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TITLE: **Values-led principalship:**

myths and realities

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"Values-led principalship: myths and realities"

Introduction

The impetus for this study was an awareness of the growth in widespread support for the positive influence of values in contemporary human endeavours, not least being in principalship (Mulford & Johns, 2004). The popular belief is that values can play an essential role in overcoming many challenges faced in today's social, organizational, and leadership contexts.

From a social context, this popular belief was witnessed in the results of the American Presidential elections where the most significant factor for the voters was found to be moral values (Coorey, 2004). Here it is argued that the perceived values of the candidate was seen by a majority of voters as being the best indicator for determining who would make the most suitable President for leading America through politically and economically troubled times. Arguably, a similar perception of the essential role that values play in informing good government helped establish the "Family First Party" at the recent Australian federal elections.

From an organizational context, the concept of "values alignment" (Gilley & Matycunich, 2000, p.81) is being widely endorsed. It is argued that the modern organization needs to be a "developmental organization" in which its leaders need to engage the principle of "organizational consistency" through the process of "values alignment". Essentially, today's organizations need to be led by people who can model the values that all are encouraged to adopt. In this way, a trusting and collaborative organizational environment is established and this is more likely to nurture the development of the necessary unique solutions to the modern complex problems faced by organizations (Wilson & Barnacoat, 1995).

From a leadership context, there is now a strong emphasis on personal values. In our post-industrial world marked by uncertainty and constant change, "capable leaders tend to be people with character shaped by a values-set finetuned through the warp and weft of life's experiences" (Duignan, 2003, p. 22). Sarros (2002) argues that the soul or essence of contemporary leadership relies on knowing personal values and

includes the articulation and building of credibility through ethical and socially responsible behaviour.

For the principal, as an educational leader in these uncertain and changing times, it is thought that values are essential because the role "is not for the faint-hearted" (Starratt, 2003, p.242). Principals are required to bring clarity to complex situations, anticipate problems, and engage comprehensive and powerful leadership strategies. Recognising this challenge in principalship, there is a new emphasis in the literature on engaging a values-led perspective of principalship (Day, 2000). This understanding of principal leadership assumes that principals know their personal values and intentionally apply only suitable values in their work.

However, an initial review of literature highlighted the paucity of research and knowledge about values and the specific role that they play in influencing principalship behaviour. Despite long-held assertions within academic literature (Barker, 2002; England & Lee, 1974) that personal values are important influences on leadership behaviour, there has been a lack of corroborative research in support of these assertions (Begley, 2000; Sarros, Densten & Santora, 1999). This is acknowledged in the claim that:

> People regularly make impassioned appeals to some value or values for a variety of noble-sounding but nebulous purpose. Such pleas are full of emotive allure but, more often than not, devoid of any specific cognitive content. This cognitive deficiency hardly advances the cause of understanding. (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 2)

Moreover, a review of the Educational Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) database revealed 3761 documents associated with the study of the role of the school principal were written between 1990 and 2002 but only 70 focussed on values and principalship. Moreover, of these 70 studies only 3 studies (Campbell-Evans, 1991; Laible & Harrington, 1998; Moorhead & Nediger, 1991) document attempts to synthesize the array of personal values that influence a principal's behaviour. Little research has been directed towards clarifying the relationship between personal values and principalship behaviour.

This suggests that the perception that personal values can have a positive influence on principalship behaviour is more assumed than demonstrated. It is more of a popular idea rather than a confirmed reality. Given the definition of a myth as being "an understanding about reality that embodies popular ideas on natural or social phenomena" (Concise Oxford Dictionary), it is suggested that the proposed positive relationship between personal values and principalship behaviours is more like a myth than a confirmed reality. However, it is important to note that, as a myth, the perception that personal values can have a positive influence on principalship behaviour is not necessarily a false understanding but, rather, that it lacks confirmatory evidence.

This paper seeks to achieve two purposes. First, it seeks to more fully describe the nature of what is implied by the values-led principalship myth. Secondly, it seeks to develop some confirmatory data about the reality of values-led principalship.

