



## A Model for Ethical Leadership

The purpose in devising a “model” for ethical leadership is two fold. First, it breaks the *idea* of leadership into components that can be examined and analyzed. Second, it connects leadership *as a concept* to leadership *as an activity*. The question of ethical value arises in the midst of action and as a component of selection among alternatives. The following model is based on several assumptions:

1. As interactive agents, individuals live and act in any of three different **modes of being**: (1) as autonomous individuals, (2) as members of teams and relationships of various sorts, (3) as members of larger community and organizational groups.
2. At least six different **conditions of being** can exist in relation to any of the three modes of being: (1) *Identity* – self-recognition, awareness of boundaries between the self and other, perceptions of purpose (life purpose, organizational purpose) and knowledge of definition; (2) *Internal Reality* – self-reflection, understanding of the emotional and cognitive level factors contributing to a relationship, understanding of the systems or underlying.
3. structures that support an organization or community; (3) *Contextual Reality* - the factors that compose the overall context for the self, the relationship or the organization; economic, social, cultural realities; the reasons for which the team or relationship were created in the first place; the general context that surrounds the self, the relationship or the organization; (4) *Tensions* – the competition between and among competing values, the stresses that arise when individuals and teams and communities begin to act in relation to one another, conflicts between and among individuals, teams and groups; (5) *Ambiguity* – the apparent gap between one’s intuitive sense of things as an individual and one’s complete cognitive awareness of the dynamics entailed in the partnership or group relationships; (6) *Complexity* – the recognition that ambiguity can be embraced and absorbed through refusal to see *Ambiguity* (apparently irreconcilable *Tensions*) as insurmountable; the condition in which true leadership can be exercised.
4. There is a relationship between psychological health/knowledge and one’s capacity to assess both self and other(s) in relation to which one may adopt a leadership role.
5. The point at which circumstances appear to be least supportive of constructive future options or possibilities is precisely the point at which leadership emerges. The leader is the one who finds a way to transform an apparently hopeless situation into a hopeful one. In so doing, the leader makes a choice that impacts “the other.” Consequently, leadership is an ethical activity.

Very simply articulated, the development of leadership ability and the capacity to recognize leadership in practice involves moving through the following **6 stages of recognition for the individual**:

1. I know who I am and what I can do; I understand my role in the relationships I choose to perpetuate
2. I understand how my own motives and desires compare to my actual abilities, and I am aware of the emotional as well as the cognitive dimensions of the relationships I choose to perpetuate
3. I understand that there are realities in my life and in my relationships that I do not control (i.e., the nature of the national economy, the behavior of other people), and I realize that the relationships in which I function may make demands I cannot satisfy – neither can my demands always be satisfied by them
4. I understand that real tensions emerge between myself and others based on both emotional and cognitive factors
5. I understand that there is a gap between my intuitive sense of what those tensions may mean and a potentially objective definition which takes into account factors that I may not know or be able to recognize; I further understand that in order to remain dynamic, relationships and groups depend on someone being able to find a way to transcend the tensions and ambiguities than threaten dynamism
6. I recognize the capacity to transcend the tensions and ambiguities that threaten the dynamism of human interaction to be leadership, and even if I am unable to practice it, I am capable of recognizing leadership practice as the capacity to move individuals beyond the limits of their own emotions and cognitive abilities when those limits threaten the development of the individual or the dynamism of the team or group



**NEWTINKER**

**Complexity Model and Ethics**

**Terry Macaluso, PhD**

The following model is designed to illustrate the relationships among the modes and conditions of being as we evolve through the six stages of recognition. Through experience the conditions of being become stages of recognition. This model is titled “Embracing Complexity Model” to illustrate the fundamental point that leadership entails comprehensive knowledge of both emotional and rational development. Both individuals and groups depend on the dynamism of relationships and teams to evolve as fully developed entities; leadership is the capacity to enable and empower that evolution through the transcendence of limits that would otherwise prevent development.

It is through comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the dynamism of relationships that it becomes possible to appreciate the essential role of personal integrity – a temporary state that exists when the mode of being and the condition of being are aligned, thereby revealing a moment of balance referred to as authenticity.



