

Analysis of becoming an effective leader



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Try not to become a man of success, but rather to become a man of value” – Albert Einstein. Becoming an effective leader means engaging in self – awareness. Only through this process can a leader truly understand the steps to take to become a better individual and a commander of an organization.

Leadership theories have guided the discussion of the author’s journey from ignorance to self – discovery and therefore, through these theories recommendations are made possible. The author has progressively displayed the gaps preventing effective leadership, reasons for this and ways to improve for future success.

Consequently, the author has listed future goals and is intent on making them a reality.

Introduction

1. 1 Leadership Defined

“ Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2009). For Northouse (2009), leadership is not a trait or characteristic that is found in only a handful of people. It is an interactive process whereby, the leader affects and is affected by followers. “ Influence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without influence, leadership does not exist.” (Northouse, 2009). In this light, both leaders and followers are involved in this process thus, leaders need followers and followers need leaders (Burns, 1978). In addition, leadership can only take place in a group context when the leaders’ efforts are directed to a goal.

Furthermore, leadership is not restricted to special people with inborn characteristics but is determined by the context and situation people are in and therefore, available to everyone. As postulated by R. Pearman (1998), “everyone, regardless of organizational status, has the capacity (the mental wiring) to lead effectively.”

1. 2 About the Author

The author is currently an Area Manager for a large and reputable retail company (Cadel Trading Limited) in Trinidad and Tobago. There are 42 retail clothes and shoe stores around the country in which the author has to visit regularly to carry out tasks such as: making recommendations to store managers concerning their productivity levels, observing and reporting the behaviour and attitudes of subordinate staff to report to the executive management team and monitoring and improving operations at each store. The organisation’s key selling point is that of customer service and brand differentiation. Therefore, having an outgoing, committed, motivated, willing and pleasant staff is critical to the organisation’s success.

The author is currently in this position for the last year. Prior to that, the author lectured at the University of the West Indies, Open Campus Division teaching the year one and year two Advanced Level CAPE Programmes. The author is learning and growing in the area of leadership and hopes in gleaning self-awareness further understanding and effectiveness will emulate from the author’s actions.

Using Kotter’s (1990) model for leadership the author has identified the parameters of their leadership position. In establishing direction for the

company, the author needs to develop strategies to improve employees' effectiveness, has to create a vision of customer service and its benefits to the company for employees and clarify and communicate the goals and objectives of the company to the subordinate staff. With respect to aligning the people in the organization, the author has to seek commitment from staff and engage in team building activities. Also, the author has to inspire and motivate employees on a daily basis to satisfy the needs of the company and allow room for the empowerment of employees.

Rationale – Key Leadership Issues

Upon analysis of Stogdill's (1974) Trait theory approach to leadership, the author has identified her key leadership weaknesses as: making concrete decisions and the inability to tolerate stressful situations which occur regularly in the business environment due to the inherent nature of the retail industry which deals with finding solutions to please dissatisfied customers.

In addition, although the author possesses the three basic skills (technical, human and conceptual) that a leader should learn and enhance postulated by Katz (1955), the author is not given room to nurture and develop the conceptual skill in the organization. The author is held in a middle management position where the technical and human skills are necessary however; the conceptual skills are used by top management in strategic planning processes for the organization. For Mumford et al (2000), leadership skills and knowledge are enhanced through career experience. As leaders move through their careers, the need for higher levels of problem solving and social judgments skills become inevitably more important and valuable.

Lastly, being a female leader in a patriarchal organization is problematic due to the fact that the author cannot be expressive, creative, use a participatory leadership style when the inherent leadership style by her male counterparts is autocratic and ultimately, such a culture serves in restricting the author from advancing into a top leadership position. Therefore, gender biases are critical to the effectiveness of the author's leadership role (Julie Indvik, 2004).

Objectives

To critically evaluate the author's current effectiveness as a leader.

To analyse the author's leadership using three broad aspects of leadership theory such as: Leadership Qualities or Traits, Leadership Skills and Women and Leadership.

To produce a personal development plan.

To make recommendations for future success as a leader.

Methodology

The author used both primary and secondary research methodologies.

Primary data was gathered by a leadership trait questionnaire which was used to produce a table and a peer review report known as the Johari Window.

Secondary data was collected from reflective exercises such as: a personality quiz and by performing a SWOT analysis.

