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Authentic Leadership: As Exemplified by Kamla Persad Bissessar- Implications for Current and Potential Leaders

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Abstract

The focus of this paper will be on the six seeds of authentic leadership as espoused by Cashman (2003) and the relationship to Kamla Persad Bissessar's leadership. Her strengths and weaknesses will be examined with a view to determining whether she displays qualities of an authentic leader. Speeches, e-mails, her facebook pages and the party's manifesto for 2010 will be used as touchstones to evaluate her level of authenticity as a leader. The six seeds are: (a) the need for leaders to manifest what is in their hearts, (b) ability to embrace both the good and the bad and learn from them, (c) the leader serves the parts and the whole through value creation, (d) the leader masters the ego and moves beyond the ego, (e) the leader displays social intelligence through his or her ability to connect with others, and (f) the leader is able to find the potential in others. A discussion ensues based on the example of authentic leadership and how potential and current leaders could capitalize on becoming more people-centered leaders.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Potential Leaders, Current Leaders, Women Political Leaders

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Introduction

How authentic is Kamla Persad Bissessar's leadership? The premise of this paper is to determine the level of authenticity, Mrs. Persad Bissessar displays as leader of the opposition. Written before she won the general election, there is a marked indication that Mrs. Persad Bissessar exemplifies facets of Cashman's (2003) six seeds of authentic leadership. In a climate where legitimacy, transformation, and authentic leadership are capstones of charismatic leaders, Mrs. Persad Bissessar used her feminine nurturing quality to garner support for her political campaign as both leader of the opposition and later for her bid to become Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Defying the dictates of an adrocentric society, Mrs. Persad Bissessar set the stage for women to embrace their aspirations, inspirations, and rise to the challenge of self-leadership and leadership of others.

In this article, I document the speeches, given by Mrs. Persad Bissessar in the lead up to the general elections in Trinidad in May 2010. With the "Kamlamania" hype prevalent at the time this article was written, I felt there was a need to examine her leadership style as an authentic leader and her ability to connect and engender trust in others. Her facebook page was used as an indication of her plans to implement change within the country if elected as Prime Minister. Since writing this article, Mrs. Persad Bissessar has been elected Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and has been named in *Time* magazine's ten top female leaders. Adams (2010) stated:

Since being sworn in, on May 26, 2010, the onetime Attorney General has laid out ambitious plans to tackle the country's growing murder rate, boost pensions and slash the number of Trinidadians living in poverty (now one-fifth of the population). (p. 9)

The aforementioned statement illustrates Mrs. Persad Bissessar's authentic leadership in action and sets the tone for a leader who is a true example of what women can achieve.

Tenets of Authentic Leadership

"To thine own self be true" resonates the hackneyed dictum and the precepts of authentic leadership are based on such principles. Authenticity in leadership dates to the early years. Walumba, Avolio, Gardner, Wrensing, and Peterson (2008) indicated that there is an increased need for leaders to cultivate and hone authentic leaderships. Furthermore, within the political arena where there is need for transparency, accountability, and adherence to strict ethical and moral standards the need for an authentic political leader is a necessity to followers. Researchers have indicated that authentic leadership raises the level of optimism, social intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Walumba et al., 2008).

With the focus on moral, ethical leadership and leadership that inspires, motivates, and empowers, authentic leadership has emerged as one of the capstones of leadership theory and one to be aspired towards. Harter (2002) defined authenticity as "owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself" (p. 382). Amongst the cacophony of dissident views on authentic leadership, an indelible thread of authenticity appears. These congruent qualities include: self-

awareness, self-regulated positive behaviors, self-efficacy, and tenacity and continuous self-development toward fostering a more positive self-image.

Cashman's (2003) six seeds exemplified a higher level of consciousness in relation to one's responsibility as a leader. The first seed of purpose points to the need for leaders to define themselves by outwardly manifesting what is in their hearts. The second seed of authenticity urges the leader to embrace both the good and bad and learn from them. The third seed of value creation empowers the leader to serve the parts and the whole. The leader then promotes and fosters values.

The fourth seed encourages the leader to move beyond the ego and master the ego rather than allow the ego to rule. The fifth seed of relationship promotes the need to connect with others, which is part of social style and social intelligence. The final seed of coaching encourages the leader to find the potential in others.

