

Feminine Concepts of Leadership and Power: A New Framework for Development Ethics and Education Development

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Abstract: The last twenty years have been a period of growth in education development, development ethics, and female leadership studies. Literature indicates meaningful connections between these disciplines and points towards reassessment of obstacles to systemic change. A new term *empowerment* is coined to define a proposed framework for ethical development practice.

Exacerbated by rapidly changing political and economic demands, the fractious context of education development is characterized by a competitive split between two theories in practice: paternalistic, supply-driven aid versus non-political, project-focused programs. According to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), n.d., aid efficiencies are negatively impacted by inconsistent, largely top-down implementation policies. UNESCO describes the work of the majority of aid agencies as follows:

They are very active and carry out activities as they please, often preferring to make their own concept of development progress, rather than respect the goals of the recipient country, or take into account its capacity to absorb the aid. (p. 5)

Questions intrinsic to post-WWII development include: (a) What direction and by what means should societies develop? (b) Who is morally responsible for beneficial change? and (c) What obligations do rich societies have towards poor societies (Crocker, 1998, p. 1)? These questions are addressed by the emerging field of development ethics. The purpose of this paper is to analyze these dilemmas from a new point of view, that of the female leader, in order to create a unified framework for ethical, effective practice.

Method

A review of the extant literature was used to collect data for this paper. The data collection procedure involved a search of ERIC documents, policy briefs, executive summaries, books, professional journals, as well as significant web sites, including UNESCO. Once these data were collected, they were placed in categories for analysis. We conducted interrelated reliability analysis by reading and re-reading the data and crosschecking to keep track of common themes and patterns that emerged throughout the literature. Three critical issues that have received attention in the arena of ethical development practices include: (a) education development, (b) development ethics, and (c) female leadership.

Theoretical and Historical Perspective

Temporal and theoretical connections exist between three seemingly unrelated disciplines: education development, developmental ethics, and female leadership studies. All three experienced significant growth during the 1980s. With the publication of *In a Different Voice* in 1982, Carol Gilligan identified aspects of women's moral reasoning that researchers find manifest in both private and public spheres. Systematic, authoritative discourse on development ethics began in 1987 at the first conference of the International Development Ethics Association (IDEA) in San Jose, Costa Rica (Goulet, 1996). In 1990 the first World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) attempted to coalesce and catalyze state-of-the-art Western resources, technology, and expertise in extending education opportunities to the world's poor.

The essential work of researchers and theorists in these disciplines is a search for connections, a vigorous effort to apply new ideas to nagging dilemmas.

Education Development

The struggle to overcome failures of traditional top-down welfare theory in the education sector mirrors broad historical themes in the development field. Throughout the post-WWII 40s, 50s, and 60s, comprehensive economic planning focused efforts on manpower development, industrial and agricultural growth, and technology transfer. By the 1970s, critics were taking this dependency approach to task for fostering underdevelopment and spreading neocolonial ideas. The debt crisis of the 80s brought austerity measures and efficiency planning to the table, but the creation of the Human Development Index in the 90s redirected attention to human resource development, inclusion, and participation. The tragedy of the theoretical debate among donor nations has been its real effect on the poor. While the pendulum swings between technocratic and transactional aid processes, powerless societies stagnate because “the legitimacy of individual nation-states depends, in part, on their effectiveness in promoting [the] globally established vision of national development—a vision which does not necessarily correspond to local conditions or resources” (Chabbott, 2003, p. 49).

Despite 50 years of unremitting efforts, the history of international development reveals high levels of frustration caused by repeated failures to achieve systemic change (Chabbott, 2003). The cyclical dynamic of international development agencies is characterized by periods of frenzied goal setting and action planning, followed by extensive fieldwork, culminating in reflection and bitter disappointment. A period of stagnation often results. For example, education workers, having fallen short of the lofty Year 2000 goals of the WCEFA, remain as tenaciously committed to their institutions as they are to the traditional, top-down means used to create them. UNESCO describes the salient features of the current state of international education development in several ways: (a) developing nations’ vague discourse and declarations of intent provide aid workers with an insufficient framework to guide responsible decision making, (b) member nations’ inability to engage in upstream planning and downstream implementation is largely due to the absence of strategic vision, technical expertise, and analytical data, (c) a shift in attention to developing national education policies has placed focus on political exigencies, rather than educational needs, and (d) financially dependent nations experience organizational imbalances in which nationals are replaced by expatriates at the planning and implementation levels (UNESCO, n.d.). The time is ripe for reconceptualization. Given that the customary organizational, philosophical, and ethical underpinnings of international development have been hierarchical and autocratic, indeed masculine in nature, analysis of the situation based on a different conception of leadership and power is appropriate.

