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Understanding Kindness – A Moral Duty of Human Resource Leaders

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Introduction

The role of leaders in the modern organization has evolved as scholars and practitioners have recognized that a key element to long-term profitability is the creation of high trust and high commitment work systems that treat employees as valued partners (Kim & Wright, 2011; Block, 2013; Beer, 2009; Caldwell & Floyd, 2014). Effective leaders create aligned organizational cultures with systems, processes, practices, and programs reinforcing the organization's espoused values in achieving its mission (Schein, 2010). Human resource professionals (HRPs) play a critical leadership role in ensuring that human resource management (HRM) cultural elements are properly integrated, communicated effectively to employees, and followed in a manner that builds trust and increases commitment (Lengnick-Hall, 2009; McEvoy, *et al.*, 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to identify the importance of kindness as a moral duty of HRPs in serving their organizations and the employees within them. As HRPs perform their strategic and operational roles in the modern organization, properly understanding the nature of kindness is an important factor in carrying out HRM roles. This paper begins by defining kindness and its specific application to HRPs – equating the definition of kindness as a leadership trait with six elements of kindness and seven kindness-related ethical perspectives. The paper concludes with a summary of its contribution for HRP practitioners and scholars in understanding the nuances of kindness as a morally-and ethically-related HRM leadership virtue.

Understanding Kindness

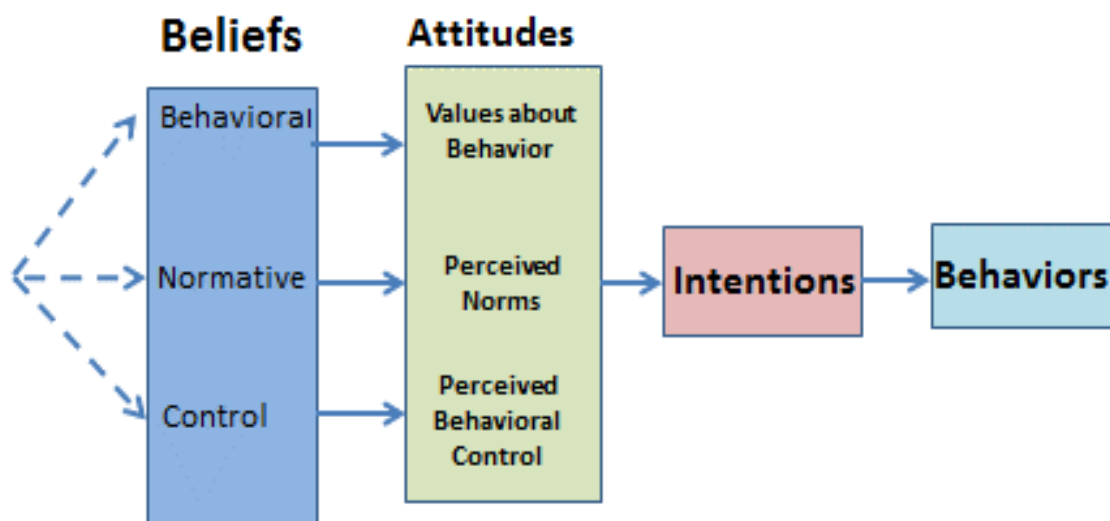
Baker and O'Malley (2008) have advocated that "leading with kindness" is effective in both optimizing organization performance and building high commitment workplace cultures and is a moral duty if organizations are to both maximize wealth creation and honor duties owed

to employees (DePree, 2004). Like many complex management terms, the construct of kindness has been defined in varying ways by different scholars. Passmore and Oades (2015, p. 90) define kindness as “selfless acts performed by a person wishing to either help or positively affect the emotional state (mood) of another person.” Ryon (2013) referred to kindness as a genuine act with a sole purpose for helping another, in contrast to meeting social expectations. Many scholars define kindness as having religious roots: Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity all refer to the importance of kindness as a duty owed not only to friends, but also to our enemies (Passmore & Oades, 2015). Post (2005) noted that being kind positively benefits both the recipient and the giver. Although we generally have an intuitive understanding of the nature of kindness, its fine-grained qualities merit careful examination in greater detail. Underlying each of these definitions is the implicit assumption that kindness is an ethically-based moral duty (cf. Caldwell, 2017)

Binfet and colleagues (2016) confirmed that kindness is a behavior subjectively perceived by the recipient. Explaining the nature of that subjective perception Covey, (2013, 198-212) had observed that others evaluate what is important to them based upon their individual “emotional bank accounts” – or those priorities that each individual considers to be most important in his or her life. Creating relationships that build trust, Covey (2013) explained is dependent upon 1) understanding what others value, and 2) taking actions that benefit the intended beneficiary according to how the recipient assigns that value.

