University Leadership Within the Neo-liberal Agenda: Reframing the Landscape Through a Principled Leadership Approach

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Abstract

This article emerged from a doctoral study that explored Nova Scotia university leaders' leadership beliefs and values, and change agency approaches. "Principled leadership" was conceptualized as an expansion of authentic leadership theory and involved – authenticity (identity), spirituality, and love (an ethic of care). Principled leadership was examined as a possible approach which could facilitate successful change agency. The leader-participants included university presidents, vice-presidents, directors, and deans. A key finding was that leaders were operating within a conceptualization of authenticity. They held honesty, integrity, and trust as critical to their change agency. Another finding was that principled leadership offered an antidote to the depredations on positive leadership resulting from neoliberalism that has seriously impacted Canadian higher education. This study raised questions surrounding the nature of authentic leadership and identity; that is, the core of authenticity is knowing oneself and being true to one's own values, but what if a leader has "drunk the Kool-Aid of neoliberalism" thereby truly believes that their top-down, autocratic (or destructive leadership) approach was 'efficient' (a neoliberal tenet) and crucial to organizational effectiveness and change agency. Can they still be considered authentic leaders? Thus, this study indicated that principled leadership was a useful expansion of Avolio and his colleagues' authentic leadership theory.

Introduction

This article reveals the findings of a doctoral study that explored university leaders' conceptualizations of leadership, their beliefs and values, and approaches to their change role agency as change agent. A key proposition was to identify factors and characteristics which promoted leadership effectiveness to explore if a conceptualization of "principled leadership" facilitated leaders' change agency. Principled leadership was posited as encompassing authenticity (a leader's identity), spirituality, and love (an ethic of care).

In scoping the context of higher education, the economic principles of neoliberalism appears to have had a significant impact on many higher education systems including Canada (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Smyth, 2017).

These impacts include reductions in funding to universities, increased accountability, decreased provincial funding, greater competition and so on, and have influenced leaders' operating context. These changes are under the premise that privatized is good and a service or public good is a drain on society within the lens of capitalism (Apple, 2000, 2006; Camicia & Franklin, 2011). As Smyth (2017) described it, neoliberalism has produced a "toxic university" context. He further cited the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on the academic work and culture of universities as toxic, destructive, and has radically altered higher education in many western nations. Larner (2000) described the term neoliberalism as a form of political economic governance based upon market relationships or principles. Apple (2000, 2006) warned of the damaging impacts of neoliberalism and capitalistic approaches to higher education. Thus, this examined the tensions of how leaders can remain authentic, true to their identity, values and beliefs, and caring within universities that are increasingly corporatized and influenced by the principles of neoliberalism. The article provides insights on the contemporary leadership culture within Canadian higher education institutions, relevant leadership theories, introduces principled leadership theory, a

glimpse into the research methodology, results of the study and its potential impact on leadership within the higher education sector.

Conceptual Framework

As means to provide context, I have included the conceptual framework, as well pertinent key terms and how these were applicable to the study. Four main areas guided the literature review for this study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
Conceptual Framework
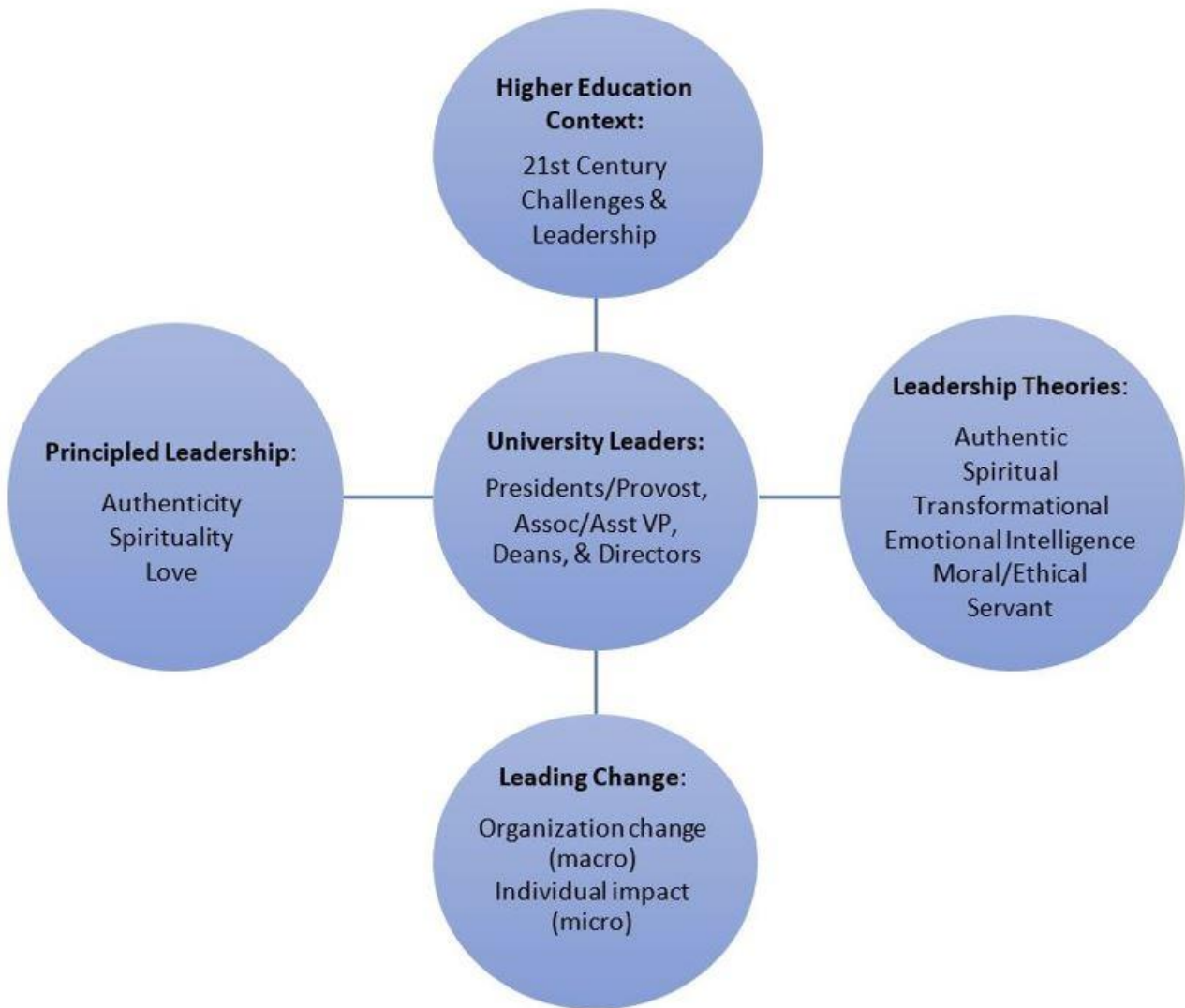
These four areas included: the higher education context, leadership theories, principled leadership dimensions, and leading change. The higher education context resulted in an examination of the impacts