Application of Authentic Leadership to Kamla Persad Bissessar

Kamla Persad Bissessar has indicated what is in her heart simply from the act of embracing diverse factions of society and welcoming them into the coalition party she helped form. A quote from her facebook account typifies this belief:

Everybody in this country is my "own kind." This is one country with one people. Our history of servitude and struggle binds us together. Everybody in this country is equal and that is how it will be with our People's Partnership government. (K. Persad Bissessar, personal communication, May 7, 2010)

These aforementioned statements illustrate an authentic leader who is willing to accept differences and use these dissimilarities to foster harmony and strength within the coalition. Her genuine ability to embrace everyone who wants to work with her and empower them using their strengths to benefit the party and people, while simultaneously highlighting their talents and skills, makes her an authentic leader.

Mrs. Persad Bissessar's preoccupation with youths and expanding the tertiary level education also indicates an authentic leader who wishes to empower youths. From the onset, with her various speeches geared toward touching the hearts of the people and creating comic relief in an already tense environment, she displays the qualities of an authentic leader. K. Persad Bissessar stated in a personal communication on May 9, 2010:

I cannot emphasize this strongly enough: the People's Partnership is committed to continuing free tertiary education and we will expand the GATE program to include technical and vocational education. Our policies support the diversification of our nation's economy so you- the young people we are educating- have real jobs and careers in your future.

She charges every individual with the concomitant responsibility of being model citizens and finding his or her potential and unleashing it. The excerpt that segues from her facebook account shows her authenticity as a leader:

The People's Partnership will not take away programs but we will make our educational system better. We need to make sure every young person has a marketable skill and the chance to live out and realize their dreams. In addition, young people must feel safe and secure. (K. Persad Bissessar, personal communication, May 5, 2010)

Here, she is concerned and this preoccupation is illustrated in her words and the fact that one of the five hierarchical needs postulated by Maslow, safety, is one of the priorities of her party. Thus far, she has displayed all the seeds of an authentic leader and shows a high level of self-efficacy, self-discipline, and self-awareness with self-epistemological beliefs. Shamir and Eilam (2005) described authentic leaders as having four attributes: (a) "role of a leader is a central component of their self-concept, (b) they have achieved a high level of self-resolution or self-concept clarity, (c) their goals are self-concordant, and (d) their behavior is self expressive" (p. 399).

From her speeches and her facebook account it is clear that Mrs. Persad Bissessar emulates the aforementioned qualities:

Last night I was warmly received in Laventille, a place overrun by crime, fear and a sense of hopelessness. Why, you may ask, should you care? Because if you believe, as I do, that everybody in this country is equal, then you want a better future for everyone in Trinidad and Tobago May 24th. (K. Persad Bissessar, personal communication, May 11, 2010)

Strengths of Kamla Persad Bissessar as an Authentic Leader

The manifesto for 2010, presented a meticulous proposal of her party's projected plans when and if they do come into government after the May 24, 2010 elections. Her strengths are definitely in uniting diverse groups in society. From the onset, future plans in the manifesto underscore a people-centered leadership typifying the authentic leader. Throughout the people's Partnership manifesto (Bissessar, 2010) an indelible thread highlighted that the safety and wellbeing of the national community is a major preoccupation. The seven pillars espoused in the People's Partnership manifesto for 2010 (Bissessar, 2010) give a clear indication that she is genuine, interested in the welfare of all, trying to be optimistic, people-focused, and geared toward community improvement and involvement. The seven pillars challenge everyone to take ownership and responsibility for the country through active participation. The use of "we" and "our" bring a closer perspective to the public and indicated intimacy rather than distance. This

slight pronoun change foisted ownership for the manifesto on the part of the reader emphasizing her thrust toward people-centered governance.

The issues discussed in the seven pillars underscore Mrs. Kamla Persad Bissessar's strength as an authentic leader with the manifestation of care and concern for the Gestalt rather than individual or disparate factions within the national community. These seven pillars include: (a) people-centered development, (b) poverty eradication and social justice, (c) national and personal security, (d) information and communication technologies, (e) a more diversified knowledge intensive economy, (f) good governance, and (g) foreign policy. The aforementioned pillars exemplify her authentic leadership where there is an underlying philosophy of clarity of goals with transparency and accountability at the helm of her modus operandi. Such qualities are the forte of an authentic leader as defined by Walumba, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) and Cashman (2003).

