



The role of moral leadership for sustainable production and consumption



Onno M. Vinkhuyzen^{a,*}, Sylvia I. Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen^b

^aEuropean Bahá'í Business Forum, Tamboer 167, 6866EH Heelsum, The Netherlands

^bPublic Administration and Policy Group, Wageningen University, Hollandseweg 1, 6706KN Wageningen, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 October 2012

Received in revised form

30 May 2013

Accepted 24 June 2013

Available online 5 July 2013

Keywords:

Ethics

Moral leadership

Service oriented leadership

Transformation

Transcendence

Capabilities

ABSTRACT

The principles, the actions and the vision that form the basis for sustainable production and consumption (SCP) are not unknown, but there is a considerable gap between knowledge and action, and behavioural incentives are not sufficient for system change. In this paper we explore a key missing ingredient in the work to promote SCP, leadership that is underpinned by ethical dimensions in its purpose, style and motivation. We show that current leadership styles are insufficient to generate the will and the human resources required for building SCP. The core of the paper is a comparative theoretical and ethical analysis of three leadership models designed to address complex adaptive challenges and with varying degrees of ethical dimensions incorporated. This enables us to evaluate the added value of incorporating ethical dimensions in leadership models and training. We analyse in more depth the most promising of the three models in this regard, the moral leadership framework developed by Eloy Anello and others at Nur University in Bolivia. We conclude that Anello's model provides a number of additional elements usually neglected in leadership models but that appear essential in generating the necessary vision, understanding and motivation to work for SCP. The evaluation of trainings in the moral leadership framework made so far indicate its potential for supporting transformational change, individual and collective, change that is essential in the promotion of sustainable production and consumption.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The need to transform the prevailing patterns of consumption and production, as they have been developed in the industrialised world and now adopted across the globe, towards more sustainable ones that respect the planetary limits and the entitlements of future generations is an often repeated claim and does not need much elaboration. It is supported by scientists from the Limits to Growth reports in the early 1970s and onwards (Meadows et al., 2004), to the recent effort to estimate (despite the methodological difficulties) how far humanity already has transgressed certain 'planetary boundaries' (Rockström et al., 2009). It has been estimated that as many as 60 per cent of the ecosystem services are degraded (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

The knowledge linking consumer choices with environmental degradation is mature. It is known, for example that 70–80 per cent of the life-cycle environmental impacts in society are accounted for

by mobility, food, energy use in the home and house building and demolition, various sources quoted in Tukker et al. (2008). However, much remains to be learned about *how* to forge sustainable consumption and production (Tukker et al., 2010). Much work remains to elaborate the pathways on which societies can reach the required transformations in consumption and production, two activities that are closely linked in "a complex co-evolving relationship" therefore requiring systemic change at both individual and societal level (UNEP, 2012:11). This all amounts to system change (Tukker and Butter, 2007).

The limited progress we made so far indicates how challenging such transformations are. One major challenge in transforming our societies towards sustainability lies in adopting a systemic perspective and translating that into responsible and sustainable consumption and production patterns, worldwide, including the physical, social and institutional structures involved. The pioneers who take action towards this objective will exercise *de facto* leadership. Their leadership can empower individuals to transform themselves and the structures of society. Solutions that will help establishing SCP "need leadership that makes a difference" (Tukker et al., 2008:1220). Many questions can be raised around the role of such leaders. How important are they for driving change?

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 647326786 (mobile), +31 858770774.

E-mail addresses: onno@ebbf.org (O.M. Vinkhuyzen), sylvia.karlsson-vinkhuyzen@wur.nl (S.I. Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen).

What attitudes, skills and capabilities do they need to be effective? What patterns or styles of leadership are best able to enable deep societal change? In this paper we touch on these questions that have to some extent also been addressed in literature on sustainability leadership and complexity leadership, see for example Redekop (2010) and Uhl-Bien et al. (2007). However, our main research question concerns the possible added value of explicitly incorporating normative dimensions in leadership models, an aspect that is a relatively new topic in mainstream leadership studies (Palmer, 2009). These dimensions, that we can also refer to as ethical or moral dimensions, can be linked to at least three aspects of leadership: the objective of leadership, the style of leadership and not the least the motivational drive that is needed for those who decide to take up a leadership role for societal change. We approach our research question through a theoretical rather than empirical inquiry by comparing three leadership models (theories or frameworks) that to different degrees incorporate ethical and moral dimensions within them. In so doing we analyse in more depth the one of these models that is integrating ethical dimensions most deeply. Based on this analysis we conclude that adopting such a model that has ethical aspects at its core could speed up the transition to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption considerably if it were more widely adopted.

