

***A PSYCHOANALYTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ANALYSIS OF
EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A
REVIEW OF CURRENT PERSPECTIVES
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Abstract

The aim of this review paper is to provide a critical analysis of the literature on emotionally intelligent leadership, particularly in Higher Education drawing attention to psychoanalytic phenomenology to examine this area of research. The purpose of this review is two-fold: firstly, from a humanitarian perspective, research points out that emotional intelligence has been identified as a priority area of concern for and among leaders and arguably an important aspect of leadership that has the potential to lead humanity through betterment of society (Macaleer and Shannon, 2002; Rao, 2006) and secondly, by exploring the various research theories and evidence that provides critical understanding and meaningful insights into leadership research in Higher Education. It initially reviews the (leadership) literature focusing on the current issues facing leaders and discusses how attitudes, behaviour and beliefs of leaders profoundly impact workplace relationships apart from the administrative, technical skills, laws and legal issues affecting Higher Education. Finally, it looks into psychoanalytic phenomenology and discusses how leaders' perception of their lived experiences influences group and organizational dynamics within the context of Higher Education.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, leadership, perception, phenomenology, psychoanalysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background and context

Leadership has been an important concept throughout history and considered to be a key determinant in the ultimate success or failure of any organisation. In the UK, changes in Higher Education (HE), driven mostly by state and government initiatives, have resulted in the need for changes in its internal structure, changes in culture and the need to work across organisational boundaries in order to sustain quality improvement and to achieve a competitive advantage. However, these changes to a large extent have added more pressure to the current issues facing leaders in HE, therefore demanding high quality leadership.

One definition of leadership (Northouse2001, p. 3) states that it is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”, however, from the various leadership literature, there seems to be no consensus for the definition of leadership (Smith and Hughey 2006, p.162). One set of theories posits that leaders are born, not made and another school of thought says that leadership is a series of traits to be learned by any individual. Yet, other theories support the belief that leadership is contextual and changes according to situation. Recently, the focus on leadership seems to be along the lines of power, influence and the ability to inspire its members while emphasizing on ethics addressing the need for high levels of moral responsibility from its leaders (Moore 2006; Scott 2004). Despite the various definitions

of leadership, there seems to be a common theme that requires leaders to be able to inspire and influence its members and that suggests that leaders do affect individual and group behaviour within the organization on an unconscious level, that ultimately affects organizational functioning.

Leaders in HE may include, but not be restricted to, vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors, deans, principals, vice-principals, secretaries and registrars, heads of school, programme leaders, directors of resources and others who hold strategic responsibilities in HE (LFHEⁱ 2006; Rich 2006, p. 40). In Smith and Hughey's (2006, p. 157) study, they point out that "the difference between excellence and mediocrity, or even survival and extinction, is often a direct reflection of the leadership within an organization". Similarly, Montez (2003, p. 6) states that apart from the institutional norms and policies, leaders' attitudes, behaviour and beliefs have profound impact on workplace relationships, emphasizing qualities, skills and values of a leader to be of paramount importance.

Evidence-based research demonstrates that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is crucially important for workplace success (Ashkanasy et al. 2002; Beatty 2000; Domagalski 1999; Goleman 1996; Mayer and Salvooy 1997; Mayer et al. 2000; Slaski and Cartwright 2003) and shows that it is a key determinant of effective leadership (Kellett et al. 2006; George 2000). According to Mayer et al. (2000, p. 267), EI is the "ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on that basis". Goleman (1996) indicates more precisely the components of EI to be "self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal, motivation, empathy and social deftness". On the other hand, Ashkanasy et al. (2002, p.317) view it as "the ability to read emotions in one's self and in others, and to be able to use this information to guide decision-

making”. Taken in total, they all relate to the ability of a leader in dealing with the emotional response states of self and of others and according to Lord and Hall (2005, p. 611), this kind of leader is said to be an emotionally intelligent leader.

Recent leadership is perceived to be of a mix of behaviour, cognitive and social skills, that requires pro-active steps by the leader which go beyond self-directed learning towards more deeper-level aspects to leadership for long-term development (Lord and Hall 2005). As a rule, an organisation has to develop a culture of commitment and trust among its members, it is therefore crucial that the credibility of leaders be reflected to their followers. One particular study (Yukl 1998) states that anyone in power has, by default, more influence on others but despite all this, leaders at times fail to have positive influence on their organisation members and there is not much research on this area. Therefore, to provide better insights and contextualize leader behaviour, it is imperative to know and understand the meaning leaders attach to EI from their perspectives to improve organizational dynamics.

