



Leader, Community and Mission – the Triangle of Ignatian Leadership

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The paper is an attempt to articulate the defining features of Ignatian Leadership and to clarify what might distinguish it from other brands of leadership without lapsing into motherhood statements and worn-out *clichés*.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The Ignatian leadership style that is presented is grounded in Ignatian spirituality, which is a source of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. Hence, the research problem was formulated: how can Ignatian leadership be implemented in everyday practice? The method of critical analysis of sources was applied.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The paper argues that Ignatian Leadership is, in fact, a radical form of servant leadership, since the Ignatian Leader is at the service not only of the Community, but also – and for Ignatius of Loyola, even more fundamentally – of the Mission entrusted to that Community.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Concretely, it proposes a conception of Ignatian Leadership as a three-way relationship among the Leader, the Community, and the Mission, in the process, illustrating what *magis* and *cura personalis* might mean in one's exercise of leadership, but also, spelling out, in light of these relationships, the key functions of the Ignatian Leader.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Ignatian leadership is a form of servant leadership insofar as Ignatian Leaders ought to prioritize serving the Community that they lead over their own interests. However, what distinguishes Ignatian Leadership from servant leadership is its explicit and non-negotiable prioritization of service of the Mission as well.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **IGNATIAN LEADERSHIP, MAGIS, CURA PERSONALIS, SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, JESUIT**

STRESZCZENIE

Lider, wspólnota i misja – triada ignacjańskiego przywództwa

CEL NAUKOWY: Artykuł stanowi próbę przedstawienia cech definiujących przywództwo ignacjańskie i wyjaśnienie, co może je odróżniać od innych rodzajów przywództwa, z pominięciem utartych schematów.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Prezentowany ignacjański styl przywództwa jest zakorzeniony w duchowości ignacjańskiej, której źródłem są *Ćwiczenia duchowe* Ignacego Loyoli. Stąd postawiono problem badawczy: jak przywództwo ignacjańskie może być realizowane w codziennej praktyce? Zastosowano metodę krytycznej analizy źródeł.

PROCES WYWODU: W artykule podkreśla się, że przywództwo ignacjańskie jest w istocie radykalną formą przywództwa służebnego, ponieważ ignacjański lider służy nie tylko wspólnotcie, ale także – a dla Ignacego Loyoli nawet bardziej fundamentalnie – misji powierzonej tejże wspólnotcie.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Została zaproponowana koncepcja ignacjańskiego przywództwa jako trójstronnej relacji między liderem, wspólnotą i misją, przedstawiając, co ignacjańskie *magis* i *cura personalis* mogą oznaczać w praktyce przywództwa, ale także określając kluczowe funkcje lidera inspirowanego się *Ćwiczeniami duchowymi*.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: Przywództwo ignacjańskie jest rodzajem przywództwa służebnego w tym sensie, że liderzy ignacjańscy powinni przedkładać służbę wspólnotcie, której przewodzą, nad własne interesy. Jednak tym, co odróżnia przywództwo ignacjańskie od przywództwa służebnego, jest wyraźne i niezbywalne nadanie priorytetu również służbie misji.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **IGNACJAŃSKIE LIDEROWANIE, MAGIS, CURA PERSONALIS, ĆWICZENIA DUCHOWE, JEZUICI**

Introduction

In recent years, the study of leadership has been characterized by a multidisciplinary approach that includes not only psychology and sociology, but also spirituality (Burke, 2006; Fry & Altman, 2013; Go, 2018). An approach to leadership that is based on a spirituality – one such as Ignatian spirituality – understandably puts relationships front and center. After all, spirituality, more than anything else, is about our relationship with God (Martin, 2012). For Ignatian spirituality, however, our relationship with God, while distinct, is inseparable not only from our relationships with others, but just as fundamentally, from our relationship with ourselves (Lowney, 2005). It is an insight characteristic of Ignatian spirituality, a spirituality that is firmly grounded on – and never divorced from – human psychology.

A basic principle in Ignatian leadership is that its exercise depends not only on the Leaders' relationship with the Community that they lead, but also – just as importantly – on

their relationship with the very Mission of the community. While in most of the literature about leadership, sufficient attention is given to the relationship between the Leader and the Community, too often the more essential relationship with the Mission remains but implicit and as a result, often ends up neglected.

The Leadership Triangle

We can conceive of Ignatian Leadership as consisting of a three-way relationship among the Leader, the Community, and the Mission.

Apart from the obvious relationship between Leader and Community, there is a third – and when you think about it, indispensable – party in the relationship: the Mission. The Mission is the very *raison d'être* for Ignatian leadership, a cause larger than both leader and follower (Ganss, 1970; Meissner, 1992).

