DYNAMICS OF LEADERSHIP – Concept & Style

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Introduction

The dictionary definition of a Leader is that of one who leads or goes first. A separate definition would develop out of the idea of one who leads i.e. one who motivates. Thus it is very difficult to separate out theories and concepts of Leadership and Motivation. The leader, to fulfil their role has to know how to motivate people and must seek ways to do this so as to maintain their role as leader. Many theories and styles of leadership have emerged since the end of the 2nd World War, as people's attitudes to leadership, motivation and management have developed and changed to a more intelligent level.

Ideas of Leadership

In the dynamic corporate world it's largely observed that some managers and supervisors gain the best efforts of their staff while others are only able to obtain a moderate amount of co-operation or even attract open hostility? The answer lies in the analysis of the varying concepts and styles of leadership.

1. **Attribute Theory -** Leadership as an attribute of the individual.
   This view of leadership suggests it resides in personality traits or attributes of the individual. In any situation where leadership is appropriate, the person with the largest number of desirable traits emerges as the leader. There is a fair amount of consensus about which personality traits correlate with leadership effectiveness. 'Big Five' Trait theory suggests conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, open to experience and neuroticism. Other traits linked to effectiveness are humility and humour and the trait which has attracted the most attention in recent years is charisma, regarded as the essence of leadership.

2. **Likert's Leadership Style -** In most industrialized societies there have been increases in expectations for openness, access to information, collaboration, communication and consultation. The model of democratic - autocratic leadership is a complex construct in leadership studies. This refers to the way in which decisions are taken; whose needs in the organization are met and what characterizes the relations between leader and follower.
   Rensis Likert (1961) presents four systems of relationships in the democratic Vs autocratic dimension:
   - **Exploitative Autocratic**- This style comprises of legitimate, formal relationship using coercive and punitive methods to gain control.

- **Benevolent Autocratic**- In this control is gained by use of rewards. Power in both the above systems rests at the top with no scope of consultation.
- **Consultative**- There is two way communication in this system.
- **Democratic**- Here, the emphasis of leadership is on the creation of supportive, friendly interpersonal relationships based on trust and participation.
  Likert's prescription to organizations was to move towards Democratic system ,claiming that this had a significant impact on organizational effectiveness.

3. **Fiedler's Contingency Theory-** It's a situational approach, which distinguishes leadership behaviour from style. Fiedler believed that leadership behaviour is a specific response a supervisor can make in a particular situation. Whereas, leadership style and consistencies in the patterns of responses across different situations was a relatively fixed feature of individuals, which reflected a supervisors motivational make-up. Fiedler proposed a framework of different situations, which could be identified by analyzing three major elements:
   - **Leader-group relations-** If the leader-group relations were good, the leader was accepted, qroup members were loyal and communication was easier.
   - **Task structure**- Some are routine tasks and have one approach to a single situation, while others are more complex.
   - **Position Power**- This is indicated by the legitimate authority of the leader.
   Fiedler's findings state that the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on the situation and this view is still upheld by most of the psychologists and leadership trainers.

4. **Charismatic or Transformational Leadership-** Burns was the first leadership researcher to give a comprehensive explanation about charisma and distinguished between leadership and management. As per him, managers are power holders, who have by virtue of their position, capacity to influence others. On the other hand, leaders are able to induce followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations , the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers.
   Burns describes this as Transformational leadership. This is a deep and powerful process where one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.
   Core components are: charismatic communication style, communicating a vision, implementing a vision, individualized and consideration. Transactional leadership is simply a mutual exchange for economic and political reasons between leader and follower. Charisma is not a trait, what is central to charisma are the two-way process of projection and transference. While transference stimulates our dependency needs, projection allows us to

attribute the leader with our own desires and fantasies. From this perspective, all leadership is potentially charismatic but some leaders are more aware of these processes and may actively encourage them. While some leaders can use these processes constructively, others are ultimately destroyed by them.

Changing Perceptions of Leadership - Thought Leadership

According to Dr.Mitch McCrimmon, a chartered psychologist, conventional Leadership theory is out of sync with today's knowledge driven world. There is a shift in the power from the top down to force of personality and the quest for dominance is being replaced by power of innovation and widely dispersed knowledge.

