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Appreciative Interview

Ethical Challenges

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Introduction

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) represents a paradigm shift in organizational development, emphasizing strengths rather than weaknesses, opportunities rather than problems. This approach is particularly relevant in the public sector, where it can foster significant improvements in organizational effectiveness and community welfare by focusing on what works well and why (Barrett & Fry, 2012). AI encourages public sector leaders to identify, understand, and leverage successful practices in their administration and policy implementation (Cooper, 2006).

In this study, we explore the ethical leadership of two distinguished public sector leaders, Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery, and Sergeant Emmanuel NSO, both retired from the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC). Through Appreciative Inquiry Interviews, this paper delves into their leadership experiences, focusing on incidents and practices that highlight their ethical approaches and decision-making processes. Both leaders have been celebrated for their ability to navigate complex ethical landscapes and inspire a culture of integrity and fairness within their organizations, thus providing invaluable insights into the embodiment of ethical leadership in the public sector (Johnson, 2018).

Interview 1 Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery:

Situation, Actions, and Outcomes: During a volatile incident at a maximum-security prison, Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery exemplified ethical leadership following an inmate's assault on a staff member. Upon arrival, Lowery found the staff members highly agitated and leaning towards retaliatory violence against the inmate. She took immediate control, ensuring the inmate received medical attention and was safely detained, thereby preventing any use of excessive force, and maintaining adherence to legal and ethical standards (Cooper, 2006). Following the incident, Lowery organized a debriefing session to review use-of-force policies and provided a platform for staff to constructively express their frustrations, encouraging them to seek mental health support if necessary (Johnson, 2018).

Ethical Principles and Values: Lowery's decision-making process was informed by several key ethical principles and values:

- **Integrity and Justice**: She upheld legal and moral standards by preventing excessive force, showing a strong commitment to justice and integrity (Cooper, 2006).
- **Empathy and Respect for Persons**: Her approach demonstrated a profound respect for the dignity of all individuals involved, handling the situation with empathy and consideration (Johnson,2018).

- **Responsibility and Moral Courage**: Lowery displayed moral courage by prioritizing ethical conduct over hierarchical rank and peer pressure, taking responsibility for the well-being of both staff and the inmate (Johnson, 2018).

Key Themes from the interview:

- **Utilitarianism:** Lowery's actions targeted the greatest good, aiming to prevent harm and ensure just and humane treatment of the inmate (Cooper, 2006).
- **Deontological Ethics**: She adhered strictly to rules and ethical obligations, embodying a duty-based approach to ethics (Johnson, 2018).
- **Virtue Ethics:** Her leadership was characterized by virtues such as patience, empathy, and moral courage, vital for ethical leadership (Johnson, 2018).
- **Ethical Leadership**: Lowery exemplified ethical leadership by making morally sound decisions and influencing others to adopt ethical practices (Johnson, 2018).

Moral Courage: She demonstrated the courage to uphold her ethical principles despite opposition, a key aspect of moral leadership (Johnson, 2018).

Interview 2: Sergeant Emmanuel Nso

Ethical Situation, Decisions, and Impact: Sergeant Emmanuel Nso exhibited ethical leadership during a moment when an employee was struggling with personal distress. By recognizing the employee's difficulties, Nso provided immediate support through empathetic listening and respect for the individual's diverse background and beliefs. His decision to direct the employee to counseling services ensured the availability of professional help, which not only supported the employee during a challenging time but also reinforced a workplace culture of understanding, support, and respect for individual needs (Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2005). Nso's actions had a lasting impact, enhancing trust and morale within the team and demonstrating his commitment to the well-being of his staff (Mantel & Ludema, 2004).

Principles and Values Guiding Actions:

- **Humility and Tolerance**: Nso's approach, characterized by humility and tolerance for diverse backgrounds and beliefs, was evident in his respectful and attentive listening (Johnson, 2018).
- **Fairness and Autonomy**: He treated the employee fairly, recognizing the importance of autonomy by empowering the individual to seek professional help (Cooper, 2006).
- **Social Responsibility**: Nso's actions reflected a strong sense of social responsibility, demonstrating a commitment to the broader welfare of his team and the community (Barrett & Fry, 2012).

Interview Themes:

- **Fairness**: Nso's equitable treatment of employees, irrespective of their personal issues or backgrounds, shined the light on his ethical stance on fairness (Cooper, 2006).
- **Social Responsibility**: His decision-making process was deeply embedded in the value of contributing positively to the community and supporting employees in times of need (Barett & Fry, 2012).

- **Autonomy**: Nso respected the individual's autonomy, providing support while allowing the employee to make decisions about seeking further help (Johnson, 2018).
- **Humility**: His approach was characterized by humility, acknowledging the shared human experience, and showing genuine concern for others (Johnson, 2018).
- **Tolerance:** Embracing diverse perspectives and backgrounds, Nso's leadership style was marked by tolerance, facilitating an inclusive and respectful workplace environment (Johnson, 2018).

