

WHY THE POSITIONAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE HINDERS THE ABILITY OF ORGANIZATIONS TO DEAL WITH COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC SITUATIONS

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The 21st century competitive global environment is dynamic, complex, and multi-cultural, and necessitates a more rapid response to changes to survive (Rost, 1991). The most effective approach for dealing with this is to involve employees in the various leadership processes for the organization (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Raelin, 2003). However, the leadership role described is not the common view of leadership based on authority. Rather, the required leadership is based on everyday influence processes by anyone in the organization derived from knowledge and the recognition for the need for a specific change. This paper shows how the perpetuated perspective of leadership as something reserved for persons of authority actually inhibits the very organization behaviors called for by the complex and dynamic situations in which they work.

Leadership has been studied and debated for a number of years with many attempts to define what it means and how leadership theory should be developed and used in organizations. An extensive examination of leadership literature (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978, 1998, 2003; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Goethals & Sorenson, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977; Harter, 2006; Heifetz, 1994; Hickman, 1998; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Hollander, 1992; House & Aditya, 1997; Jacobs, 1970; Locke, 1991; McCrimmon, 2006; Murrell, 1997; Northouse, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Raelin, 2003; Rost, 1991; Selznik, 1957; Stogdill, 1948, 1974; Uhl-Bein, 2006; Yukl, 2006) leads to two conclusions: (a) the predominant leadership perspective is based on authority positions with associated assumptions about appropriate leadership traits, characteristics, and behaviors and (b) everyday individual leadership behaviors in organizations have not been adequately addressed in the literature, and little is commonly understood about the factors that encourage and facilitate the leadership behaviors that support organizational effectiveness (Heifetz, 1994), particularly in complex and dynamic work environments.

Nature of the 21st Century Work Environment

The 21st century competitive global environment is dynamic, complex, and multicultural, and necessitates a more rapid organizational response to changes to survive (Rost, 1991). Many organizations currently operate in an environment where time is a critical resource (Brue et al., 2001; Butler, 1995; Stalk & Hout, 1990). More and more, organizations are challenged to change what they do and how they do it at a rapid rate in order to remain relevant and effective in the dynamic and uncertain world (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001; Hannan & Freeman, 1984). This rapid rate of change and high uncertainty are well beyond the abilities of the individual manager to effectively deal with them and know what appropriate actions are required at any given time (Cashman, 2008; Childs & McGrath, 2001; Davis & Blass, 2006; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2007; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; McCrimmon, 2006; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Senge, 1990). Therefore, organizations operating in this environment require proactive involvement of employees in decisions previously reserved for executives and managers. As organizations increasingly face dynamic and complex situations, there is an increasing need for individuals not in positions of authority to be involved in decision making, solving problems, and acting on opportunities. Many organizations are distributing the essential leadership functions among different members of the team or organization (Yukl, 2006).

Specific Organizational Behaviors Required for the 21st Century

There are certain behaviors common to organizations successfully navigating the dynamic and complex terrain of the 21st century work environment. While this may not be an exhaustive list, and success is not guaranteed if these are pursued, there is ample evidence that traditional approaches to organization structure, planning, decision making, and problem solving are not sufficient to survive and thrive.

Adaptability, Flexibility and Agility

Turbulent environments have long been regarded as compelling organizations to deal with uncertainty more proactively (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Stacey, 2001), to exploit change as an opportunity (Drucker, 1999) and to evolve their business processes and management philosophies frequently (Stalk, 1988; Eisenhardt, 1989; Strader et al., 1998; Senge & Carstedt, 2001). However, organizations often have difficulty changing strategy and structure (adapting) quickly enough for keeping pace with the demands of uncertainty and change (Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001).

Organizational agility has been defined as the ‘the successful exploitation of competitive bases (speed, flexibility, innovation pro-activity, quality and profitability) through the integration of reconfigurable resources and best practices in a knowledge-rich environment to provide customer-driven products and services in a fast changing market environment’ (Yusuf et al., 1999, p. 37). At the heart of the agility concept is speed and flexibility.

