



Shepherding the Flock: Shepherd Leadership in Multi-Cultural Environment

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SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK: SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP IN MULTI-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The topic of effective leadership behavior remains of paramount importance for the understanding and application of multi-cultural leadership today. Negative social stereotypes or orientations, fueled by sinful human nature, foster divisions and conflicts along cultural lines. These forces compel people to lose sight of effective communication of organizational vision and mission. As a result, organizational performance suffers, unity is fractured, and cross-cultural conflicts worsen (Halche, 2012).

What is the solution to these issues? Is it safe to assume that as the world becomes 'smaller', globalization trends will diminish such cross-cultural conflicts? While the intuitive answer may appear affirmative, despite the increasing role of multinational firms, international supply chains, and other forces that could be seen to lead to homogeneity of cultural practices and values, these values and practices are still quite

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dissimilar (Drenth & Den Hartog, 1998). According to Scarborough (1998), many cultures continue to adhere to the values that they have embraced for decades despite the evidence that specific aspects of societal culture are related to increases in gross domestic product, societal standard of living, and several other financial and business measures. In other words, leaders continue to lead in ways that reflect societal core values, despite external pressures to do otherwise (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). That is where the role of effective cross-cultural leadership gains paramount importance.

This chapter focuses on examining the applicability of shepherd leadership theory to and effectiveness of shepherd leadership behavior in multi-cultural environments where many modern organizations find themselves. Unlike charismatic, transformational, transactional, authentic, servant, or spiritual leadership theories, the shepherd leadership theory has received limited attention and, mainly, in the context of church leadership. Viewing organizations through a lens of a “flock” metaphor, this study endeavors to expand the boundaries of understanding of what constitutes shepherd leadership behavior and how it can be effectively applied to multi-cultural organizations (Averin, 2015).

SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Analysis of shepherding and Jesus’ leadership in the Biblical examples gave rise to a Shepherd leadership theory. In the contemporary culture, “shepherd” signifies a guide, leader of sheep, care-taker of his flock. However, it meant different things in first-century Israel. Initially, shepherding was a primary and important occupation and sheep were indicators of wealth and sources of food, clothing, and sacrifice (Brand, Draper, & England, 2003). As cultivation increased, shepherding became more of a role for slaves and younger sons, so shepherds were often the uncommitted hired hands Jesus spoke about in John 10:12–13 (Roof, 2013). However, as Jesus used the “shepherd” metaphor it carried a deeper meaning of leadership that traced its roots to the Old Testament times.

There are three primary usages of the original Greek word when translated by the verbs *shepherding*, *tending*, or *herding* or by the nouns *shepherd*, *shepherdess*, or *herdsman*: (1) herders of livestock; (2) YHWH (Yahweh—the most holy name of God in the Hebrew language) as Shepherd of Israel; (3) a person or group as leaders/rulers (Kinnison, 2010). Exploration of social and cultural context as well as voices among

the characters depicted in John 10 revealed themes and topics that Jesus emphasized in the complex environment of the New Testament time (Robbins, 1996). Specifically, the social and cultural analysis of the text uncovered Jesus' call for conversion, call for nobility and honor, call to go counterculture, and call for cross-cultural unity that are foundational for understanding human nature, cultural tensions, and effective cross-cultural leadership.

Call to Conversion

Jesus exhibits a conversionist response to the world in John's Gospel. It is argumentation that considers the outside world corrupted because human beings are corrupted. However, to address this issue, Jesus took no interest in social reforms or political solutions (Robbins, 1996). Instead, He exposed the heart of the bad leadership head-on by pointing out that the flock was constantly subject to danger from both inside and outside. There were robbers, predators, and thieves who were looking to prey on the flock. But then, there was danger from the inside, specifically from "a bad shepherd" who simply abandoned his flock in the face of external danger or took advantage of them for personal gain and selfish motives—which is a commentary on the religio-political context of Jesus' day (Kinnison, 2010).

It was during the week of the Feast of Dedication (or Hanukkah) when Jesus spoke about Himself as the Good Shepherd (Burge, 2000). It was the season when hard questions were asked about failed leadership of Israel and false shepherds, referring to Hellenization of the Jews and desecration of the temple since the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. (Burge, 2000). Jesus contrasted Himself as the Good Shepherd against the hireling. The hireling represented the religious leaders of Israel, who were indifferent to the fate of ordinary people in Israel, for whom they had no more concern than the hireling would have for the sheep which he did not own (Sanders & Mastin, 1968).

In John's discourse, Jesus was not calling for conformity to the present order of His day; neither did he call for a revolution. Instead, He emphasized a corrupt nature of men versus righteousness and sacrifice of God (Kinnison, 2010). By drawing a parallel between His closeness with the sheep and His closeness with God the Father, Jesus emphasized necessity of conversion and following God (Kinnison, 2010). In His call for conversion, Jesus challenged His followers to abandon selfish motives, submit to

God, while leading and communicating with genuine care and concern that breaks down social and cultural barriers and tensions (Kinnison, 2010).