Current Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership Qualities

Leadership qualities or traits are inherent in an individual and thus, are fixed attributes (Northouse, 2009). Looking at the SWOT analysis in Appendix A, Figure 1. 1, it can be seen that the author has gaps in the qualities that a leader should possess. Stogdill (1974) in a study on the relationship between leadership and intrinsic traits of leaders it was found that if applied to the right situations, some people have the qualities that can make them exceptional leaders. He identified these qualities as:

A drive for responsibility and task completion

Vigour and persistence in pursuit of goals

Venturesomeness and originality in problem solving

Drive to exercise initiative in a social situation

Self – confidence and sense of personal identity

Willingness to accept consequences of decision and action

Readiness to absorb interpersonal stress

Willingness to tolerate frustration and delay

Ability to influence other persons' behaviour

Capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand

Within the work environment the author found issues with making decisions in critical instances. This instability to commit to a decision coupled with the stressful nature of making decisions such that decisions made could potentially affect the profitability of the entire organisation leads to the author's emotional instability. Yukl (2010) argues that this emotional instability causes managers to become moody and display inconsistent behaviour due to outbursts of anger. This can undermine the interpersonal relationships with subordinates and peers. See Appendix B for the author's results on a personality test which shows a particular problem in this area.

According to McCall and Lombardo (1983), the author's lack of emotional stability can affect the agreeableness of the author with others. Even though the author may generally have a cheerful and optimistic disposition the sudden bouts of fury can undermine all the traits that lead to good interpersonal skills. For Yukl (2010), successful leaders are able to remain calm, confident and predictable during a crisis. This is a crucial problem experienced by the author.

However, even though the author is not able to make decisions quickly and confidently in stressful situations the author is able to admit to any errors in judgement. According to McCall and Lombardo (1983), when people make errors more time and energy is spent on covering up the mistake. However, very few people can own up to a mistake without fear of the consequences and fear of victimisation but the author is able to do this. This shows that the author has tremendous integrity even in the most difficult situations.

For instance, the author took it upon herself to authorize a shipment of goods to one of the stores that she was situated in, since the store manager was currently busy. This was an error in judgement since the shipment was for another store that was badly out of inventory. This cost the company added expenses since there were loss of sales due to the high demand for the product at the time, wasted time and resources by employees. The system to receive the goods can only be accessed by managers however; it is not uncommon for store managers to give access to stock clerks to receive shipments. The author could have easily passed the blame to the store manager or one of the stock clerks so as to remain blame free and not responsible for the lack of judgement. Incidentally, it is the store manager's duty to receive all shipments however; having good values, the author opted to inform senior management of the mistake on her behalf and was willing to face the consequences.

Northouse (2009) contends that integrity is an important leadership quality to possess. This implies that the author is honest and trustworthy as seen below in Table 1. 1 which has been tabulated from a leadership trait questionnaire that was filled out by the author and five other colleagues. The author has scored the highest in this area from the questionnaire completed by her colleagues. Leaders with integrity are inspirational to others because people become confidence in that they will do what they say they are going to do. They are loyal, dependable and not deceptive.

In addition, by looking at Figure 1. 1 below which depicts the use of the “Johari Window” technique put forward by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham

(1955) as an interpersonal communication and relationship heuristic exercise, the author was viewed by herself and peers to be trustworthy.

Among other things, the author is assertive and challenges the status quo as seen in Appendix A, Table 1. 1, the Leadership Trait Table 2. 1 and Figure 2. 1, The Johari Window. For instance, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and founder of Cadel Trading Limited sent a company-wide email implementing a change in “luxuries” allowed to the workers. Due to the economic downturn all water coolers and other toiletries allotted to the workers by the company would be stopped to decrease operating costs. The author realised that this was a direct infringement of the OSHA Act 2006 (The Occupational Safety and Health Act) instituted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago which contains a list of standards in which businesses must operate. All companies must supply workers with drinking water and other toiletries.

The author went above and beyond the call of duty to lobby against this policy change even though other employees were not sold on defying authority. Eventually to avoid a public scandal and a fine that might ensue, the CEO reverted the policy to workers having their “luxuries” once more.

Even though, being bold and assertive might challenge the status quo and revolutionary changes may come about, it can be disadvantageous at times. Yukl (2010) argues that if an organization’s members see no need for change this can actually create conflict and disrupt operations awaiting to no changes being made.

Additionally, even though the author has a couple traits that are not worthy of leadership, the author possesses mostly good traits which supersedes the

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bad ones. Referring to Appendix A, Table 1. 1, the SWOT analysis shows the author as being energetic, innovative, self-motivated, cooperative, alert, sociable and ever willing to assume responsibility. However, having these innate abilities is not sufficient to become a great leader as argued by opponents of the trait theory. One must develop their skills and competencies in the right situations to shine as a good leader (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969a).