While emotions and EI are used interchangeably by some authors in the literature, Domagalski (1999, p. 843) describes emotion to be “a biological intra-personal response to some stimulus” and explains how the shared realities of the workplace are negotiated through emotions and therefore considered to be a primary feature of organizational process (ibid, pp. 844-846) and this brings to light, how emotions of individual and of others have the potential to affect the organizational functioning both on a conscious and unconscious level. It raises the question of whether leaders are consciously aware of EI when dealing with others and the effects and consequences it may have on the workplace. Thus it is crucial to know and understand how leaders perceive EI and the meanings they

attach to it, as it ultimately affects their decisions and actions in the workplace, which is the central focus of this review paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenging issues facing leaders

Current issues surrounding leadership and of leaders in HE in particular are empowerment, collaboration, diversity, globalisation, partnerships, role ambiguities, social change, accountability, entrepreneurialism, gender issues, innovation, ethics and spirituality, etc (Kezar et al. 2006, Rich 2006; Scott 2004). Empowerment, for instance raises debates concerning who is empowered to be leaders, the role of leaders in empowering others and how followers' beliefs are affected by oppression. These point to the direction of a lack of components of EI in leadership.

Globalisation and technology coupled with diversity is another core leadership issue Magrath (2000) and Brown (2004) mention that it is essential that leaders require certain emotional abilities and skills in the way they communicate to different cultural groups. The fact that interpersonal relations between leaders and organizational members depend on communication means that the quality of relationships relies on communication. In addition, the recent expansion in HE that has increased its internal population with regard to gender, age and ethnicity (Bown 2006; Watson 2003) shows that HE has not been very responsive in handling diversity issues. One reason is that universities in UK are traditional-bound, i.e. ethnocentric (Dimmock and Walker, p.195-197, 2005) compared to other countries such as USA, therefore UK universities may not

allow changes to its institutional practices (Bown 2006; Young 2004) and this poses as a leadership issue.

Diversity will not disappear especially in an emergent global environment like the UK, therefore a call for a better understanding of societal and ethnic cultures requires leaders to develop insights and theories that can inform their leadership processes and various studies point to the need for incorporating EI to enhance their leadership process (Domagalski 1999; George 2000; Rao 2006; Smith and Hughey 2006). However, this does not mean that emotions play a central role in leadership at all times since individuals do behave instinctively (fight/flight mode) based on gut reactions but it is essential for leaders to have a basic awareness of their own and others' feelings and emotions to deal with situations more effectively. In order to bridge the cultural gap and enhance workplace relationships, it is important for leaders to be able to communicate effectively to others to achieve better understanding of inclusion and diversity issues. However, not much research has been done in this area so far and Dimmock and Walker (2005, pp. 2-3) mention that it is important to re-address this area in order to tackle such leadership issues.

Analysis of emotionally intelligent leadership

The academic leadership literature, though few, show aspects of integrity and morality in a leader whether inborn, i.e. natural traits or required, i.e. learned traits and suggests that these are qualities educational stakeholders most value in their leaders (Lord and Hall 2005; Watson 2002; 2003). One of the central characteristics of EI is to display emotional abilities in the workplace (Beatty 2000; Mayer and Salovey 1997; Mayer et al.

2000; Wolff et al. 2002, pp. 510-514) and indicates that the emotional labour underpinning Hochschild's (1983, pp.2-4) interactional model is essential for leadership.

According to Smith and Hughey (2006, pp. 159-160), a complex organization such as HE needs predictability, creativity and control, therefore it has the tendency towards conflict, stress and emotionally charged debates within its environment. Various research (Gmelch & Burns 1993; Hughey & Smith 2006; Osseo-Asare et al. 2005; Wolverton et al. 1999) point to the direction of lack of EI in leaders as the root cause of stress and conflicts within the workplace. In particular, Wolverton et al. 's (1999, pp. 82-85) study shows that leaders require skills and qualities above cognitive intelligence to enhance their leadership processes. All this to a large extent has shifted the direction of leadership towards an emotional direction taking into account the importance of self and others' emotions and feelings when dealing with workplace relationships.