of globalization and the application of economic principles of neoliberalism as the most significant influences on universities in many western nations and those which have affected leadership roles and responsibilities (Tarc, 2012). The leadership theories deemed to be the most informative and applicable to the study's research questions were: authentic, spiritual, transformational, moral/ethical, and servant leadership. These were selected because of their relational orientations which were likely to support positive change within universities. Principled leadership was posited to be a coalescence of authenticity – that is, a strong leadership identity, spirituality, and love or a genuine ethic of care. This was identified as broader than simply authentic leadership or moral and ethical leadership (Blanchard, 2018) and it was proposed that the three dimensions working in concert could be more powerful than simply adopting one leadership approach. Universities are constantly facing change from both external and internal forces (Beach et al., 2005; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Erkutlu et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2002; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; McRae, 2009; O'Neill, 2010; Paul, 2011; Rowland, 2008; Shaw, 2020). Thus, the capacity to be a successful change agent is important, however, leaders' approaches to change can be either positive or negative. This means they can establish change, but how they engage with the change can either damage or support their faculty members (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lavigne, 2022; Smyth, 2017).

The study provided the opportunity to discern a range of leadership theories, specifically, authentic, transformational, spiritual, ethical, moral, and principled leadership and included an exploration of the neoliberal ideology as it has played out in contemporary higher education contexts. A consistent emergent theme regarding humanistic leadership resonated throughout the methodological stage resulting in the need to re-frame the leadership approaches identified under the umbrella of 'humanistic-type' leadership defined as a 'humanistic leadership style' that is strategic, compassionate, ethical, and considers the strengths, weaknesses, and emotions of others (Parameswar & Prasad, 2017, p. 48). The study further integrated neoliberalism, change management in universities, authentic leadership, and principled leadership. The definition of principled leadership proposed that the journey to discover one's

identity, spirituality, and choice to love is connected to the ability to become fully authentic, and where to be an authentic leader requires a genuine internally-rooted desire to believe in, and care for, others and that this comes from a deep knowledge of self, identity, and personal values (Blanchard, 2018).

This article posits an emergent theme from the research questioning, if we do not have principled leadership we can be left with pseudo-transformational leaders who can be destructive while remaining authentic and true to themselves (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lavigne, 2022; Lumby, 2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Shaw et al., 2011; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Einarsen et al. (2007) defined a destructive leader as: a bully, abusive, undermining, self-gratifying, and deviant to the extent of being corrupt (p. 215). The framework of the study was further underscored by the understanding that bad leadership is not always a result of the individual leader but possibly due to internal and external political and neo-liberal forces that promotes negative leadership approaches (Einarsen et al., 2007). However, the hegemonic practice of bad leaders, coupled with the inherent political pressures within higher education institutions, could subconsciously promote deconstructive/constructive leadership approaches. As one research participant shared, "There are more examples of bad leadership than good and I think we just have to be open to that … of more political issues these days, people wring their hands and moan about the lack of leadership". Hence, the need to further examine contemporary leadership within higher education as a means of providing a deepened understanding as it compared to principled leadership theory. This next section provides a review of the literature as a means of discerning the contemporary higher education context, leadership theories, change management theory, and introduces principled leadership theory in more depth as related to the study.

Higher Education Context/Examining the Higher Education Culture

Although the focus of the study was to primarily investigate leadership attributes, leaders provided insights regarding the challenges faced while leading within the 21st century higher education context. In addition to financial, human resource, and enrolment management challenges, participants

noted similarities to Lawrence and Pirson (2015) who discussed the unprecedented global challenges facing 21st century institutions such as social inequity, climate change, and terrorism. An increased pressure to provide a quality education while competing with a culture in which provincial funding is continuing to decline, competing with local and national universities for enrolment with decreased enrolments being experienced across Atlantic Canada, and a lack of financial and human resources (including leadership) support was especially highlighted by participants. In their move from academe to administration, leaders indicated that many assumed their role without proper leadership training, and that their leadership experience was the accumulation of their experiences with mentors, former supervisors, and family members who positively impacted them.

