

How to Cite:

Tedla, B. A., & Vilas B, G. (2022). An essence of leadership, its styles: A review and personal account commentary. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 175–183. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.5083>

An Essence of Leadership, its Styles: A Review and Personal Account Commentary

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Abstract---The paper defines leadership and highlights its essence and importance in the modern world, and also discusses the foundation, evolution and barriers of leadership from ancient times to present with relevant sources, reviews and commentaries. The main purpose of the paper is to show that leadership is a skill that can be developed and how to apply leadership styles situationally. The research also highlighted about various types of leadership, an implementation of leadership as well as various barriers of leadership. The study is based on the secondary data collected from various sources. Through discussions this study has brought about the leader should know when and how to implement various ideas.

Keywords---leadership, leadership styles, leadership implementation, leadership barriers.

Introduction

Some people might believe that the real test of leadership is exhibited during hard times. It seems that they are oblivious to the fact that crisis at any level is a byproduct of inept leadership that is produced during peaceful times. The way a leader behaves or practices at a particular time eventually determines the kind of situation to come up. With inept leadership, crises are likely to happen and it is hard to avoid them. Social, economic, cultural or political crises around the globe simply show that leadership has not been put rightly in place. Countries in the world, for instance, invest tremendous resources in the military instead of leadership development, and yet believe that they demonstrate effective leadership in all sectors. Since the future market of the globe is uncertain, nations should erect leadership as a pillar. As of this, the significance of leadership is equally important both in peaceful and crisis times. The noticeable difference could be

International Journal of Health Sciences ISSN 2550-6978 E-ISSN 2550-696X © 2022.

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Manuscript submitted: 27 Nov 2021, Manuscript revised: 09 Feb 2022, Accepted for publication: 18 March 2022

that the importance of leadership during crisis times (e.g., Covid-19) is highlighted and leaders act more consciously or frantic than ever; otherwise, the weight of leadership is equally indispensable at all times with no exception.

Why is that leadership only apparent during crisis times? The first and most important reason could be: because of complacency. During smooth sailing times, it seems that leaders are less interested in leadership development. The second reason could be: because leadership is a cultural construct, its definition or meaning becomes subjective. This reason is partly attributed to the leaders' confusion and in effect applying leadership wrongly. The purpose of this paper is, then, to conceptualize the general picture of leadership related to its main definition, scope and application. In doing so, the author aims to put a great deal of emphasis on the foundation of leadership with relevant theories and commentaries, so that it might shed light on the essence of leadership. Leadership is simple and natural if its definition, essence or importance is tied up to unconditional service.

Leadership in general

The discipline of leadership is broad in scope, complex in nature and daunting in implementation. Its definition varies from place to place, time to time, and from culture to culture. From historical and philosophical perspectives, leadership is in a continuous process of evolution. There are over 1000 leadership definitions, more than nine leadership styles and eight major leadership theories so far (Silva, 2016). Since leadership is a social and cultural construct, its definition brings forth complexities, pluralism and thus its application becomes somehow problematic or challenging. Howsoever leadership might be complex or daunting, its basic essence is rendering service. The key-term "service" stands high and wide in leadership, and surmounts all leadership definitions and concepts, for a simple reason that service, at any level, is the spine of leadership.

Leadership service might be defined differently by different scholars. The focus of leaders at any given time and place, could be conditional to any cause or interest (Summerfield, 2014). If we look at the leadership theories from the earliest to the latest, the central focus has been shifting from one person authority figure as in the case of great man theory to the followers' participation and transformation of individual talents. For instance, the traditional leadership focuses on serving organizations thrive with nominal employee consideration, while transformational or servant leadership, on the other hand, puts great deal of emphasis on developing talents to perform a better job. In other words, leadership has evolved from solo acting to public service. As a matter of fact, leadership service in this conference paper is the powerful force that happens when one discovers his/her potential to serve humanity unconditionally for the betterment of future generations. The big question is, however, how is service delivered by a leader either to organizations or individuals? The author opted to discuss the foundation of leadership before actually answering the question.

Foundation of leadership

Leadership history is as old as mankind, but the foundation of sense making leadership dates back to Plato's, Lao-tzu's times and other contemporaneous thinkers (Suze, 2016). The scientific leadership, however, came into existence with the help of Frederick Winslow Taylor and Scientific Management (early 20th century), R.M. Stogdill and Trait Theory (early 20th century), Kurt Lewin's Leadership Styles (1939), Max Weber and Charismatic Authority (1976), Fred Fiedler and the Contingency Theory of Leadership (1960's), Rensis Likert of Participative Leadership Theory (1967), Situational Leadership (mid 1970's), Martin Evans' Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (1970), Robert Greenleaf of Servant Leadership (1970 & 1977), Bernard Bass of Transformation Leadership (1980's to 2011) and Bruce Avolio and Fred Luthans of Authentic leadership (2008). The trend of leadership evolution as we have seen above, has been undergoing for centuries and still inchoate, but becoming better and better over the years. That could be part of the reason that why leadership definitions are numerous, incomplete and abstruse. The essential concept is, however, to improve upon subsequent leadership theories with the purpose of civilizing human actions and modernizing the way of doing business.