Similar to other complex behaviors, kindness conforms to the *Theory of Reasoned Action* (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Specifically, behaviors are the deliberate and spontaneous actions taken as the product of 1) one’s normative, behavioral, and control-related beliefs; 2) one’s attitudes and perceptions about those same beliefs; and 3) the translation of those beliefs and attitudes into a specific intention to act (Fisbein & Ajzen, 2010, pp. 22-23). *Diagram 1* summarizes the TRA general model provided by Fishbein & Ajzen (2010, p. 22).

Diagram 1: Theory of Reasoned Action Model



Applied to the *Theory of Reasoned Action*, acts of kindness as behaviors are a derivative of 1) one's cognitive ability to understand others' needs, one's beliefs about acceptable behavioral norms and the duties one owes others, and one's emotional intelligence in crafting an appropriate response to others; 2) one's affective attitudes about values associated with being kind and compassionate, the emotional capacity to empathize, one's self-expectations about duties owed or one's personal responsibility to act, one's willingness to comply with perceived interpersonal norms, and one's self-perceptions about the ability to control one's response to a situation; 3) one's intention to then act in a kind way to honor the relationship cognitively and affectively perceived as a duty; and 4) ultimately one's actions in treating others in a way that is perceived as both kind and morally appropriate (cf. Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

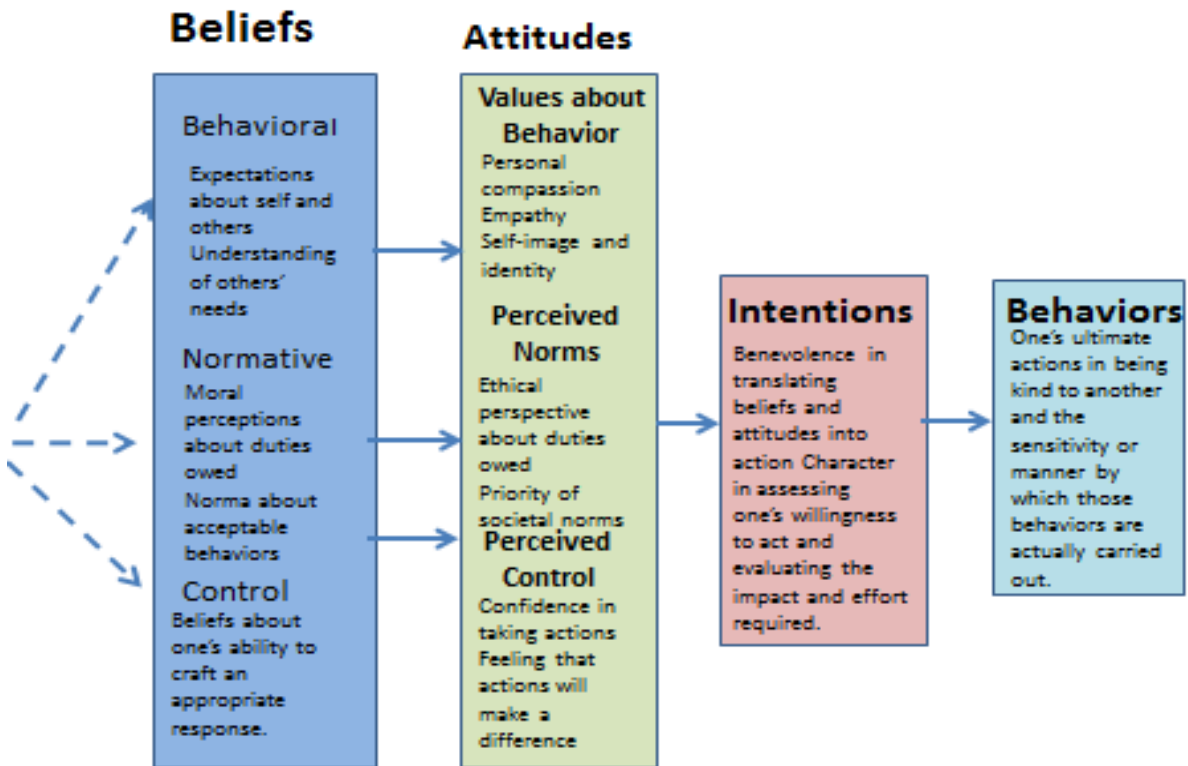
Thus, kindness is inherently a moral duty to act that extends beyond legal responsibility – especially when that action substantially benefits another party (cf. Caldwell, *et al*, 2014; Murphy, 2001). This obligation to take affirmative action when that action is needed is morally a part of a leader's ethical duties and is cognitively assessed. But Yagil (2014) noted that kindness in action also reflects affective emotions resulting from compassion, a willingness to help, and empathy. Thus, kind and beneficent action integrates cognition, attitude, and intention.