Universities are by their very nature places of conflict and dissent which has been reinforced and expanded due to the influence of the neoliberal ideology that has swept through the higher education context internationally generally, and now throughout Canada specifically (Poole, 2007; Rigas & Kuchapski, 2016; Sattler, 2012). It was apparent through the literature that universities have to make space for those who are working outside of the neoliberal frame; embrace conflict, for the higher education leader to be able to accept when others says, "I disagree", and ask the questions: Am I an agent of the corporation, myself, or for others to whom I serve? Do I leave space for honest debate? How do I navigate my team environment where there is resistance to change, multiple perspectives, and deal with the messy situations? An emergent theme in the literature highlighted destructive leadership and the impact of neoliberalism on higher education where Apple (2000, 2016) associated neoliberalism with public institutions that have become, "'black holes' into which money is poured – and then seemingly disappears – but which do not provide anywhere near adequate results" (p. 59). Higher education institutions notions of "bums in seats" provided a dramatic but realistic example of the terms used and the impact of neoliberalism. This aligned with concerns associated with globalization and the impact of economic competition, where benchmarks for comparison are essential in order to measure systems'

status (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Winter, 2012). Given the neoliberalism context in higher education, students are further conceptualized as 'clients', parents are considered "consumers" and universities are designed to produce a product or a marketable commodity that supports a nation rather than successful well-rounded graduates (Apple, 2006, p. 23).

Leadership in 21st century neoliberal higher education institutions require leaders to determine where they fit or desire to be, to question whether there is a difference between the 'academic leader' versus 'business leader' (Davies & Thomas, 2010; Wolverton & Poch, 2000). The study raised the question of whether higher education institutions are equipping their academic and administrative leaders to succeed, and the need for future leadership training (Cohen, 2009; de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Wolverton et al., 2007). This led to the need to examine existing leadership theories that aligned or misaligned with the conceptualization of principled leadership theory so as to determine if there were gaps in the literature.

Principled Leadership: a comparison of humanistic-type leadership approaches.

Principled leadership is defined as a leader who is rooted in authentic behaviors, free from the influence of one's ego, firm in the knowledge of self through identity, has a balanced perspective based on strong morals and values, and works in service of others based on love and respect (Blanchard, 2018). As part of this definition authenticity was integrated where to be authentic is to remain true to one's core values, identities, preferences, and emotions, in doing this, the more authentic you will become (Avolio et al., 2004). In this study, I proposed that authenticity and authentic leadership, as an element of the conceptualization of principled leadership required a genuine internally-rooted desire to believe in, and care for others and that this comes from a deep knowledge of self, identity, and personal values which aligns well with Avolio and his associates' (2004), explanations of authenticity. This involves the ability to desire authenticity in others and results in a leadership approach where the primary goal is to bring out the best in others and to do this with honesty, integrity, and trust. A principled leader is committed to

action to a morally justifiable set of principles and values (Becker, 1998, p. 157) enabling them to be a leader with integrity, and a leader who is rooted in love that operates as Fromm (2006) describes, "genuine love is an expression of productiveness … an active striving for the growth and happiness of the loved person, rooted in one's own capacity to love" (p. 55). To love becomes a choice to act out of free will for the good of another. With true humility at its core, this act of love by the leader creates an environment built on the respect, dignity, and value of each individual (Freire, 1994; Fromm, 2006). The desire to be or become principled is grounded in a desire to serve others, authentically, freely, with the hope that the 'other' will benefit from this leadership approach.

Leadership Theories

A need to understand the noted challenges faced by higher education institutions provided a foundation for examining leadership. A broad literature search on historical leadership theory, definitions, and approaches uncovering inherent weakness, strengths, and limitation associated with each, noted a change in the literature moving away from traditional leadership as noted by Parameswar and Prasad (2017) who indicated that traditional transactional forms of leadership "are no longer celebrated as the best forms of leadership in organizations" (p. 47). Parameswar and Prasad argued, "great leaders are expected to move out of their comfort zone, be more transparent to the situations and have a macro as well as a micro view on the problems and challenges that they face" (p. 47). This supported the observed trend toward 'humanistic-type' (Blanchard, 2018) leadership approaches which will be further examined in this paper. For the purpose of this study, the following leadership definition was integrated into the study for context, "leaders ignite change; in that leadership produces useful change" (Kotter, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005) and "leadership is essentially concerned with bringing about transformational change" (Burnes & Todnem, 2012, p. 241). Authentic, spiritual, moral/ethical, servant and emotionally intelligent leadership theories were reviewed to further understand humanistic leadership theory as it related to principled leadership theory and the study.

Humanistic Leadership Theory

One of the reoccurring themes throughout the study was the consistent humanistic character and leadership approach of the research subjects. The term humanism continued to be a theme and as such a review of humanistic leadership theory was required. A literature scan highlighted the tremendous amount of breadth and depth in defining the terms, humanism and humanistic. The following definitions were examined based on purpose, clarity, and intent relative to the study: humanism "a devotion to human welfare" (Merriam-Webster, 2024); and, humanistic "treating people with respect and making sure they are safe, happy, healthy, etc." (Cambridge University Press & Assessment. 2024). In describing humanistic leadership, Parameswar and Prasad (2017) described a 'humanistic leadership style' as "a strategic, compassionate, and ethical style that considers the strengths, weaknesses, and emotions of the people they work with" (p. 48). They further described a humanistic leadership style that develops the potential of those they lead and creates a culture "where excellence, trust, camaraderie, care of all stakeholders, transparent communication, creativity, etc. start to flourish naturally which in turn produces excellent performance" (p. 48). The importance of understanding and integrating human-like qualities as part of responsible leadership approach was further reinforced by Lawrence and Pirson (2015) who said "responsible leadership needs to be informed by a better understanding of human nature and understand the ensuing responsibilities" (p. 391). Perucci and Schwartz (2002) further reinforced this stating "the leader-followers relationship is fraught with the qualities associated with being human – compassion, betrayal, seduction, love, and hate. A humanistic approach, therefore, can help us develop an understanding of the leadership dynamic" (p. 15). Humanistic-type leadership for the purpose of the study and emphasizing the elements of the conceptualization of principled leadership (Blanchard, 2018), was further understood through the examination of six leadership theories, authentic, spiritual, servant, ethical/moral, emotionally intelligent, and transformational as compared to the definition of principled leadership.

