed the human science research question in a manner that elicited information pertaining to their experiences. According to Moustakas (1994), human science research questions:

(a) reveal more fully the essences and meaning of human experience, (b) uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behavior and experience, (c) engage the total self of the research participant, (d) [sustain] personal and passionate involvement, (e) do not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships and (f) are illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings, or scores. (p. 105)

By constructing the initial research question in the manner Moustakas suggested, the researcher gained a greater understanding of philanthropic leadership. An understanding began

to form as she interrogated participants' hearts. Van Manen (1984) contended, "To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the centre of our being" (p. 8). The researcher presented participants with an initial question regarding their experiences as philanthropic leaders. She asked subsequent questions based on the dialogue that ensued. According to Pollio, et al., (1997), "All questions flow from the dialogue as it unfolds rather than having been determined in advance" (p. 30). This mindful, yet open interview approach helped to render the essence of participants' leadership experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on the lived experiences of philanthropic leaders in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations, as well as, the leadership phenomenon such experiences represented. The study addressed the problem of the devaluation of employees in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations by presenting an alternative, a philanthropic leadership approach that valued employees. This research study explored the philanthropic leadership approach and the effect that such an approach had on the leader/employee relationship. The study determined to what extent, if any, love, compassion, caring, altruism and perceptive listening influenced the attitudes, perceptions, behaviors and performance of employees in a bureaucratic, mechanistic organization. Although the focus of this study was on the phenomenon of philanthropic leadership in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations, the influence of such a leadership approach carried over into relationships that leaders and employees had outside of their organizations.

Assumptions

This study was based on the assumption that the prevalent leadership approaches adopted by leaders in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations have had a negative influence on the

leader/employee relationship. The researcher assumed that employees have not responded to these negative leadership approaches in a positive manner. This research was based on the premise that there was a desire on the part of employees in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations for leaders who acknowledged and embraced their humanness and their emotions in the workplace. The researcher further presumed that interactions between leaders and employees affected the overall performance of the organization and that leaders needed to be concerned about these interactions. The study was based on the assumption that participants were honest about their interactions with their employees and that the experiences they shared reflected the true nature of their leader/employee relationships.

The researcher based the study on attitudes and behaviors of leaders perceived to have philanthropic leadership characteristics that would positively affect the relationship between leaders and their employees. The researcher based her research on the assumption that the hermeneutic phenomenological research approach would provide the vehicle for a phenomenon to emerge and for revelation of the essence of the participants' leader/employee relationships to occur.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study was limited to leaders who demonstrated philanthropic attitudes and behaviors in bureaucratic, mechanistic organizations. The term *bureaucratic, mechanistic organization* denotes an organizational structure and culture firmly entrenched in patriarchal and theory x managerial beliefs, beliefs that have existed for many years (Block, 1993). Such beliefs powerfully shape how leaders interact with their employees.

Delimitations

The study was limited by the following parameters: (1) participants had to be in a leadership role and must have had regular interactions with their direct reports; (2) participants had to be leaders in organizations that are bureaucratic and mechanistic in nature; (3) participants had to display leadership characteristics that promoted the well being and humanness of their employees; and (4) participants had to be willing to openly and honestly share their lived experiences during the interview process. By setting these parameters, a more accurate account of the participants' lived experiences and their interactions with their employees emerged.

Definitions

The following 12 terms appeared throughout this study: (1) altruism; (2) artifacts, (3) bureaucratic, mechanistic organization; (4) caring; (5) compassion; (6) leadership model; (7) lived experiences; (8) love; (9) perceived elements or elements; (10) perceptive listening; (11) phenomenon creators; and (12) philanthropian leadership:

1. *Altruism*. For the purposes of this study, altruism is a selfless attitude that seeks to benefit others. According to Ozinga (1999), "Altruism is simply doing for others at some cost to oneself...Altruism is kindness" (p. xvi).

2. *Artifacts*. For the purpose of this study, artifacts are "visible organizational structures and processes" (Schein, 1992, p. 17).

3. *Bureaucratic, Mechanistic Organization*. For the purposes of this study, a bureaucratic, mechanistic organization is a centralized organization. A centralized organization depends solely on its top-level managers to dictate how the organization is to function (Hatch, 1997). This type of organization operates in a very rigid, impersonal, predictable and specialized manner.

4. *Caring*. For the purposes of this study, caring is an attitude, which is sensitive to and supportive of the needs of others. Roach (1992) defined caring as an “investment of the self in others, through commitment to something that matters” (p. 4).

5. *Compassion*. For the purposes of this study, compassion is an awareness of one’s interconnectedness with others; it creates an attitude that is motivated to value others. According to Eckhardt (1972), compassion consists of a “radical faith in human nature, altruistic values, cognitive creativity [and] justice defined as equality” (p. 239).

6. *Leadership model*. For the purpose of this study, the term leadership model is the representation of the characteristics adopted by participants seeking to lead others. Bass (1990) defined a model as “a facsimile that captures the important essentials of reality” (p. 919).

7. *Lived Experiences*. For the purposes of this study, the term lived experiences describes an “immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness, which is, an awareness, unaware of itself” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 35). Lived experiences are the world as we experience it each day; they are the starting and end-point of phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1984).

8. *Love*. This word has many definitions and interpretations. For the purposes of this study, its meaning is a commitment to valuing others through one’s attitudes and behaviors. Montagu (1953) defined love as a feeling of deep regard, fondness, devotion and being all for others.

9. *Perceived Elements or Elements*. For the purposes of this study, the terms

perceived elements and *elements* refer to love, compassion, caring, altruism and perceptive listening.

10. *Perceptive Listening*. For the purposes of this study, perceptive listening is a listening approach that relies on openness, perception and intuition as ways of discovering the hidden meaning of a person's actions, behaviors and dialogue. Its purpose is to assist that individual in becoming self-actualized. Perceptive listening relies on discernment and compassion (Wakefield, 2002).

11. *Phenomenon Creators*. For the purpose of this study, phenomenon creators are individuals, whose attitudes and behaviors contribute to the creation of a given leadership model.

12. *Philanthropic Leadership*. For the purposes of this study, philanthropic leadership is a moral leadership approach based on love, compassion, caring and altruism as well as perceptive listening. Philanthropic leadership is the central phenomenon this study explores.

Although many of these terms were familiar, it was important to ensure consistency of meaning and a clear understanding of these terms as they appeared throughout this study. The terms love; compassion and caring rarely arose when discussing characteristics of the leader/employee relationship. Use of the definitions enabled leaders and employees to adopt such terms more readily in relation to workplace life. In contrast, terms such as lived experiences and philanthropic leadership were not familiar, and, therefore, needed to be defined so that their meaning and purpose were clear.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduced a leadership model based on five characteristics: love, compassion, caring and altruism, as well as perceptive listening. The intent of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the essence of philanthropic leadership. The study used