Development Ethics

David Crocker (1998), one of the founders of IDEA, defines development ethics as “ethical reflection on the ends and means of socioeconomic change in poor countries and regions” (p. 1). The work of development ethicists is to push current thinking to another level by asking probing questions and viewing dilemmas from multiple points of view. In 1968 the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal (1969) introduced his effort to reconceptualize the gap between objective and values-based development interventions by asking the following:

...how can the student of social problems liberate himself from (1) the powerful heritage of earlier writings in his field of inquiry... (2) the influences of the entire cultural, social, economic, and political milieu of the society where he lives, works, and earns his living and his status; and (3) the influence stemming from

his own personality, as molded not only by traditions and environment but also by his individual history, constitution, and inclinations? (p. 3)

Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Prize winning economist and ethicist, has achieved such freedom of thought with his groundbreaking entitlement and capability theories. Sen (1999) views development globally, as a process rather than an end, applicable not just to poor countries but to any sector of any society in which poverty, opportunity, equity or quality of life are at issue. At the heart of Sen's work lie his confidence in liberty and potentiality and his rigorous analysis of the effects of material distribution on these essential aspects of well-being. Sen uses the term entitlements to describe not those things people have a right to receive, but the acquisition power they possess to obtain them. Capabilities refer to the range of options people have available to them (their capability set) and things people do to achieve them (their functionings). Implicit in these theories is the necessity of individual freedom and democratic discourse, to which he assigns three levels of importance: (a) direct importance – freedom of choice has value in and of itself, regardless of results: in determining a market's attractiveness, results should be treated as a separate issue, (b) instrumental importance – liberty of thought and action can lead to secondary positive results, and (c) constructive importance – freedom is an educative process that plays a critical role in public discourse and the assemblage of community consensus on values, goals, and priorities (Gasper, 2000).

Gasper (2000) reiterates that “capability analysis, by taking us beyond the markets...brings us to more open political choices about values rather than choices hidden behind financial calculations” (p. 993). Education is central to this theory; it guarantees transparency through informed discourse and expands the range of available entitlements and individual capabilities. Sen (1999) criticizes the traditional welfare approach to development, writing “the focus has to be...on the freedoms generated by commodities, rather than on the commodities seen on their own” (Gasper, 2000, p. 996). Sen permeates development ethics with human agency; he takes discourse beyond the traditional debates between direction and cooperation, welfare and independence, objectivity and particularity. Development becomes both the allocation of necessary resources for achieving individual and societal freedoms and the removal of structural obstacles to achieving liberty. Sen's theories fall short, however, when viewed operationally; “gaps between opportunity and action, and choosing and doing, while not ignored have not been deeply investigative” (Gasper, 2000, p. 999). Leadership bridges this gap. According to Newstrom and Davis (2002), “Leadership is the process of influencing and supporting others to work enthusiastically toward achieving objectives. It is the critical factor that helps an individual or a group identify its goals and then motivates and assists in achieving the stated goals” (p. 163).

Female Leadership

Although Sen does not explicitly address leadership styles, he provides direction by distinguishing between sympathy and commitment to the well-being of others. Gasper (2000) maintains that “sympathy’ is concern for others where one’s own well-being rises/falls as their state of well-being or achievement rises/falls; ‘commitment’ is concern that exists regardless of effects on one’s own feelings of well-being (or despite negative effects)” (p. 997). Leaders tending towards a sympathetic response to the condition of others naturally depend on detached, objective principles of justice in decision-making. Committed leaders utilize an ethic of care, as described by Carol Gilligan (1982), because it is more relational and responsive to the needs of others. Sympathetic leaders, in order to preserve their own well-being in the face of oppression, poverty, and powerlessness, wield power over others while committed leaders selflessly exercise

power with or give power to the other. The latter conception of leadership – committed, caring, relational, responsive, and selfless – has been identified as female in nature (Brunner, 1995; Stanford, Oates, & Flores, 1995).

Rather than assigning these characteristics gender specificity, however, female leadership theorists use their research on women to put forth a non-traditional leadership style accessible to any interested leader (Evans, 2001; Kark, 2004). The voice described by Carol Gilligan (1982) in her landmark book *In a Different Voice* is thematically unique rather than gender specific. Its association with women was established through empirical observation, arising from experiences shaped by differences in social context, status and power relationships, and reproductive biology (Gilligan, 1982). Recent research suggests that gender differences are also strongly affected by distinct brain structures. In the chapter entitled “Women’s Rights and Women’s Judgment,” Gilligan (1982) identifies a salient feature of this unique voice, an ethic of responsibility which is at “the center of women’s moral concern, anchoring the self in a world of relationships and giving rise to activities of care...” (p. 132). Referred to in the literature as the ethic of care, this judgment framework is characterized by a transactional, responsive, relational practice of morality, as opposed to the detached, objective, principles-based masculine ethic of justice (Shaipro & Stefkovich, 1997). According to Gilligan, philosophers have assumed that justice is determined by weighing competing rights within a rubric of absolute moral injunctions. Feminine morality is more circumstantially contingent and holistic; for women “the personal is political” (Brunner, 1995, p. 5). Women’s moral judgment is exercised through distinctive leadership behaviors. Archetypal characteristics of female leaders include sublimation, commitment, consensus building, and communication. Female leaders are described as wielding power through others, being non-confrontational, and exerting quiet influence. They are highly motivational, team-oriented, and collaborative. Women tend to lay a firm foundation for success and then delegate power to qualified others (Brunner, 1995; Stanford et al., 1995).