Brue et al. (2001) found that agile workforces have been claimed to capitalize on skills by proactively innovating their skill base just ahead of need. They argued that organizations need to scan their environment and interpret its dynamics continuously with a view to anticipating future skill requirements.

Collaboration, inside and outside the organization, are key to enabling agility, as well as empowerment and autonomy in decision making (Goldman & Nagel, 1993; Kidd, 1994; Van Oyen et al., 2001). Decentralization of decision making between mostly autonomous organizations have been found to facilitate speedy coordination and action (Gunasekaran, 1998).

Brue et al. (2001) identified several principal attributes of agile workers, as listed below:

- Responsiveness to changing customer needs
- Responsiveness to changing environment conditions
- Speed of developing new skills and competencies
- Speed of innovating management skills
- Effectiveness of cooperating across functional boundaries
- Ease of moving between projects
- Employee empowerment for independent decision making

While the need for agility and flexibility is generally not disputed, the positional leadership perspective creates a culture and paradigm where managers are expected to be the driving force behind the necessary changes (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). As previously discussed, managers are routinely late in recognizing the need for change. In many cases, most employees know the truth about certain issues and problems within the organization yet dare not speak that truth to their bosses. This is exacerbated by a ‘don’t rock the boat’ mentality, or intolerance for dissent or questioning. Upward flow of information is filtered or discouraged, based on several factors: manager fear of negative feedback or manager implicit beliefs. In dynamic and complex environments, the employees closest to the work are the first to recognize the need for change, but are generally precluded or discouraged from voicing their views and exhibiting the very leadership behavior required of the situation (Morrison & Milliken).

Fostering Innovation

In addition to adaptability and agility, organizations dealing with complex and dynamic situations consistently perform better if they are able to foster and sustain innovation (Gundling, 2000). As Thomas Watson Jr. of IBM stated: “If an organization is to meet the challenges of a changing world, it must be prepared to change everything about itself except its basic beliefs as it moves through corporate life. The only sacred cow in an organization should be its basic philosophy of doing business” (Collins & Porras, 1994, p. 81) Indeed, the drive for progress is never satisfied with the status quo, even when the status quo is working well. It is an internal force that does not wait for the external world to indicate when it is time to change (Gundling, 2000).

Gundling (2000) argued that what is most consistently critical to the creation of value for commercial enterprises is innovation. Innovation occurs most often and is sustained in an environment where employees are empowered and encouraged to act on their own initiative. Innovation cannot be directed or managed. It occurs when and if employees are provided the freedom to follow an idea or hunch. According to Gundling, the company 3M emphasize sharing ideas and technologies to generate unexpected discoveries or realizations. Employees are encouraged to seek out input and perspectives from completely different parts of the company. Substance of 3M vision is based on the deep-rooted idea that one person with a bright idea and the willingness to work hard enough, can make a difference.

The successful innovative companies create the environment where innovation can and does occur repeatedly over many years. Kanter, Kao, and Wiersema (1997) stated there are three major components of innovation; invention (getting ideas), development (turning ideas into reality), and getting the product on market and making it a huge success. A striking aspect of one approach is the idea of placing most of the emphasis on empowering and enabling the employees rather than the profitability of the company. Executives of these companies recognize the first leads to the latter. The key to enabling innovation is based more on how the talented members of the organization are treated, rather than the craftiness in which the executives manage stock value (Gundling, 2000).

Gundling (2000) explained the 3M HR Principles to foster the culture of innovation: respect the dignity and worth of individuals; encourage the initiative of each employee; challenge individual capabilities; and, provide equal opportunity. He further explained that the concepts of innovation that fit 3M best are in fact the ones that reconcile and integrate alleged opposites such as incremental and breakthrough, established organizational processes and entrepreneurial skunk-works. Kanter, Kao, and Wiersema (1997) explained that networking, internally as well as externally, is a critical aspect of being an innovative company (p. 22).

