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Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior

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Abstract

The morality of transformational leadership has been sharply questioned, particularly by libertarians, "grass roots" theorists, and organizational development consultants. This paper argues that to be truly transformational, leadership must be grounded in moral foundations. The four components of authentic transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) are contrasted with their counterfeits in dissembling *pseudo*-transformational leadership on the basis of (1) the moral character of the leaders and their concerns for self and others; (2) the ethical values embedded in the leaders' vision, articulation, and program, which followers can embrace or reject; and (3) the morality of the processes of social ethical choices and action in which the leaders and followers engage and collectively pursue.

The literature on transformational leadership is linked to the long-standing literature on

The literature on transformational leadership is linked to the long-standing literature on virtue and moral character, as exemplified by Socratic and Confucian typologies. It is related as well to the major themes of the modern Western ethical agenda: liberty, utility, and distributive justice. Deception, sophistry, and pretense are examined alongside issues of transcendence, agency, trust, striving for congruence in values, cooperative action, power, persuasion, and corporate governance to establish the strategic and moral foundations of authentic transformational leadership.



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