LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES

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Abstract

The paper attempts to deconstruct the leadership phenomenon, with emphasis on competencies needed by leaders to thrive in turbulent situations. Leadership has been a topic that has garnered a lot of interest from researchers over the years and as a result of this, there are significant number of literatures on the subject matter. However, there have been discrepancies in definition on the role of leaders, specifically on leadership styles and which style of leadership can be considered the best for all situations. While, there are several discussions amongst scholars on the most appropriate leadership style for all situations, the paper attempts to elucidate that one major thing scholars agree on is that leadership involves inspiring followers to achieve organizational objectives specifically evaluating the role of leaders as organizational stewards and their ability to restore the balance between an organization and its environment in turbulent times.

Keywords: Leadership, Turbulent Times, Teamwork, Organizational Stewardship

Introduction

To discuss the topic of leadership, particularly in turbulent times, it is important to understand the concept of leadership. The notion of leadership and its influence on a society and institutions have always been a topic of debate which has garnered a lot of attention from various scholars and researchers. Situations and circumstances in the world today have affected the ground rules that determine viable norms, values, systems and processes. Additionally, with the technological advancements in the world today, market globalization, availability of information in terms of speed, rapid changes that can affect a society’s business domain and increase in competition, there has been an amassed need for a leader who can restore the balance between an institution and its environment. In addition, Mohammad, AL-Zeaud, & Batayneh (2011) emphasized that societies and institutions require a clear vision which believes that success and excellence requires careful leadership. Leadership according to Ekvall & Ryhammar (1998) is conceived as the process in which an
individual or groups of people are influenced to move in a certain direction and the way the leadership is executed has a strong impact on the group. Aarons (2014) stated that leadership is important in shaping the perceptions of workers, the rate at which they respond to organizational changes and their acceptance of innovation.

Some societies have experienced poor leadership because their structures, customs and history believe leadership to be a notion where there is an authority figure or a ‘master mechanic’ successfully designed to ensure that a ‘machine’ runs well. Contrary to the aforementioned, Ardichvili & Kuchinke (2002) believe that leadership involves having the ability to motivate followers by inspiring them, offering followers challenges and encouraging personal development. Consequently, Thite (2000) placed emphasis on the fact that understanding the importance of leadership in increasing the level of productivity and efficiency of individuals or groups of people, there should be an effective leadership style that is efficient in all situations. This paper will attempt to critically discuss different types of leadership styles. Additionally, teamwork and organizational stewardship will be elucidated. Competencies for thriving in turbulent situations will be discussed, and a conclusion will be drawn based on the analysis of the above mentioned.

**Leadership Styles**

Understanding how to proceed in turbulent times is crucial for effectiveness and efficiency of survival in such times. It is important to understand leadership styles because, the most urgent task for leaders in tough times is to take a break from speed and change, pause and understand what style is necessary for bringing them and their followers out of such trying times. Valdimir lein who overthrew the Russian monarchy in 1917 understood the phenomenon of pausing and recharging (Beaudan, 2002). He understood that coping with anxiety and tasking change, he needed to pause and recharge. In 1921, after four dreadful revolutionary reforms, he stunned his critics and followers by ushering in a New Economic Policy (NEP) that terminated all reforms and reversed the clock on all radical changes his party had originally initiated (Beaudan, 2002).

In 2002, Goleman expounded the leadership typology. The typology encompasses a comprehensive description of different leadership styles and their application in varying situations. Moreover, in societies today, many leaders exhibit one or more of the styles described under Goleman’s typology. Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2002) defines the authoritative style of leadership as one which involves mobilizing workers towards a clear vision and allowing flexibility of innovation in achieving the goal. On the other hand, the democratic leadership is another style which is described as a mode of leadership which requires immediate compliance in a drive for achievement. Burns & Carpenter (2008) noted that the coercive style of leadership is associated with negativity because it demands immediate compliance with directives from leaders. Contrary to Burns & Carpenter (2008), Greenfield, (2007) argued that even though it might not be suitable at all times it might be appropriate in situations and circumstances where there is crisis (Turbulent times).

Goleman (2002) describes the affiliative style of leadership as one which involves communication and commitment amongst a team. An affiliative leader is a person who strives to make workers happy by building trust and strong emotional bonds with them and this in turn leads to loyalty from the followers to the leader. Conversely, the coaching style of leadership can be defined as a leadership style which involves developing the skills and abilities of a team. It also helps individuals within the team identify their strengths and weaknesses (Goleman, 2002). Also, according to Okafor-Dike (2008), it is crucial for leaders to be able to categorize their followers based on McGregor (1960)’s theory X and Y. The theory enunciates that X workers are not as enthusiastic towards tasks as Y followers. Y followers are people who see work as a natural phenomenon; they not only like working but seek it.

**Teamwork and Organizational Stewardship**

One of the primary tasks of a leader is establishing team roles and rules that will govern the conduct of the team. The ability to select, motivate, develop, retain and engage people is crucial to the success of any leader. Leaders in all sectors whether industry, Government, military or academia are always being challenged to do more with less. Consequently, issues in turbulent times can only be resolved by having a team with an
appropriate blend of leadership and management mindsets, specifically having the flexibility and adaptability to switch between roles and leadership styles. Furthermore, having a comprehensive understanding of the competencies of team members is also a crucial factor for overcoming challenges as a leader. During turbulent times, most people feel disconnected and demoralized. Therefore, it is important for a leader to strengthen the bond between teams. It is worthy of note, to mention that during times of uncertainty, people are hungry for leadership, which implies that a leader in such times, requires persistent focus.