Literature Review

Within this study, a review of the literature served to provide an initial explanation of the concept of values-led principalship by clarifying the relationship between personal values and behaviour. The expression, 'values-led principalship', seems to assume that:

1. Values can influence principalship behaviour.

2. Principalship behaviour that is influenced by values is preferred to principalship behaviour that is not influenced by values.

3. The principal has the choice of whether or not to allow values to influence their behaviour.

4. There are particular values that are more beneficial in influencing principalship behaviour than others.

5. The principal knows what values are influencing their behaviour.

6. The principal can eclectically choose the most appropriate values to influence their behaviour.

7. A principal can change their principalship behaviour by allowing preferred values to influence their behaviour.

As an initial step in this study, the appropriateness of these assumptions was explored using literature from psychology, ethics, and values theory.

This body of literature offered a comprehensive description of human values. This description not only highlighted the nature of human values, but also examined the level of consciousness people have of their values and explored how it was possible for values to influence behaviour. Here it is argued that the real power behind what causes human behaviour is the self-concept, self-esteem, motives, values, and beliefs held within the person (Hodgkinson, 1991). This acknowledges that personal values do, indeed, influence behaviour; people are usually influenced by approximately 30 to 40 different personal values (Rokeach, 1973). Despite this influence, personal values are largely a subliminal component of the Self. While behaviours are observable and beliefs are somewhat knowable, it seems that the other components of the Self, including values, motives, self-esteem and self-concept, are progressively more subliminal and difficult to come to know (Hodgkinson, 1996). People generally have very little self-knowledge of their values. Moreover, it is very difficult for a person to know their personal values and to be able to clearly state these to another person.

This explanation of the relationship between behaviour and personal values enabled the researcher to develop a conceptual map of the Self (Fig.1).
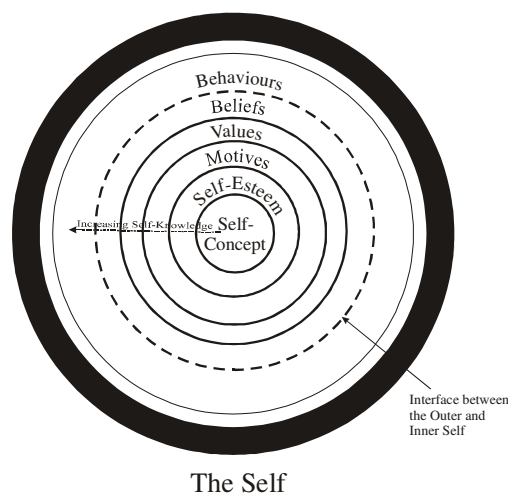

The Self

Figure 1   A diagrammatical representation of the various dimension of the Self as presented by the literature, which shows how these dimensions are able to interact in order to influence a person's behaviour

This conceptual map highlights that one's self-concept is at the heart of one's Self and illustrates the sequential order of the components as one moves from the self-concept to behaviours. Here various components of the Self (ie behaviours, beliefs, values, motives, self-esteem and self-concept) are not discrete entities but, rather, they are inter-related and inter-active with each other. Moreover, this conceptual map suggests a pathway for learning more about the relationship between the individual's behaviour and the more subliminal components of the Self such as personal values, motives, self-esteem and self-concept.

Based on these insights, the researcher identify the following research questions:

1. How knowledgeable are the principals about their own personal values?

2. How have the personal values of the principals been formed?

3. Can a principal gain increased self-knowledge of his or her personal values and the relationship of these personal values to his or her educational leadership behaviour?

4. Does an increased level of self-knowledge of personal values bring about values-led principalship?

The Design of the Study

Given the nature of the focus of this research problem, and the subsequent research questions, this research study was informed by the research paradigm of constructivism. More particularly, this study was informed by pragmatic constructivism, which represents one such form of this philosophical tradition (Burbles, 2000). In short, pragmatic constructivism offers a distinctive research paradigm with its own ontological, epistemological and methodological claims (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp.111-112). From an ontological perspective, "[pragmatic] constructivism's relativism … assumes multiple, apprehendable, and somewhat conflicting social realities that are the products of human intellects, but that may change as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated". From an epistemological perspective it accepts a "transactional/ objectivist assumption that sees knowledge as created in interaction among the investigator and the respondents". Pragmatic constructivism relies on a hermeneutic/dialectical methodology aimed at understanding and reconstructing the previously held problematic constructions.