**Embracing Complexity Model**

	[Modes of Being]		
	Self (1)	Team/Relationship (2)	Organization/Whole (3)
<b>[Conditions of Being]</b>			
<b>(A) Identity:</b>	personal capacities and desires (A1)	reason for these particular individuals to be connected in this particular way (A2)	organizational mission (A3)
<b>(B) Internal Reality:</b>	emotional motives and desires; actual capacities and abilities (B1)	emotional and cognitive dimensions of the relationship; actual capacities and abilities (B2)	systems, expectations and history of accomplishment through which organization defines its success (B3)
<b>(C) Contextual Reality:</b>	the circumstances and “facticity” of one’s life – economic, social, cultural, ethical (C1)	reason for which team or relationship has been created as distinct from the individuals, themselves (C2)	market, political and social milieu within which organization exists and in relation to which it expresses its expectations of the “whole” (C3)
<b>(D) Tensions:</b>	stresses between and among A1, B1, and C1 (D1)	stresses between and among A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 (D2)	stresses among A3, B3, and C3 (D3)
<b>(E) Ambiguity:</b>	gap between intuitive and cognitive understanding of D1 (E1)	struggle which produces need for leadership as a result of needs of individuals at stage D1 (E2)	dynamic organizational structure shifts to reflect E1 and E2 (E3)
<b>(F) Complexity:</b>	embracing E1 as an opportunity for consideration of future possibilities (F1)	commitment of individuals expressed through relationship or team solidarity in relation to goal or objective produced by successful completion of stage E2 (F2)	empowerment of leadership vested throughout organization in individuals at stages F1 and F2 (F3)

Note: Each stage is labeled with a letter and a number in parentheses, e.g., (A1), (F3). When stages are referenced, they are not enclosed parenthetically, e.g. at stage (D3), A3, B3, and C3 are referenced as part of the definition of (D3). These references are descriptions of Conditions of Being *as experienced*, i.e., stages of recognition.



### **What does the Complexity Model Show, and Why is it Useful?**

This model begins with the capacities and desires of the individuals and ends with the empowerment of leadership vested throughout the organization, based on three specific assumptions. First, individuals are independent beings and they are beings “in-relation.” Individuals are “in-relation” in two ways. We can be “in-relation” in partnerships or selected teams, in which case we have a high degree of choice about the connections we will allow to circumscribe our experience. We are also “in-relation” as members of extended families, communities, societies, cultures, and organizations in which we have a low degree of choice about the connections that circumscribe our experience. So, while I may choose a marriage partner, I did not choose my family.

Similarly, I may choose or be chosen for membership on a team or committee or work group based on my performance, skills, or interest but I do not choose the people who will live in my neighborhood or who will join my church or the organization for which I work. One’s comfort and sense of self-confidence is enhanced insofar as one has a high degree of choice; it is diminished insofar as one has a low degree of choice. It is in the interval between high and low degrees of choice that leadership becomes important; indeed, it is in this interval that the opportunity for leadership emerges.

It is reasonable to say that the executive and the trustees have all had a high degree of choice about whether or not to engage in their leadership partnership. At the same time, the trustees who formed the partnership, initially, with a particular executive generally leave the board after a set term, and are replaced with new trustees. New trustees must then enter the partnership with the executive who is currently in place, but their relationship with that executive will be different from the one that existed between the trustees and the executive whom they were responsible for hiring. So, in a certain respect, the degree of choice changes over time. The executive’s freedom of choice is diminished (depending on his/her role in the selection of members of the governing board) and the trustee’s freedom of choice expands, inasmuch as the executive serves at the pleasure of the board.

Second, individuals are more or less skilled and adept at managing tension, living with ambiguity, and embracing complexity. Individuals who serve in leadership roles are called upon to do all three (manage tension, live with ambiguity and embrace complexity) while simultaneously maintaining the relationships in which they are engaged whether those relationships exist as a result of the leader having had a high degree or a low degree of choice in creating them.

