Foresight as the Central Ethic of Leadership, Voices of Servant– A Book Review

Paul Andrew Bourne, Vincent M S Peterkin, Heather A Smith-Sherwood

Northern Caribbean University, Mandeville, Manchester, Jamaica

*Corresponding Author: *Paul Andrew Bourne, Northern Caribbean University, Mandeville, Manchester, Jamaica*

The issue of servant-leadership as ascribed to Robert K. Greenleaf, which was articulated as a new paradigm in leadership, is a profound exemplar that holds the key to a different perspective to human relations (Greenleaf, 1977). This paradigm holds the leader to a high ethical standard that was NOT previously emphasized in leadership. Dr. Kim examines the issue of servant-leadership and came to the conclusion that foresight is a critical element, a nexus in the ethic of leadership, which was penned in 'Foresight as the Central Ethic of Leadership'. The monograph is twenty-two pages, with a definition of servant leadership from the perspective of Greenleaf, goals and mission from The Robert Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

Kim begins the monograph expressing his fascination with Greenleaf's essay on 'The Servant as Leader'. The author writes, "…[Greenleaf's work is] a constant reminder of the high standards a leader must set for him/herself if one is to be worthy of people's full commitment"(Kim, 2002, p. 1). It can be deduced from Kim's perspective that leadership is simply not about the influence of people as it is about the high ethical standard of the leader in the quest to lead. While ethical principles or standards are necessary for a leader, Kim, using one of Robert Greenleaf's quotation from 'The Servant as Leader,'writes, "The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an *ethical* failure; because a serious ethical compromise today (when the usual judgement on ethical inadequacy is made) is sometimes the result of a failure to make the effort at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act" in Kim, 2002, p. 1). Clearly, Greenleaf's perspective provides Kim with an identification of foresight being the central ethic of leadership. Undoubtedly both Greenleaf and Kim believe that the issue of right and wrong of leadership-the ethic of leadership, is foresight. The author

argues that such a strong position by Greenleaf compelled him to a deeper analysis of foresight as critical to the role of leadership.

From a simple position, Kim begins to unravel the phenomenon of foresight for leadership and this led to the examination of investments in stock in the stock market. He recognizes that while an investment in Dow 30 on the Stock Market may be a 'limited investment strategy', he asks"…how many options do you have for picking eight stocks out of a universe of only thirty stocks?"(p. 2). He went on to say that the odds of selection was even greater by suggesting the likelihood of choosing the correct lottery number from '5.7 million different combinations'(Kim, 2002, p. 2). Kim notes that people experience these difficult situations, daily, hence they must practice foresight and not be daunted by the reality of the situation.

Kim, then, progresses into a discussion on the disparity between forecasting and predicting (p. 3). He notes that the forsight is "…about being able to perceive the significance and nature of events before they have occurred"(p. 2); while predicting is stating a fact based on information. This can be made clear by examining this scenario by Kim, "To understand the difference between forecasts and predictions, de Geus offers the following illustration. If it rains in the foothills of the Himalayas, we cannot forecast exactly when the rivers will swell and flood the valleys, but we can predict with certainty that the flooding will occur"(Kim, 2002, p. 3). In keeping with the above, Kim emphasizes that the ethical responsibility of a leader is to know the underlying structures within one's domain of responsibility and be able to make predictions that can guide followers to a better future.

Having outlined a difference between forecasting and predicting, Kim takes the reader into another intriguing situation as he continues to expound ethical failure in leadership and the need for foresight; this time, using "helping and meddling" To distinguish between both

concepts, Kim uses a perspective forwarded by Dr. Demings. He notes that helping is "…changing the underlying structure that determines the capability of the system"(p. 5) while any other involvement is meddling. There is an important link, Kim says, between understanding the underlying capacity of the system and having the capacity to exercise foresight. When leaders take actions or cause actions to be taken that are actually worsening the organizational state of affairs it constitutes an ethical failure as this is taking action under the disguise of "helping"when, in fact, the underlying justification for our actions is illegitimate.

In an effort to expound more on the issue of ethical failure, Kim draws on another aspect of Greenleaf's writing. He examines awareness and perception and notes that if leaders are to exercise foresight, they must continually expand their awareness and perception, go beyond the limitations of their own direct experiences and cultivate a capacity to see things yet unseen to the unseeable. Ethical failure in leadership is simply the absence of foresight to have a vision of certain occurrence, which by neglect will retard growth (Kim, 2002, p. 7). Kim warns against personal conform and limitations to foresee futuristic events. Leaders must cultivate a capacity of foresight. "And, when we begin to see things nobody yet sees, we must have the capacity to stay centered even if that awareness is not well-received by others or make us feel uncomfortable" Kim says (p. 7) This captures comprehensively the depth of the importance of foresight in the leadership arena.

To increase one's depth of understanding of awareness and perception, Kim admonishes leaders to broaden their understanding of the world. Kim uses a diagram which presents different levels of perspective and action that can be taken by people, with the the highest level being the visionary and generative mode. According to Kim, although there are multiple levels of perceptive through which we can understand and see our world, most persons tend to inhabit only one or two levels. This framework is based on a classic insight in the field of systems dynamics that posits that structure drives behaviour.