Caldwell and colleagues (2014) distinguished between benevolence – regarded as a key element of trustworthiness and the intention to act – and beneficence – or the actions associated with caring for another's welfare, growth, and wholeness motivated by that intention. Treating people with beneficence treats others with an understanding of our “oneness” with them (Fromm, 1956) and involves a moral duty to act extending beyond legal responsibility, especially when to do so greatly benefits another party. This obligation to take affirmative action when action is needed is fundamentally important in understanding the leader's ethical duties. Beauchamp (2008, section 1) described beneficence as encompassing altruism, charity, mercy, humanity, and even love. Noting the correlation between the positive actions of beneficence and benevolence, Beauchamp (2008, section 1) distinguished the latter term as “the morally valuable character trait – or virtue – of being disposed to act for the benefit of others.” Thus, beneficence, the affirmative behavior or conduct in the service of others, is correlated with benevolence, the intention to take action or the disposition to act.

In summary, applied to the *Theory of Reasoned Action*, one's acts of kindness as behaviors are a derivative of 1) cognitive ability to understand others' needs, beliefs about acceptable behavioral norms and the duties owed others, and emotional intelligence in crafting an appropriate response to others; 2) affective attitudes about values associated with being kind and compassionate, the emotional capacity to empathize, self-expectations about duties owed or one's personal responsibility to act, the willingness to comply with perceived interpersonal norms, and 3) the morally-valuable intention to translate cognitive beliefs and attitudes to honor the relationship perceived as a duty; and 4) the ultimate behaviors and actions actually taken in treating others in a way that is kind and morally appropriate (cf. Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Diagram 2 provides a model of kindness as a *Theory of Reasoned Action* construct, based upon this summary.

Diagram 2: The Theory of Reasoned Action Applied to Kindness



Thus, kindness is the integration of beliefs, attitudes, and intentions about behavior owed to others, and the resulting behaviors that actually aid another – particularly when such actions prevent harm or assist another who has a great need. In honoring the duties of kindness, individuals enrich the world and the persons they serve as they demonstrate their humanity and character.

Applying Kindness to HRPs

As organizational leaders obligated to create aligned HRM systems and programs that facilitate the achievement of their organization's strategic purpose (Ulrich, *et al.*, 2012), HRPs play a major role in contributing to an organization's success. Schneider, Gunnarson, and Niles-Jolly (1994) observed that an organization's success is typically defined by a system's approach wherein elements are properly aligned in pursuing a worthy goal. Success has also been defined by return on investment for programs the HRP may deliver (Ulrich, 2013; Phillips, 2012). Huselid (1997, p.172) observed that effective HRM involved "designing and implementing a set of internally consistent policies and practices that ensure that employees' collective knowledge, skills, and abilities contribute to the achievement of its business objectives."

Beer (1997) has identified three vital tasks of strategic HRM:

- 1) **Focus on cost-effectiveness.** Refining the delivery of HRM services to reduce costs, so as to make HRM functions more efficient.