Third, the development, in the individual, of psychological maturity both enhances and is enhanced by successful engagement at levels D - Tensions, E - Ambiguity, and F – Complexity. An individual at stage E2, who is able to manage him or her self at the same time that he/she is able to provide clarity or opportunity for others who are similarly struggling with the issues of problem definition leading to solution, is an individual who has achieved a high level of personal integration and self-differentiation. [Self Differentiation is the degree to which one is able to define one’s self as distinct from other beings and other reality such that one accepts responsibility for one’s self as an autonomous agent with personal integrity]<sup>1</sup>

It is only as a consequence of being self-differentiated that an individual can provide leadership; otherwise the emotion and intensity that accompany the relational interaction that leadership entails devolves into either dysfunctional symbiosis or a simple misunderstanding of what is often perceived by the undifferentiated leader as power.



As Friedman goes on to illustrate in the following statement, it is precisely *because* the leader is able to maintain a sense of self as distinct from the group that he/she can lead it. But the importance lies in the subtle understanding of how one maintains the delicate balance of “belonging to” at the same time he/she is “distinct from” the group.

“The basic concept of leadership through self-differentiation is this: If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position as “head” and work to define his or her own goals and self, while staying in touch with the rest of the organism, there is more than a reasonable chance that the body will follow. This emphasis on a leader’s self-differentiation is not to be confused with independence or some kind of selfish individuality. On the contrary, we are talking here about the ability of a leader to be a self while remaining a part of the system.”<sup>14</sup> Friedman, Edwin, (1985). Generation to Generation. New York: Guilford Press, p. 229.

Stage E2 is the critical point at which leadership may emerge. It is at the stage at which genuine tension is both felt on an emotional level and understood on a cognitive one that the need to “find a way” is made evident. Whether on a team/relationship or in a larger organization, leadership becomes possible only when there is a need to select a direction based on the idea that some options will have to be forsaken in order for others to be selected. Precisely because of the diversity of human developmental patterns, and because there is no way to predict the degree of psychological maturity or self-differentiation that any single individual will bring to any specific set of circumstances at any specific moment, it is important to observe that leadership is not so much an attribute or condition as it is an activity in relation to a “needful context.”

However, leaders are most often appointed positions, where the same person is expected to lead no matter what the circumstances may be. For this reason, I would propose that we make a mistake to imagine that we can identify leaders, *per se*. There are individuals who have provided leadership at various times and in various circumstances, but those circumstances described the moment at which need, capacity, and opportunity all occurred simultaneously. Leadership is an activity in which various individuals engage at various times based on their readiness in relation to a moment of ambiguity during which the leader is able to maintain a sense of self (self-differentiated and psychologically mature) while simultaneously acting on behalf of more than just self.

This perspective on leadership suggests a much less charismatic notion than we often desire or imagine. Indeed, I think we (Americans) confuse leadership with celebrity; hence, we seek leaders rather than leadership. Since leadership is something born of the collision of capacity (that of the leader) and need (the circumstance in which tensions, ambiguity and complexity threaten to confound us), it is a mistake to imagine that one individual could provide leadership over an extended period of time in what is always a dynamic and changing reality. Our frustration with leadership in the American culture is that we do not know what it is. We confuse leaders with athletes, with movie stars, and with legendary heroes. In truth, leadership is an activity in which any individual can engage, assuming that one is self-differentiated and psychologically mature.

Further, leadership is an activity in which most of us should engage – thereby mandating that we achieve our full potential as self-differentiated, psychologically mature individuals. Leadership makes possible personal integrity; it enables the individual to experience authenticity. As long as we romanticize the notion of leadership and as long as we imagine that there is something mysterious and magical about leadership, we allow ourselves to be infantilized, thereby paving the way for manipulation, the abuse of power, and the rise of tyranny. History is replete with examples.

Imagine, then, the leadership partnership in which *groups* of individuals are experiencing the activity of leading from a variety of personal, developmental vantage points.



“Taking Bohm’s work as a point of departure, it is clear that if the world of organization is an unfolded empirical reality, then we can best understand the nature of organization by decoding the logics of transformation and change through which this reality unfolds. Such imagery invites us to search for the basic dynamics that generate and sustain organizations and their environments as concrete social forms.” (Morgan, Gareth, (1986). Images of Organization. (p. 235). Newbury Park, California:Sage.)