Comparative Analysis

Common Themes:

- **Ethical Leadership**: Both Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery and Sergeant Emmanuel Nso exemplify leadership, highlighting the profound influence a strong moral compass can have on guiding leaders' actions. Their unwavering commitment to doing what is right, even under challenging circumstances, has significantly shaped their organizational cultures. This theme of ethical leadership is crucial as it mirrors the principles outlined in the works of Cooper (2006) and Johnson (2018), who discuss the importance of ethics at the core of leadership responsibilities and the impact on shadow and light leadership dynamics.
- **Decision-making Guided by a Moral Compass**: The decisions made by Lowery and Nso were consistently aligned with deep-seated ethical principles, showing a clear moral compass that steered their actions. This was notably evident in Lowery's effective management of a potentially volatile situation and Nso's empathetic engagement with an employee experiencing personal distress. Their actions reflect the appreciative and inquiry-based frameworks discussed by Cooperrider and Whitney (20050, where the focus on positive potential leads to ethical decision-making outcomes.
- **Impact on Organizational Culture and Employee Morale**: The ethical actions undertaken by both leaders have positively influenced their organizations' cultures, creating environments where respect, empathy, and justice are highly valued. This transformation has, in turn, bolstered employee morale and fostered trust within the organization, as suggested by Mantel and Ludema (2004), who emphasize the role of conversational leadership in sustaining positive change and building cooperative capacity.

Reflection of Concepts, Models, and Theories from Cooper and Johnson:

- **Ethical Dilemma Frameworks**: The scenarios encountered by Lowery and Nso are quintessential examples of ethical dilemmas where leaders must navigate competing values and obligations. Their approaches align with Cooper's (2006) frameworks for resolving ethical dilemmas, emphasizing that ethical considerations should be prioritized above other factors, a sentiment that supports the foundational ethics of public administration.
- **Virtue Ethics:** Both leaders' actions are illustrative of virtue ethics, where personal virtues like empathy, fairness, and moral courage play a critical role in ethical leadership. These virtues are central to Johnson's (2018) discussion on ethical challenges, highlighting how personal character shapes leadership and decision-making processes.
- **Transformational Leadership:** The narratives of both Lowery and Nso align with Johnson's (2018) concept of transformational leadership, which describes leaders who inspire and motivate employees to exceed expectations. Their leadership styles not only resolved immediate ethical

challenges but also cultivated a lasting positive influence on their organizations, fostering an atmosphere of respect, integrity, and a shared sense of purpose.

The ethical leadership demonstrated by Lowery and Nso grasps key concepts, models, and theories as presented by Cooper (2006) and Johnson (2018). Their adherence to a strong moral compass and commitment to ethical principles have profoundly influenced their decision-making processes, positively shaped organizational culture, and enhanced employee morale, epitomizing the ideals of ethical and transformational leadership in public service.

In addition, the application of Appreciative Inquiry as discussed by Barrett and Fry (2012) is evident in the leadership approaches of both Lowery and Nso. This method, which focuses on identifying and building upon the strengths of individuals and organizations, supports the development of leadership strategies that are inherently positive aspects of every situation can catalyze significant organizational changes and promote a culture of continuous improvement and ethical awareness. Their leadership not only addressed immediate ethical challenges but also laid the groundwork for long-term organizational resilience and ethical fortitude.

Furthermore, the synthesis of these leadership styles with the theoretical frameworks provided by Mantel and Ludema (2004) highlights the importance of conversational leadership in fostering an environment where ethical practices are discussed and reinforced through dialogue. The open communication channels established by both leaders allowed for a convergence of ethical viewpoints and the collective advancement of organizational values. This approach has proven essential in navigating the complexities of public service, ensuring that ethics remain at the forefront of organizational decision-making and community interaction, ultimately strengthening the trust and commitment between the public sector and the communities they serve.

Application to the Compleat Public Sector

The concept of the Compleat Public Sector is epitomized through the integration of ethical leadership, integrity, fairness, and respect for individuals, as demonstrated in the interviews with Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery and Sergeant Emmanuel Nso. These attributes are not only pivotal to individual leadership success but are also foundational to the functioning and prosperity of the public sector (Cooper, 2006; Johnson, 2018).

Attributes of the Compleat Public Sector:

- **Ethical Leadership**: Leaders like Lowery and Nso illustrate that ethical leadership involves making decisions guided by a moral compass, prioritizing the well-being of individuals and the organization. Ethical leaders inspire trust, foster a positive work culture, and set a standard for behavior within the organization (Johnson, 2018). Their actions, which emphasize the importance of ethical decision-making, reflect the principles discussed in *Appreciative Inquiry: A positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity* by Barrett and Fry (2012), which advocates for leadership that builds on the positive potential of individuals and organizations.
- **Integrity:** This involves unwavering adherence to moral and ethical principles. Both leaders showcased integrity by taking actions that were legally and morally right, even when faced with challenging situations, thus maintaining organizational credibility and trust (Cooper, 2006). Their

integrity ensures that ethical considerations remain at the forefront of decision-making processes, aligning with Cooper's framework for responsible administration.