- 2) ***Merger of the HRM function with the strategic role of the firm.*** Aligning key tasks, programs, and systems so that they mesh instead of conflict and enable the organization to effectively and efficiently utilize its human capital.
- 3) ***Develop new knowledge.*** Creating a learning culture based upon high trust and empowerment that interdependently links financial performance, culture, and goal achievement.

Accomplishing these tasks is enhanced by honoring duties owed to employees as owners and partners in the success of the organization (cf. Block, 2013). Empirical evidence confirms that treating employees as valued partners, empowering employees, and demonstrating high trust to achieve those three strategic tasks result in greater profitability, better customer service, and improved quality (Pfeffer, 1998; Becker, *et al.*, 1998; Paine, 2002; Covey, 2006; Mitchell, *et al.*, 2013).

Six Elements of Kindness

In this section, we identify six moral and ethical elements of kindness that have specific applications to the HRM function and the role of HRPs. Although scholars and practitioners define kindness in different terms and contexts, we present these six elements as specific and practical applications of kindness within the HRM context. These six items were identified by Caldwell and Anderson, 2017, Ch. 13)

Kindness and Authenticity

Kind authentic behavior is the degree that “those who are authentic perform acts determined by what they inherently believe, rather than by a desire to be liked, admired, or rewarded” (Yukl, 2006, 303-304). Authentic leaders incorporate values, beliefs, emotions, and abilities in establishing their respective identities (Men & Sacks, 2014). When HRPs are authentically kind, they are true to themselves and to others. In addition, they chose not to conform to role expectations that conflict with their values and beliefs. O’Malley (1998) explained that kindness is authentic and perceived as such by others.

HRPs who are manipulative to achieve a self-serving purpose are quickly recognized (cf. Covey, 2006). In contrast, authentic leaders promote positive and establish positive ethical climates. In so doing authentic HRP leaders foster increased self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency that enable positive self-development of employees (Walumbwa, *et al.*, 2008). Authentic leaders are more likely to be perceived as congruent and honest because of how they treat others (Wang, *et al.*, 2014). When HRPs are viewed as solicitous but inauthentic, they are perceived as unethical and duplicitous. When they are kind and authentic, they inspire employee commitment and are deemed to be honorable (cf. Verplanken & Holland, 2002).

Kindness and Humanity

Humanity incorporates the capacity to see oneself and others as participants in a common experience (Akin, 2009). When HRPs interact with humanity, they align with others in creating a better organization (Nussbaum, 1998). Glover (2012) argued that humanity is a moral concept that acknowledges that interconnectedness creates obligations to others. Humanity reflects the duty to avoid harming others and creates value for society and the organization (Freeman, 2007). Humanity and kindness are implicitly related.

HRPs with humanity adopt the transformational leader's commitment to both the organization's and its employees' best interests (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Caldwell and colleagues (2011) opined that HRPs owe a complex set of transformational, covenantal, and servant leadership duties to employees. Kindness enables HRPs to pursue their stewardship responsibilities in working for employee interests while simultaneously honoring duties to the organization (cf. Hernandez, 2008 & 2012).

Kindness and Respect

Respect is a fundamental element of justice and a foundation of trustworthiness (Primeaux, Karri, & Caldwell, 2002; Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Clapham, *et al.*, 2014). Interactional justice emphasizes the importance of relationships with others (Bies & Moag, 1986). Lind (2001) noted that interactional justice is high when employees are treated as valued partners (cf. Block, 2013) and incorporates the degree to which others are treated with courtesy and respect— including providing employees with information needed in achieving sought after outcomes (Greenberg, 1993).

As HRPs interact with others, their focus must honor the letter of the law, but also demonstrate compassionate commitment to its spirit and intent. HRPs demonstrate a commitment to the welfare, growth, and wholeness of others in their role as ethical stewards of the organization (Caldwell, *et al.*, 2011; Caldwell, Hayes & Long, 2010). Respect and kindness demonstrate genuine regard for others while speaking the truth in a way that is neither condescending nor officious (Covey, 1992). HRPs who mesh kindness with respect speak honestly but respectfully, seeking to help people to become their best version of themselves while honoring the truth (Caldwell, *et al.*, 2011).