Authentic leadership

Perhaps the most renowned researcher influencing the last three decades of leadership theory is Avolio, a significant scholar who has been studying evidence-based leadership for over twenty-five years. Avolio posited authentic leadership is sustainable beyond all other forms of leadership and is what saves us (leader), from ourselves. An authentic leader may influence followers' attitudes and behaviours, but these same leaders also use intervening behaviours such as hope, trust, positive emotions, and optimism (Avolio et al., 2004; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Avolio et al. (2004) conceded that authenticity is a root construct and key characteristic of a leader indicating that "authentic leadership is at the very base or core of what constitutes profoundly positive leadership in whatever form it exists" (p. 818). For the purpose of the study authentic leadership characteristics were described as: transparent, have a capacity to build trust, genuine – meaning what you say and saying what you mean, credible, know your own values and beliefs, and prepared to ascertain the values of the individuals who follow you as well as the collective they lead (Agote et al., 2016; Avolio et al., 2004; Avolio & Gardiner, 2005; Kreber et al., 2007; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Understanding authentic leadership underscored the research study as a means of determining how and why principled leadership was applicable. The study uncovered that through the journey of becoming authentic or integrating authentic leadership there was a need to understand one's identity and the interplay of whether you can be principled and be authentic or do you have to be authentic to be principled? Either way, the concern that without either what you could be left with are pseudo-transformational leaders who are described as being destructive leaders (Einarsen et al., 2007; Padilla et al., 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Shaw et al., 2011).

Spirituality

Spirituality comes from the Latin, "spiritus", meaning 'breath of life', is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized

by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate (Elkins et al., 1988, p. 10). The literature provided a varied definition of spirituality but there was consistency connecting spirituality to a higher being, love, authenticity, and caring for others (Klenke, 2007; Phipps, 2012) aligned to the conceptualization of principled leadership. The general characteristics of a moral/ethical leader were identified in the literature as one who: displays commitment to right action; has strong values and morals; has virtue; leads from the heart; in touch with their spirit; giving; honest; fair; integrity; understands social responsibility; motivated to act morally; and, leads with the head (Ah-Kion & Bhowon, 2017; Bolman & Deal, 2001; Burnes & Todnem, 2012; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; Levine & Boaks, 2014; Salter et al., 2014; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2005). Researchers (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Burns, 1978) also suggested that people with high moral reasoning should be motivated to act morally based on this internalized moral identity (as cited in Salter et al., 2014). The literature on moral/ethical leadership within the context of spirituality supported the conceptualization of principled leadership as part of the study.

Servant Leadership

A servant leader was described as: servant first; serves others; serves the ideas and values that shape community; they are a relational leader; operate with moral authority; make the switch from hierarchical to steward; leadership is built on trust; acts with humility; combines desire to serve with motivation to lead; exercises empathy; is authentic; works with purpose; and, is a connected leader (Fry, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2005; Williams et al., 2014). Greenleaf's seminal work on servant leadership puts forward the notion that the servant leader is attuned to basic spiritual values in serving others including colleagues, the overall organization, and greater society. In discerning servant leadership as part of the conceptualization of principled leadership, the following was identified: a) connected to the element of spirituality, b) not necessarily apparent that it is connected to a knowledge of self, identity, and personal values, connected beyond oneself, and c) a deep sense of integrity and trust.

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Given this, the elements of servant leadership were applicable to the conceptualization of principled leadership when understood within the context of spiritual and authentic leadership and their associated attributes.

Transformative Leadership

It was challenging to consider transformative leadership without thinking of the leadership reformation over the last twenty years as historically connected to change, and not necessarily removed from transactional leadership (Burnes & Todnem, 2012; Eisenback et al., 1999; Gill, 2003; Kotter, 2005). In comparing the core elements of a transformational leader to those included within the conceptualization of principled leadership there was not conclusive evidence that a transformational leader was firm in knowledge of self, had a desire to bring out the best in others, or was connected beyond oneself. Although a transformational leader encourages ethical and moral behaviours, is inspirational, and charismatic, it was not evident that they operate with high moral integrity, strong ethics, or values. In addition, the elements of love, humility, and spirituality were not indicated to be attributes of a transformative leader.

Emotionally intelligent leadership

In discussing the conceptualization of principled leadership and emotionally intelligent leadership, there was alignment with the elements of: care (strong emotions that engender care); self-awareness (authenticity); ethics; and trust, loyalty, and respect. The emotionally intelligent leader was described as one who leads from a place of emotion, and from a place of care (Avolio et al., 2004; Gill, 2003). The elements of emotionally intelligent leadership are applicable to the conceptualization of principled leadership when understood within the context of spiritual and servant leadership and their associated attributes. The attributes of both spiritual and servant leadership, if combined, support emotional intelligent leadership within the context of principled leadership.