In Ignatian spiritual direction, this third party is God. In Annotation 15 of his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola cautions the spiritual director against “stealing the scene” from God. It is God who must remain centerstage since our goal in spiritual life is to grow in our personal relationship with God (*Spiritual Exercises* #15).¹

For this same reason, likewise Ignatian Pedagogy cannot just be all about the teacher and the students (Go & Atienza, 2019). While rapport with the teacher is certainly necessary to learning, it is only when learners engage directly with the *content* that learning can happen.²

The Ignatian Leader’s Threefold Task

In Ignatian leadership, the most important party in this three-way relationship is the Mission of the Community. It is on this Mission that leaders consistently need to train their eyes, and it is to this same Mission that leaders hope to inspire the commitment of their Community. Indeed the Mission is the *raison d'être* for Ignatian leadership just as God and the subject matter are the *raison d'être* for Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy, respectively.

This leadership triangle can help us unpack what Ignatian leadership means and what it entails (Fig. 1). Each of the three relationships highlights an essential task of the Ignatian leader – namely:

¹ All references to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola will refer to the numbered paragraph in the text of Puhl (2000).

² This “I-Thou-It” relationship among the Leader, the Community, and the Mission is drawn from St. Ignatius of Loyola’s insight into retreat direction discussed in Annotation 15 of the *Spiritual Exercises*, when he points to a similar three-way relationship among the retreat director, the retreatant, and God. It has also been adapted as the basis for Ignatian Pedagogy.

- Leader and Mission: To discern the vision and direction of the Community
- Leader and Community: To shape personal relationships and the institutional culture in the Community
- Community and Mission: To build the purpose for the Community and its potential for the Mission

Figure 1: Triangle of Ignatian Leadership



In order to fulfill these tasks, the Ignatian leader needs to make sure that the threefold relationship in the leadership triangle is properly Ignatian.

The 6 Es of Ignatian Leadership

What differentiates Ignatian leaders from other types of leaders is the quality of relationships that they nurture not only with their Community, but also with the Mission that has been entrusted to them. One way of describing these relationships is by using a list of six core values that we refer to as the 6 Es.³

The Ignatian leader's relationship with the Community ought to be characterized by Empathy and Empowerment, while one's relationship with the Mission should be distinguished by Expertise and Enthusiasm. Moreover, the third and most essential relationship – the one between the Community and the Mission – should be defined by Engagement and Excellence.

³ The so-called 6 Es are adapted from their framework for Ignatian Pedagogy in: Go & Atienza (2019). These 6 Es are just as instructive when applied to Ignatian leadership.

As it turns out, the 6 Es are also a way of promoting the two Ignatian values of *cura personalis* and *magis* (for the Community as well as for the Leader) (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: The 6 Es of Ignatian Leadership



***Cura Personalis* through Empathy and Empowerment**

An Ignatian leader’s relationship with the Community ought to be defined by one’s *empathy* for the members and at the same time one’s *empowerment* of them. The two must – as much as possible – go together. You could think of these two Es as an operationalization of the Jesuit way of proceeding called “*cura personalis*.”

Cura personalis points to a “culture of the person” – a type of caring that is intended for “the whole person” and that takes into consideration the unique situation of the person: Every individual’s mind, feelings, needs, physical attributes, talents, even moods – all these, to the extent possible, deserve care and attention (Casalini, 2019).

In its original sense, *cura personalis* is the prescription given to superiors in terms of the care that they are expected to provide Jesuits under their care (Geger, 2014).⁴ However, it very much applies to the exercise of any type of Ignatian leadership – be it in schools, universities, parishes, social works, and other communities.

Ignatian Leaders can be agents of *cura personalis* by offering empathy and empowerment to the members of their communities.

⁴ For some time now, *cura personalis* has been identified as a defining feature of Jesuit education precisely because the educational ministry ought to be much more than mere academic development.

“Empathy” refers to our ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. For leaders, however, feeling some empathy for followers is not enough; this empathy needs to be communicated to – and *felt* – by the members of the Community. In short, not only should leaders actually be able to put themselves in the shoes of others’, the community members should also feel that their leaders are walking with them.

In establishing this much-needed personal connection, however, leaders should take care to avoid developing the habit of constantly running to their followers’ rescue and doing their job for them. Obviously, when leaders get carried away with empathy, the community may develop an excessive and unhealthy dependence on them.

The leaders’ empathy needs to be balanced by a commitment to empower the community. Empowerment means creating ample opportunity for the community not only to participate actively in its mission, but also to take initiative whenever possible or permitted. The Ignatian leader is, therefore, expected to build an organizational culture that leaves room for such initiatives and participation, while at the same time, standing by for any opportunity to coach those who are in need of guidance.

It is through their empathy for – and empowerment of–their community that leaders are able more effectively to fulfill their task of building personal relationships and organizational culture.

Personal *Magis* through Expertise and Enthusiasm

Ignatian leadership entails a commitment to something beyond the communities or organizations that we lead. This higher commitment belongs to the Mission. Ignatian leaders, more than anything else, are servants of this Mission, and are expected to cultivate a direct relationship with it.

The Ignatian Leader is expected to be an agent of *magis* as far as the Mission is concerned. *Magis* comes from the Jesuit motto of *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, which means “for the greater glory of God.” It comes from that series of questions in the *Spiritual Exercises* that St. Ignatius of Loyola suggests that retreatants ask in prayer before the Crucified Christ: “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?” (*Spiritual Exercises* #53).