Kindness and Perspective

Perspective requires the ability to understand the context of situations and to respond appropriately (Caruso & Bhardwaj, 2012; Bradberry & Greaves, 2015). Perspective-taking refers to relating effectively to others and to correctly interpreting their feelings (DeBernardis, Hayes, & Fryling, 2014). The ability to relate to others and their motivations is dependent upon an HRPs skill in taking perspective and responding appropriately (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Skills associated with taking perspective are as a result of life experiences and are measured on a continuum (DeBernardis, Hayes, & Fryling, 2014).

Perspective also includes the ability to accurately understand one's role, the needs of others, and the complex factors of a problem, a situation, or an event. Mencken confirmed that such complex problems do not have simple solutions (Ehrenfeld & Hoffman, 2013). Similarly, Albert Einstein (1946) noted that the solutions to problems require a higher level of insight than existed at the time that those problems were created. Kindness reflects the ability to develop this refined perspective about the importance of people. Lacking that perspective, HRPs will be unable to balance conflicting demands facing their organizations (cf. Becker & Huselid, 2006; Bradberry & Greaves, 2015). Being kind includes identifying when improvement is needed and in others' best interests – but doing so in a way that neither demeans nor offends others.

Kindness and Integrity

Hatcher (2006, p. 3) challenged HRPs to “(p)ractice with integrity, or do not practice at all,” emphasizing that in their work, everything has an ethical implication. Solomon (1992) opined that integrity was a requirement of every leader and critical in successfully confronting moral

and ethical issues. Integrity is related to the concept of wholeness – including telling the whole truth and honoring commitments owed. Integrity is a condition precedent for establishing trust (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007) and encompasses loyalty to others, telling the truth, defining reality, keeping commitments, and honoring promises (Simons, 2002 & 2008). Corey (2016, p. 1) affirmed that kindness is “brave and daring, willing to be vulnerable with those we disagree” and “neither timid nor frail.”

Employee commitment is related directly to the integrity of an organization’s leaders (Senge, 2006). The confidence that employees will be treated fairly and kindly has a predictable impact on employee willingness to produce extra-mile performance and the creative initiative that create competitive advantage (Christensen, 2016). HRPs who combine kindness with integrity create HRM systems that reflect their commitment to both individual and organizational potential (Senge, 2006; Pfeffer, 1998; Beer, 2009).

Kindness and Competence

Competence in performing HRM functions and in creating systems that reflect organizational values translate those values into a culture of high trust and demonstrate HRP knowledge, skill, and ability (Pfeffer, 1998). Competence involves technical proficiency, interpersonal skill, and the ability to achieve desired outcomes (Mayer, *et al.*, 1995). The integration of kindness and competence create an additive effect on organizational performance (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008; Levin & Cross, 2004).

For HRPs to contribute as resources to individual department goals, they must become subject-matter experts about tasks performed and understand how to help personnel to acquire and apply performance-related job skills (Beer, 1997). Competent HRPs also help people to refine their skills and acquire critical knowledge essential to performing their responsibilities (Mitchell, Obeidat, & Bray, 2013).

Ethics and Kindness

Scholars have observed that HRM policies and the role of HRPs are inherently ethically-related (Wiley, 2000; Hosmer, 1987). Valentine and colleagues (2013) explained that HRPs directly impact employee attitudes toward ethics by their actions, policies, and practices. As a leadership quality of HRPs, kindness can be examined in context with seven ethical frameworks commonly used to evaluate behavior. The following is a brief summary of each of these ethical frameworks, including general comments about how each framework relates to the construct of kindness.

- 1. Utilitarian Ethics** is a framework of normative ethics that defines the morality of actions by their utility, outcomes, and consequences. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are generally agreed to be the advocates of this ethical framework (Carroll & Buchholz, 2014). The instrumental outcome of utilitarian ethics is framed in terms of achieving “the greatest good for the greatest number.” Utility involve the amount of benefit or pleasure accrued together with the absence of loss or pain (Winstanley, Woodall, & Heery, 1996). According to this framework, the most morally-correct choice is the one that produces the optimal good, net benefits, or utility. The moral difficulty in utilitarian ethics, however, is in measuring the incremental value of net utility or loss.