Furthermore, the researcher accepted advice from Denzin and Lincoln (1994) that pragmatic constructivist research be positioned within the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is considered to be a value-laden, pragmatic approach to social research, which is influenced by four key beliefs (Charon, 1998). First, the belief that what is real for human beings always depends on their own active intervention, their own interpretation or definition. The world does not tell people what it is; they actively reach out and understand it and decide what to do with it. Second, the worthiness of knowledge is judged by how practical, applicable, and useful it is in helping to understand a given social situation. Third, the elements within the particular social situation are defined in terms according to their specific usefulness in that situation. Finally, the initial focus of social research should be on the actions and behaviours that are occurring then these guide further exploration.

With these research features of symbolic interactionism in mind, case study was considered an appropriate orchestrating perspective for this study (Sarantakos, 1998; Yin, 1994). A case study approach best serves studies requiring intensive, holistic description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution or community (Merriam, 1998). Within this particular case study, the boundaries of the case were defined in terms of secondary school principals working in the system of Catholic schools conducted under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Brisbane. This study consisted of a variety of data sources with the principals of the 26 secondary colleges within Brisbane Catholic Education being potential participants in the study. A process influenced by the Delphi Method was used to select five suitable principals to participate in this study. In accordance with standard ethical research procedures for maintaining confidentiality, these principals were named Principal A, B, C, D and E. The use of multiple research methods in this case study allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the case and led to a holistic appreciation of what was happening as well as an inspection of the isolated elements within the case (Charon, 1998).

This study involved two stages of research:

<u>Stage 1</u> involved an exploration of the participants' knowledge of personal values. In this stage, there was a series of open and closed questionnaires to assist the principals in this study to explore and clarify their personal values. In the *Values Nomination Questionnaire,* individual principals were asked to take as much time as necessary to simply record their personal values, which they felt were most influential in their educational leadership behaviour. The data from this questionnaire was used to ascertain the relative clarity of the principal's self-knowledge of their personal values. After the *Values Nomination Questionnaire* had been completed and given to the researcher, the principals were asked to complete the *Values Selection Questionnaire*. This questionnaire provided the principal with a list of 170 potential values from which to select their personal values. Despite this being a simple, uncomplicated process, the literature (McGraw, 2001; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994) accepts these selected values as being a credible indicator of the individual's personal values.

<u>Stage 2</u> involved an investigation of specific issues identified in the initial exploration stage. Here, semi-structured interviews explored the issue of values formation by asking the participants to provide life history accounts. In addition, the relationship between personal values and leadership behaviours was explored using personalised 'visual displays' that showed the relationship between the individual principal's leadership behaviour, inherent beliefs, and personal values. This investigation relied on data collected using the closed questionnaire, *The Leadership Practices Inventory* (Kouzes & Posner; 2001) as well as responses provided in the semi-structured interviews.

Research Findings

These multiple methods of data collection provide a 'rich' database from which to answer the four research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1: How knowledgeable are the principals about their own personal values?

At the outset of this study, there was general acknowledgement by each principal that they were quite unsure of their personal values. In the seminal work of Milton

Rokeach (1973) it is suggested that, on average, people's behaviour is influenced by 30 to 40 personal values, and this claim provided a standard for judging the clarity of the principals' perceptions of their knowledge of personal values. The data gathered from each of the participating principals through the *Values Nomination Questionnaire*, the *Values Selection Questionnaire* and the semi-structured interviews were used to determine how knowledgeable the principals were of their personal values. In the *Values Nomination Questionnaire*, Principal D and Principal B nominated close to the expected 30-40 personal values, which suggested that they might have known their values. Principals C, E, and A appeared to have very little knowledge of their personal values based on their apparent inability to name anywhere near 30 to 40 personal values. However, data from the *Values Selection Questionnaire* presented a somewhat different picture. The number of personal values selected from the provided list of 170 values ranged from Principal E with 52 values to Principal D with 114 values. Every principal was well in excess of the expected 30-40 values. This suggested that all of the principals in this study were unable to consistently name their personal values.