To be a successful leader, Smith and Hughey (2006, p.159) point out that leaders "must understand the people with whom they work - their roles, the function of their specific jobs and the larger organizational structure" which emphasizes the role of emotions and their impact on leadership. Similarly, Humphrey (2002, p.499) states "leaders' emotional displays are demonstrated to have a larger impact on perceptions of leaders than the content of the leaders' messages, at least in some circumstances". Reuven Bar-On provides evidence that EI is strongly correlated to Maslow's theory of self-actualisation (Bar-On 2001, pp.82-93) as the basic physiological needs have to be met before reaching self-actualisation, i.e. full potential (Macaleer and Shannon 2002, p. 9).

Rendon's (2000, pp. 3-6) study claims that since leaders deal with people, it is only humane to connect the intellect with the heart. She (ibid.) suggests that leaders will only be able to deal with the academic analysis of the issue but not deal with the emotional part if one cannot engage one's heart and therefore is not able to engage the hearts of others (Lim and Mau 1998). This points to self-reflection, self-awareness and self-orientation, all of which are key components of EI. Similarly, Rao's (2006, p.216) study from a clinical perspective demonstrates that EI begins with the capacity for recognizing one's own feelings, i.e. self-awareness and those of others. Again, it reinstates EI to be the *Sine Quo Non* of leadership.

George's (2000, pp. 1033-1035) study shows how emotions are intertwined with traits and stimulates the cognitive processes and decision-making highlighting the relevance of both emotions and traits for leadership effectiveness. He (ibid, p.1046) points out that since leadership itself is an emotional-laden process, EI is relevant to leadership where traits are subsumed (Humphrey 2002, pp. 494-496; Van-der Zee et al,2002, p.104; Yukl 1998). Similarly, Beatty (2000) states that in the first place, one must have the motivational (emotional) drive to be personally involved. Her study shows how a competent leader has to adhere to his/her actions despite obstacles or discouragement to attain one's goals and desired outcomes, similar to an altruistic personality (Humphrey 2002, p. 494).

It shows that a leader's optimism and show of appreciation and praise is a powerful motivator for organizational members and this can be related to Maslow's theory of motivation in terms of what motivates an individual to seek certain position reaching self-actualization. It can also be related to Mead's (1934) humanistic theory on

symbolic-interactionism, i.e. self and others that uses the term the looking glass self, i.e. imaging how we look to another person and understanding ourselves better.

According to Davies et al. (2001, p. 1027), the “running of schools and faculties has been based on management as opposed to leadership”. From the perspective of the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) model, the three root causes that lead to weak leadership are weak interpersonal communications, weak empowerment and weak staff support (Ossere et. al. 2005, pp.155-156) and / which show the lack of components of EI in leadership. Leaders need to possess certain leadership skills and qualities in addition to cognitive abilities in order to interact well with members of staff in such a way that the whole system can be developed, implemented and continuously improved for efficient running of schools and faculties (ibid, pp. 158-162).

While the majority of literature and research support EI in leadership, some critiques of EI claim that it is more of a myth than a science (Landy 2005) since it lacks theoretical and empirical grounding and therefore is not able to make substantial claims to its validity (Ciarrochi et al. 2000; Davies et al. 1998). Some consider EI as an elusive construct and agree with the lack of scientific consensus (Zeidner et al. 2001) and therefore make a premature attempt to measure EI because there is no clear definition. Others claim that emotions have negative effect on rational decision-making (George 2000, p.1028; Northouse 2001, p. 202).

Psychoanalytic Phenomenology

Two of Freud’ distinct aspects of psychoanalysis (Bateman and Holmes 1999 p. 17) that fascinate me are the development of the mind and the influence of the early life

experiences on adult mental states. As evident from the leadership literature (George2000; Macaleer and Shannon 2002; Rao 2006; Smith and Hughey 2006), this nature and role of unconscious mental phenomena of individuals can be related to leadership through leaders' behaviour based on how they perceive the world and react accordingly. Therefore, it makes sense to understand the world of meaning of leaders' lived experience through their perception and how they feel about it and to be able to interpret and make-sense of their meanings.

This fact highlights the need for studies in this specific sector of the population to understand if there are specific ways to promote high levels of leadership in HE. In order to interpret leaders' inner dynamics from their perspectives, this part of the paper discusses the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a variant of phenomenology based on Heideggerian phenomenology underpinned by philosophical principles and its application to the leadership domain. Moustakas (1994) and Smith (2004) find that an interpretivist stance would be most appropriate to discover individual perception. Van Manen (1990, p. 2) considers hermeneutic phenomenology to be a dialectical relationship, wanting to "let things speak for themselves while recognising that (social) phenomena need to be interpreted (through language) in order to be communicated to others".