Put another way: “How can I be of *greater* service to God and to others?”

The Ignatian leader is *magis*-driven—constantly on the lookout for opportunities to serve God and others more, but also better. In a sense, Ignatian leadership should breed an allergy to mediocrity and a constant quest for excellence. This spirit of *magis* is best manifested by the Leader’s drive to increase *expertise* on the mission, as well as one’s *enthusiasm* for it. Both are equally essential to exercising effective Ignatian leadership.

By “expertise,” I am referring not just to technical expertise specific to a field or discipline – i.e., knowledge and skills for which you can hire the services of another. Rather, I am referring to one’s personal appreciation of what is most essential to the Mission as well as one’s ability to reinterpret this Mission creatively given the changes of the times.

It is a minimum requirement for leaders to understand their mission and the very purpose of the institution or community that they lead. The last thing a community needs is a leader who doesn't understand the "why" of the community's existence. For this reason, leaders are expected to spend time reflecting on the mission so that they have a better insight into where the community should be going.

Aside from this kind of expertise in the mission, part of the work of Ignatian leaders is the equally crucial task of *communicating* this understanding to their followers in a manner that not only clarifies it to them, but also inspires them and infects them with the same enthusiasm. There are, in fact, situations in the life of an organization when such an enthusiasm for the mission far outweighs the need for the leader's expertise.

An important function of the Ignatian leader, therefore, is to discern the organization's vision and direction with expertise, and to communicate these effectively in order to inspire enthusiasm for the mission.

Communal *Magis* through Engagement and Excellence

The relationship between the Community and the Mission is the most crucial of the three relationships. After all, the Community needs to be loyal not to the person of the Leader, but above all, to their shared Mission.

As discussed earlier, a Leader's followers ought to commit themselves *directly* to the organization's Mission. Like the Leader, the Community is called to *magis* in serving the Mission. This commitment – which ought to be made in the same spirit of *magis* as the Leader – can best be characterized as one of *engagement* and *excellence*.

Engagement entails a voluntary commitment to serving the Mission and the willingness to put in whatever amount of time and effort it may ask of them. To be engaged in the mission is to become truly "partners in mission" – evident in the degree of self-investment that the members of the community are prepared to make for the sake of the Mission.

Excellence, on the other hand, refers to the *quality* of contribution that one actually makes as a result of one's commitment to the Mission. It is, after all, this commitment to the mission that is most concretely manifested in one's efforts in carrying out the Mission and contributions in promoting it – regardless of how great or small.

To promote a commitment to the Mission that is marked by excellence, the Leader should also be on the constant lookout for potential among the community members and for opportunities to develop these potentials.

What makes this particular relationship different from the other two – and much trickier – is that it is the one relationship over which the Leader exercises no direct control. Leaders simply cannot *cause* the Community to make their commitment to the Mission. They can do this only indirectly – only through their relationships with the Community as well as through their own relationship with the Mission. Only through the empathy and empowerment they reserve for the Community, as well as the expertise and enthusiasm

they cultivate and share about the Mission are they able to summon this engagement and excellence from among the community members.

In this triangle of Ignatian leadership, it is the Leader's primary task to inspire the Community to do as the Leader is doing: To commit to serving this higher cause. The Leader bears the primary responsibility in modeling this commitment and communicating its value and rationale. Only in making sure the Community is focused on the mission is any Leader able to exercise leadership effectively.

Hence, an important task of Ignatian leaders is to build not only the Community's passion for the mission, but also its potential for the sake of the mission. It is the ability of leadership to inspire engagement and excellence among the Community that will enable them to succeed in this challenging task.

Conclusion: Ignatian Leadership as Radical Servant Leadership

One way of synthesizing what we have discussed thus far is that Ignatian leadership is effectively a radical form of servant leadership.

In coining the term, Greenleaf (1977) makes a distinction between one who is a "leader first" and another who is a "servant first" (the servant-leader).

The "leader-first" is the more traditional – and stereotypical – type of leader – the "boss" who sits at the top of the pyramid and wields power and authority to issue orders to underlings.

While such traditional leadership is about the accumulation of power, servant leadership is more about prioritizing other people's needs. According to Greenleaf, these are the questions that guide the actions of the servant leader:

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 20)

It is clear then that Ignatian leadership is a form of servant leadership insofar as Ignatian Leaders ought to prioritize serving the Community that they lead over their own interests. However, what distinguishes Ignatian Leadership from servant leadership is its explicit and non-negotiable prioritization of service of the Mission as well.

As discussed, Ignatian Leaders are called to put themselves at the service not just of the Community, but also – and ultimately – of the Mission. After all, the spirituality on which Ignatian Leadership is rooted is "a spirituality of service" (Darmanin, 2005, p. 11). This primacy of the Mission is what distinguishes its brand of servant leadership as truly Ignatian. This prioritization of the apostolate has always been the guiding principle and the defining feature of the Ignatian charism.

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