Finding your leadership voice through poetry
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Finding your leadership voice in found poetry: Poetic engagement for ethical leadership development

A proposal for a 1.5 – 2-hour PDW Professional Development Workshop (PDW) Track

Abstract (250 wc)/1-2 page outline with framework (200 wc)

Abstract

Credibility and authenticity have become central concepts in contemporary leadership perspectives, yet the shape of ethical leadership development for practice – whether through ethical skills development or ethical behavioural interventions – remains somewhat enigmatic (Buskirk et al. 2015). The central purpose of this professional development workshop is to provide a framework for participants to explore their leader identity and values and to ‘find their leader voice’ through ‘found poetry’ in a reflective and creative experience. Producing poetry opens up a unique space for exploring identity and values, gives voice to feelings, perceptions and genuine concerns, and fosters human connection (Armitage, 2015) which has the potential to support moral reasoning and moral action. In order to facilitate the enhancement of leader authenticity and credibility, this PDW proposes to facilitate a deeper exploration of leader identity and values and tap into creative-emotional thinking toward discovering and developing leader voice through poetic engagement: both producing and reflecting on poetry in organisational and leadership contexts.
Overview (1-2 pages)

In order to facilitate the enhancement of leader authenticity and credibility, this PDW proposes to facilitate participants’ venture in achieving a deeper exploration of their own leader identity and values. In the process, the workshop aims to support participants in tapping into their own pool of creative-emotional thinking and guide them toward discovering and developing their leader voice and expand their scope of cognitive learning through poetic engagement. We will have the opportunity to both reflect on poetry in organisational and leadership contexts and produce a personal piece of poetry.

The workshop conveys its central message through conceptual grounding, exercises, and creative processes. By guiding participants through the activities, the workshop will communicate its purpose to develop leader voice and ethical engagement both through a theoretical foundation, analytical work, and practical creation.

The theoretical foundation will expand on the following: Credibility and authenticity have become central concepts in contemporary leadership perspectives, yet the shape of ethical leadership development for practice – whether through ethical skills development or ethical behavioural interventions – remains somewhat enigmatic (Buskirk et al. 2015). Kouzes and Posner (2012) proposed that in order to ‘model the way’ for leadership credibility individuals must find their leader voice.

The analytical activity will extend the following: Numerous scholars have turned to reflexive practice in leadership development toward activating moral sensitivity (Hedberg, 2017; Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015; Waddock, 2010). Whilst reflective practice is a useful tool for professional development, the process of reflection can get stuck in the rational-cognitive realm, and thus miss out on accessing deeper emotional and creative levels of experience. Some have argued that using poetry as a foundation for reflection in organisational contexts can help spark creative problem-solving and unpack complexity (Morgan, 2016; Armitage, 2015). Others have argued that poetic engagement accesses cognitive processes of more emotional depth. For this reason, participants will have the chance to consider some poetry for reflection and analysis as well as find space to conduct personal reflection.

The practical creative element of the workshop will centre around the following: Producing poetry opens up a unique space for exploring identity and values, gives voice to feelings, perceptions and genuine concerns, and fosters human connection (Armitage, 2015) which has the potential to support moral reasoning and moral action. Using the activities for stream of consciousness writing for reflective practice, participants will then use techniques of found poetry to create their own pieces of poetry. This process is designed to enable an emotive analysis of leader values and voice toward a deeper understanding of authenticity and to enhance personal leader credibility.

Who is this workshop for?

The workshop is conceptualised predominantly as a reflective writing workshop and poetic engagement experience. Variations of the workshop have been successfully conducted in the past in the context of guest lecturer sessions on authentic and servant leadership for students of Executive MBA programmes. The workshop could attract estimated participant numbers of 20-30 BAM delegates from all interest groups, whether academics, enterprise and business
participants, public sector delegates, as well as postgraduate research students, and will address BAM delegates with a variety of interests, e.g. those who:

- are keen to improve their leadership practice and engage with ethical aspects of leadership;
- are interested in poetry and curious about creative approaches to leadership development and moral engagement in leadership;
- wish to participate in dialogue around the challenges of developing ethical leadership and moral action in leadership.

Format

The central purpose of this professional development workshop is to provide a framework for participants to explore their leader identity and values and to ‘find their leader voice’ through ‘found poetry’ in a reflective and creative experience. The background and motivation for the workshop is an extension of a current research project around poetic engagement, production of poetry, and ethical leader development.

The workshop aims to offer a safe and inclusive space for reflection and dialogue and provides an opportunity for creative outlet. The facilitator also seeks to demonstrate links between reflexivity, the leadership process/relationship, and ethical reasoning in practice. A framework of activities and tools for reflective practice, such as stream of consciousness writing, is provided. Brief theoretical input for leadership approaches is also provided. A foundational introduction to ‘found poetry’ will ground practice and guide participants through a process of creating their own poetic pieces. Space is provided for personal reflection, as well as for further dialogue in pairs and in small groups with collective debriefing to promote synthesis and learning. Participants will leave the workshop with a piece of poetry that they have composed themselves and can share with others or use for personal enjoyment. Most of all participants should take away a sense of accomplishment and personal growth having engaged in a creative process that may be completely new to them or is simply a pleasant change of scene from the purely rational-cognitive mode to the emotional-aesthetic mode of thinking. Continued professional development can be pursued based on the activities and knowledge conveyed in the workshop as these are simple yet powerful (and fun) techniques.
References