There is an extremely important point to understand about this different perspective on innovation – it is not about the executives or senior managers. It is about the employees and how they are set free to explore and follow their hunches. It is about relying on the leadership of each employee, not just the executives. Just about anyone can be a key protagonist in building an extraordinary business. Invalid is the debilitating perspective that the trajectory of an organization depends on whether it is led by people ordained with rare and mysterious qualities that cannot be learned by others. All individual executives eventually leave the organization. Yet, innovative companies prosper over long periods through multiple life cycles of products (or services) and executives. Therefore, the positional leadership perspective stifles the very nature of what is required for an organization to be innovative.

Learning Culture

Kanter, Kao, and Wiersema (1997) stated that arrogance is a major enemy of innovation, as it precludes a willingness to learn (p. 27). The 21st century knowledge-based economy requires knowledge creation and sharing, not knowledge management. Learning is a critical element of adaption and agility. Without learning, individuals and organizations will keep doing what they did before; and fail. Frese (1997) notes that dynamic self-reliance is increasing in value as an employee characteristic necessary for success of 21st century organizations. The critical components of dynamic self-reliance are the ability "to acquire knowledge and skills by oneself and to self-start motivational processes" (p. 399). Knox (1993) argued that the accelerating pace of technological and social change makes ongoing workplace learning a requirement of most businesses. The ability to learn on the job is a necessary skill.

In the complex and dynamic workplace, self-directed learning is a key aspect for development of employees. (Smith, et al., 2007). Cho (2002) wrote, "adult learners who are self-directed are more likely to recognize the importance of interaction with others, to share others' knowledge, and to build new networks with others". The implication is that the primary thrust of employee development is not directive teaching, but, instead, the facilitation of learning. The goal of teaching, therefore, is to develop an employee to the point where he or she functions as

self-sufficient learning individual and may interact as equal with other employees and create, acquire and transfer knowledge within organization (French, Bell, & Zawacki, 2005).

Confessore and Kops (1998) argue that there is a link between the individual capacity for self-directed learning (SDL) and the organizational culture that enhances and prepares the foundation for that learning to occur. The characteristics that are reflected for SDL to happen in organizations in the literature are the tolerance for errors with an emphasis placed on innovativeness and creativity, a participative style of leadership and the delegation of responsibility to the individual for learning, support for learning initiatives that are linked into organizational goals and values, open communication that provides for collaboration and teamwork with both internal and external learning sources, and provisions to find opportunities and situations for individual learning to happen.

There is a strong theoretical and empirical basis to the position that SDL requires specific skills, a strong motivation and a lot of initiative from employees (Brookfield, 1986; Clardy, 1992; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Foucher and Brezot (1997) found that many organizations have shifted to employee development approaches requiring a greater involvement of individuals in their own learning. Also, they found that implementation of a decentralized, participatory management style is conducive to the emergence and development of SDL in work environments. However, the dominant expectation that leadership is a manager or executive trait or behavior reinforces the idea that employees are not expected to show initiative and engage in learning unless told to do so. Unless employees are actively encouraged to engage in self-management and self-directed learning, few will take the risk.

Participative Decision Making

Pearce and Conger (2003) note that leadership previously was conceived around a single individual, called the leader (actually the manager or executive) and the vertical relationship between that individual and the subordinates, often called followers. Leading in the current change-seeking age is complex and challenging (Childs & McGrath, 2001) and increasingly beyond the capabilities of the individual manager or executive (Cashman, 2008; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Senge, 1990). As organizations increasingly face dynamic and complex situations, many are distributing the essential leadership functions among different members of the team or organization (Yukl, 2006).

Houghton, Neck, and Manz (2003) determined that decentralization of power, authority, and decision-making responsibilities provides organizations the flexibility and rapid response capabilities necessary to remain competitive in high-tech or service-oriented markets. Organizational power decentralization is creating unprecedented opportunities for organizational members at all levels to take greater responsibility for organizational performance as a whole (Shipper & Manz, 1992).

Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) wrote that new models of leadership recognize that effectiveness in working relationships do not depend on individual (positional) leadership but rather on leadership practices embedded in interdependencies at different levels within the organization. McCrimmon (2006) argued that taking empowerment to the next level by exorcizing dependency—where employees do not just wait for managers or executives to provide direction—is a form of leadership based on action and influence not on authority. Complex situations require this kind of influence leadership. Therefore, among the

organizational characteristics for effectively dealing with change and complexity are the acts of involving and facilitating others to engage in sharing change ideas (Cashman, 2008).

Pearce, Yoo, and Alavi (2004) provided evidence showing that shared leadership was a more powerful predictor of team performance than vertical or individual leadership. However, the leadership role described is not the common view based on authority; rather, the required leadership is based on everyday influence processes by anyone in the organization derived from knowledge and the recognition for the need for a specific change. They also found shared leadership to be a more useful team dynamics and perceived effectiveness predictor than vertical management. Burke, Fiore, and Salas (2003) wrote that shared leadership was found to be more effective than vertical leadership in increasingly complex organizations.

To Raelin (2003), the need for leaderful practice is based on the need for timely leadership. For a 21st century organization, leadership needs to be exercised when and how the situation requires, not when the manager is available. This perspective is more consistent with the needs of the 21st century environment. Raelin's mutual model of leadership incorporates everyone in leadership that transforms leadership from an individual property into a leaderful practice across the organization.

Raelin (2012) proposes that leadership be viewed as a practice, rather than as traits or behaviors of selected individuals. Although, even he falls victim Leaderful practice does not just merely present a consultative model of follower empowerment where executives allow managers to participate in executive decision making. Leadership, to Raelin (2003), is broadly distributed among sets of individuals, to include peers, where it is viewed as an activity rather than the attributes of a single individual who fills a position of authority. In this paradigm, leadership is not determined by authority, but instead by an individual's capacity to influence peers and by the leadership needs at a given moment or situation (Pearce & Conger, 2003). It is recognized that each member brings a unique perspective, knowledge, and capability to the team. This means that managers must be inherently collaborative and compassionate in order to enable the organization to take advantage of the unique talents of each member at the right time and place, and enable and facilitate leadership by all (leaderfulness; Raelin, 2003).

A less obvious point, raised by Raelin (2003), is that the focus should not be on how organizations, as a whole, change their view of leadership, but how every individual, especially managers, reconsider their perspective and understand leadership differently as an individual-influencing process. Each individual recognizes that they are responsible for the overall organizational success and act in a leaderful way to more effectively deal with complex and dynamic situations. This means that a well-developed sense of self in each member enables them to develop a deep consideration of others, thus being open to other's contribution at the right time.

Therefore, in this new model of leadership, some preparation is required for employees to assume responsibility and participate in leadership processes in their organization (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Raelin, 2003). The challenge is how to know if employees are ready to participate in the leadership process. Do they possess the required understanding and intention to participate in leaderful practice? When involving employees in the leadership process, the concern should be much less on leadership effectiveness, and more on the initiation of leadership behavior.

Raelin (2003) distilled readiness characteristics for leaderful practice to four principles that apply across individual, team, and organization: (a) be sure that leaderful individuals and communities have the necessary resources (financial and information) that will allow them to assume empowered decision making accountability, (b) add a learning component to prepare all

involved to assume shared responsibility, (c) ensure that there is a commitment to allow leaderful behavior to proceed without taking back control at the first misstep, and (d) be selective—leaderful practice should only be accorded to those ready to assume the responsibility. This distillation suggests that Raelin may be confusing some aspects of management with leadership, or at least not completely letting go of a paternal positional leadership perspective common in the dominant discourse view.