There is the tendency for some leaders to settle at the events level where they act only in response to events and or things as they happen and this is quite limiting. Leaders must endeavour to move from being only reactive to more advanced levels of behaviour (see also, Bass and Bass, 2008; Pink, 2012; Scopuller,

2011; Gillet, Cartwright and Van Vugt, 2010). At the level of Patterns of Behaviour, leaders are able to increase their leverage in creating their future by being able to take adaptive actions. At the level of systemic Structures and Creative Action Modes, leaders see the world from the source of patterns and events they have been dealng with at the lower level and are able to identify the various systems, structures, processes and policies -that are producing the events and patterns. At the level of Mental Modes and Reflective Action, leaders are able to effect systemic change which are alliged to those changes that are desirable at the level of Systemic Structure. Mental models are leaders' deep belief about how the world works and how things "ought" to be.

When people, leaders, at the visionary level and generative action mode, are moved by a deep passion for something, it fashions a conceptual map or compass that gives foresight, retards complacency and ignites more drive in seeking to attain the vision (Kim, 200`2, p. 11). He refers to this as a higher leverage, which should be attained by every leader.

Failure to lead with foresight is an ethical failure Kim notes, because in keeping with the biblcal Proverb, "where there is no vision, the people perish, organizations really do die a natural death because of leaders who operate at the event level reacting to one thing after another. His simple yet profound statement, "Unfortunately, vision has become such an over-used word that it has lost its meaning in many organizations"(Kim, 2002, p. 12) is a call for leades to return to the fundamental truth that visionary leadership has to be a reality for success to be realised in organizations. Kim continues, that idle dream, vision, vision statement and corporate objectives are critical issues in human existence. Leaders need to understand that the crafting of a vision statement marks the beginning and not the end of the visioning process that is continuous and ongoing in an organization.

Kim also makes a distinction between vision and corporate objectives. "Visions are clear and compelling pictures of the future that people truly care about bringing into reality" (Kim, 2002, p. 14). Hence, it is for this very reason, vision has an emotional depth, and provides an energy or desire to meet certain objectives (p. 14). Simply put, when a vision is crafted by a person, she/he is moved into action by this emotional ethos. Organizational objectives, on the other hand, are statements of measurable goals outlined by a business, which are

oftentimes outside of the goals and objectives of people (p. 14). The issue of vision, objectives and dreams will materialize, if the individual makes the fundamental choice first. (p. 15). It is the choice of the individual to follow a certain pathway that will materialize a vision. He puts it this way, "It is the conscious choice to bring something into reality that transforms an idle dream into a vision that has the power to tap people's energy and commitment" (p. 15).

Having outlined the reationship between the power of choice and foresight, Kim uses Robert Fritz's hierarachical model of choice to examine how choices are made and different strategies and tactics are employed. Fritz identifies three levels of choices: Fundamental, Primary and Secondary and notes that it is quite difficult for people to make choices at one level if they have not yet made a choice at the level below it. When a leader crafts a vision he or she is making a primary choice-that of choosing a clear picture of a result that the individual needs to create. The issue is that people are continuously engaged into activities that result in a variety of choices, and "…very few have an idea regarding how their activities are connected to a broad strategy or a common vision, let alone a sense of purpose" (Kim, 2002, p. 16) which addresses the hierachy of choices and how they are determined.

The need to create order from chaos without control is an important ingredient to foresight as the central ethic in leadership. There is the tendency for leaders to exercise tight control of their processes and work force in an effort to ensure that organizational goals are realized. Kim posits, that quite often, exercises in over-control do not always produce the desired result. Instead of exercising tight control, leaders must remain focussed on the core values, purpose and vision of the organization. Leaders must endeavour to create opportunities that will allow every member of the team to internalize the core values and purpose and to have a clear picture of the result for which the organization strives (Blanchard, 2007; DuBrin, 2013).

"Having said all of the above, why do we care about exercising foresight in the first place?" Kim asked (Kim, 2002, p. 19). The answer to this question is simply because of Robert Greenleaf's concept of ethical failure. A part of the answer to this question is charting a certain path for 'our'children. Kim warns against criticizing our challenges and in the process miss the real issues, a legacy for future generations (p. 20). He summarizes the danger of not leaving a legacy for future generations this way, "…one day sometime in the future, people are going to look back and say to us, 'You fool, somebody stole our children's future!"(p. 20) and this is the reason for foresight and good foresight to create ethical prosperity and NOT failure. As a result, Kim forwards the idea that people answer the call of service to humanity, servant-leadership. and this is the rationale for all having insight as it is the key for unlocking a legacy for future generations.

In concluding, it is a worthy monograph to read and make for a beautiful gift for christmas, birthday or any special event.

REFERENCES

[1] Bass, B.M. & Bass, R. (2008). The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial applications, 4th edition. New York: Free Press.

[2] Blanchard, K. (2007). The Heart of a Leader: Insights on the Art of Influence, 2nd ed. Colorado: Cook Communication Ministries.

[3] DuBrin, A.J. (2013). Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills, 7th Ed. Ohio: South-Western Cengage Learning.

[4] Gillet, J., Cartwright, E., & Van Vugt, M. (2010). Selfish or servant leadership: Testing evolutionary predictions about leadership in coordination games. Personality and Individual Differences.

[5] Greenleaf, R.K. (1977). Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness. New Jersey: Paulist Press.

[6] Kim, D (2002). Foresight as the Central Ethic of Leadership, Voices of Servant –Leadership Series, booklet 8. Indiana: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

[7] Pink, D. (2012). To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others. New York: Riverbed Books.

[8] Scouller, J. (2011). The Three Levels of Leadership: How to Develop Your Leadership Presence, Knowhow and Skill.Cirencester: Management Books 2000.