Another strong point is her ability to forgive by pardoning others for whatever may have happened in the past. For example, Mrs. Kamla Persad Bissessar openly embraced certain members of her government who opposed her bid to become leader of the opposition. This act in itself shows self-knowledge, self-efficacy and the qualities of a true authentic leader and self-concordant an equal aspect of value creation.

Challenges of Kamla Persad Bissessar as an Authentic Leader

Kamla Persad Bissessar exemplifies that manifesting what is in the heart also has disadvantages as illustrated in the following example. Tearing up the People's National Movement Manifesto 2010 may have shown what Mrs. Bissessar feels in her heart but it does not indicate a leader who is self-regulated and willing to embrace the positive and negative aspects of leadership. This aforementioned act may have shown strength and courage but it also displayed human frailty and the need to master the ego rather than letting the ego rule.

A further issue facing the leader of the opposition is the ability to effectively merge the diverse groups of people into one synergistic Gestalt. Her true leadership skills will be tested if she wins the election and has to find a niche for each individual. Mrs. Persad Bissessar's true mettle will be determined by how effectively she governs and manages the UNC, COP, NJAC, and the Movement for Social Justice. Not only does she have to remain true to her promises and proposals but she also has to sustain unity within a group that the public has seen torn by loyalty towards the new regime versus loyalty towards the old regime. How she eventually resolves such a dichotomy determines as much on her ability to know herself, her relationship with others, and her mediating skills. Moreover, those members of her party with loyalties to the old regime will have to move from cognitive dissonance to a paradigm shift where change is ineluctable.

The third challenge confronting Mrs. Persad Bissessar is her high insistence on participation and inclusion. She proposed to set up different boards with diverse stakeholders within the community to regulate the various ministries. Participation and inclusion lead to ownership and autonomy from all stakeholders. However, the Sisyphean struggle would be to unite and regulate the boards. How would she determine when to include and when not to include? What measures will she use, if elected, to decide who should participate and who

should not participate? What measures will be in place for control and selection of what she takes under advisory? The e-view is a valid instrument which Mrs. Persad Bissessar plans to implement as a means of generating public feedback. The e-view will be a website allowing citizens to air their views, issues, and concerns about what is taking place in the country. This will be in keeping with Mrs. Persad Bissessar's people-centered governance.

Implications for Current and Potential Leaders

In contemporary organizations, the epitome of leadership is the leader's ability to discern, adapt, intuit, and internalize the underpinnings of environmental culture. Rumination and introspection are natural processes of a leader's growth. Spawning a culture that inculcates transformation within the organization and creates authenticity is the concomitant and onerous responsibility of contemporary leaders. Such leaders have the Herculean challenge of merging the etic and emic voices in leadership. Hypothetical theories of leadership are given validation or lack thereof through praxis.

When considering authentic leadership and its application to potential and current leaders, one must first ask whether he or she is comfortable with the contribution to the organization and what type of legacy will be left behind. Only through symbiotic dyads between the heart and actions taken in leadership can individuals espouse the embodiment of authentic leadership. The example exemplified in this article suggests to leaders to know themselves and in self-knowledge, true leadership and service to the organization and people can be attained.

The second seed, the ability to embrace the good and the bad suggests the need for all leaders to assess their weaknesses and strengths and transcend these areas. When followers see that leaders are self-aware and willing to show frailties and power, this engenders trust. Trust, according to Covey and Merrill (2006), is the single most effect measure in perpetuating change within an organization. Current and potential leaders who are willing to embrace the flower as well as the thorn could reap increased reward in the followership confidence in them.

Value creation is another vital aspect of authentic leadership and one in which leaders should inculcate in quotidian life. According to Maxwell (2006), every person is a leader whether at the top of the organization or the bottom or as is the case in a horizontally structured organization. Leaders, who try to make a difference in each person's life, lead and perform in a manner benefiting as many persons as possible. Kamla Persad Bissessar personifies such a leader in her capacity as leader of the opposition in government in Trinidad and Tobago.

Communing with nature and embracing the self, when finding that contentment within oneself, is the fourth seed espoused by Cashman (2003). When an individual is centered and operates and performs leadership functions from a position of contentment, such sanguine energies are infectious. Optimism is contagious. Potential and current leaders should master the ego and lead from a position of servant.