These findings suggested that the principals had limited knowledge of their personal values. However, this could be a somewhat incomplete perception. Rather than just considering whether or not a principal had precise and explicit knowledge of his or her personal values, a third alternative could be that he or she had a sense, an impression, or a notion of their values. A comparison of responses in the *Values Nomination Questionnaire* with those in the *Values Selection Questionnaire* suggested that the participants may have used synonyms, instead of identical words, as these could suffice for a match between values nominated in the first questionnaire with those selected in the second questionnaire. While each principal was not always able to clearly and accurately state his or her personal values, these data supported an understanding that he or she had a notion or an intuition of them.

Research Question 2: How have the personal values of the principals been formed?

The literature proposed that personal values are derived from the particular person's education, life experience, circumstance, biology, genealogy, and culture (Hodgkinson, 1991). Interview data collected in this study confirmed these claims.

It seems that personal values are formed from a wide variety of lived experiences from across an entire life. In this study, the participating principals were readily able to speak of events from their youth that influenced their leadership behaviour. These personal histories highlighted the beliefs and values that underpinned their preferred leadership behaviours. Family life experiences played a very formative role in four of the five principals. For the remaining principal it was more to do with coping as a boarding student on entering secondary school. Even with the four principals, who aligned their values to their particular experiences within their family, each recounted quite significantly different circumstances. One principal was influenced by the values and exaltations of his mother. Another remembered the strictness and directedness of his father. A third principal was influenced by the challenges and responsibilities of having to help in a family business. While the fourth principal claimed that the experiences of growing up as the eldest child of a relatively large family living in a fairly isolated area were of greatest influence in forming his values. All of these accounts tend to provide supportive data for the view presented in the literature that one's values are not inherent within the individual but are formed from such things as the particular person's education, life experience, circumstances, biology, genealogy, and culture.

This understanding about the formation of personal values highlights the difficulties associated with changing personal values. Here it seems that changing personal values requires changing intimate understandings about one's Self, and this is a very complex and complicated activity. It would require more than the mere promotion of a preferred value as its adoption would also have to negate an understanding of one's Self that had been developed and nurtured over time and which applies to all aspects of one's life. Newly promoted professional personal values have to compete with not only the existing general personal values, but also their accompanying historical importance, before they would be adopted. Hence, as the literature suggests (Hultman & Gellermann, 2002), people are very reluctant to change their personal values.

Research Question 3: Can a principal gain increased self-knowledge of his or her personal values and the relationship of these personal values to his or her educational leadership behaviour?

The account in the literature of the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem, motives, values, and beliefs held within the Self (Hodgkinson, 1991; 1996) alerted the researcher to the possibility of using a visual display to show the relationship of leadership behaviour, beliefs, and personal values. Using data collected in Stages 1 and 2 of this study, the researcher was able to produce a personalised visual display for each principal in this study, that illustrated the link between the principal's leadership behaviour and their beliefs and personal values. This personalised display was then shared with the respective principal, who was asked if their visual display was an accurate representation of their behaviour, beliefs, and values. There were also questions whether the display was understandable and informative in respect to the relationship between leadership behaviours and personal values. On reviewing their individual visual displays, each principal endorsed not only the accuracy but also the ease with which each display could be understood. From these visual displays, these principals could not only account for their own personal values but also see how these personal values impacted on their key leadership behaviours. The link between their personal values and their leadership behaviour was clearly established and understood. The following table is an example of one of these visual displays:

Table 1   The visual display for the first of Principal A's highest ranked leadership behaviours

SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR	PERSONAL HISTORY	UNDERLYING BELIEFS	INHERENT INFLUENTIAL PERSONAL VALUES
1. **Encouraging and acknowledging the positive contribution of others to the ongoing success of the school by :** ➢ Recognizing individual or group contributions to school achievements ➢ Appropriately celebrating school community accomplishments **This is achieved through:** • Praising people for a job well done; • Giving community members appreciation and support; • Expressing confidence in people's abilities; • Finding ways to celebrate accomplishments; • Recognizing people for commitment to shared values; and • Rewarding people for their contributions.	1. The understanding that people respond positively to praise and affirmation was developed in the family upbringing, particularly by mother, and this view influences attitude to all areas of life, not just professional perspectives. 2. This perspective was reinforced at the beginning of professional career when more experienced teachers willingly provided personal support and encouragement, which provided a strong and confident start.	General beliefs are that : • people are motivated by positive, constructive, and affirming praise; • people work better if they feel appreciated; and • the leader gives essential direction to the efforts of the school community through acknowledging, supporting, and encouraging the positive effort of individuals, groups, and the whole community. Consequential specific beliefs are that it is personally important to : ⇨ Value people's contribution; ⇨ Acknowledge what people do; ⇨ Give encouragement to people in their positive endeavours for the school; ⇨ Seek out contributors to thank them in both formal and informal ways; ⇨ Appreciate the diversity in contributions made by people from across the school community; ⇨ Always try to suitably reward people for their positive contributions to the successful accomplishments within the school; and ⇨ Celebrate school achievements in appropriate ways.	A. **Personal values associated with positive personal qualities seen in self** encouraging supportive affirming recognition approval respect integrity sincerity caring empowerment generosity diversity nurturing accepting others concern for others developing others B. **Personal values associated with positive personal qualities seen in others** loyalty hardworking commitment diligence reliability dedication responsibility initiative giving involvement ownership participation nurturing C. **Personal values associated with positive qualities seen in people working together** harmony companionship cooperation friendship cohesiveness collaboration productivity success quality community involvement

Research Question 4: Does an increased level of self-knowledge of personal values bring about values-led principalship?

Within the literature, it is claimed that personal values are formed from one's personal characteristics and one's personal life experiences (Hodgkinson, 1991). They originate within one's very core, one's self-concept, and are formed within one's self-esteem and one's personal motives (Hultmann & Gellerman, 2002; Osborne, 1996). These personal values are subliminal and affect all of one's behaviours and not just one's leadership behaviours (Hodgkinson, 1996). Hence, to increase one's self-knowledge of personal values by overcoming their inherent subliminal nature does significantly enhance one's awareness and comprehension of one's practice, but it does not bring about immediate change. For behavioural change to occur the particular value must be seen to be unsuitable from a holistic perspective within the life of the person (Graeber, 2001). For the self-knowledge of one's personal value to be effective in changing one's behaviour it must not only distinguish the value but it must also show that it as either generally producing an unwanted outcome or as being incongruent or in strong conflict with other key personal values.

These thoughts in the literature were supported by data from this study. In the final interview, each participating principal was asked: What have you learnt about yourself, as a principal, from this study and is this new knowledge likely to change your educational leadership behaviour? While acknowledging enhanced self-knowledge, the principals responses were more of an "uh huh", a recognition of a new understanding, rather than a "wow" response from a powerful new insight that mandates essential and immediate personal changes. There was clear recognition of new knowledge about their inner Self, and how their values and beliefs were influencing their leadership behaviour, but there was not the sense that this increased self-knowledge was going to immediately initiate a change in their leadership behaviours. The perceived benefits gained from an increased self-knowledge of their beliefs and values were mainly identified in terms of being able to clarify, substantiate, and support the principal's individualistic leadership style and provided him or her with renewed confidence and assurance.

Implications

In response to the previously established inherent assumptions within the concept of values-led principalship the findings from this study suggest:

Assumption 1: **Values can influence principalship behaviour**.

Values do influence principalship behaviour.

Assumption 2: **Principalship behaviour that is influenced by values is preferred to principalship behaviour that is not influenced by values.**

All behaviours are influenced by values. The role that values play in influencing behaviours is not through choice, it is automatic. It is not possible for a principal to initiate any behaviour that is not influenced by values.

Assumption 3: **The principal has the choice of whether or not to allow values to influence their behaviour.**

Values are constantly applying a subliminal influence on all human behaviour. Values are always directing or driving each person's every action. Hence, all principalship behaviour is influenced by values but more often than not the principal is not aware of this. Values are continuously directing or driving the principal's behaviour. The principal cannot choose whether or not to allow values to influence their behaviour as their values automatically influence their behaviour.