Call to Nobility and Honor

Jesus described Himself as a Good Shepherd. Some translated the adjective that describes the shepherd in 10:11 and 14 as ‘noble’, ‘ideal’, ‘model’, ‘true’, or ‘good’ (Neyrey, 2001). However, the Greek adjective is καλός, not αγαθός, and these two words refer to quite different semantic domains, although they were linked together in certain instances (Neyrey, 2001). The opposite of καλός is shame (αισχρός), while the opposite of αγαθός is evil (πονηρός) (Neyrey, 2001). Καλός is best understood in terms of the cultural value of honor and shame, which is not the same as the sphere of good and evil (Neyrey, 2001). The Good Shepherd is ‘honorable’ for several reasons: (1) He lays down His life for the sheep; (2) He knows His sheep, and (3) the death of the shepherd is ‘voluntary’, a traditional criterion of a ‘noble’ death (Neyrey, 2001).

In His call for nobility and honor, Jesus called for sacrificial attitude in leadership approach to the followers. Placing the interests of others above one’s own was also echoed by Paul in his letter to Philippians where the Apostle admonished his disciples to be imitators of Christ:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6–8)

Such attitude of humility is disarming, and leadership behavior marked by nobility and honor reflected in the sacrificial service was viewed by the GLOBE study as “ideal” and most effective, providing mechanisms that are necessary for today’s leaders to deal with the cross-cultural issues such as stereotypes and miscommunications (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012).

Call to Go Counterculture for Cross-Cultural Unity

In Jesus’ day the Jewish culture operated on the power of shame. Specifically, in first-century Judaism, social relationships were arranged hierarchically with those closest to God: the High Priest, then priests,

Levites, obedient Jews on down to those most removed from God, the Gentiles, shepherds, tax-collectors, prostitutes, and generally the “people of the land”, the illiterate humanity (Frye, 2013). People were kept in their places by stringent social shaming (Frye, 2013).

Outside of the context of King David, Israel’s king as shepherd-ruler, the notion of the shepherd carried with it base and shameful connotations placing it among the “despised trades” (Neyrey, 2001, p. 286). Jesus, however, was not limited to these social relationships and cultural norms. He led counterculture—counterculture that was interested in creating a better society, but not by legislative reform or by violent opposition to the dominant culture (Robbins, 1996). Jesus presented Himself as a Good Shepherd who was characterized by nobility, honesty, commitment, and self-sacrifice. In addition, He effectively addressed socio-cultural tensions in the Jewish-Gentile community at the end of the first century AD. Jesus’ concern for Jewish-Gentile unity in “one flock” was a powerful reminder of the Lord’s vision (Kostenberger, 2002). This is a vision of not letting anyone to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9) despite social and cultural animosity between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus gave a great example of leadership mindset with global vision for cross-cultural unity. He was eager to have personal relationship with His flock. He emphasized in John 10 that He knew His flock and His flock knew His voice and responded to His calling. However, Jesus did not stop there, He explained that the Good Shepherd came to expand the flock, by crossing cultural and ethnic barriers, as well as adding to his fold those outside of Judaism (i.e., Gentiles) (Kinnison, 2010). Addressing the issues of cultural inclusivity, Barclay (1956) put it well:

One of the hardest things in the world to unlearn is exclusiveness. Once a people, or a section of a people, gets the idea that they are specially privileged, it is very difficult for them to accept that the privileges which they believed belonged to them and to them only are in fact open to all men. That is what the Jews never learned. They believed that they were God’s chosen people and that God had no use for any other nation. They believed that, at the best, other nations were designed to be their slaves, and, at the worst, that they were destined for elimination from the scheme of things. But here Jesus is saying that there will come a day when all men will know him as their shepherd. (Barclay, 1956, William Barclay’s Daily Study Bible, para. 30)

Jesus' paramount goal was to do His Father's will and to lead all people who choose to follow Him into eternity with the Father. He was and is the leader who opens His arms to lead multitudes regardless of who and where they are, hence, effectively communicating the message of unity, crossing cultural barriers, and breaking the walls of prejudice and stereotypes.

SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP: MODERN APPLICATION

When carefully examined, the Shepherd model of leadership says that the way to inspire action is by empowering people, where the Shepherd leader emphasizes relationships rather than roles, people rather than positions, by sacrificing his own agenda for the benefit of his followers, and by effectively communicating the vision.

