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The Case for Behavioral Professionalism in Leadership

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In this chapter I explore the nature of leadership and the nature of a profession and conclude that it is neither practical nor appropriate for the former to become the latter. Close examination of the roles and responsibilities of leadership reveals that certification of leaders is fraught with practical issues. In lieu of licensure or certification, I propose *behavioral professionalism* as a more appropriate ideal for individuals at any level of an organization. Further, in positions of formalized authority, leaders/managers can strive to make behavioral professionalism normative within their organizations.

First, I describe the nature of a profession and distinguish it from the process of professionalization and follow with a discussion of the nature of leadership. Next, I outline a few intractable issues precluding the professionalization of leadership. I conclude by sketching the contours of a more workable alternative, behavioral professionalism (adapted from Maister 1997), which has potential to enhance ethical business conduct across a range of occupations.

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Conceptual Clarity of Professions, Professionals, and Professionalization

A review of the literature on professions, professionals, and professionalization suggests that these terms have often been used interchangeably with the unintended effect of undermining conceptual clarity of each term. As prelude to the main discussion, I propose and use the following classical conceptions of each of these terms:

A **profession** is a formalized occupation or group of occupations, and is typically sanctioned by a government entity (hereafter, “state”). State recognition of a field as a profession usually limits the practice in that field to individuals who are licensed, registered, or certified by either the state (e.g., state bar examinations) or by third parties (state-specific medical boards). For example, establishment of a profession prevents unqualified individuals from declaring themselves “attorneys” or “physicians.”

A **professional** is an individual who is a member of a profession in good standing (e.g., with the state, professional board/association, or both). Professionals’ work is often subjected to peer review, and typically professional membership association will have power over a professional’s continuing credentialing required to practice. In law or medicine, a professional can be disbarred or lose one’s license to practice medicine by the bar or medical association in that jurisdiction.

Professionalization is the process, long studied by scholars in sociology and other fields, of how an occupational group becomes a profession (see Weidner and Kulick 1999). The process of professionalization involves an occupational group gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the government. In the absence of an established profession, any individual can declare themselves to be a practitioner of anything from acupuncture to consulting to human resources to industrial engineering.

Unfortunately, scholars have often used these terms seemingly interchangeably (see Carvalho et al. 2016; Dekker et al. 2015; Castro 2016), which has muddied rather than clarified the above distinctions. These distinctions are vital when considering the case for or against professionalization of leadership.

The Nature of a Profession

Professions are a public and widely accepted recognition of the *specialization* of a body of knowledge and the *criticality* of that knowledge to a society (Torres 1991). Professions are typically state-sanctioned, and may be governed by a combination of licensure, certification, or registration, any of which may be required in advance of legal practice. Professions are typically characterized by the autonomy of the individual professional in using their judgment to make decisions or offer advice. In the US, employment was long considered to compromise professionals' autonomy, and some argue that employment has risked undermining the status of a number of professions, such as engineering (Krause 1996) or nursing (see Weidner 1998). Sociologists and social scientists in other disciplines have long been interested in studying professions because they represent an accumulation of power by a subgroup within a society, often gatekeeping the admission of new professionals to their field, sometimes with the effect of limiting competition among practitioners within a profession.

Specialization and criticality are vital in distinguishing between a profession and a discipline, trade, or occupational group. For example, members of contemporary society may appreciate that a discipline such as sociology or anthropology, and occupations such as photography or culinary arts, are characterized by *specialization*. None of these occupations, however, are perceived as inherently possessing such *criticality* to society that entry to those fields should be governed in some way by the state. Established professions such as medicine or law and occupational groups such as airline pilots and flight attendants are regarded as requiring knowledge both specialized *and* critical that licensure and/or certification is required to engage in the field.

Functions of a Profession

Professions function in numerous ways in contemporary society. Professions provide a form of occupational control, excluding others from encroaching upon specified job titles, tasks, or responsibilities (for an in-

depth discussion, see Weidner and Kulick 1999). In broad terms, establishment of an occupation as a profession serves as a barrier to entry to individuals not deemed “qualified” to perform specified functions or claim a specific job title. When backed by the power of the state, licensure, certification, and/or registration requirements bar an individual from legally claiming to be an “attorney,” “surgeon,” “psychotherapist,” or “architect,” among other “professions.” Note that although verifying the credentials of employed professionals is critical to their employers, the aforementioned titles cannot be conveyed by an employer; they are bestowed by the professional organization, often via the state. Job titles given by an employer (or by the individual themselves) do not a profession make; titles are highly fungible if they fall outside of those recognized by statute or regulation as a “profession.” For example, the title “consultant” is depreciated through overuse, and when appearing on a business resume is often interpreted as filler between periods of employment.

