

# Leadership, Morality and Power: The Leadership Quotient

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## Leadership: Challenge and Necessity

To mention the term “leadership“ in Germany is almost a provocation, at least a challenge. This is on the one hand justified because of the misuse of the term “Fuehrer“ (leader) during the Third Reich. Such a history cannot be ignored and must lead (sic!) to lessons from the past.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, many people describe a crisis of leadership in our society, rightfully asking whether there is a need for “leadership“ and whether the good caution against self-imposed leaders has gone too far causing a lack of a modern leadership.

Leadership is a value-laden concept because it does not make sense to describe a leadership crisis, if leadership is value free.<sup>2</sup> Leadership therefore has a power and a moral dimension. It can be defined as “moral execution of power“<sup>3</sup> or as “contribution to the solution of public problems“<sup>4</sup>.

These two aspects of leadership (morality and power) contradict two tendencies of the theoretical mainstream not only in Germany: ethical relativism and the rejection of an elite.

## Leadership and Morality: Against Relativism

Theoretical, cultural, political and ethical relativism dominates the mainstream of our time. Examples for such theories are analytical philosophy, existentialism, critical rationalism, open systems theory, postmodernism, critical theory, political realism and other theories.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the global dimension of the crimes of nazism these arguments do not apply just to the German debate but too an international discussion as well. One consequence of history is to use the English term “leader“ instead of the German “Fuehrer“.

<sup>2</sup> This is Heifetz' argument for a value-laden concept of leadership, compare Heifetz (1984).

<sup>3</sup> This refers to Burns' description of “purpose“ including “intent“ (morality) and “accomplishment“ (power), see Burns (1978)

Relativism is not able to solve the problem that sound judgements need non-relative criteria. The development of ethics has made little progress in this regard in the last 2000 years.<sup>5</sup> In contrast enormous technical developments have brought human power to dimensions hard to imagine. Together with this power the importance of moral development increases and it creates the duty of a responsible execution of power.

This leads Karl Otto Apel to describe a basic dilemma of modern moral philosophy: on the one hand global challenges and risks create a necessity of a binding ethic of responsibility, on the other hand the rational grounding of such an ethic is extremely difficult. Modern science defines the term of rational grounding in connection with neutrality of values and all value-laden theories appear as pure ideologies. Therefore, a rational ethics of conflict management seems to be impossible because this ethics appears to be the ideology of one conflict party. This dilemma is according to Apel an expression of the paradox, that the same science that through its technological consequences creates the main cause for the practical necessity of an ethics of responsibility, the same science seems through the self-imposed concept of rationality as value-free objectivity to be both, the cause and the reason for the impossibility of rational ethical grounding.<sup>6</sup>

Apel's convincing answer to this problem can not be explored in detail,<sup>7</sup> it is important to stress the necessity of the rational grounding of universally binding moral criteria, the necessity of leadership in moral philosophy.

The rejection of relativism is not only a precondition of moral judgements, it is simultaneously a precondition of leadership. Only if one claims, that leadership actually leads to the

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<sup>4</sup> Compare the mission of the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

<sup>5</sup> One of the few exceptions is the transcendental pragmatism of Apel, in his "Transformations of Philosophy" (Apel, 1973)

<sup>6</sup> See Apel: "Discourse and Responsibility" (Frankfurt, 1988, p. 16 and 24)

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Tenbergen (2000, p.29-40)

improvement of the standard of living of others, can one say that the individual leads and is not led by external factors (history, culture, the system, etc.).