Leadership has been existing since ancient times when people started to learn to live as civilized communities (Suze, 2016). As people learn to live as communities, nations and reach out the globe, the need to find an approach to synergize human interests for a common purpose that benefits humanity as a whole, becomes immensely important. Leadership is, then, the science to explore, cultivate, manifest human talent to reality and eventually synergize it. In this case, leadership in general may show up itself as visionary leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, transactional leadership or leadership development. Leadership existed perhaps to help discover human potential and thereby attach a purpose to it and eventually to multiply it to infinite folds. In today's world, leadership has become more apparent with the technological advancement, commercial proliferations and social disruptions.

Modern leadership is all about service

Ancient leadership practices were leader oriented, such as great man theory, iron man, divine traits and the like. People, in the past, associated leadership with divine power. Service was exhibited through submissiveness. During the industrial revolution, for instance, workers could not think as important talents. Over the years, however, ancient leadership practices, have been challenged so much to the extent that leadership is not a position, title or authority, but rather an unconditional service. Although ancient directive leadership styles were standard or fashionable in their times, their popularity diminished somehow when followers started becoming assertive to push forward the nature of the working environment from blue-collar to white-collar jobs (Begley, 2007). Modern leadership service is not only a challenge to archaic leadership practices, it is also an empowerment of and challenge to followers to transform themselves from a serfdom mentality to democratic participation.

Genuine leadership service is inclusive and diversified. It relishes diversities. Modern leadership teams are run with integrative leadership styles (Winston & Patterson, 2006). Modern leadership service concocts or emanates from the realization that organizational cultures or working atmospheres are better with appropriate employees' participation, right conditions, resources and two-way of communication. By implication, modern leadership service recognizes employees' strengths for optimal outcomes and requires more leaders than bosses. The question, then becomes how do leaders practice leadership to deliver services rightly in the modern world?

Application of leadership: making sense of leadership styles

Leaders, in the past, could at least enjoy a relatively stable world, where change was at a much slower pace. These days, however, nothing seems predictive: the future is almost unimaginable; the present is fleeting without fully realizing it. From a customer perspective, leaders face up a great deal of expectations to meet customer satisfaction. From an employee perspective, leaders have to utilize time wisely to deal with a number of complex tasks while planning the future juxtapose (Steers, 2012).

Leaders carry out a number of things from setting goals to their actual implementations. The question is, however, what leadership style do leaders employ to meet expectations, execute plans and produce satisfactory outcomes. There are a number of leadership styles that leaders apply in a certain situation for a certain task. Throughout history, great leaders came up with particular leadership styles in providing direction, motivating followers and implementation plans (Sethibe & Steyn, 2015). There are many leadership styles, but in this paper, the author discusses the most common leadership styles: authoritarian, democratic, delegative, transactional, transformational and situational leadership styles with their advantages or disadvantages. Despite these leadership styles, questions still remain:

- What is the meaning of each leadership style?
- What difference or similarity exists between each leadership style?
- What advantages or disadvantages each leadership style has?
- How and when each leadership style is applicable?
- What fiasco could result when they are applied wrongly?

Authoritarian leadership style

This style of leadership is sometimes called autocratic. Authority resides in a single person. It is centered around the leader. Decisions are made by a single individual without consulting, and handing down to subordinates for execution with no questions asked. As its name indicates, a leader applies coercive power, imposes plans, directs employees and defines outcomes (James, 2020). Employees may have their sayings, but not that much as in the case of democratic leadership style. A leader who applies an authoritarian leadership style could be successful when employees need direction and also when he or she is knowledgeable about the task and team members.

Merits:

- Efficient strategy in time-constrained situations. A leader could make a quick decision without consultation
- Clear chain of command
- Mistakes in plan implementation can be reduced somehow
- Consistent outcomes and improved performance from employees are due to the feeling that a manager is watching.

Demerits:

- One way communication: top-bottom channel
- Strict directives could lead to employees' fear, rebellion or resentment
- Hinders creativity or innovation
- Minimizes team synergy and collaboration
- Team input is reduced
- Employee burnout or attrition
- An organization could be paralyzed in the absence of a leader

Democratic leadership style

The democratic leadership style is sometimes called participative. Unlike the authoritarian leadership style, the democratic leadership style seeks the involvement of team members in the decision-making process; each team member is important and included (James, 2020). In effect, employees feel a sense of ownership, responsibility and inclusiveness. The leader, of course, will normally guide and direct participative discussion processes. The leader applies a combination of expert and reverent powers. This kind of leadership style works better when a leader's communication skill is better and also when employees are comparatively skilled.

Merits:

- Multiplies employees' motivation and job satisfaction
- Increases retention of employees
- Brings forth creativity, a cohesive team and a high level of productivity
- High performing team
- Transparency, trust and two-way communication channels
- Positive working environment

Demerits:

- Decision-making process sometimes becomes time consuming
- High probability of leader's apologetic to employees
- Communication failure could happen when conflict arises
- Security issues may arise because of information transparency
- Poor decisions might be made if employees are not educated.