The paper proceeds as follows. The following section elaborates on the relationship between leadership and societal change. First we discuss the concept of leadership and its general role in societal change, then we elaborate on the normative characteristics of leadership that seem to be required for SCP and their ethical dimensions. In section three we describe the objective, methodology and normative starting points of the paper and in section four we move to the actual analysis of three leadership models that should have some potential to meet the requirements of leading for SCP. We first analyse two models, the adaptive and ecology models, somewhat briefly and then we look at the moral leadership model in considerably more detail. We conclude the analysis with a systematic comparison of the three models, particularly the way they address ethical issues and the related implications for their potential to promote SCP. Finally in section six we summarize our conclusions and suggest further research directions.

2. Leadership and societal change

Any type of fundamental change in a social system at whichever scale – populations, communities, firms, etc. – depends both on individual actions and on the ability to channel individual action into collective enterprises that change the basic structures of the system that in turn further empower individuals to act responsibly. This is definitely also the case for efforts to promote SCP. We argue that leadership is an important element in system change.

2.1. Leadership

The literature that has explored pathways to system change for sustainability is characterised by something of a mismatch. There is considerable emphasis on the role of sustainable consumption to drive change, thus emphasizing the role of individual behavioural choices and neglecting the potentially larger influential role that governments could have on driving both production and consumption in more sustainable direction through e.g. regulation and taxes (Stevens, 2010). But also the literature that does include a strong emphasis on production and innovation, such as the socio-technical transitions literature, neglects the role of leadership. For example, in the book synthesizing a six-year research project on transitions, there is no reference to leadership (Grin et al., 2010). Similarly, in a volume summarising the result of a major

EU project on SCP, leadership is only mentioned once as crucial to establish at all levels within business and beyond in governments and NGOs and thus not systematically analysed (Charter et al., 2008).

These examples show how the role of individuals and individuals as leaders can be obscured in analysis of large scale societal change. At the same time it is clear that individuals can only have a limited influence on e.g. consumption. Changing consumer behaviour towards sustainability is only likely if motivation/intent, ability and opportunity are simultaneously addressed, Sto et al. quoted in Tukker et al. (2008). For example, the interest of individual consumers to use renewable energy for their house and transport is not possible until there is enough pressure in society to create the supporting structures for the increased production of e.g. solar and wind energy. The ability and opportunity often has to be created by larger governance structures around people. However, also in these structures we find individuals within organisations, within networks, and within communities. In all these contexts individuals can exercise influence and thus potentially perform the role of being leaders.

Leaders are people who have a larger than average influence on their environment and thus have higher potential to change it or prevent it from changing depending on the pattern of leadership they adopt. It is only in groups that the concept of leadership emerges and the role of leaders becomes visible, leadership “always occurs within the context of others” (Gini, 1997:325). Palmer (2009) refers to the core of leadership as being the motivation of others to act in light of a common aim. While change can start with individuals, change at a larger scale is needed to accomplish SCP. People may make every effort to do their share to create a better world, they need the back-up of some informal group where they meet likeminded people and find support and inspiration. What the leader is in his or her own environment, this informal group may become in society, especially when the group starts activities of its own. It is in a collective context, in groups of individuals working together in partnerships that the seeds for change are usually born and can take off, see for example Toynbee's (1939) discussion of creative minorities or the role of robust networks of actors in the niches where innovation takes place in socio-technical transitions (Smith et al., 2005).

Brundtland (1994:245), the chair of the commission that broadly launched the concept of sustainable development, argued that the challenge of moving to sustainable consumption will “test our ability to lead”. This undoubtedly is true also for the challenge of moving to sustainable production.

2.2. Normative leadership characteristics required for sustainable consumption and production and their ethical dimensions

Exercising leadership for SCP, and for addressing many other challenges of a mature society (see discussion below), requires different qualities of leaders than what has been sufficient in societies before. Change towards sustainability involves dealing with high degrees of, for example; complexity, uncertainty and interdependence. The challenges of change for SCP are complex in the deep system changes that need to be accomplished. They are uncertain in, for example how environmental degradation (like climate change) and social and economic changes will play out in reality, what policies are more effective and/or legitimate and what various actors will be willing to do. The challenges display interdependence over space and time between all inhabitants of the globe including future generations. Furthermore, working for SCP requires a long-term horizon and persistent action over that horizon considering that a full transition can take several decades (Tukker and Butter, 2007).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1745103>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1745103>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)