Formal establishment of a state-sanctioned profession prevents non-physicians from opening an office as a medical doctor or surgeon—we are justifiably horrified when imposters are exposed, both for trust misplaced and harms committed. Professions perform an important “cueing” function to the public, signaling that members of a profession can be relied upon to provide their service with care and put clients’ interests first.¹

In academia, particularly the humanities and social sciences, interdisciplinary work crossing disciplinary lines is sometimes encouraged, making possible fluidity between disciplines (e.g., Chomsky, Fish, Pinker). This is possible because these fields are perceived as possessing lower levels of criticality to the public interest in an academic field (e.g., linguistics, literature, psychology) than in state-sanctioned professions.

Recipe for a Profession

Wilensky (1964) identified a model of sequential steps as the process of professionalization that lead to status as a state-sanctioned professional:

1. becoming a full-time occupation;
2. establishing a first training school;

3. establishing the first university school;
4. establishing the first local professional association;
5. establishing the first national professional association;
6. establishing the first state license law; and
7. creating a formal code of ethics.

Of the above, all but the state licensure through the law (6) can be achieved by members of an occupational group. Certification or a licensure must be imposed on an occupational group by the state (at the municipal, provincial/state, or national level). For example, in fall of 2003, the US Congress established an Federal Aviation Administration (FAA 2008) certification requirement for flight attendants effective December 11, 2004.

Although licensure can be maintained at any level of government, in the US, most professional licensure occurs at the state (provincial) level. For example, in my home state of Pennsylvania, twenty-nine boards and commissions manage licensing of facilities and occupations ranging from hospitals and swimming pools to accountants and veterinarians. The specialization and criticality of the knowledge required to conduct that work is publicly recognized and regulated, whether related to public hygiene (e.g., barbers, cosmetology), health (e.g., medicine, nursing, pharmacy), or public safety (e.g., architects, crane operators, engineers, navigation of rivers). The applicable board or commission is charged with safeguarding "...the public from harm caused by unqualified persons...", and engages in conducting examinations, initial and renewal of licensure, revoking or suspending issued licenses, and maintaining a registry of practitioners (see Pennsylvania Department of State 2017).

To illustrate Wilensky's formulation, consider two fields: chiropractic and massage therapy. Chiropractic medicine has navigated its way to status as a nationally recognized profession in the US over the past several decades. Three decades ago, the field of chiropractic found itself outside the medical mainstream and excluded from many health insurance plans. Chiropractors and their state and national associations worked collectively and persistently to secure government studies reporting on the efficacy, safety, and cost-effectiveness of chiropractic care (Alaska Chiropractic

2017), which resulted in licensure and funding by national health programs. Chiropractic is no longer considered an “alternative therapy.”

In contrast, massage therapy is not as well developed a profession in the United States, and possesses less legitimacy and recognition. Forty-three states offer either licensure, certification, or registration to massage therapists, but only thirty-eight states require licensure to use the title “massage therapist.” Beyond state requirements, some US municipalities require a license to practice any type of massage.

Worldwide, even greater variation exists. In some countries (e.g., China, New Zealand) massage is not regulated by the government, in others (e.g., Canada), massage therapy is licensed by some but not all provinces. In other countries, massage therapy is regulated (e.g., India), while in other countries (e.g., South Africa), massage therapy is regulated but poorly enforced. Thus, although massage and/or massage therapy occur around the world, its practice is diffuse; in many locations no barriers exist to entering the field.

Claiming Profession Status

Members of occupational groups often form membership associations that self-proclaim a status as a *professional association*. While there is no harm in striving to bring greater *professionalism* to a field—a theme I will return to later in this chapter—there is a clear distinction between behaving professionally and professionalization of a field. Some membership associations require admission to a profession as a precondition of membership (e.g., American Trial Lawyers Association), but admission to a membership association does not establish an obligation for the state to license practitioners.