Delegative leadership style

The delegative leadership style is commonly called laissez-faire or hands-off style. Leaders delegate power or initiatives to followers. The delegative leadership style becomes successful when employees are competent enough, carry out

responsibility and relish working individually. Delegative leaders for some reasons trust and would like to empower team members. *The motto is: first create and articulate a vision; then build a really strong team and stay out of the way.* Delegative leadership style best works on top of an organizational tree where senior leaders appoint other experienced or skillful seniors to run respective departments (Marco et.al. 2013).

Merits:

- Creates personal responsibility
- Positive working environment
- Employees can take advantage of their competence, skills and experience
- Innovation and creativity, either at individual or group level, is highly appreciated

Demerits:

- Command chain is not properly defined
- Creates a difficult situation in adapting to changes
- Could cause disagreements, split or division among members
- It could lead to poor motivation and low morale
- Creates lack of accountability
- High stress level if subordinates feel unsupported
- Deadlines could be missed

Transactional leadership style

Transactional leadership style as its name indicates, it is the transaction between a leader and followers. A leader applies reward power and employs a variety of reinforcements such as reward, punishment and other exchanges to motivate followers and get the job done. This leadership style is very common in private, public or governmental organizations. It is kind of give and take leadership style: hire, reward or fire. The leader simply sets projects or goals and instructs team members how to execute them (Marco et.al., 2013). Team members are required to comply with established routines and procedures in an efficient manner.

Merits:

- Easy to follow and implement
- Specific, measurable, time bound, achievable goals and minimizes confusion of chain commands
- Production is probably increased
- Team members focus on reward systems

Demerits:

- Could create more submissiveness and boring working environment
- Innovation and creativity might be minimized
- Less concern about employees
- Creates more followers than leaders

Transformational leadership style

Transformational leadership style is a leadership by example. Transformational leadership style primarily focuses on how to inspire, transform and empower followers. A leader models a behavior, sets up clear goals and high expectations, and at the same time supports subordinates emotionally. Transformational leaders know their followers well, create a compelling vision laden with values and culture of no blame as the focus is on problem solving, not on who created the problems (Felfe & Liepmann, 2004).

Merits:

- Balanced goals: short-term and long-term goals are balanced somehow
- Vision focused on communication
- Places high priority on relationships and corporate vision
- Employs motivation and inspiration to move employees around
- High moral of employees
- Lower employee attrition or turnover rate
- High subordinate trust

Demerits:

- Could be ineffective in the beginning until trust is built
- Not detail oriented as leaders are characterized to inspiring
- Consistent inspiration, motivation and feedback could be time-consuming
- Transformational leadership at times could lead to the deviation of protocols or regulations.
- In rare situations, leaders could deceive employees by the name of transformation

Barriers of leadership development and implementation

As in any field, leadership has also a number of barriers ranging from personal stereotypes to cultural beliefs. Leaders, if not all, have misconceptions about leadership. Some of the common misconceptions of leadership, among others, are a position will make one a leader, everyone could be led the same way, leaders are not vulnerable, leaders have all the answers, education would make one a leader, elite clans are leaders, leaders are born, leadership is a masculine talent, leaders are extroverts and many more others (Holmes, 2017). Leadership, however, as many might think, is not a position or title, but a skill to serve humanity unconditionally. Like any skill in any field, it can be developed through diversified education, inclusive culture and creating a sense of belongingness.

Discussion and Summary

Leadership is a broad discipline; it is a multifaced construction of social and culture. Its definition varies over a period of time from theory to theory. In effect, there are many leadership styles as there are leaders, but could be categorized either by people focused or task focused. Authoritarian leadership style is more task oriented than people focus; democratic leadership style focuses on people and tasks; transformational leadership style puts more emphasis on people than

tasks; transactional leadership style focuses more on results, and delegative leadership style puts less emphasis on people and tasks.

The leadership styles discussed above, for instance, are not applicable equally all the time. Autocratic leadership style best works in military, when quick decisions are needed in emergency situations, failing organization is needed to turn around or existing supervision is lenient. Democratic leadership style, on the other hand, works best when subordinates are professionals or experts, for example, in medicine, technology and other technical experts. Otherwise, it is pointless to participate subordinates in a decision-making process, if they have no qualification. Unlike autocratic and democratic leadership styles, transformational leadership style best works when an organization has a proven leadership and strong long-term vision to accomplish in the future. Similarly, a delegative leadership style best works when a leader works with entrepreneurs, innovators, scientists and other self-initiated or driven talents to success. In other words, it best works when an organization has a proven track of high performance and solid skills from team members.

Since all leadership styles are not applicable all the time, situational leadership style comes into existence. At times, leadership styles might overlap, but a leader should know when and how to implement them. Situational leadership style is the application of a particular leadership style when and where is necessary (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). For example, when a democratic leader comes across an emergency situation, he or she is opted to autocratic leadership style for a quick solution. Although leadership styles come to most leaders by default or naturally, they should know how to use their power and authority to lead others and adapt to situations to avoid a failure. Genuine leaders know how to adjust their style based on situations.

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