Social intelligence and being open, honest, and sincere generates trust and hope. Leading from a point of trust, as exemplified by Kamla Persad Bissessar, fosters trust and confidence in

leaders. Leader's ability to understand and comprehend social situations within the workplace also displays the use of visceral instincts and a higher level of understanding. Goleman (2006) divided social intelligence into two facets: social awareness and social facility. Social awareness encompasses; (a) primal empathy, (b) attunement, (c) empathetic accuracy, and (d) social cognition. Social facility embraces: (a) synchrony, (b) self-presentation, (c) influence, and (d) concern. Struggling leaders who have issues with change resistant behaviors could infuse some of these qualities into their leadership repertoire. Additionally, leaders who allow followers to participate in and take ownership for the organization's vision will dissipate resistant behaviors. Followers feel valued and confident when they are given autonomy for their tasks and are part of the decision-making process.

Finding potential in others and acting as a mentor in a leadership position shows a level of selflessness and the desire for others to succeed. When there is clear purpose and the leader is a whole and authentic leader, the leader engenders trust and loyalty in followers. The leader who is in touch with his or her values and innate self resonates at a higher level and foments resonant leadership. Resonant leadership affords a larger circle of influence with increased charisma and influence on others. Resonant leaders possess legitimate and charismatic powers.

The Fish philosophy purported by Lundin, Paul, and Christensen (2000) contains elements of all six seeds and includes: (a) improving communication through empathetic listening, (b) making work fun, (c) making someone's day in a memorable way, and (d) choosing a positive mindset and attitude irrespective of what is taking place. Current and potential leaders can implement these strategies to improve value creation and motivate followers to move beyond their expected potential. Nothing shows authenticity and care more than finding ways to emotionally touch lives in a positive way.

A wise leader uses praise effectively both formally and informally. Extrinsic rewards should be memorable and one that can motivate followers to work harder. Gostick and Elton (2002) underscored the importance of extrinsic rewards, "leaders must not only understand the necessity to encourage, inspire and reward the top 20 percent, they must be sure that the high performance 70 percent is always energized to improve and move upward" (p. 14). Rewards externally experienced intensify and motivate followers to work harder and set long-term and short-term goals.

Leading with the other five seeds as posited by Cashman (2003) spawns the ability to ignite other's passion and bring forth latent potential. As has been evidenced in Kamla Persad Bissessar's leadership, authentic leadership is people-centered leadership where the welfare of others is of paramount importance. Leaders in all spheres will do well to inculcate such leadership strategies in their praxis.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The authentic leader foments a level of self-regulation, self-awareness, empowers followers, and possesses the ability to tap into the potential in others. Mrs. Persad Bissessar has exhibited such qualities and can be deemed an authentic leader. If elected to lead Trinidad and Tobago, she must continue to strive toward staying an authentic leader with her declaration of

values as important touchstones toward increasing authenticity. Values of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, dialogue, and leadership hold Mrs. Persad Bissessar in good stead to creating and sustaining a culture of transparency and authenticity.

If elected into office, additional research and information can be used to determine whether Mrs. Persad Bissessar is a true authentic leader. Ultimately, if elected, after a period of time, additional research on her leadership styles and skills could support her effectiveness as a leader. Furthermore, determining her style of leadership as either authentic rather than transformational could be another research paper. The issues discussed in this article add to the body of information on authentic leadership especially authentic leadership as purported by Cashman (2003). There is a dearth of studies conducted on authentic leadership and its significance to leaders. More research should be conducted on authentic leadership and its impact on both followers and leaders in fomenting a more horizontal organization structure.

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Biography

Charmaine Bissessar is a graduate of the University of Phoenix, Arizona. She presented the findings of her doctoral dissertation at the American Society of Business and Behavioral Studies in Hawaii in 2008. She conducted a workshop on Webquest, problem-based, and project-based learning for online and traditional classrooms on June 11th at the Hyatt for the elearn conference 2009. In July 2009, Charmaine Bissessar presented a comparative assessment of Trinidadian and Bermudian college students' use of emotional intelligence. She has recently published a book of short stories entitled *Grains of Sand*. She is an adjunct faculty with UWI ROYTEC and an online facilitator for UWI Open Campus from September 2010. Her main interests include emotional intelligence, motivation, and transformational leadership, women in leadership and politics, and social justice.