Kindness as a utilitarian behavioral choice of HRPs is evaluated in context with its ability to produce not only greater benefits, as perceived by employees who are treated kindly, but better outcomes for the organization as measured by the value of wealth created

(Schulman, 2001). Kindness has the potential to be a contributor not only to the quality of individual relationships, but to an organization's product or service quality; its level of customer satisfaction; its influence on the creation of a new product, process, or service innovation; and increased profitability (Pfeffer, 1998). Thus, leadership behavior which is most utilitarian optimizes organizational wealth creation – and the empirical evidence confirms that when HRM systems treat employees with high regard, trust, and respect they generate the greatest profitability, improve customer service, and achieve higher quality (Pfeffer, 1998; Beer, 2009).

- 2. Virtue Ethics** describes an ethos of personal character developed by Plato and Aristotle which advocates the value of virtuous character traits as the moral obligation in creating a better life (Russell, 2013). Yearley (1990, p.2) defined virtues as actions that lead to “recognizable human excellence (creating) an instance of human flourishing.” Cameron (2011) described this flourishing as the foundation of virtue ethics and a key responsibility of leadership. Virtues comprise just and decent ways of living in the pursuit of excellence (Solomon, 1992; Sherman, 1991).

As a virtue, kindness focuses on treating others with their best interests in mind without being condescending or submissive in so doing (Corey, 2016). Aristotle defined virtues as the appropriate balance between two vices or excesses (Gottlieb, 2011) and explained that virtues and vices were both voluntary decisions to act or not to act – with those choices imposing a moral responsibility on an actor.

Parsons (2016) indicated that was an important contributor to a healthier organizational culture and greater organizational success, consistent with the findings of positive psychology. Chun (2005) also found that kindness manifest as empathy, integrity, and warmth, was correlated with effective organizational performance. HRPs who adopt kindness as a personal virtue and who incorporate kindness within their organizations create relationships that increase employee satisfaction and commitment while improving overall performance. In context with the strategic role of HRM, wise HRPs recognize that kindness enables them to honor transformational duties owed to both their organizations and its employees (Covey, 2004).

- 3. Universal Rules Ethics** advocate an inspired set of moral rules that govern action and achieve a greater good for society and for organizations within it (Hosmer, 1995). Kant (1959) argued that logic and rationality in examining choices were required to make an ethical decision, and that such choices must be based upon universal rules or “categorical imperatives” which guide one's actions. But Kant's (1959) universal rules also apply to the treatment of individuals, who Kant argued should always be treated as means in and of themselves and never as ends to the achievement of personal or organizational means. Lamsa and Takala (2000, p. 391) reported that “good will, and only good will, can be universalized” according to Kant.

Translating universal rules to HRM, organizations and HRPs have a moral duty to treat employees as “yous,” or valued partners, rather than as “its” or commodities and cost-centers to be minimized (cf. Block, 2013; Buber, 2010). Creating an organizational culture of good will, according to the principles of universal rules ethics, is a fundamental concept of high performance and high-trust work systems and consistently shows that such HRM systems benefit both employees and the organizations within which they work (Huang, et al., 2016; Ning, et al., 2015; Muduli, 2015).

- 4. Individual Rights Ethics** set forth an articulated list of rights that ensure personal freedoms within a social context (Hosmer, 1995). Such freedoms include the right to act, work, think, and behave without retribution as members of society and as a result of societal and legal standards. In governing organizations, those rights are often protected by governmental authorities such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). But individual rights also mean the right to grow, to make choices, and to learn from mistakes made.

Winstanley and Woodall (2000) called for HRPs to be more sensitive to the individual rights of employees. Newman and colleagues (2016) found that employee-oriented HRM systems positively impact extra-role behavior but that compliance with legal rights alone had minimal impact. When individual rights are extended to include the right to be empowered participants, Guerci and colleagues (2015) found that employee involvement increased the quality and benevolence of the organizational climate from the employees' perspective. Thus, expanding the concept of individual rights to include the right to excel and to become one's best builds trust, enhances commitment, and creates a win-win relationship for organizations and their employees (cf. Covey, 2004).