### **Leadership and Power: Against Egalitarianism**

Leadership is not just a question of moral principals, but of consequences too. Leadership must be grounded on an ethics of responsibility not just on good intentions.<sup>8</sup> Someone, who does nothing wrong but has no significant impact on the external world, is not a leader. A leader must try to develop as much leadership as possible. The more that is contributed to the solution of problems, the more leadership is mobilized. This concept demands humility rather than arrogance in the leader, because the leader must cope with the challenge of fulfilling his or her potential. "A gift is a duty" the artist Kaethe Kollwitz once said with regard to this leadership concept. In this sense, it is part of leadership to want power but this power need is not anti-moral as in Nietzsche's philosophy, rather it is a moral claim. Power and morality constitute a double leadership challenge: people with good intentions must increase their power to realize their goals and especially gifted individuals (so called "high potentials") must try to find a morally sound application for their talents. In this sense, it is the task of the leader to help good people to be great and to help great people to be good.

Egalitarianism is an approach which contradicts this leadership concept because it is based on relativism. An example is social envy. Research has shown that some workers would prefer not to get a salary increase rather than to accept a higher salary of their colleagues. Another example is the OECD definition of poverty, which is not according to basic needs but according to the medium income of a society. In this sense, an average European student is poor but an Ethiopian child starving from hunger, is not.

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to Weber's distinction between the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of intention, see Weber (1973, p. 542-580).

These effects of egalitarianism are morally problematic, but the main problem is the rejection of an elite. Society needs an elite because the gap between the possibilities of the technical development (power) and the development of morality is so significant that it could easily lead to the destruction of mankind as a whole. Examples for this development could be the probably very easy development of biological weapons of mass-destruction or the debate whether spiritual robots will replace mankind in one hundred years which was initiated by Bill Joy, founder of the computer giant SUN Microsystems.<sup>9</sup> To cope with these problems, one needs a leadership concept which gives everyone (the weakest and the most gifted) the opportunity to fully develop their potential. Leadership can neither be just the support of a (difficult to determine) elite nor an unnatural equality, which is not using the necessary potential of the elite.

### **LQ: The Leadership Quotient**

The importance of power and morality for the above mentioned concept of leadership can be expressed mathematically:

Leadership = morality x power

This formula integrates the opinion that leadership can not be value-free. There is such a thing as negative leadership, if power is used unmorally. The more power is used unmorally, the more negative the leadership product becomes. Leadership can also fail because the leader is too powerless, even though he or she may have good intentions to describe this concept of leadership it makes sense to develop a leadership quotient (LQ):

$$\text{LQ} = \text{morality} : (1 : \text{power})$$

or

$$\text{LQ} = \text{morality} : \text{lack of power}$$

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<sup>9</sup> See for example [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org)

If the above mentioned diagnosis of a leadership crisis is correct, the opportunity to test such an LQ is very important to identify how individuals can lead society out of this crisis and how they can be supported in this task. Research results such as Sashkin's leadership profile,<sup>10</sup> Kienbaum management consultant's test of soft skills or Kohlberg's analysis of the development of the moral conscience<sup>11</sup> can help to develop this test. The first hypothesis is:

LQ = stage of the moral development according to Kohlberg : (1: result of the Kienbaum test)

## **Conclusion**

This paper aims to show why leadership is simultaneously a challenge and a necessity. Leadership challenges not only because of the dark shadows of a fascist past, but also because it attacks the dominating paradigm of relativism (and egalitarianism). Leadership is a necessity because mankind needs leadership (defined as moral execution of power) to survive. Furthermore, theoretical considerations would support the need of leadership, even if the current development was less dangerous. To identify leadership potential it is important to develop criteria to measure it. For this reason, a leadership quotient LQ = morality : lack of power, was suggested which could be the result of a test development.

Morality and power are the two important elements of this concept of leadership. The approach can be summarized through a short classical poem of Friedrich Schiller:

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<sup>10</sup> See Sashkin and Rosenbach (1998)

<sup>11</sup> See Kohlberg (1981)

Nur zwei Tugenden gibt's,  
O waeren sie immer vereinigt,  
Immer die Guete auch gross,  
Immer die Groesse auch gut!

There are just two virtues,  
Imagine they would ever be united,  
Ever goodness also great,  
Ever greatness good!

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