- **Fairness:** The commitment to equitable treatment, as demonstrated by Nso's empathetic interaction with an employee, ensures that all organizational members feel valued and respected, which is crucial for nurturing a sense of justice within the organization (Johnson, 2018). This aspect of leadership is essential in fostering an environment where fairness prevails, supporting Mantel and Ludema's (2004) notion of sustaining positive change through appreciative leadership.
- **Respect for Individuals**: Both interviews highlighted the importance of respecting individuals' dignity and rights. This respect fosters an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and employees are motivated to contribute their best (Barrett & Fry, 2012).

Contribution to Organizational Success:

- **Organizational Success**: The attributes of ethical leadership, integrity, fairness, and respect are integral to creating a thriving organizational culture. They contribute to a sense of shared purpose and commitment, driving organizational success and public trust (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).
- **Employee Retention**: Respectful and fair treatment, along with ethical leadership, are key factors in employee satisfaction and retention. Employees are more likely tp remain with an organization that upholds ethical values, treats them fairly, and respects their dignity (Cooper, 2006).
- **Effective Public Service**: A public sector entity imbued with these attributes is better equipped to serve the community effectively. Ethical leadership ensures that decisions are made in the best interest of the public, while integrity and fairness build public trust in the institution. Respect for individuals ensures that the public sector responds appropriately to diverse community needs, leading to more effective and impactful public service (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The Compleat Public Sector is characterized by a synthesis of ethical leadership, integrity, fairness, and respect for individuals. These attributes are essential for fostering a positive organizational culture, achieving success in public service, and ensuring high levels of employee retention and satisfaction. The insights from the interviews with Lowery and Nso, combined with theoretical frameworks from Cooper and Johnson, highlights the critical role of these values in shaping a healthy and effective public sector.

Conclusion

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) represents a paradigm shift in organizational development, emphasizing strengths rather than weaknesses, opportunities rather than problems. This approach is particularly relevant in the public sector, where it can foster significant improvements in organizational effectiveness and community welfare by focusing on what works well and why (Barrett & Fry, 2012). AI encourages public sector leaders to identify, understand, and leverage successful practices in their administration and policy implementation (Cooper, 2006).

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and decision-making processes. Both leaders have been celebrated for their ability to navigate complex ethical landscapes and inspire a culture of integrity and fairness within their organizations, thus providing invaluable insights into the embodiment of ethical leadership in the public sector (Johnson, 2018).

The insights gained from the interviews with Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery and Sergeant Emmanuel Nso, coupled with the theoretical analysis based on the works of Cooper and Johnson, provide a compelling narrative on the significance of ethical leadership in the public sector. These real=world examples of ethical decision-making and leadership underscore the profound impact that principled leaders can have on their organizations and the communities they serve,

Ethical Leadership, as demonstrated by Lowery and Nso, goes beyond mere compliance with laws and regulations. It involves a deeper commitment to doing what is right, guided by a moral compass that prioritizes the well-being of individuals and the collective good. Their actions highlight how ethical leadership fosters a culture of integrity, fairness, and respect, which are essential for nurturing trust, morale, and engagement within the organization.

The future of public sector and nonprofit management is increasingly dependent on the ability of leaders to navigate complex ethical dilemmas and to inspire a culture of ethical conduct. The challenges faced by these sectors require leaders who can balance competing demands while upholding ethical standards and demonstrating respect for all stakeholders. The attributes of ethical leadership, as revealed through the interviews and theoretical exploration, are not merely desirable but essential for the long-term success and sustainability of public and nonprofit organizations.

In conclusion, The concept of the Compleat Public Sector is epitomized through the integration of ethical leadership, integrity, fairness, and respect for individuals, as demonstrated in the interviews with Associate Administrator Bertha Lowery and Sergeant Emmanuel Nso. These attributes are not only pivotal to individual leadership success but are also foundational to the functioning and prosperity of the public sector (Cooper, 2006; Johnson, 2018).

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 the essence of the Compleat Public Sector lies in its embrace of ethical leadership as a foundation principle. This approach not only ensures effective and fair management but also positions the public sector to meet future challenges with resilience and integrity. Ethical leadership, therefore, is not just a facet of good governance; it is the cornerstone of a future where public and nonprofit organizations continue to thrive and contribute positively to society.

The integration of Appreciative Inquiry, as emphasized by Cooperrider &Whitney (2005), into the fabric of public sector leadership further enriches the ethical dynamics explored in this study. This approach encourages leaders to seek out what works well in their organizations and to use these strengths as a foundation for further development and ethical decision-making. By focusing on positive attributes,

leaders like Lowery and Nso can cultivate an environment where innovation and positive change are not only encouraged but become standard practice. This method highlights the concept of ethical leadership by reinforcing behaviors that align with the highest standards of integrity and public service.

Reference

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