Within the field of management, the list of membership associations which do not meet reach the threshold of a profession includes, but is not limited to: The Academy of Management, Society for Human Resource Management, WorldatWork (until 2008, the American Compensation Association). While the knowledge in these fields is specialized, the fields do not rise to the level of criticality to the public interest such that these occupations requires state control or restriction. Some membership associations offer *certifications of skills*. Some examples include:

- Project Management Institute's Project Management Professional (PMP);
- Society for Human Resource Management's Certified Professional (SHRM-CP) and Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP);
- American College of Healthcare Executives' Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE); and
- Chartered Institute of Management Consultants' Chartered Management Consultant (ChMC).

While these credentials might carry weight *within* a specific field, these credentials are far less recognized *outside* their respective field. Although these credentials are each competency-based, created with sound social science practices to define and assess competencies, competencies alone do not call for a professional licensure. This comment is not meant to disparage the competencies called for or valued in each field, but is simply to note the lack of formal recognition is based on lower criticality—preventing the field from being considered a profession (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For example, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become institutionalized within corporations, but has simultaneously been marginalized because it is perceived as a supportive staff occupation (see Risi and Wickert 2017) rather than an externally recognized profession. The term “professionalism” clearly has appeal in the marketplace, whether as part of marketing appeals to customers or in its frequent appearance in organizational mission statements (Evetts 2011).

At the core of licensed professions is the responsible application of their critical and specialized knowledge in an autonomous manner. The judgment of the licensed individual is called upon in a wide range of unstructured situations. Criticality may be a function of risk of tragic—and preventable—failure by the professional: poor legal representation, surgery gone wrong, or a fatal building collapse. The subordination of members of a profession to non-autonomous employees has been a recurring concern across professions throughout the modern “corporate” era.

Professionalization of a field creates an implicit exchange: the public is asked to trust practicing professionals who are in turn protected from market competition (Weidner and Kulick 1999). That protection is substantive; Kleiner and Krueger (2010, 2013) have shown that after

controlling for education, occupation, and other variables, licensing commands a 15–18 percent premium in income.

Since laypeople do not have sufficient expertise to review or critique clinical or professional practice, peer review is then required for a profession to maintain its privileged status. One of the criticisms of established professions (medicine, law, accounting) is that peer review tends to be too permissive, with members of a profession fairly unlikely to call peers out for poor practice save for the most egregious cases. Emergent fields face an uphill climb in attaining legitimacy and public understanding and support for their establishment as a legally-sanctioned protected field of practice (see Roigt 2012). A prospective profession needs to reach critical mass and internal solidarity while making the case that its knowledge is specialized and critical. Established occupational groups such as human resources have had difficulty gaining acceptance as a profession, in part because laypeople have well-established notions about HR and its functional predecessors, including employee relations and personnel.

Although licensure may be state-sanctioned, professional associations can and do speak with moral authority about issues in the public sphere that affect their domain. However, occupational solidarity can shift over time: given the expansion of knowledge and subsequent sub-specialization of medicine, after enactment of the Medicare and Medicaid Act of 1967, physicians' membership in the American Medical Association (AMA) shifted to specialty associations (such as the American Academy of Pediatrics). AMA membership fell from 73 percent of physicians in 1963 to 35 percent by 1999 (Weimer 1999). Doyle et al. (2016) found similar fragmentation in Germany among consultants and their firms.

Based upon this understanding of professions and professionalization, we turn our attention to the nature of leadership and assess the appropriateness of its status as a profession.

Nature of Leadership

In contrast to the formal structure of professional occupations—distinct competencies, license requirements, definition of scope, legal status—leadership is amorphous and thus not easily defined (Yukl et al. 2002).

The literature on the history of leadership is recounted in countless texts, tracing its roots from the “great man” era through the present day. Leadership is practiced or demonstrated as a natural process of social organizing.

Leadership and Celebrity

Leaders and their leadership are regularly profiled in the popular/business press and in academic literature (including case studies). In the latter, fawning or damning descriptions of leaders and their decisions have given rise to a “celebrity” of leadership coverage (e.g., Jobs, Gates, Welch). By crowning heads of corporations as exemplar leaders, American media has embedded “leadership” in popular culture to the point that US high school students applying to college are commonly expected to have demonstrated “leadership” well before reaching the age of majority. Thus trait-based leadership, despite being discredited long ago, persists within American society.

Ubiquity of Leadership

Underlying the notion that young people can provide evidence of their leadership or leadership potential is the idea that leadership happens in both formal organizations and informal interactions, i.e., leadership is such an integral part of social interactions that it is, like oxygen, all around us. A similar case could be made for other lenses through which we view society: “law,” “ethics,” “the environment,” “inequality,” “sexism,” “institutionalized racism,” “class structure,” and the like. However, the pervasive presence of leadership doesn’t imply that a corresponding profession exists. With so many competing models of leadership, one point of departure is to distinguish between leadership and management. Unfortunately, this muddies the waters more than it clarifies the issues because the conventional management literature—still present in today’s academic textbooks—defines “leading” as part of the task/process of management (planning, organization leading, controlling).