This statement explains the assumptions that lie behind the Complexity Model. There is nothing static in either our individual or our collective realities. Therefore, any authentic portrait of leadership must reflect dynamism. It might even be helpful (assuming that the objective here is to see if the model can be implemented and used to measure results) to think about leadership and followership as two points in a constantly emerging dialectic. Leadership requires followership and the two together produce, constantly, a new definition of what each entails such that each remains dynamic even as they are locked together in a kind of eternal tension.

There are seven key concepts that require further elaboration in order to make sense of this model. Three of these concepts can be categorized under the rubric, Knowledge of Objective Reality. They are (1) self-knowledge, (2) knowledge of purpose of relationship, and (3) knowledge of purpose of organization. The remaining four key concepts, (4) self-differentiation, (5) emotional maturity, (6) capacity to live with ambiguity, and (7) capacity to embrace complexity are all categorized under the rubric, Degree of Psychological Maturity.

By Knowledge of Reality, I mean to imply that there is an objective reality that can be known and verified. I am a self with actual skills, abilities, and flaws. My capacity to know the truth about myself in all these areas determines the degree to which I am self-aware. Similarly, and regardless of the importance or power of emotion in my personal and professional relationships, there is also an objective reality that describes the purpose of each of those relationships. For example, if I work with John to complete a collaborative writing project, and I also like John, the truth of that relationship is that it exists for the purpose of friendship and for the purpose of writing the paper together. If the relationship is maintained, the purposes change. If I want to have knowledge of reality, I must be aware of how those purposes change. The same can be said of relationships of intimacy. Whatever draws me to an “other” based on emotion or personal desire is a real thing that can be known. If I perpetuate that relationship, the emotions will change, purposes will become more or less obvious – but whatever happens, the point is that my genuine awareness of what is actually happening is what I mean to reference when I talk about “knowledge of reality.” Extending the point from relationship to organization should make the concept clear. One either does or does not know the purpose of the organization for which one works. Organizational leadership either does or does not know – itself – the purpose for which it exists. Leaders either do or do not convey that purpose to their employees. Leaders either do or do not understand their respective relationships to the organization. And so it goes.

By Degree of Psychological Maturity, I mean to imply that individuals move, constantly, back and forth along a behavior continuum. While I agree with stage theorists that growth and development can certainly be cumulative, I also believe that development entails the possibility for slipping backward into “old behaviors” out of which one might be said to have passed, but back into which one can easily slide. One’s psychological maturity is determined by assessing his degree of self-differentiation [to what degree is he able to define himself as distinct from other beings and other reality such that he accepts responsibility for himself as an autonomous agent with personal integrity], emotional maturity [to what degree does he manage and/or use his emotions and how does he behave when he is overpowered by his emotions], capacity to live with ambiguity [to what degree can one tolerate open-endedness and uncertainty; how does one behave when one KNOWS that he cannot know what will happen next?], and, finally, capacity to embrace complexity [ability to understand that no matter how much one prefers to simplify for the purpose of personal convenience, and no matter how obvious it is that one’s preferences ought to be honored, it is just possible that there is some factor out there contributing to a complexity which I cannot YET comprehend in its entirety].



The purpose of the leadership model, then, is to allow anyone to translate or decode an experience by using those seven key concepts to explain real experience, and thereby identify the moments at which leadership is (or might have been) in evidence. It is also necessary to show how each of those seven concepts can be measured. For that, I revert to the two categories under which I earlier subsumed the seven concepts. The first category, Knowledge of Objective Reality, can be measured by using the correspondence theory of truth. This method assumes that there is an objective reality to which perceptions and ideas either do or do not correspond. The second category, Degree of Psychological Maturity, can be measured using the coherence theory of truth. This method relies on the establishment of internal integrity to determine truth. In this case I would measure psychological maturity by assessing the degree to which the integrity of the individual and the integrity of the relationship/partnership or organization are mutually sustainable.

NOTE: The purpose of the presentation is to provide understanding of the model and to illustrate the ways in which decision-making, development of personal integrity, and the experience of personal authenticity conspire to make ethical decision making a value in itself. The model merely describes a method by which the individual can avoid the distractions and misleading options that can result in weak decision making. An ethical failure is a real failure. It is not possible to make a successful or valuable decision that is inconsistent with personal integrity or that contradicts the experience of authenticity.