Change Management

The study explored leadership within the context of change and specifically those factors/leadership approaches impacting the leaders' ability to navigate change. The study raised the key indicators of difference for macro and micro change as principled leadership was found to be aligned with supporting a micro system, where the influencer of change is the leader with an eye on the macro but focused on individuals to authentically enact. Given this context, it was found that change leadership, organizational change management, and educational development pointed to processes that primarily involved and/or impacted human behavior, while change, organizational change, institutional change, and organizational design focused primarily on processes, techniques, and output. For the purpose of the study, change and change management was the focus of the theoretical literature within the context of change and included the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) where Hall (2013) argued change processes had become too predictable and continued to focus on the problem, working to attain a desired outcome rather than focusing on the impact of individuals. CBAM provided an evidence-based approach to change in the education sector for the past four decades where seminal research, examination, and application was thoroughly identified throughout the literature (Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007; Hall, 1974, 2013; Hall & George, 1979; Hall & Hord, 2011; Kapustka & Damore, 2009). For the purpose of the study, the following change context was applied; change management refers to the human aspects of change, where project managers use tools and processes to control change, but people are at the center (Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007, p. 14).

Research Design

The study benefited from a mixed methodology research approach underpinned by the pragmatic philosophical orientation as I hoped to have outcomes that could practically inform leadership change practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This enabled a mixed methodology approach using both quantitative and qualitative approaches where the deficits of any one of these methods could be

ameliorated by the inclusion of the other. The qualitative component was influenced by an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach (Cooperrider, 1996) as this was deemed to be respectful and positive stance which could facilitate leaders to open up and be more candid and revealing about their challenging roles.

Using two research instruments through mixed methods provided the opportunity to compare and contrast the findings supporting the interpretation and integration of corroborated data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 19). The research study utilized qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) research instruments as a means of gathering data regarding leadership practices and attributes. The mix of methods employed in the study involved a questionnaire that was administered to university senior administration (n=27) and an Appreciative Inquiry-framed semi-structured interviews (n=33) with a total of 60 participants throughout the higher education sector in Nova Scotia, Canada (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Based on the qualitative data, the overall research sample consisted of sixteen females and seventeen males with three emergent population groups: university presidents (n=5), vice-president/vice-presidents (n=18), and senior/executive director or dean (n=10). The following demographic information was based on the quantitative results only. The average age of the sample group was 57. A 44% response rate was achieved with universities (n=5) involved. All interviews were transcribed and coded using an iterative thematic coding.

The semi-structured interview schedule was sent to participants in advance of the interview so as to provide the opportunity for reflection and preparation. This approach provided face-to-face interaction with the interviewees, and direct learning from their answers/responses to the questions, providing the opportunity for further discovery and exploration of leadership concepts.

The **qualitative methodology** was framed within the discovery dimension of "appreciative inquiry" (AI) (Cooperrider, 1996). Appreciative inquiry is a four-stage enquiry process including 1. Discovery where through narrative and provocative questions participants delve into what is life giving, 2. Dream of what might be, to imagine, and envisioning a scenario for realizing a positive future, 3.

Design, the co-construction of *what should be* to create the ideal is discerned, and, 4. Destiny where the powerful envisioned future/destiny is mapped out (Cooperrider, 1996). The study integrated stage one of the four "D" process that involved 'Discovery' where through narrative and provocative questions participants described their experience in leading a change phenomenon. In designing appreciative inquiry questions for use in higher education, Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) acknowledged, "leadership in higher education is not for the faint at heart. It is highly complex, with multiple stakeholders … using an appreciative outlook can be uplifting during those times" (p. 93). Cooperrider (1996) further supported the positive use of this type of questioning stating: "the new methods will be distinguished by the art and science of asking powerful, positive questions" (p. 2). Integrating AI allowed a focus on individual strengths, that is, "drawing attention to what people feel has been achieved, the reality they experience is one in which things can be done well, whereas focusing on problems creates a reality in which things are always failing" (Reed, 2007, p. 28). It also provided a process to build relationships, trust, and enable their voice to be heard.

The **quantitative discovery** utilized a questionnaire with rating type questions using "agreement" Likert scales. The questionnaire included 25 questions that included the following: demographics, gender, age, leadership development, current role/position, and then in-depth response to qualitative questions as it related to leadership position and style. Each was discerned for the purpose of measuring leadership qualities and attributes as related to my research questions. I designed my own questionnaire given the specific definitions and research questions required for the study, however, I explored a number of different questionnaires to provide a stronger foundation for my own (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Fifteen questions focused on extracting demographic information, nine questions looking for descriptive statistics, and four qualitative-based questions.

Analysis and Integration of the Data

The research included qualitative and quantitative tools so as to draw out data that could then be contrasted and compared to ensure accuracy. The analysis stage of the research integrated a crossover analysis (see Figure 2, informed by Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Figure 2
Cross-over Analysis
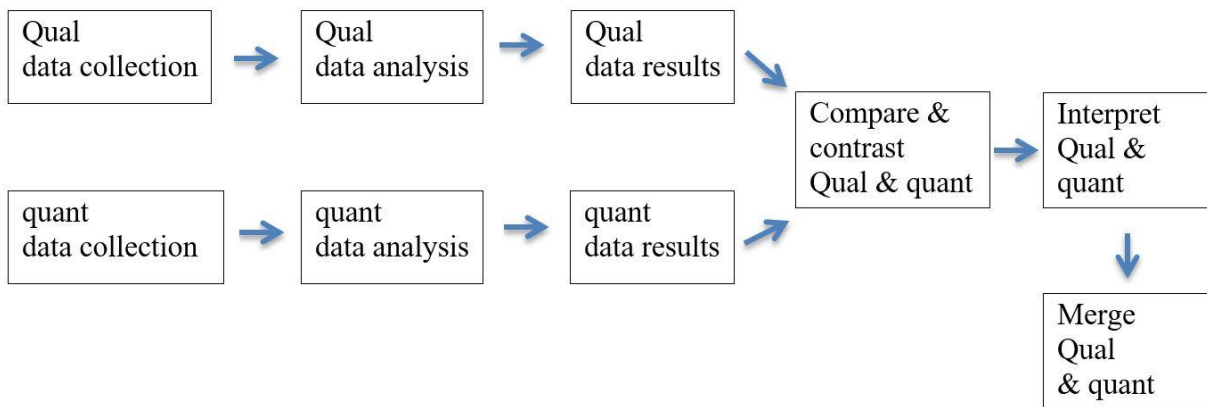
These data were presented focusing on the qualitative data with quantitative data substantiating its correlations. The qualitative results provided the themes and sub-themes where the quantitative data were integrated into the overall results and findings as a means of providing validation and increasing trustworthiness of the qualitative data collection process.