Leadership Skills

Northouse (2009) posits that leadership traits or qualities are innate, based on the individual's personality and are fixed however; leadership skills and abilities are learned and developed. This approach contends that a leader's effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to solve complex organizational problems. Therefore, " leadership skills are defined as the ability to use one's knowledge and competencies to accomplish a set of goals or objectives" (Northouse, 2009).

For Katz (1955), leadership is dependent on three skills which are technical, human and conceptual skills. Technical skills involves being proficient in a particular work. The author is quite competent in the managerial field as she possesses a Bachelor's degree in Management Studies, Sociology and is currently pursuing a Master's in Business Administration. Also, as part of the middle management team in the company the author possesses the human skills necessary to interact and work well with people. The author has the ability to cooperate with the staff to achieve common goals as seen in Appendix A, Table 1. 1. For instance, during the high sales holiday seasons such as Christmas and Carnival (a street festival involving the parade of

costumes) the demand for clothes and shoes are extremely extraordinary. Customers usually swarm the stores which results in sales people having less time to attend to customers and they have to work longer hours. The author, although is a middle manager and is not involved in the sales process assists the workers in selling, cashing and even restoring the store to its original condition after the crowds have cleared. In addition, the author works longer hours to keep the staff motivated and energised. Thus, proving that the author makes an exemplary effort to cooperate and assist team members whenever necessary.

Moreover, the author has the ability to work with ideas and derive strategic concepts to drive the organization but the author is not given the chance to foster her ability. In the future, one of the author's goals would be to harness her conceptual skills by creating new policies for the organization. Simon (1987) argues that to be able to make good strategic decisions extensive experience is necessary. This is a major pitfall for the author since she only had the privilege of working with the organization for one year thus far.

In addition, Mumford et al (2000) developed a skills-based model of leadership which is known as the “ capability” model because it compares a leader's knowledge and skills to their performance. The five different components in this model are: competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences and environmental influences. Looking at Appendix A, Table 1. 1 the author's strengths showcases her skills such as: competencies (problem solving, social judgements skills and knowledge) and individual attributes (cognitive ability, motivation and

personality) which transcends to leadership outcomes (effective problem solving and performance).

It also shows her weakness of lack of leadership experience. According to Mumford et al (2000), career experience assists leaders in developing their skills and knowledge by complex problem solving in the organization over time.

2.3 Women and Leadership

The workplace is inherently “gendered” that is, “the allocation of responsibilities in organizations and nearly all decisions about employees’ career progress, resources, salaries, power and authority, and appropriate work behaviour are affected by the distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” argues Acker (1992). Hale (1996) contends, that even though organizations like to think leaders are chosen through merit, it is evident that gender biases are present in decisions of who becomes a leader. Therefore, for a long time researchers battled over three questions: “Can women be leaders? Do male and female differ in their behaviour and effectiveness in organizations? Why do so few women reach the top?” (Indvik, 2004).

This area is of particular interest to the author since this problem has plagued women for centuries and has been a hindering force in the leadership advancement of the author since the author is a female. Studies suggest women are outnumbering men in graduate school however; they still make up a very high percentage of underpaid workers and are virtually non-representative in leadership positions in companies’ top executive

management teams (Lewis, 1999). For the author, it is evident that a very small percentage of women are leaders even though they make up the majority of the workforce as can be seen at Cadel Trading Limited. The workforce is littered with females in lower level positions accounting for approximately 70% of the staff and of the remaining 30% of male employees almost 15% are in management positions. Also, there is a salary differential between women in management positions to men, as such this was experienced by the author in relation to that of her male counterparts in the same positions (Oakley, 2000). 1

The author is in a position in the company which is dominated by males and thus, faces scrutiny and interference when making decisions by male counterparts. Incidentally, researchers suggest that companies can enhance their productivity, increase their competitive advantage and financial performance by promoting women as leaders in organizations. For Barney (1997), using the company's internal resources can give the company a sustainable advantage thereby; utilizing women in leadership positions in the organization can be an untapped resource where the organization's creativity and teamwork can flourish. Powell (1993) suggests that leadership effectiveness is the same for both men and women where they both demonstrate " leader aptitude, motivation to be a leader, job satisfaction, commitment and subordinate satisfaction."