- 5. Ethics of Care** or relationship-based ethical perspectives emphasize the importance of "care and responsibility in relationships" as the driving forces of moral decision-making (Gilligan, 1982, p.73). This focus on the moral significance of relationships is acknowledged as a moral perspective which values people, choice, and responsibility as governing values in ethical decision-making. Care encompasses meeting the needs of oneself and others, rather than relying primarily upon a set of societal rules (Gilligan, 1982). Thus, the "voice of care" is provided as a contrast to the "voice of justice" in weighing philosophical priorities. The logic of the ethics of care is that relationships trump rules because of the interdependent nature of people who are reliant upon others for their welfare (Gilligan, 2008). Recognition of others' needs, accepting responsibility for those needs, responsiveness to others' needs, and competence in responding are key elements of the ethics of care (Tronto, 2012).

Schumann (2001) incorporated the ethics of care in his discussion of ethical HRM. He explained that the moral principle of the ethics of care is that a "moral obligation is not to follow impartial principles, but rather to care for the good of the particular individuals with whom the person has concrete special relationships" (Schumann, 2001, 104). The ethics of care requires an employer to honor duties owed to employees to protect their best interests rather than to take advantage of employees or do them harm (Schumann, 2001). Clearly, kindness and the ethics of care are closely-related concepts and a growing body of evidence affirms that treating employees well equates with increased commitment, high performance, and long-term value creation for organizations (Beer, 2009).

- 6. Religious Injunction Ethics** advocate that compassion and kindness must accompany honesty, truthfulness, and temperance and that moral decisions must be based upon religious precepts (Hosmer, 1995). This ethical perspective is common to many religious beliefs across the world and reflects a belief that doing good benefits the entire community and is congruent with Divine Will. The "Golden Rule" of reciprocal treatment — doing unto others as you would have them do unto you — is often cited with regard to this ethical standard (Donaldson & Werhane, 2007).

HRPs incorporating the ethics of religious injunction often do so out of a desire to apply practical normative rules accepted by society as the basis for ethical decision-making (cf. Cathy, 2007; Hosmer, 2010). These HRPs may suggest that the principles of love, repentance, and forgiveness should appropriately apply to the context of management (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Kostenbaum, 2002). HRPs who view themselves as ethical stewards committed to the welfare, growth, and wholeness of others are comfortable with the kindness and compassion of this ethical perspective (Caldwell, Hayes, & Long, 2010).

- Economic Efficiency Ethics** are derived from the economic perspective of Adam Smith and seek to maximize profitability (Hosmer, 1995). Stieber and Primeaux (1991) opined that this ethical standard was a practical paradigm for business ethics and decision-making. A risk of adopting this economic paradigm for organizational ethics is that doing so may focus the organization on maximizing profit rather than on the pursuit of an organization’s underlying values and purpose. Collins and Porras (2004) provide evidence that a focus on profit-making actually results in lower economic returns than making organizational values and mission the primary priority. Thus, they advocated that organizations focus on serving their customers well, performing with excellence, and honoring their proclaimed values – and that economic success will be a natural byproduct of that focus (Collins & Porras, 2004).

Although many HRPs will adopt the ethics of Economic Efficiency because of its natural alignment with the profit-making goals of business, those HRPs may also fail to fully understand the nuances of optimizing long-term wealth creation and will choose to create a transactional rather than a transformational or transformative ethical relationship with employees (Covey, 2004; Pfeffer, 1998; Bennis & Nanus, 2007). For those HRPs who do not fully comprehend the importance of maximizing commitment and trust to ensure competitive advantage, their perspective will be to maintain a traditional, arms-length relationship with employees and will fail to integrate social and financial values to optimize wealth creation (cf. Paine, 2002).

All seven of these ethical perspectives have practical value for HRPs. *Table 1* integrates the seven ethical perspectives with the six elements of kindness and provides insights about how each ethical point of view emphasizes the priorities of kindness in a slightly different manner.

Table 1: Integration of Ethical Perspectives with Elements of Kindness for HRM

	UTILITARIAN	VIRTUE ETHICS	UNIVERSAL RULES	INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	ETHICS OF CARE	RELIGIOUS INJUNCTION	ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY
AUTHENTICITY	Seeks to optimize win-win outcomes	Treats others genuinely.	Honors principles without pretense.	Genuinely seeks best interests of others.	Demonstrates genuine care and responsibility.	Treats others as they wish to be treated.	Recognizes that kindness creates commitment.