Results

An interesting contention arose in considering effective leadership, change agency and authenticity in an age of embedded and pervasive neoliberalism, that is: Can a bad leader be authentic? Can someone who behaves badly act with good intentions, be honest, true to his/her core identity? and, How do you determine if a leader is the 'real deal'? In other words, the core of Avolio et al.'s "authenticity" is knowing oneself and being true to one's own values, but what if a leader has "drunk the

Kool-Aid of neoliberalism" thereby truly believes that their destructive leadership approach is crucial to organizational effectiveness and change agency – can he/she still be considered an authentic leader?

A significant finding was that senior leaders, while acknowledging the intense challenges of their institutional mandates and the influences of neoliberalism, were highly aware of the need to be authentic and to develop positive relationships with their leadership teams and staff. They perceived honesty, integrity, and trust as crucial to their leadership approach. In the analysis it became apparent that principled leadership could offer an antidote to the pervasive negative influences of neoliberalism which tends to strip humans of their humanity – to reduce them to automatons – and conceptualizes operations purely in terms of 'dollar and cent' values. Additionally, the forms of leadership approaches that are encouraged and nurtured within the neoliberal agenda are that top-down and autocratic which tears the fabric of collegiality (Smyth, 2017); however, authentic leadership offered an alternative to these "destructive leadership" and power approaches while remaining effective in terms of their change agency (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lumby, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, three key results were reviewed as related to principled leadership as the antidote to the neoliberal agenda within higher education, they were: The Challenges of Leading the Academy, Key Indicators of a Principled Leader, and Reframing Love and Leadership.

The Challenges of Leading the Academy

Research participants agreed that effective leadership is not to be taken lightly, that it is hard work. Leaders need to maintain a balanced perspective of "we're not saving lives", "we are not performing heart surgery", that failure is ok, you can be successfully vulnerable, and that courage is an absolute essential necessity for navigating not only institutional change but the everyday associated with leading higher education institutions. Having a balanced perspective grounded in passion and motivation, influenced by desiring work/life balance and healthy communication, regarding leadership enables this sample of leaders to be more effective.

On and off the record, leaders shared examples of challenging situations and experiences that have enabled them to reach deep into the depths of their being when making decisions regarding their response and approach. Participants discussed the lack of collegiality and described faculty in-fighting, toxic environments, highly judgemental colleagues, critical and appalling communication, and the abusive behaviour experienced amongst colleagues. These challenges were felt internally as well as externally, from furious donors to furious alumni and the feeling of being completely undervalued, overlooked, and disrespected. "There's so much distrust and there's us versus them and people are very suspicious particularly at times when resources are thin", said one participant.

Participants shared that as part of navigating these challenging environments they, "keep your friends close, your enemies closer" or "dance with those who want to dance with you" just to survive, said another participant. Participants had dealt with former leaders and bosses who would, "scream at you at the drop of a hat" and situations where, "there was lots of infighting", said another participant. This participant said, "I would go home in tears some days, thinking this is the most challenging thing I've ever undertaken". While participants shared the good with the bad, they indicated their environment was "a very fractioned work environment", or that the environment in which they worked "left people in a P.T.S.D. (post-traumatic stress disorder) type of environment, people were shell-shocked, underappreciated, he had pitted people against each other. It was just a toxic work environment". They described how when they came into their leadership role, "it was huge for me because I was turning a ship around that was headed in a very dangerous direction". This participant provided the example of a former leader/boss who had lied to cover up a situation on campus, "trying to cover up a sexual assault which for me tore at the very foundation of who I was, I'm still scarred by that complete lie". Participants also felt not supported by their leaders, as indicated by this participant, "He had put me in a number of different situations over the years where it was like, here's something I don't think you can do".

Key indicators of a Principled Leader

The study provided evidence of leaders working within the range of attributes as presented in the conceptualization of the definition of principled leadership. The significant attributes of principled leadership consistent with the emergent values and beliefs of the leadership sample were: authenticity, integrity, trust, building relationships, being collaborative, enabling, caring, loving, kind, moral, ethical, respectful, treating others with dignity, honest, encouraging, having spirit, heart, and courage. Higher education leaders in Nova Scotia echoed a 'higher calling' theme, that was shared across all participants and stressed by one participant who said, "we're not just having impact, it's a calling, we're part of this community, we're part of creating prosperity for everybody".

