

Chapter 4

Character Strength Development of Leaders in Cyberspace

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ABSTRACT

Leadership development in cyberspace presents new challenges within an abstract interactive environment. The flexibility and versatility of virtual spaces offers many freedoms from ordinary rules and restrictions. Examining relevant signature character strengths under the high six virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence provide guidance for virtual leadership. Aspiring authentic transformational leaders must continue their awareness of selfhood and society in cyberspace milieus by opening their human apertures while leveraging their signature character strengths.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century has deluged humankind with a tsunami of technological advances that have placed an infinite amount of information at our fingertips anytime and anywhere. With the availability of notebooks, tablets, smartphones, or other mobile devices, anyone can remain “connected” all day long and never miss a minute of any type of informational updates. Furthermore, the technology required to generate virtual environments (VE) has matured at an accelerated rate over the last decade. Driven primarily by the gaming industry, users have sparked the demand for greater realism, intuitive interaction, and enhanced usability for today’s virtual engagement (Hale & Stanney, 2015).

According to Moore’s law, there have been multiple doublings of computer power in our current time span. Today, human-machine interfaces consist of a variety of multimodal display devices such as: visual, auditory, haptic, and olfactory displays used to provide information to VE users in addition to multimodal input devices used to control movement throughout the virtual world. These input sensors allow the ability to capture various physical responses such as eye gaze, gestures, facial expressions

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Figure 1. Virtual campus

Source: Image Credit Andrew Stricker.



(Hale & Stanney, 2015). These trends pose unique challenges for the way we promote the leadership and character development of individuals who must interact with their followers in VE. Will human interactions be the same in these abstract environments? How will these trends affect future human interaction, engagement, ethics, character strengths, and the ability to lead in cyberspace? This chapter attempts to answer these questions by exploring the intersection of leadership and character development within the context of VE and other forms of advanced information technology (AIT).

CYBERSPACE

What is cyberspace? Maybe the real question is *where* is cyberspace? Some say it is the place where email conversations occur. Some say it is the space between the phones or the indefinite place where human beings meet and communicate online. The word “cyberspace” was coined by the science fiction writer William Gibson in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer* to refer to his vision of a global computer network linking people, machines, and multiple sources of global information, enabling one to navigate through a virtual space (Gibson, 1984). The word “cyber” refers to the science of *cybernetics* derived from the Greek verb “Kubernao” meaning to steer. Further, it describes the idea of not only navigating through a space of electronic data, but having control over much of the data as well. Additionally, Gibson’s descriptions of cyberspace were not limited to passive spaces of data (such as libraries), but connected communication channels to the real world that permitted these cyberspace navigators to interact with that world.

Moreover, the word “space” provides several directions for this nebulous environment. First, it allows us to expect an infinite extension of information such as the existing levels of data available on the Internet. Next, space promotes the notion of freedom of movement without any restrictions. Lastly, space implies direction, movement, and dimension. This latter concept can be further illustrated in the use of *virtual reality*, whereby a three dimensional (3D) space is generated by a computer allowing the user to immerse and interact within a 3D space as they would in a real or physical world. Present day interpretations of *cyberspace* may include some of the descriptions described previously, reference for

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