Information about leadership yielded by IPA is relevant because leaders attach specific meanings to their experiences that are unique to each individual and that ultimately determine their decisions and actions in the workplace. The key here is the awareness of what is meaningful to leaders on a conscious level that can help understand the links between their lived experience of this phenomenon and their behaviour, that can

help explain organizational dynamics. It is a powerful way of making sense of participants' sense-making, which provides meaningful insights and contextually new findings useful to leadership research in HE.

Most of the phenomenological studies are popular in the health care discipline drawn towards patients' life experiences but overlooked in the leadership domain. And as yet, there is no clear literature investigating emotionally intelligent leadership in an academic domain particularly in HE. And because of the reasons mentioned above, qualitative studies using a phenomenological approach in this area of research need to be acknowledged.

IPA is particularly useful for the analysis of the emotionally intelligent leader for its specific focus on participants' perceptions of their experiences and their attribution of meanings (Prins 2006, p. 339; Smith and Eatough 2006, pp. 325-327; Smith 2004). Higgs (2003) argues that if a sense making paradigm is used, it becomes feasible to even identify a model of experiential leadership relevant to the context of complexity and change facing organizations in the new millennium.

According to Diamond (1999, p. 34), psychoanalytic phenomenology "centers on the acquisition of reflective knowledge" of participants' lived experience by making sense of their perceptual world and the influence of that inner world on their organization. It looks into the subjective perceptions of the world achieved by using reflective analysis of their experience and meaning. In this respect, IPA is used to understand what leaders experience, how that experience influences their perceptions and ultimately affects their decisions and actions in the workplace. It provides insights into the part of leaders to gain insight into the reaction of organizational members (Northouse

2001, p. 199). In addition to this, Douglas (1970 cited in Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, p. 2) says that the “forces that move human beings, as human beings rather than simply as human bodies.... are meaningful stuff.” They are internal ideas, feelings, and motives that say that subjective perceptions greatly influence human behaviour.

From a phenomenological perspective, the important reality is what people imagine it to be. Bogdan and Taylor (1975, p.13) explain this as “what people say and do is a product of how they interpret the world” and in this respect, IPA can be used to show how leaders reflect on their own background and experience and how this affects their potential as leaders with others. Unlike the positivist approach, which searches for facts and causes, IPA is concerned with understanding the phenomenon through participants’ perception.

From the various leadership literatures, there are many theories and frameworks that underpin EI and leadership, namely Maslow's motivational theory, multiple intelligence theory, Dewey’s reflective thinking theory, Vygotsky’s inner speech theory or even a combination of these theories to provide a broader spectrum from an interdisciplinary interpretation. However, based on the discussion above, at a conceptual level, the framework that I consider most influential for this area of research is the Psychodynamic Theory (Freudian approach) using psychoanalytic interpretations, though not limited to, integrated with the Systems Theory (Neumann and Hirschhorn 1999).

This influence can be translated to explain and understand leaders, group and organizational behaviour embedded in a net of mutual interactions between personal, behavioural and environmental spheres within the context of HE. The choice for this integrated framework referred to as the Systems Psychodynamics is that it considers both

micro and macro level perspectives, for instance using the Psychodynamic Theory to look into the unconscious motivations of individuals while employing the Systems Theory to look into the conscious ones rooted in economic, technological and political concerns looking at processes from an organizational level (ibid, pp. 683-685).

Domagalski (1999, p. 839) points out that the behaviour of leaders seen from a psychodynamic perspective can be described “as psychologically defense-mechanisms to unconscious fears and anxieties and unresolved early life experiences”. This perspective helps to describe how leaders’ unconscious emotional processes influence organizational processes and thus interpersonal relations within the organisation.

According to Freud, the psychodynamic perspective explains the filling of gaps between the conscious and unconscious links of participants so that the meaning correctly represents the outer world. Psychoanalytic concepts of inter-subjectivity, defense-mechanism, intra-psychic factors and transference would be useful to explain and understand the organizational dynamics within HE, however, the discussion towards a more detailed account of this area of research and the subjects’ lived experiences will contribute towards the author’s doctoral paper.