Leadership is Not Management, and Management is Very Important

A significant problem with the traditional leadership perspective is it contributes to the confusion about the difference between management and leadership, or that the distinction is even necessary. This confusion has facilitated missed opportunities for gaining significant insights into the leadership process (Heifetz, 1994). Because the confusion between management and leadership continues to this day, inquiries into leadership traits are unreliable in differentiating those traits associated with management from those associated with leadership. According to Rost (1991), many authors have distinguished between leadership and management (Graham, 1988; Jacobs, 1970; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Selznick, 1957; Zaleznik, 1977). Rost cited Selznick (1957) as the first who wrote that “leadership is not equivalent to office-holding or high prestige or authority or decision-making” (p. 130). He defined management as a relationship based on authority, and leadership as a relationship based on influence. Reicher, Platow, and Haslam (2007) considered leadership in terms of the ability to shape what followers actually want to do as opposed to management, which enforces compliance using rewards and punishments.

Jacobs (1970) argued that management “resides in the relationship between positions in an organization, and derived from consensually validated role expectations for the position incumbents involved” (p. 231). Leadership was described as an interaction between persons in which one presents information of a sort and in such a manner that the other becomes convinced that his or her outcomes will be improved if he or she behaves in the manner suggested or desired.

Rost (1991) described management as unidirectional authority and leadership as multidirectional relationships. He further summarized the distinctions. Leadership is about (a) the influence relationship, (b) leaders and followers, (c) intending real changes, and (d) intended changes that reflect mutual purposes. Management is about (a) the authority relationship, (b) managers and subordinates, (c) producing and selling goods and/or services, and (d) the goods/services resulting from coordinated activities.

Yukl (2006) described qualities of a manager as concern for “stability, order, and efficiency whereas leaders value flexibility, innovation, and adaptation” (p. 5). According to Yukl, managers devote more of their efforts to getting people to accomplish the task at hand by increasing performance, while leaders focus on gaining consensus relative to doing the right thing.

McCrimmon (2006) viewed management as an act of implementation and argued that managers can be enabling, supportive, and empowering, rather than just controlling. He also cited Magretta (2003) in writing that nothing would get done without organization and management. McCrimmon defined management and leadership as functions, rather than styles or traits. Even though disagreement still exists, viewing leadership through a non-positional perspective can facilitate the distinction between leadership and management.

Limitations of the Positional Leadership Perspective

Although many organizations assume the leadership needs to come from the top, the research of Collins and Porras (1994) found no evidence to support the hypothesis that great leadership is the distinguishing variable for agile and adaptive (innovative) organizations. New models of leadership recognize that effectiveness in working relationships do not depend on individual positional authority, but rather on leadership practices embedded in interdependencies at different levels within the organization (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). These new models conceptualize leadership as more of a relational process, a shared or distributed phenomenon dependent on social interactions and networks of influence. Therefore, among the characteristics for effectively dealing with change and complexity are the acts of involving and empowering others to demonstrate leadership behavior (Cashman, 2008). McCrimmon (2006) argues that taking empowerment to the next level, exorcizing dependency, where employees do not just wait for managers or executives to provide direction, is a form of leadership based on action and influence, not on authority. Complex and dynamic situations require this kind of influence leadership.

What drives success in the new complex, dynamic, and hyper-competitive world is rapid innovation and better ideas (McCrimmon, 2006). Complexity and rapid change render managers separated by multiple layers or distance ineffective or irrelevant. New ideas typically do not emerge from the top, but rather from the fringes or in the midst of interactions in the organization. However, the dominant leadership perspective expects ideas to come from management. Disempowered employees see thinking as the boss' job, and they are just there to do what they are told. They allow the boss to take away from them any responsibility for the success of the organization. This puts the full burden of the leadership responsibility on the boss. McCrimmon argued that conventional leadership theory is wrong and damaging. In that, it portrays leadership as an impossible combination of skills and traits, and then claims that anyone can learn to be like that. The truth is that leadership cannot be learned. What can be learned is the skill of communicating and persuasion, which makes the act of leadership more effective, easier or less risky.