Through a comparison of the findings and interview observations, potentially eight out of thirty-three research participants lead from a high level, conceptualization of principled leadership stance, six from a medium level, and six from a low level. This finding was possible through comparing and contrasting the transcribed interviews, interview observations, overall qualitative data results, as compared to the characteristics of the conceptualization of principled leadership authenticity, love [care], spiritual [moral/ethical], and service, which correlated with the conceptual framework. In determining this, a point was given to each participant who had a propensity to one or more of the four characteristics as a means to determine alignment with the conceptualization of principled leadership. As one participant said, "leadership is really about defining principles and it doesn't have to be emotional, it can be emotional but it's really about saying what's fair, what's at stake here" and another, "an effective leader is: personable, gracious, passionate, connected".

Participants indicated that a leader needed to move beyond just being inspirational and motivational, and provided evidence of leadership closely aligned with Avolio et al. (2004) concluding that without authenticity as a root construct of a leadership approach, the associated behaviours and characteristics were not sustainable in one's leadership practice. Integrity was a vital attribute of

effectively navigating higher education institutions, and this was a theme that deeply resonated over each of the thirty-three interviews. Nova Scotia leaders operate from a high degree of integrity. This was demonstrated by 85% of research subjects who indicated that ensuring decisions are made with integrity is most important to their leadership approach. The following statement by one participant provides evidence of how important integrity is to this sample of leaders, "I am nothing without integrity". And further noted by one participant, "I stand on my own integrity and I always use that, and I define integrity as doing the right thing when nobody else is looking". Only 11% of participants agreed/strongly agreed that it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold to their own sense of integrity while leading in the contemporary university culture, indicating that this leadership group feels it is a critical component of their leadership as well as that they are confident in navigating challenging situations while holding onto their integrity.

In summary, the *principled leader's* focus is on the individual; being the best version of themselves so that they can unleash the potential in others, reconciling who they are with who they want to be, consistently whether at work, at home, or in their community. It is a call to be firm in identity, 'to be you, in all that you do' where providing balance to one's life and to those you work with, is fundamental. The principled leader's focus is on the 'other' with humility at the core, and a firm desire to serve others through caring (love). A principled leader also has the courage to be vulnerable, to have open, direct, and honest dialogue and works to create a culture entrenched in honesty and respect, ensuring the dignity of the other is upheld in all situations. 'To make mistakes. To love. To care'.

Reframing Love & Leadership

Even though there was a difference of opinion regarding definitions of the terms *love* and *care*, most posited that caring for others was important in ensuring overall employee satisfaction as well as in meeting the goals of the university. It was evidenced by the research study that higher education leaders were continually challenged to manage the ever-changing and dynamic landscape found within

universities while balancing the internal and external forces impacting financial, academic, and social sustainability. Love and care were integral to the conceptual framework as presented in the study. One of the potential challenges expected in the research study was that there would not be evidence of participants leading from a place of love. But as this sample evidenced, their leadership was not about learning to love, but aligned with hooks (2000) notion of love as "the will to nurture" and choosing to love through caring. The leadership sample did not consistently use the term love when describing their leadership approach but they did provide solid examples of caring and choosing to care from a place of love using the terms, "encouraging, care, self-efficacy, service of others, empowering others, being kind, heart, believe in, desire to help others, care for others, love my team", as Freire (1994) pointed out, it was their conscious act to choose to care.

A positive result of the study as evidenced by the research sample is found in the examples of their care which substantiated love as connected to caring and being in service of others. One participant described that they did not feel the need to care for their employees where universities have departments who take care of employees needs and, did not believe that care was necessary for leadership. However, this same participant further described an experience of undergoing a major renovation to ensure that they (their employees), had a comfortable and enjoyable work environment "because I just love those guys", indicating that caring was still important but manifested through love.

Discussion

The study provided evidence that current higher education leaders integrated elements of the conceptualization of principled leadership assisting them in facilitating the requisite changes to meet the neo-liberal challenges experienced by 21st century higher education institutions. One of our conclusions is that principled leadership offered an antidote to the destructive impacts of neoliberalism in higher education leadership. A principled approach, one that incorporates authenticity (identity), care (love), and spirituality (in service of, knowledge of other), was the antidote to the negativity embedded in

leadership constructs and expectations within the neoliberal ideology, where eight out of the thirty-three leaders provided evidence of a Principled Leadership approach.

The study provided evidence of authentic leadership where the leader not only incorporated elements of the authentic leadership construct but also chose to love, care, and be in the service of others in the workplace. There was an indication that participants understood authentic leadership and, in many cases, believed that they were an authentic leader (Blanchard, 2018). Thus, this research provides an extension and deepening of our understanding of the underpinnings of authentic leadership. Can a bad leader be authentic? Can someone who behaves badly: Act with good intentions? Be honest? True to her/his core identity? How do we know the difference?

Destructive Leadership: Can Principled Leadership be the antidote?

Of interest to the study was that leaders provided evidence of working with, and challenges of, destructive leaders (ship) in the form of previous employers or bad bosses indicating that internal forces impacted leaders working in higher education. This speaks to the internal challenges faced by higher education leaders and their strategies for coping when discussing their experience with "bad bosses" that actually enhanced their overall leadership approach or became integrated into their leadership approach. As noted in the seminal work by Kouzes and Posner (1999), leadership is dichotomous, it is "about toughness and tenderness. Guts and grace. Firmness and fairness. Fortitude and gratitude. Passion and compassion" (pp. xv-xvi). As noted by Fry (2003), "one should lead and manage by using values that drive fear and abuse out of the workplace and engage the hearts and minds of the people" (p. 704). In comparing the leadership attributes that emerged regarding a transactional leadership approach, it wasn't surprising to find a low alignment with the literature where 5/23 of the transactional leadership attributes aligned with the conceptualization of principled leadership attributes, which were: integrity, respect, sincerity, honesty, and relationship contrary to Lawrence and Pirson's (2015) homo economicus; a transactional leader who engaged in an exchange only (p. 383).