1 Cadel Trading Limited: Company Demographics for Employees

As indicated by the literature, women social skills are higher than men's (Eagly and Wood, 1991) and women leaders tend to adopt a cooperative style to leadership or "web leadership" (Lauterbach and Weiner, 1996) which is in alignment with leadership skills that are required for the 21st century, global companies (Sharpe, 2000). Alternatively, male leaders handle company stress and their own personal frustrations better than women. Women are very emotive, which is one of the flaws expressed previously by the author. However, the author does seem to possess these inherent social skills which come with being a woman. Evidence of this is found in Appendix B where the author rated high in the extraversion section. Also, cooperation and assistance is a mantra that the author lives by in every facet of life not just in the work environment.

Likewise, female leaders make excellent planners and organizers as suggested by research but they tend to take an empathic approach to winning no matter the cost. According to Gendron (1995), female leaders are very indecisive, another flaw in the author's effectiveness as a leader. Also the literature suggests that due to women's participative leadership style they are more suited in middle management positions. Once more there are parallels between the author's position and the literature on female leadership.

However, the author begs the question: Why women have not reached the top? Or more importantly, why the author has not reached the top? As Ragins et al (1998) posit, women have not reached the top due to the "pipeline theory," that is, women have not been in managerial positions long enough to naturally progress into executive managerial positions. Upon

analysis of the author's career, it can be argued that the author stills need to grow and get more familiarized in a managerial, leadership position before any ascension in the organization's hierarchy can take place.

However, the author can argue that not being able to advance in the organization can be based on three broad factors such as: organizational barriers, interpersonal and personal barriers. Firstly, as Heilman (1997) remarks, an organization can have an " inhospitable corporate culture" where women are not seen as valuable and therefore, do not belong in executive positions. This has been severely experienced by the author at Cadel Trading Limited. As proposed by Tharenou (2001), a patriarchal hierarchical organization such as Cadel Trading Limited will hinder women's promotions into middle and upper leadership positions. In addition, there exists a sense of " homophily" where people in leadership positions prefer other people in the same demographic to advance in such positions however stifled creativity and decision making may be.

Lastly, in relation to the author, personal barriers such as a commitment to family, culture and personal life choices have restricted growth in the leadership position. Bell and Nkomo (2001) argue that these factors are quite common in restricting women from rising in the ranks to assume top leadership positions.

2. 4 Future goals

Learning about oneself is critical to one's success in the world. Research has shown that the most effective leaders show a great sense of self-awareness. This is essential to reaching goals, becoming independent, and building a

bridge for the future. It allows one to become more open, confident, and comfortable with themselves. Therefore, life moreover, leadership is about learning and growing. Thus, the future goals of the author is to continue trying to be the best by learning from the greatest leaders such as Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Princess Diana of Wales and Jesus Christ.

Through this commitment to lifelong learning the author hopes to be a better individual and thus, a better leader. As such the author holds to the premise that not all great leaders are born, many of them develop their leadership through study, trial and error and the experience gleaned from complex problem solving. In addition, the author hopes to live by the principle that great leaders are not only concerned about themselves but is concerned about the feelings and needs of other people and are always trying to find ways to promote positive changes and growth in any institution.

“ True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience,” (Bennis, 1987). Therefore, the author upon engaging in self-reflection would like to become more competent in her career and thus, rise to new heights in the organization.

Personal Development Plan

3. 1 What is the author’s current state?

Strengths

Intelligent, trustworthy, determined and perceptive.

Weaknesses

Indecisive, cannot handle stressful situations and do not have enough management work experience.

Feedback from others

Not settled, still searching and self-conscious.

Conclusion

Trying not to get worked up easily; remaining calm and collected in any situation.

Learning to stick to a decision regardless of the consequences. Decision making is a necessary skill for a successful leader.

3. 2 What is the author's desired state?

Hopes to achieve

Always looking for new opportunities rather than walking the common path; continuing to improve managerial experience level.

Proactively taking the lead in situations. When a group decision must be made, the author should be the first to give a recommendation and stick to it and should not agree with other conflicting views.

Should calmly and positively assess any situation before reacting to it by looking at the glass half full instead of half empty in every circumstance. Thus, focusing of energy on finding solutions rather than succumbing to problems and trying not to accede to stress.

Why does the author want these desires?

Why achieve?

Being a strong, unwavering decision maker enables the author to command respect from others in authority. Thus, creating more substantial opportunities in the future to advance in the organization.

Being able to control stress and anger means that the author will not regret hurtful comments or rash decisions made. This energy, instead of being used negatively will be directed towards positivity.