While leadership *per se* may be widely understood to be important, leadership by itself does not rise to the level of criticality, and the settings in which leadership is or can be practiced are so varied, and practicing leaders so heterogeneous, that satisfying the notion of specialization is unlikely.

Although the frequent mentions of “leadership” in the media might suggest we are inundated with too much leadership, polls of public opinion express dissatisfaction with both corporate and political leaders. “Leader” doesn’t appear on most C-level executives’ titles, because leadership is both what they are expected to provide and what they do. Regional and national differences complicate our conception of what “leadership” is.

Leadership and Outcomes

Should leadership be evaluated in terms of outcomes? Consideration of both existing professions and leadership history would suggest that is not the case. An exemplary surgeon will still have operations that do not succeed; by design, half of trial attorneys lose their cases. Tragic outcomes in fields as diverse as pharmacy, nursing, engineering, and commercial aviation often reflect systemic—rather than individual—failures. For example, automobile crashes may provide evidence of a failure of vehicle design, engineering, and manufacturing, highway design, engineering, construction, conditions, or driver-related factors (e.g., Ford/Firestone rollover), of which a number of organizations’ leadership may or may not be a contributing factor (see Perrow 1984).

Organizations are social constructions, and all organizations are not created equally. The achievement of an individual organization’s outcomes may not be in the best interests of larger society (e.g., Shrekli’s pricing of pharmaceutical drugs). If a company’s goal is to attain monopolistic power, leading a company to achieve such a goal is not in the interests of society, and may be illegal. Indeed, a criminal leader could be considered highly effective depending upon the measures used, although the prospects for certifying politicians, or leaders in the world of criminal enterprises or repressive political regimes, are slim.

Another less considered variable when discussing leadership is time. Leadership is exhibited by people, and people do change and grow over

time. For example, assessing Steve Jobs' leadership at Apple earlier and later in his career would likely result in different assessments of leadership success in terms of both outcomes and process. Winston Churchill was a world-saving hero after the Second World War ended in Europe, but was a defeated politician by the time the war ended in the Pacific months later.

Leadership, Culture, and Accountability

Decades ago, Schein (1990) recognized the symbiotic relationship between leadership and organizational culture. Formal leaders of an organization have a disproportionate influence on its culture and have a responsibility for culture within an organization. At the same time, organizations exist within a larger social structure, a culture with norms and expectations about what organizations and its leaders can and should do in the conduct of business (see Schein and Schein 2016).

Instead of a professional body or peer review holding corporate leaders accountable, the marketplace of social opinion has considerable leverage over companies concerned about public opinion. Consider three companies in a span of a few short months where corporate executives were held accountable by a combination of mass media, social media, and public pressure: (1) Fox News lost its president and co-founder and its top personality, (2) the CEO of United Airlines was denied elevation to Board Chair as a result of a single service response, and (3) the co-founder/CEO of Uber and a board member were forced to leave the company. In each of these cases, the media, the internet, and intense public and pressure—including scorn—were sufficient to hold executives accountable for the culture of their organizations.

Frustration with Unaccountable Leadership

The common thread running through each of the preceding examples is a shared public frustration with unaccountable leaders who are unresponsive to social pressure and concerns. This presents a bit of a paradox: Rather than have leaders who see what is popular before they decide what

they believe is right, we would prefer to have principled leaders who can decide what is right and then proceed to do it (Pfeffer and Sutton 1999). Unfortunately, few reliable levers exist to directly hold formal leaders to account. Currently, the controls we have on leaders engaging in undesirable behavior come from one of several sources: legal/regulatory constraints, marketplace pressure from customers, financial pressure on a firm's stock or debt. The most pre-emptive of these, legal and regulatory constraints, are specific to a leader's individual role (e.g., CEOs and CFOs under Sarbanes-Oxley) or an organization's role (e.g., stress-testing a bank after the Great Recession), liability (e.g., revocation of FDA approval), public safety (e.g., Takata airbags), and exposure to risk (from shareholders, or a combination of the above-referenced constraints).