The problem with the dominant perspective, as McCrimmon (2006) sees it, is the tendency to expect leadership (change ideas) only from authority figures leading executives to; dismiss the ideas or suggestions of potential rivals or subordinates perceived as a threat to sustaining their grip on power, and delay successor development. He wrote that "the paternal model of leadership is a colossal waste of human energy in a complex, competitive world where all employees must be fully functioning adults able to make independent, confident decisions" (p. 82).

Traditional leadership theory is the major obstacle to employee engagement and competitive advantage in the 21st century (McCrimmon, 2006). It holds up impossible acts to follow as the paradigm cases of leadership, then it defines leadership in terms of powerful, inspiring influencing skills and, finally, it says anyone can learn to be like that. Traditional leadership theory creates employee dependency on managers for direction, which hinders employee involvement in generation of new ideas and innovations. Waiting on managers for change ideas takes too long, if it happens at all. The damage is missed opportunities. The dependency on manager direction, facilitated by manager tendency to 'protect their territory,' also tends to keep employees focused on the activities of their own unit, rather than the

organization as a whole. This further hinders employee ability to see situations where the status quo should be challenged or a new idea shared.

Survival in the complex 21st century requires challenging the status quo, something managers are not inclined to do if they want a promotion. Managers drive stability and efficiency in the effort to get stuff done at the lowest cost. Leadership is about challenging the status quo. Managers tend to focus on meeting goals and getting promoted. Generating new ideas is secondary at best. Even if someone has a good idea, if they don't have the courage to share it, there is no leadership. So, any actions to diminish the courage of the idea generation person will diminish the chance for leadership – and survival. It only makes sense that a person who thinks they are expected to share ideas will more likely do so than someone who thinks management is not expecting or does not desire them to share ideas.

McCrimmon (2006) notes that leadership literature is fixated on the person at the head of a group, studying what notable leaders do. This drives study to focus on personality differences, which, as McCrimmon argues, only addresses the effectiveness of leadership, not the initiation of leadership. Those traits attributed to hero leaders are charisma, strong vision, outgoing (extravert), etc. These are the behaviors that actually diminish or inhibit others from sharing ideas or challenging the vision of the hero leader. Looking to people with certain traits creates the conditions where we overlook others who may have exhibited the kind of leadership needed in complex and dynamic environments, but just did not act. Focus on positional leader also misses the point that there are two leadership domains; content and process. Content leadership promotes new products, services or markets. Process leadership promotes better ways to get the work done.

Leadership as an Influencing Process

McCrimmon (2006) and Raelin (2003) wrote that complexity demands leadership from everyone. Leadership is another important element of agility and adaption in an organization. Although many organizations assume the leadership needs to come from the top, the research of Collins and Porras (1994) found no evidence to support the hypothesis that great leadership is the distinguishing variable for agile and adaptive (innovative) organizations. This means a different kind of employee is needed for agility and adaption, not a strictly compliant one.

Employees need to develop a sense of responsibility, curiosity, and, above all, leadership to become innovation champions without senior manager intervention. Raelin (2003) provided some great insights on how to do this. He discussed what is required to develop individuals in an organizational structure towards more leadership in all, or what he called leaderful practice. He proposed a mutual model of leadership that incorporates everyone in leadership that transforms leadership from an individual property into a leaderful practice where leadership is distributed across all members of the organization.

Raelin (2003) described an alternative organizational approach to leadership where the classic approach for dealing with complex conceptual situations is shifted from only the highest levels to involvement of individuals at lower levels. This encourages all members to share in the process of deciding what and when changes are required and how to implement them. His model requires all members of the organization to exhibit flexibility and adaptability in dynamic environments, and offered recommendations for how individuals could be mentored to develop these characteristics. Raelin encouraged promotion of shared leadership, team work, and

collaboration on decisions, beginning with less complexity and graduating to the more complex situations as the team develops more capability and confidence.