HUMANITY	Knows treating others kindly brings returns.	Values people as “Yous”	Understands value of treating others justly.	Seeks to ensure rights of all are respected.	Loves others as valued partners.	Honors the Golden Rule.	Cares about helping others become their best.
RESPECT	Acknowledges role of mutual respect in creating a team.	Acknowledges value of others as individuals.	Honors the obligation to treat all persons fairly.	Protects rights but also is courteous and compliant with policies.	Values others interpersonally by actions and words. Balances candor and consideration.	Does no harm and honors intent of rules.	Builds mutual respect among all.
PERSPECTIVE	Understands “win-win” and optimization.	Self-aware about own virtues and areas to improve.	Follows the spirit of rules, policies, and systems to honor others.	Is consistently fair to all and protects every person’s best interests.	Accepts people where they are but helps them to improve.	Refrains from letting problems undermine values.	Recognizes value of both short-term and long-term value creation.
INTEGRITY	Diligent in seeking best outcomes but not at expense of people.	Understands that virtuous principles are modeled to inspire trust.	Keeps commitments and honors the truth when candor is needed.	Zealous in working for others’ best interests.	Honors relationships and demonstrates unending caring.	Loves others and works for their welfare, growth, and wholeness at all times.	Uncompromising in seeking optimal outcomes while honoring people’s needs.
COMPETENCE	Stays informed about consequences of actions and helps problem solve.	Uses intelligence to seek outcomes that help others become their best.	Constantly seeking knowledge and creates a culture that inspires confidence.	Protects rights of all, including helping others to improve where needed.	Develops interpersonal responses best suited to needs of people of different types.	Demonstrates high awareness of consequences of systems and responds in others’ best interests.	Creates a culture that encourages learning, growth, mutual regard, and cooperation to optimize short-term and long-term results.

As HRPs recognize the complexity of their relationships with employees and the ethical duties owed to them, the importance of kindness and its six elements becomes clearer. O’Malley (1998) had observed that most people are unaware of the potential power of kindness in helping others to discover their greatness.

Contributions of the Paper

Kindness as an ethically- and morally-based leadership concept has identifiable value for HRP practitioners seeking to build commitment, increase trust, and achieve organizational goals. The following are four contributions of this paper:

- **It reinforces the importance of kindness as a moral and ethical virtue.** Kindness is a key element of trustworthiness (Mayer, et al., 1995), and honors the expectations of employees that they will be treated fairly and compassionately (Rousseau, et al., 1998).
- **It explains six key elements that enhance the meaning of kindness.** Clarifying the meaning and nature of kindness gives the construct greater richness and helps explain its ability to create flourishing organizations (Cameron, 2011).

- **It integrates kindness with seven well recognized ethical perspectives.** In this integration, the ethical and moral nature of kindness become clearer and easier to recognize as duties owed to employees while also honoring HRPs duties to their organization (Beer, 2009).
- **It provides a foundation for practitioner application and scholarly research.** Explaining the nature of kindness as a moral duty of HRPs enables practitioners to honor their ethical and moral responsibilities. Identifying the obligations of kindness provides opportunities for scholars to engage in thoughtful research about high performance organizations and leadership responsibilities (Pfeffer, 1998; Beer, 2009).

Conclusion

In his wise and poignant book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl observed that there is a space between stimulus and response in which each of us make choices. Frankl explained that those choices affect both our growth and our freedom (Frankl & Winslade, 2014). By being kind, HRP leaders have the opportunity to help others by choosing to respond in ways that achieve both organizational and individual goals and that reflect a humane and caring understanding of the complexity of relationships with employees. As HRM systems treat employees kindly as valued team members, that kindness unlocks the tremendous potential that lies within individuals and creates the commitment that is the key to competitive advantage and high performance (Beer, 2009). By honoring relationships and being kind to employees, HRPs optimize the best interests of their organizations and its employees as ethical stewards and transformative leaders (Bennis & Nanus, 2007; Caldwell, 2012).

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