Given these frustrations with ineffective or even toxic leadership, it is perhaps inevitable that those responsible for teaching leadership (in academia) or developing leaders (in organizations) would turn to education, development, and training in the hope of improving leaders and leadership outcomes. However, the track record for "learning transfer" to the workplace from training in general is inconsistent at best, and leadership growth appears to be more related to an organization's culture (i.e., leadership in context) than the educational methods or training techniques (for two examples, see Henriksen and Børgesen 2016; Elmholt et al. 2016).

Another outcome of professionalization is the normative expectation that practitioners in a field will possess professional liability insurance (PLI). Weidner and Kulick (1999) observed that this may be a critical litmus test that could be added to Wilensky's (1964) seven steps to becoming a profession. Normally, professionals (e.g., attorneys, CPAs, physicians, nurses, accountants, social workers) will not engage in providing any professional services without having PLI protection in place without risking their entire career. Employed professionals may have PLI provided by their employer's policy, but in solo practice are expected to provide their own coverage. An insurance firm underwriting PLI would have a difficult task assessing risks specific to an individual leader. What kinds of issues would be flagged as reasons for denying PLI coverage to a corporate leader? At what level of an organization would PLI be needed—or desirable?

Efforts to make leadership a profession fail to recognize that leadership is a function of basic social interaction, likely predating human ability to

communicate in words. Leadership emerges in any social system, and with 7 billion people, that means there are countless leaders in countless social settings. Assuming professionalization, what would the boundaries of leadership be; what would be outside the purview of “professional” leaders? It is difficult to imagine how such boundaries would be drawn, much less enforced.

I interpret calls for the *professionization* of leadership (e.g., Elmholdt et al. 2016) as a call for “better” *leadership behaviors*. Frustration seeking better preparation of leaders and greater accountability does not seem viable given how professions operate. Instead of attempting to structure leadership into a profession—a task that, considering the above, faces long odds, at best—I suggest we consider a more modest proposal: *behavioral professionalism*.

Behavioral Professionalism: An Alternative to Professionalization of Leadership

Based upon Maister’s (1997) *True professionalism*, behavioral professionalism works from the assumption that “professional” is not a title one self-administers, but an adjective that others attribute to you. Maister distinguishes between two groups: *technicians* who are technically competent, and *professionals* [sic] who are also competent and also demonstrate that they *care* about their people and their clients. Central to behavioral professionalism is the idea that holding *oneself* accountable for behavior and decisions is the foundation of *peer* accountability.

Maister’s (2003) empirical research on characteristics of highly effective professional services firms validated his earlier (Maister 1997) conceptual framework for “true professionalism.” In this section, the main components of behavioral professionalism are linked to the extant academic and practitioner literature on leadership, organizational culture, and ethics. As described herein, behavioral professionalism can be practiced by individuals whether or not they are in a position of formal leadership (see Lowney 2017); an organization’s culture characterized by behavioral professionalism can have profound implications for both organizational

effectiveness and efficiency. Thus, behavioral professionalism is operationalized (initially) at the individual level, and differs from the *organizational professionalism* described by Reed and Anthony (1992). If and when behavioral professionalism becomes normative within an organization, the result would be an organizational culture in which leaders behave in an ethical and caring manner. Such a culture would likely result in a commitment to maintaining those norms as new managers join (or are promoted from within) the organization.

1. Behavioral Professionalism Means Demonstrating Caring

As a starting point, Maister (1997) distinguishes not between professional and non-professional as a matter of one's title, occupation, or qualifications. Instead, professionals are defined by their behavior, specifically behaviors that demonstrate that they care about their clients/customers, their people, and their firm, and consistently place that concern for others' interests ahead of their own. As Maister (1997, p. 16, emphasis in original) puts it, a "true professional" *care* is—and "...the opposite of the word *professional* is not *unprofessional*, but rather, *technician*." A technician is technically competent in that they can perform the tasks, but behavioral professionalism means competence with additional understanding of, and commitment to, substantive improvements. In a way, this might be considered reflective of the distinction we often draw in organizational behavior between leadership and management.

Based on this framing of behavioral professionalism, every individual in the workplace has the potential to exhibit behavioral professionalism, *vis-à-vis* how one completes their work—rather than a term proclaimed for oneself or believe is entitled to as a result of degrees, certification, or licensure.