Moving beyond Raelin (2003), McCrimmon (2006) described leadership strictly as an influencing process: not about or based on being in charge. He is critical of the dominant leadership perspective: as the drive to be the best or top person in an organization. McCrimmon argued that leadership “is an occasional act, like creativity, not a role. Leadership is an impact on a group that moves it to change direction (p. 31).” It can come from outside the group or from someone in the group.

McCrimmon argues further that taking empowerment to the next level, exorcizing dependency, where employees do not just wait for [the manager] to give direction, is what leadership is all about. He further argued that the only two requirements for showing leadership are; having a change idea worth saying, and having the courage to say it. He completely disassociates leadership from the person of authority, usually referred to in the organizational context as the supervisor, manager or executive. Each time a person persuades another to do something different, they are demonstrating leadership. Leadership has nothing to do with getting things done or being in charge. That is the role of management.

As leadership is an act, not a role, it is also very temporary, lasting only as long as it takes to convince another to act (McCrimmon, 2006). Once the other decides to act accordingly, the need for leadership is ended. He also emphasized that leadership is not based on any traits, but only on having something to say (a change idea) and the courage to say it. The intention to communicate a change idea (leadership) can range from a minor change to something very significant, requiring major change or transformation.

McCrimmon (2006) explains that we are working in the midst of a knowledge based existence, where it is not the possession of knowledge that matters. Rather, it is the ability to generate new practical knowledge or applications that have value to others. Therefore, leadership must be knowledge-based as well. New ideas, rather than brute force or personality, is the basis for leadership. Thought leadership is the triumph of substance over form, where substance is a new idea. Form is the way people express their ideas. So, McCrimmon is arguing that how people express their idea is much less important than the power of the idea itself. This is because, according to his idea of leadership, some ideas can be communicated by example or demonstration, rather than a well-presented argument. What matters is that the individual believes in their idea enough to have courage and persistence to share it.

According to McCrimmon (2006), courage is a trait, but also a type of motivation. Someone needs to really want to share an idea to overcome the innate desire to fit in with the group and take the risk to propose an idea that challenges the status quo. The most important point to understand is that leaders do not make decisions, they promote ideas. Managers decide and implement. McCrimmon actually argues that executives usually make decisions based on ideas presented or proposed to them. This perspective makes them followers, rather than leaders. And the ones proposing the ideas are the actual leaders. This is why the distinction between managing and leading is so important.

According to McCrimmon (2006), courage is a trait, but also a type of motivation. Someone needs to really want to share an idea to overcome the innate desire to fit in with the group and take the risk to propose an idea that challenges the status quo. The most important point to understand is that leaders do not make decisions, they promote ideas. Managers decide and implement. McCrimmon actually argued that executives usually make decisions based on

ideas presented or proposed to them. This perspective makes them followers, rather than leaders. The ones proposing the ideas are the actual leaders.

McCrimmon (2006) also argued that leadership cannot be developed; only fostered. Managers and executives are developed. The one factor related to leadership that can be developed is influencing skills. Good influencing skill is not critical to having leadership, but it does contribute to leadership effectiveness. An individual with poor influencing skills can still demonstrate leadership. They will just be less successful or have to exert more effort to have the same impact as someone else with better influencing skills. So, managers who think they want to develop leaders, can only develop individuals with better influencing skills. To have more leadership, organizations must foster leadership behavior, which involves empowering and encouraging individuals to share ideas.

Conclusion

Leadership has been extensively debated and studied without reaching a consensus for a common definition or theoretical basis (Gothels & Sorensen, 2006). While this ongoing debate sustains scholarly careers, an examination of the organizational characteristics and behaviors common among successful organizations shows that the sustainment of the positional leadership perspective is now proving unhelpful to organizations struggling to survive in a hyper-competitive, dynamic and complex world. A more serious investigation of leadership as an influencing process based on a change idea is warranted to make leadership studies relevant to organizations.

About the Author

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