Short-term goals

Trying to make two new recommendations to senior executives monthly in hopes that they will seriously consider them.

Attending anger and stress management programmes.

Long-term goals

To be confident with decisions made in any situation.

To keep calm no matter the circumstance.

How to achieve these goals?

What to improve?

Practicing the suggestion of ideas and making decisions during weekly company meetings and requesting to steer new projects.

Attending meditation and yoga classes to develop a calm peace of mind which inspires a positive outlook on life.

What resources are needed?

Books on sound decision making principles and techniques.

Anger and stress management classes.

Recommendations for Future Success

The organization as described by functionalists is similar to a living organism in which learning and growing is necessary for survival so too, the author must continue to adapt to changes on a continuous basis. For Yukl (2010), this constitutes the author's ability to learn from mistakes made and to refine her assumptions and beliefs. Argyris (1991) argues that one of the most important competencies for successful leadership is the ability to learn from experiences and adapt to change. This can only happen when the author becomes self-aware of her strengths and weaknesses as a leader and makes corrections to her deficiencies.

Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney (1997) contend that learning from experience and adapting to change involves both leadership traits and skills. Therefore, due to the inherent traits of being self-motivated and achievement oriented, the author can become quite competent once learning is established however; developing an open-mind and actively assessing her strengths and weaknesses can contribute to this facet of development and effective leadership.

Northouse (2009) argues that having career experiences will impact on leader's characteristics and competencies. Therefore, since the author is still somewhat inexperienced as a leader she should seek activities to develop the needed experience. For Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding et al (2000), when leaders want to develop experience they should; take on challenging job assignments, try to have a mentor, make use of appropriate training and gain hands-on first knowledge by engaging in problem solving activities.

Lastly, positive thinking, effective communication and persistence are needed in gender biased organizations. However having a strong work ethic and the relevant competencies such as intellectual ability and innovation can be factors that can break any barriers to advancement that might exist.

Conclusion

Being an effective leader can be a result of having innate competencies however, training and development can also produce effective leadership. In addition, in all facets of life obstacles will be faced but character is built upon the way negative situations are handled thus, producing leaders. Therefore, as statistics have shown women are continuing to break out of their comfort zone and are becoming effective leaders in their own right. Consequently, through "learning how to learn" one can become the most effective leader (Yukl, 2010).

Appendix A

Table 1. 1 A SWOT Analysis of the Author

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Strengths

Using Stogdill's (1974) Trait Theory approach the author is:

Adaptable to situations

Alert to social environment

Ambitious and achievement-oriented

Assertive – challenges the status quo

Cooperative – inspires trust

Dependable

Dominant (Desire to influence others)

Energetic and sociable

Persistent

Self-confident and influential

Willing to assume responsibility

For McCall and Lombardo (1983) the author:

Admits to errors made

Has good interpersonal skills

Has an extensive intellectual breadth

Among other things the author is:

People oriented; optimistic

Innovative - creative thinking

Original and takes initiative

Self-motivated; driven to excel

Has integrity (honest and loyal)

Emotionally resilient - (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996)

Educational Qualifications: B. Sc. Management Studies and Sociology

Weaknesses

Using Stogdill's (1974) Trait Theory approach the author is:

Indecisive in decision-making

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Intolerant of stressful situations

For McCall and Lombardo (1983) the author:

Lacks emotional stability

On the other hand, the author is:

An overachiever with perfectionist tendencies

Lack of leadership experience in the Management field.

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Opportunities

Becoming an MBA Graduate will create more job opportunities thereby increasing the author's marketability.

Throughout the MBA programme the author is able to grow and become more knowledgeable.

Threats

Competitors with superior skills, knowledge and experience in the business environment.

Recent economic downturn making it more difficult for advancement in the workplace.

Gender biases inhibit the author's ability to advance in the hierarchical organization.

Appendix B

Personality Test – Report

Overall Rating:

Neuroticism

54

Extraversion

55

Openness to Experience

61

Agreeableness

1

Conscientiousness

41

You do not feel nervous in social situations, and have a good impression of what others think of you; however you experience panic, confusion, and helplessness when under pressure or stress. You lead a leisurely and relaxed life. You would prefer to sit back and smell the roses than indulge in high energy activities. You tend not to express your emotions openly and are sometimes not even aware of your own feelings. You are not affected strongly by human suffering, priding yourself on making objective judgments based on reason. You are more concerned with truth and impartial justice than with mercy; however you do not particularly like helping other people. R