The ethic of care is also translated into a feminine definition of power. The dominant trajectory of history has been the achievement of control, command and domination over others – power over. A subordinate arc defines power as the capacity to render social good through cooperation – power with/to. Traditionally, analysts have viewed power and ethics within political arenas, such as nations, states, and local governance structures, ignoring families, religious organizations, schools, and other institutions of daily life (Brunner, 1995). These are the historic domains of female leadership, whether formally acknowledged or relegated to the background, where power with/to plays out. Furthermore, whereas masculine conceptions of power tend towards small concentrations of individuals exerting influence upon the greatest number of others, feminine power is all about production, or the nurturing of power in others. This is not to say that power production involves transferring power, granting authority, or conferring rights to the previously powerless. Rather, the feminine leadership process of power production involves development – removal of impediments to empower others in achieving their broadest possible capability set.

Empowerment. The colloquial usage of the term empowerment fails to accurately describe the potent connection between feminine leadership and Amartya Sen’s (1999) capabilities theory. By definition, *empowerment* is the act of giving power to another or of bestowing license or authority (Weiner, 1986). This implies that power is either a limited resource, transferred on the basis of goodwill and sympathy, or that power is a mental construct, defined and created by an entitled class. Sen (1999) argues that power has value, is measurable, and is inherent to personhood – even the very poor place significant value on freedom (Gaspar, 2000). Power is an

unlimited, renewable resource, and it is the leader's task is to unleash its potential to transform vision into reality. It is suggested that a new term, *empowerment*, accurately enunciates the process of bringing others into the state of power. *Empowerment* is derived from the ideas that all people are born with the capability to achieve some measure of power and that the purpose of leadership is to create an environment in which power can be used to create and discern choices. Above all it is power with – it requires leadership of the confident, committed, and caring. *Empowerment* is a process grounded in the feminine transactional form of ethics, in which decisions are formed on the basis of a holistic appraisal of internal and external situational factors, interested stakeholders, and principles of justice. It is inherently relational, sustainable, expansive, and self-proliferating.

The process of *empowerment* thrives on conflict and complexity; real power is achieved through democratic discourse and debate. As in the Hegelian dialectic, new ideas are synthesized from competing theses and antitheses. The leadership style that best enables the *empowerment* process is feminine in nature, involving listening, pulse-taking, vision and story sharing, intuiting, creating, and reflecting (Funke, Pankake, & Schroth, 2002). *Empowerment* is essential in pluralistic environments in which many views must coexist, and in which women, natural multi-taskers, are uniquely qualified to foster successful, productive, peaceful arrangements. *Empowerment* gives rise to an environment conducive to human agency rather than acquisition; the process can be messy but also pragmatic and, ultimately, economically beneficial.

Conclusions and Implications

A need exists for the development of discourses about feminine concepts of leadership and power across cultures. Currently, leaders are very conscious of changing social, political and economic demands. This is experienced within a general organizational reform movement that influences all areas leadership. The challenge for leaders is meeting the changing expectations for social and professional demands, without losing sight of the necessity to meet the needs of those they serve and protect their best interests in an ethical manner. The research implications for the nexus between empowerment and capabilities theory in the broad field of international development aid, and education development in particular, are manifold. Applicable qualitative and quantitative analyses could be conducted in the following areas: (a) archetypal characteristics of successful development leaders, both national and expatriate, at international, national, and local planning levels; (b) archetypes of organizational structures that foster feminine leadership behavior; (c) leadership recruitment and training, across cultures, and (d) common organizational attributes of successful development case studies, in education and other sectors, from the viewpoint of recipients at the national and local level.

By teasing out the threads of success – when, where, and how it occurs – researchers can build a model of leadership that may break the terrible recurring pattern of lofty goal setting, well-intentioned efforts, and disappointing failures in international development aid. Given that this research will be generated by donor nations, the prospect of using such models to assist the vast numbers of poor in already 'developed' nations is particularly inspiring. It is easy to forget that as citizens of the wealthiest of nations, we are not all benefiting from our prosperity. Ethically speaking, initiatives such as Education for All (cite) should be aimed at all underserved populations in all nations. Granted, limited material resources require strict priority setting in the development process of expanding capability sets. But by viewing the entire process from the perspective of *empowerment*, it is possible to set more ethically consistent priorities, goals, and plans of action. The instrumental and transformational effects of such a paradigm shift remain to be seen.

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