In practice, over the years Scholastic researches have attempted to evaluate Belbin’s team roles particularly, when the topic of team management and roles come up. Belbin (2011) stipulated the categorization of team roles. Belbin (2011) stated that for a team to function effectively several roles are needed. In agreement with Belbin’s assertion, Senior (1997) emphasized that there is no perfect person; each individual has strengths and weaknesses. Belbin’s roles allow teams to function effectively because each person within a team is allocated a role according to their strengths while also building on individual weaknesses such that everyone within the team is indispensable. Critically, evaluating Belbin’s team roles it can be inferred that while there are clear benefits of allocating roles in a team, different problems seem to motivate different members of a team mostly their behaviors at different stages. Consequently, it becomes increasingly paramount for a leader to engage in further discussions with team members to explore individual capabilities more, as well as tendencies of how and what other ways team members can be engaged. Winstanley & Woodall (2000) in their research found that gaps can be identified in role allocations within a team. This can be done by engaging in thorough discussions with the team, evaluating individual strengths and weaknesses while concurrently analyzing the best ways to deal with weaknesses. Similarly, Brooks (2009) stated that teammates appreciate discussions because it allows and encourages them to appreciate each other’s strengths and characteristics.

**Competencies for thriving in turbulent situations**

Leading in turbulent times requires certain capabilities, because tough times are symbolic. They reveal the natural tendency a leader has to rebuild and tap new sources that will revitalize the society or institution as the case may be. For example, the terrorist attack of 9/11 in the United States created a lot of chaos; World Trade Center’s financial services were deeply wounded. The turning point for the Nation was when the leadership was able to re-affirm the nation’s core purpose and rebuild rather being passive in the face of danger. Another viable example was that found in an article by Beaudan (2002), during the desert storm, US army general “William Pagonis” had a clear vision; He was in charge of logistics, as a leader, it was clear to him that the stress buster needed by his crew was good logistics. For the purpose of this write up, three distinctive characteristics features needed by a leader for survival in turbulent times will be discussed. Firstly, a leader needs to exhibit resilient thinking skills. A leader needs to be able to pause and think critically in the face of crisis. According to Parolini, Patterson, & Winston (2009) the absence of visibility or withdrawal during crisis can have dangerous effects. It is worthy to note that leaders don’t usually have a say about the nature or gravity of adversity facing them. However, they have a choice about how they think and react to the conditions they face.

Secondly, reaffirming the vision, building capacity and strategy are competencies that give a leader competitive advantage for averting crisis. The point of having a clear vision gives a sense of direction, evaluating the beginning to the present and being capable of foreseeing the future. The aforementioned gives a leader the ability to influence events. In uncertain times, the fuel that powers the engine of a leader can be referred to as his capacities, which are the set of skills he displays. For obvious reasons, a leader’s personal efficacy, confidence and competence are skill sets that are crucial to ensuring a turnaround in uncertain times. The point of strategizing in practicing great leadership during turbulent times is to provide clarity about the most critical elements of change. This can be done by explicitly spelling out expectations and implications with the team. The Boston Consulting Group emphasized that societies are prone to an array of crisis and there is no one way to deal with crisis. This implies crisis must be defined and properly understood and a leader has to hold planning conversations with the team and ensure that the plan is understood in order to strategize incorporating the planned actions or steps.

Lastly, learning from success by building on experiences from good and bad times is a characteristic feature
that cannot be over emphasized. Leading in tough times encapsulates exhibiting a rebuilding purpose. This can be achieved by looking back and asking a critical question which is, what has been learnt from failures more than successes?, once the question can be answered, a leader should spend more time examining successes to determine how they can be repeated, improved and expanded. Additionally, to be able to riposte amid chaos, leaders need to understand, that it is vital to abandon old clichés and tell followers how contributing will make a meaningful difference. One characteristic that allowed immediate past president of the United States Barrack Obama excel in certain aspects as a leader was the fact that, He offered a different perspective. He gave his followers a core purpose, explained why it is valid and about change, and basically allowed the bridge to transport them into a “new” reality.

Conclusion

Finally, leaders need to recognize that to return to a state of normalcy during turbulent times, leadership styles, teamwork, organizational stewardship and crucial competencies are key aspects of their day-to-day operational procedures. Managing people, information and knowledge require adequate understanding of the key competencies highlighted in this write up. Additionally, managing change requires focus to motivate followers because followers might regress in times of change. A positive interpretation of negative situation increasingly allows a leader to spot inconsistencies and articulate them in times of crisis. When there is no logical flow of ideas, it becomes critical for a leader to elicit maximum cooperation from team members.

Data availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This research does not involve the use of human participants. Additionally, principles of ethical and professional conduct have been followed in writing this opinion article, relevant sources that were informative in producing this document have been sufficiently referenced.

Conflict of Interest

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

References