Assumption 4: **There are particular values that are more beneficial for influencing principalship behaviour than others.**

Due to the complex manner by which values are formed from a myriad of personal life experiences and the interplay of the inner antecedents of the values within the Self, the perceived benefits upon behaviour that might result from the application of particular values can only be truly known by the person. Two people with different values might enact the same behaviour just as the same value in two different people might result in different behaviours. The particular life experience of each person, and the manner by which his or her self-concept, self-esteem and motives impact on their values, means that different alignments are established between their values and

their behaviours. The desired principalship behaviours need to be considered not only in terms of particular values but also in terms of the principal's sense of Self.

Assumption 5:   The principal knows what values are influencing their behaviour.

Accurate self-knowledge of personal values is uncommon such that most principals' self-knowledge of personal values is variable and notional. Hence, it is unlikely that a principal will know what values are influencing their behaviour.

Assumption 6:   The principal can eclectically choose the most appropriate values to influence their behaviour.

It is extremely difficult for a person to change their values. The belief that a person can eclectically choose their values not only overlooks the complexity of the processes associated with personal values formation but it also ignores the inner antecedents of personal values within the Self. Values are not isolated and independent phenomena. It seems that important experiences in the whole of life help define the Self. Moreover, personal values are not consciously selected or rejected as new principalship challenges arise, but rather, personal values are a part of the principal's holistic understanding of their Self and, therefore, difficult to isolate.

Hence, changing personal values requires changing intimate understandings about one's Self, and this is a very complex and complicated activity. Such change would require more than the mere promotion of a preferred value as its adoption would also have to negate an understanding of one's Self that had been developed and nurtured over time and incorporated into one's intricate pattern of self-concept, self-esteem, motives, values, beliefs and behaviours.

Furthermore, a strongly held personal value is applied to all aspects of one's life, not just to a work related role. Newly promoted professional personal values have to compete with not only the existing general personal values but also their accompanying historical importance before they would be adopted. Any new value would need to blend seamlessly into the principal's pre-existing inner being and be in accord with the principal's motives, self-esteem and self-concept.

Assumption 7:   **A principal can change their principalship behaviour by allowing preferred values to influence their behaviour.**

While it is true that people need to change their values in order to change their behaviour, given that people strongly resist changing their values it is highly unlikely that a principal could change their principalship behaviour by allowing preferred values to influence their behaviour, alone. This study found that even when the principal was made aware of their likely values and could clearly understand how these values were influencing their principalship behaviour, there was not a propensity towards changing their behaviours through critiquing the suitability or appropriateness of their values. While increasing the principal's self-knowledge of personal values by overcoming their inherent subliminal nature does significantly enhance his or her awareness and comprehension of their practice, it does not bring about openness to change. For behavioural change to occur the particular value must be seen to be unsuitable from a holistic perspective within the life of the person. The principals needed to know more about why they possessed certain values, that is, what were the antecedents of their values, before being moved to critique their values and, thereby, consider changing their behaviour.

Conclusions

The findings from this study suggest that values-led principalship is a somewhat simplistic conceptualisation that does not reflect the complexity of the whole Self. It not only overlooks the complexity of the processes associated with personal values formation but it also assumes a simplistic relationship between personal values and the principal's leadership behaviour. By not considering how personal values are formed, and the inner antecedents of personal values within the Self, any self-knowledge of one's personal values remains notional knowledge. Such notional self-knowledge maintains the tacit, subliminal influence of personal values on behaviour. In this light, personal values are directing or driving behaviour, rather than leading behaviour, as their influence is hidden from conscious awareness and consideration. Arguably, the principals were being values-driven rather than values-led. Values-led principalship, as opposed to values-driven principalship, requires reflection upon the inner antecedents of personal values. If the principal were to have self-knowledge of his or her self-concept, self-esteem, and motives, then they would be in a better

position to critique their Self, including their personal values and behaviours. Moreover, they would be more able to change their personal values in order to bring about desired behavioural changes. This understanding suggests that a more comprehensive and holistic self-knowledge of the inner Self would enable values-led principalship.

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