2. Behavioral Professional Is Founded on a Commitment to Excellence

A second hallmark of behavioral professionalism is a passionate commitment to excellence. Maister (1997) describes professionalism as including

a contagious enthusiasm for excellence among one's colleagues. Maister (1997, 2003) argues that professionalism is symbiotic with, and reinforcing of, personal enjoyment drawn from one's work. This tenet of behavioral professionalism is consistent with Burns' (1978) notion of transformational (rather than transactional) leadership and with social exchange theory (Blau 1964).

3. Behavioral Professionalism as Adherence to Values

A third tenet of behavioral professionalism is an unwavering adherence to an explicit set of values (Maister 1997). In positions of formal authority, adhering to a firm's values means a behavioral commitment to a firm's agreed-upon strategy (Argyris and Schön 1974; Pfeffer and Sutton 1999). Values are not espoused, but enacted. Coupled with this commitment to putting values into concrete action is an intolerance of violation of those values. Leaders who encounter colleagues compromising those values respond with support, coaching, and development (see Maister 1997, 2003).

4. Behavioral Professionalism as a Commitment to Learning

A fourth tenet of behavioral professionalism follows from the first three. A commitment to excellence manifests itself into a continuing commitment to learning, development, and improvement regarding (1) clients'/customers' needs and their business, (2) one's own new skills and knowledge (3) actively working to learn what to do differently when expectations of excellence are not upheld (Argyris 1990; Maister et al. 2001). Behavioral professionalism, then, involves a posture of humility and mindset of curiosity (Greenleaf 1977), a bias for inquiry in advance of advocacy (Argyris 1990).

5. Behavioral Professionalism as Accountability

Accountability protects and advances the previous four tenets. Members of a licensed profession rely upon peer review (either routinely or in

response to adverse outcomes) and fiercely defending professional/occupational autonomy (and jurisdiction). With behavioral professionalism, accountability means individuals ceding some autonomy in the service of upholding espoused values and agreeing to be influenced and/or managed by one's peers (Maister 1997). Here, accountability is less a matter of compliance and more a social function which enforces agreed-upon norms and expectations (Schein 1990). Maister (2003) provides empirical evidence that [behavioral] professionalism can be made normative within organizations, resulting in greater effectiveness.

6. Behavioral Professionalism Is Determined by Others

Unifying the preceding five tenets of behavioral professionalism is the idea that behavioral professional is assessed and recognized by others about one's motives, lending credence to the (variously attributed) saying, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Behavioral professionalism is about demonstrating one's motives—the extent to which one subordinates their own gratification or reward to the needs of the client, group, or firm instead of their own (Greenleaf 1977). Behavioral professionalism is how we might hope and aspire to be perceived.

Accountability is also a social function, as Burns (1978) observed. Leaders exhibit behavioral professionalism when they regularly employ two complementary forms of coaching (Maister 1997) with their firm, colleagues, and direct reports: (1) support and (2) demand. It is critical to maintain both—one without the other is far less effective.

7. Behavioral Professional Is Hard, Not Soft

While behavioral professionalism as described here might be perceived as "soft," it is arguably "hard" because it takes a long-term view of the firm's value and calls for sacrificing short-term gain for more sustainable long-term gains. Many corporations, despite implementing "balanced scorecards" and "triple bottom lines," find it difficult to insulate themselves from short-term goals and maintain focus on the pursuit of longer-term success.

8. Behavioral Professionalism and Organizational Culture

A large literature has consistently found a direct relationship between organizations with humanistic culture and high levels of organizational effectiveness (see Pfeffer 1995). Based on this literature, making behavioral professionalism normative while creating an organization where individuals—no matter their level or position—find it normative to be treated as professionals would likely create a formidable organization capable of both long-term and short-term effectiveness and efficiency (see Adizes 1988).

How might such a change come about? Behavioral professionalism is underpinned by deontological or rights-based ethics, and rejects consequentialism (utilitarian) ethics (Bentham 1789) and egoism. Arguably, most disappointing leadership behavior throughout history has been due to leaders' egoism or utilitarian ethics in which the rights of other stakeholders were not affirmed; further development is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is clear that behavioral professionalism by leaders will require deeper understanding and more consistent affirmation of their moral responsibilities.

Conclusion

The thrust of this chapter is that asking “Should leadership become a profession?” is the wrong question, not only because it is moot, but such framing places responsibility for leadership conduct outside the individual. Instead, we should be asking: Why don't leaders exhibit greater professionalism?

Notes

1. For consistency, throughout this chapter I use “client” or “clients” to refer to the recipient of professional services; when referring to medical professions, “client” is a proxy for “patients.”

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