Einarsen et al. (2007) posited a definition for destructive leadership and the need for a positive leadership model as, "integrating research on such diverse constructs as leader bullying, incivility, abuse, counterproductive behaviour, deviance, undermining, corruption, and theft" (p. 215). Principled leadership, as conceptualized in the study, provided an example of how traditional forms of leadership such as transactional or destructive leadership as described by Ah-Kion and Bhowon (2017), and Einarsen et al. (2007), could be "flipped upside down" where it is not about me, the leader, it is about the others to whom I am in service. It moved beyond authentic and servant leadership due to the integration of love; the choice to act in the best interest of another, based on love. Although the leadership sample did not consistently use the word love, their intonations of caring for others was insightful in evidencing love through care and this in turn had the potential to impact their organization. As noted by this participant who described an analogy of the leaders' impact and the axis of an organization with regard to higher education in Nova Scotia:

> I think that if the axis of an organization is tilted towards honesty and integrity and that's
>
> exemplified through the leader of the organization, or by the leader, then that drives a
>
> certain series of activities of all the people who work there, right?

Higher education institution leaders at the senior level are charged with increasing productivity and in many ways, simply sourcing funding for their institution, and are expected to behave in ways that move the institution forward under the guise of productivity and financial viability. The study findings raised the question of destructive leadership (or bad bosses), and the collateral damage to result from poor leadership. The study also raised the question regarding the auspiciousness of efficiency over effectiveness and that this is a quandary for 21st century institutions of higher education. As the road to 'efficiency' is ever present, the goal of creating break-even operations is more apparent, and the reality is, (although this study does not overtly cover this dilemma although it came up in many discussions), there needs to be an awareness of an imploding crisis regarding those who work within higher education,

and the negative behaviours of those leaders working to create efficiencies at any cost, while leaving a path of destruction in their path.

Whether or not it is the current context of higher education that is causing and/or promoting destructive leadership at all levels of the university, the study raised the awareness that current leaders have been impacted by negative and destructive leaders which raised the following questions: How do you build a leadership development model built on the foundations of honesty, authenticity, respect, love, care, and a knowledge of spirit? What happens if leaders are incapable of principled leadership as proposed in this study? What would those implications be? In an ideal world, what would I advise the administration of a university to do, if they had "destructive leaders"? (Einarsen et al., 2007). What are the implications of the "neoliberal university" administration starved for financial support to keep operations running, and given this context, is this actively promoting destructive leadership? (Smyth, 2017). What do you do when destructive leaders are in the system and being promoted, when bad leaders are being rewarded? How do university leaders respond to bad leaders being promoted? How do we work toward creating compassionate leaders as described by Kouzes and Posner (2017), those leaders that drive out the fear and abuse inherent in destructive leadership, and engage the heart of those they lead (Fry, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Lastly, what is the ultimate damage of toxic leaders' capacity to wreak havoc, to damage work cultures and collectives, and how does the leader mitigate the damage and limit the impact of destructive leaders (Smyth, 2017)?

In responding to the findings and the questions raised by this study, it was important to consider leadership development and how this could be integrated into a methodology or teaching curriculum, as well as how leaders could integrate this into their professional leadership practice. A leadership development model could provide a roadmap for leaders in responding to what leaders should do when they notice a poor or destructive leader; help that person (through coaching, mentoring, professional development, counseling), and/or what happens if there is no change in destructive leader who has gone

through a process for changing behaviours negatively impacting others? What actions should be taken with problematic leaders? What happens if you have leaders participate in a leadership development program similar to the principled leadership approach, and they are not a good leader, people-centered, caring, or humanistic? What if they are incapable of being principled but continue to be promoted even after you have tried to help them become more people-centered? What happens when 'good' managers become leaders? What do you do about tenured leaders that are destructive? As evidenced in this study, it takes courage and strength for leaders to question the status quo, and to push beyond the boundaries in dealing with those they lead, ask the hard questions, and in some case, to remove those who may not be a good fit, and/or who are negatively impacting others. Is it possible to build programs that foster principled leadership and how? These questions precipitated a response to provide a leadership development model that could benefit 21st century leaders. A range of strategies could be implemented to support leadership decision making when supporting those they lead.

Conclusion

The need to create an awareness of destructive leaders and the impact of destructive leadership was an important finding, and although this dissertation was limited to the exploration of the conceptualization of principled leadership, the findings contribute to building leadership theory and informing professional practice. The study provided relevance and evidence of a leadership approach aligned with authenticity and care (love) closely aligned with the conceptualization of principled leadership that is not fully or explicitly defined in the current literature.

This study provided evidence to support the conceptualization of principled leadership for further research, or integration through professional development and in real terms, described a leadership approach that may continue to help others in helping Nova Scotia and Canadian leaders, guide their universities through challenging times. The conceptualization of principled leadership as described in this study and evidenced through the participants provided a clearer understanding of how to create and

support work cultures founded on the importance of knowing self, being authentic, and caring for others, one that could lead to deeper, trustful relationships, stronger leadership, honest communication, and fostering the dignity, respect, trust, and love of those whom a leader is responsible for; to re-define effective leadership. Of further note, if a leader has the desire to work from a construct similar to the conceptualization of principled leadership, then leaders could potentially "better communicate … Knowing these boundaries we could better assimilate unique follower training programs to enhance organizational behavior, which could create an efficiency of productivity" as noted by Kreitner and Kinicki (2013, p. 18).

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