In the new context leadership is directed up as much as down. In other words, leadership can be shown to peers or upwards to superiors. This is aptly called 'Thought Leadership', which ideally illustrates what it means, to show leadership irrespective of position, personality or authority. It reflects a drastic change from the earlier views about leadership as being heroic and hierarchical. In today's business context, knowledge driven organizations are those that compete primarily on the basis of rapid innovations, where everyone needs to be initiating new directions, much as in guerrilla warfare. Such leadership is directed up and sideways by innovative workers. Senior executives are facilitators or investment brokers deciding which ideas to back. In any market powered by rapid innovation-software, telecommunications or consumer electronics, front line knowledge creation (innovation) is the primary source of competitive advantage in such industries. If it is accepted that leadership generates new directions and that such direction emerges through front line innovation, then leadership in this context must be at least as much bottom up as top down.

Traditionally, we would refer to the ideas fed up the line as suggestion box material for the real leaders to decide upon. However, if we are to develop a radically new understanding of leadership, we must begin by suspending our conventional viewpoint of what it means to lead. Older theories of leadership focus on what it takes to get to the top of an organizational hierarchy. Most primitively the power of such leaders is based on brute strength. Modern leadership theories still focus on what it takes to dominate a group but the relevant power has shifted from brute strength to the force of personality. Hence, such leaders are necessarily seen as visionary and inspirational. The power of 'thought leadership' differs from brute strength and the force of personality. Traditional leadership theories have always focused on static characteristics of persons because such power is a relatively enduring trait. Being a leader means having what it takes to achieve group dominance, commanding influencing skills are central. Conversely, the ability to come up with an innovative idea cannot be monopolized by any small set of individuals or even maintained for more than a moment by any one person. Often the idea itself carries the day, especially if its value can be demonstrated. Here, inspirational influencing skills may be useful but they are no longer central, no longer part of the very meaning of leadership.

For example, it is easier to champion a product innovation than to win the allegiance of an entire organization to a new way of working because you do not need to appeal

to people's fundamental values or emotions. The value of small-scale product or process innovations can often be demonstrated easily and they are often very local. Hence, leadership in this domain is small scale, temporary and not necessarily based on larger than life influencing skills. The meaning of such leadership can therefore be restricted to the initiation of change. Thought leadership does not have to be defined in terms of the influencing skills it takes to dominate the entire organisation.

Leadership in the world of rapid innovation is ephemeral and fickle. The rapidly shifting nature of thought leadership suggests that we should no longer talk about Leaders at all because leadership can shift rapidly from one person to another. Front line individuals and teams must find their own directions. Hence, leadership in today's business must increasingly be a front line, but non-enduring, non-hierarchical activity.

Traditional leadership theories take in their domain the running of large organizations, large-scale organizational change, the world of politics and warfare. It is in these domains that heroic leadership is often required. The realm of technological innovation or thought leadership is not so dramatic. It is more incremental and not hierarchical. Being widespread, thought leadership cannot be monopolized by a few heroes. A different theory of leadership emerges when we look closely at how thought leadership works. Developing such a different understanding of leadership gives us a general theory that can better account for leadership in both domains. It helps us to see what is wrong with traditional conceptions. It is not that heroic leadership never occurs or is unimportant. The claim is that basing our general understanding of leadership on the model of the hero striding the large stage gives us a distorted view of what leadership really means.

Conclusion

McCrimmon rightfully argues that leadership is still about power, but it is now the power of knowledge creation, a much more democratic factor rather than the power of formal authority, physical strength or the force of personality. The concept of thought leadership assists to change how we think, not to dominate us. The key purpose to regard 'thought leadership' is to pursue leadership as a function that is open to anyone to perform. The idea that leadership is the initiation of change rather than its implementation is a good example of this point. Thought leadership does not necessarily lead to anything being implemented beyond a change of thinking and thought leaders often do not have the power to implement their ideas in any case. This change in perspective requires us to cast aside the old idea that leadership is about achieving group goals. Leadership initiates new goals. Managements serve the function of implementing them.

References

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