Reflective process

The ability to reflect as a reflective learning process implies having meta-cognition abilities that contribute to learning behaviour (Brown 2004). It includes components of EI such as self-awareness and reflective processes based on the Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) model where the brain (neuro) and the words (linguistic) have a powerful effect on the state of mind that can change the behaviour of an

individual. Conversely speaking, without such reflection on lived meaning, it is difficult to become aware of unfortunate practices we are part of (Irwin 2006) whether unconsciously or consciously. Reflection through experience allows individuals to broaden and deepen the awareness of a particular phenomenon so that further improvements can be made (Bruner 1990).

Since the emphasis on IPA is on sense-making through participants' reflective process and the researcher's sense-making, it means that IPA shares with cognitive psychology and social cognition a central concern with unraveling the relationship between what people think (cognition), say (account) and do (behaviour). On the other hand, Phillip's (1999) study states that IPA and cognitive psychology are fundamentally different because in IPA, meaning is conceptualized as practical understanding that occurs in the dialogue embedded in the subject's behaviour whereas in cognitive psychology, meaning resides in mental representations within the mind (Brown 2005). In evaluating the respective merits of the hermeneutic and cognitive psychological approaches to meaning, it helps to question which of the two approaches best reflects how meaning is experienced and dealt with. Again, the discussion from these two dimensions of literature will contribute towards the author's doctoral paper based on research findings to make any firm conclusions.

HEA (2005, p.3) states that reflection "is largely based on the reprocessing of knowledge, understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess" and adds that reflection can be emotional or spiritual and believes that there is a close relationship between the use of reflection and emotions.

Inter-subjectivity of human interactions

The structure of inter-subjectivity, also referred to as thematic patterning (Gadamer 2000) discovers organizational behaviour from a psychodynamic perspective. Through leaders' perception, a coherent 'storyline' can be constructed to explain the reasons and motives underlying current patterns of organizational dynamics. According to Diamond (1999, p. 41), organizational culture consists of "structures of inter-subjectivity located in human interactions [that] are affected by pre-reflectively unconscious thoughts, feelings and perceptions" that in turn influence decisions and actions in the workplace (Finlay 2005). Therefore, an examination of the inter-subjectivity of human interaction that includes emotions to be part of the organizational process (Domagalski 1999; Hochschild 1983; Nuttall 2001) enhances organizational behaviour through the influence of interpersonal relations to effect real organizational change.

Transference of emotions in hierarchical positions

Transference of emotions is an unconscious phenomenon that occurs between two people when one transfers feelings from a significant past relationship, for example, mother, father, siblings, etc. to a significant person in the present (Bateman and Holmes 1999, p. 97; Strean 1979, p.87). Seen from a psychodynamic perspective, the analysis of transference dynamics that are usually present in hierarchical relationships provides a better understanding of organizational behaviour (Diamond 1990, pp. 37-39) because hierarchical relationships are characterized by superior-subordinate relations and have the tendency for over-dependencies. Especially in a complex, hierarchical organization such as HE where leaders and organizational members may have the "tendency to mutually

displace previously frustrated self object needs onto each other” (ibid, p. 39), the concept of transference can be used to understand and explain such organizational dynamics.

III. CONCLUSION

Based on the evaluation of the review above, it can be said that the analysis of emotionally intelligent leadership in HE is possible through psychoanalysis based on hermeneutic phenomenology. Moreover, literature on emotions and leadership (Domagalski 1999; Kezar et. al. 2006) shows that leadership processes involve parts of people outside their professional spheres involving families, communities and activities based on life experiences. It is therefore hoped that there will be more empirical studies that look into how leaders reflect on their own background and experience and how that affects their potential as a leader in order to provide a better understanding of organizational dynamics with a view to promote a positive work culture.

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Notes

1. While the review of psychoanalytic phenomenological approach in an educational context, particularly in Higher Education is fairly new, its origins in practical experience owe much to the medical and health-care discipline.
2. See, for example, Larson, J., Rosenqvist, U. and Holmstrom, I., 2006. Being a young and inexperienced trainee anesthetist: A phenomenological study on tough working conditions. *Acta Anaesthesiologica Scandinavica*, 50 (6), 653-658; Dawkins, H. and May, E. 2002. The lived experience of doing a higher degree in occupational therapy from the perspective of five graduates: A phenomenological study. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 49 (3), 128-137; Smith, J.A., 1996. Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health*, 11, 261-271.

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