Relationships

Shepherds take a very different view of organizations by emphasizing participatory governance and training people for their jobs (Cormode, 2002, p. 80). A shepherd looks for people with potential, those who can be trained and molded and who can grow into their calling. That is because they believe that the organization's primary resources are people, relationships, and processes, and not as a structure built of roles but as a community defined by its relationships (Cormode, 2002, p. 80). Such relation-oriented leadership is "primarily concerned with increasing mutual trust, cooperation, job satisfaction, and identification with the team or organization" (Yukl, 2012, p. 51). Porras and Anderson (1981) confirmed this proposition in their research, which showed that "human relations training designed to increase the use of some relationship-oriented behaviors resulted in a significant 17 percent increase in worker productivity six months after training was completed" (Yukl, 2012, p. 55). Considering historical perspective on shepherd leadership, this study proposes:

Proposition 1 *By emphasizing relationship over roles and positions, a shepherd leader is more likely to have a deeper understanding of multi-cultural perspectives of followers and more likely to lead in manner that avoids cross-cultural conflicts and stereotypes.*

Sacrifice

One of the central attributes of Shepherd leadership is a leader's willingness to sacrifice his own agenda, interests, comfort, and even life for the benefit, safety, and well-being of his followers. Jesus is the ultimate example of that. He is the Good Shepherd, one who is worthy of admiration, who would risk His life to protect His followers (Whitacre, 1999). He is a sacrificial leader whose leadership behavior reflects vision-focus, decisiveness, dependability, excellence, honesty, trustworthiness, skillfulness, and unification. Such behavior is viewed by the GLOBE study as "ideal" and most effective and provides mechanisms that are necessary for today's leaders in order to deal with the cross-cultural issues such as miscommunication, disunity, and stereotypes. This is a type of leadership that becomes a basis for other leadership models as pointed out by Swalm (2009), who suggested a viable link to other leadership theories through a powerful Biblical shepherd-leader metaphor that describes leadership processes.

There is a strong correlation between shepherd leadership and modern ethical leadership theories, such as transformational, servant, authentic, and spiritual, as well as charismatic, leadership. Yukl (2012) provided a concise summary of values that are emphasized in the ethical leadership theories, which show a great degree of consistency and cohesiveness with the shepherd leadership theory:

- Altruism: Desire to help others, willingness to take risks or make sacrifices to protect or benefit others, putting the needs of others ahead of own needs, volunteering for service activities that require extra time and are not part of the formal job requirements (p. 348);
- Humility: Treating others with respect, avoiding status symbols and special privileges, admitting limitations and mistakes, modesty about achievements, emphasizing the contributions by others when a collective effort is successful (p. 348);
- Empathy and healing: Helping others cope with emotional distress, promoting acceptance of diversity, acting as a mediator or peacemaker, encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation after a divisive conflict (p. 348).

Proposition 2 *Shepherd leaders are more likely to inspire and unite followers to achieve common goals through their sacrificial behavior for the benefit of their followers.*

Communication

Lingenfelter (2008) referred to cross-cultural leadership as the ability to inspire and empower people who come from different cultural traditions to follow a leader in building a community of trust and achieving a defined vision (p. 21). Jesus provided a great example of such leadership marked by intercultural competence, which is defined by Bennett (2007) as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 1). Jesus’ cross-cultural communication reflected what Moodian (2009) described as optimal organizational communication, that is, when it is culturally contextual, clear, ethical, and regular and exists at all levels. It inspires and motivates the followers to go beyond set expectations and creates an environment for increased productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational performance (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Hatter & Bass, 1988; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1982). Jesus’ call for conversion, call for nobility to sacrifice, and call for building cross-cultural unity explored through social and cultural analysis of the shepherd metaphor are vivid examples of the effective cross-cultural leadership and communication in a challenging environment of the first century marked by cultural stereotypes, social and religious class systems, and ethnic prejudices.

Proposition 3 *Shepherd leaders are more likely to tailor their communication to the cultural context of the followers to successfully unite them in pursuit of the common vision.*

CONCLUSION

Considering Jesus as an epitome of Shepherd leadership, the propositions presented in this chapter leave us with a practical question of whether one, other than Jesus, can be viewed as a truly Shepherd leader. After all, Christ calls us to be like Him (John 13:13–17, Ephesians 5:1–2, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6). While our imitation of Christ is not perfect, today’s Shepherd leadership examples can include such leaders as the former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, French filmmaker and writer Jean Cocteau, and former CEO of Amgen, Gordon Binder (McCormick & Davenport, 2004). Their examples and effectiveness point to the necessity that today’s leaders must develop global mindset—a way of looking at an organization on a global level rather than just a domestic or regional one (Moodian, 2009). Moodian proposed three steps in development of

such mindset. First, a leader must build foundational knowledge of different cultures (Moodian, 2009). Second, the leader must develop general cultural competency skills such as communication styles, concepts of time, leadership and decision-making, negotiation, motivation, and an understanding of how to lead onsite and geographically dispersed cross-cultural teams (Moodian, 2009). And third, a leader must develop cultural adaptability, which is the ability to adapt two different ways of looking at the world without judgment (Moodian, 2009).

Practical steps in development of such mindset can be traced to the examples of Jesus' leadership through exegetical analysis of the shepherd metaphor depicted in the Biblical passages. Specifically, analysis of social-cultural topics and voices in the New Testament helped identify the calls for conversion, cross-cultural unity, and noble sacrifice that Jesus exemplified in His leadership. Through these calls, Jesus gave us a great example of leadership mindset with the global vision for cross-cultural unity. As leaders seek to model the shepherd leadership of Christ, they remain on the right track of building strong multi-cultural teams, while understanding and respecting cultural identities of their individual members.

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