

Leadership theory and practices research paper

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Leadership Theory and Practices

Introduction

Leadership is important for any group of people that has come together for a common purpose. Clark (2004) defines leadership as a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs an organisation or institution in a way that makes it more coherent and cohesive. Thus, a leader steers and stimulates a group of people towards achieving a shared goal. While this is the basic role of a leader, people's approach to leadership varies widely. The objective of the paper is to analyse the leadership approach of a chosen leader based on key leadership theories that provide insights for an effective leader. The leader chosen for analysis is Steve Jobs. The paper is divided into sections. The first section deals briefly with descriptive facts about the leader. The second section delves into the analysis of the leader's traits that make him an effective leader. The third section concludes the paper.

Overview of the Leader

Steve Jobs was the co-founder and former chief executive officer of Apple, the largest technology company of the world according to Murphy (2012). He is well-known for his unique leadership style and acknowledged world over for being instrumental in success of this multi-national corporation.

Steve Jobs, 1955-2011, was born to two Wisconsin graduate students and immediately given up for adoption (A+E Networks, 2012). He was adopted

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by Clara and Paul Jobs, who lived in Silicon Valley. While Clara was an accountant, Paul served in Coast Guard. As a child, Jobs was intelligent and always came up with a novel approach of thinking and doing things. During his high school, he spent his free time at Hewitt – Packard, where he met and befriended a computer wizard named Steve Wozniak (A+E Networks, 2012). He suffered from temporary aimlessness after his high school. In 1976, at a very young age, he started Apple Computers along with his friend, Wozniak (A+E Networks, 2012). The beginning was modest started in Jobs' garage with a meagre seed capital contributed by the two founders. However, since then, there was no looking back. In a short span of four years, Apple Computers had become a publicly traded company. On the very first day of trading, its market value reached a whopping \$1. 2 billion (A+E Networks, 2012).

Steve Jobs brought a revolution in the field of personal computers by making it technologically advanced, smaller and more user-friendly. He is also credited to turnaround Apple in the 1990s when it was going through a tough phase. Apart from computers, bringing in innovative mobile phone and software interfaces, and world-class animated movies for customers are other notable achievements of the veteran. He will always be remembered as a leader and visionary, who relentlessly strived to offer latest technological innovations to the customers. The next section of the paper discusses Steve Jobs leadership style and its effectiveness.

Leadership Approach and Practices

Steve Jobs has been one of the most successful leader and businessman in the world. He was awarded the title of the most powerful person in business by Fortune Magazine in 2007 (Leadership with you, 2011). He possessed a unique approach to leadership that was a mix of traditional and unconventional style.

This section of the paper attempts to understand the leadership approach of Steve Jobs with the help of theories and practices of leadership approach, on various dimensions.

Characteristics of the Leader

The characteristics of Steve Jobs as an effective leader can be explained using trait theory, skill approach and style approach to leadership.

Trait Model of Leadership

Trait theory proposes that the personality of every individual constitutes of broad disposition traits. Trait model of leadership suggests the effectiveness of a leader based on pre-defined personality characteristics of popular leaders. The core traits identified for successful leadership are achievement drive, leadership motivation, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive abilities, knowledge of business, emotional maturity and other supplementary traits (Management Study Guide, 2012). Steve Jobs was self-confident, charismatic and highly motivated person. He had a strong achievement drive and energy. While he motivated his employees for performance, he had high intolerance for non-performance. He knew his business really well and his creative vision worked well for him. This also

helped him in getting into micro-management in any product development. He was emotionally mature as he did not get bogged down by failures and had a strong will power. He displayed high level of commitment and honesty towards his goal of providing customers with technologically advanced solutions. Steve Jobs was also endowed with sharp cognitive ability of analysing situations and capabilities, strong fundamental skills and capacity to make worthy judgements.

Presence of these core traits is a pre-condition for a person to be successful in his leadership. Steve Jobs possessed most of these traits that can make one a potential leader. These traits made him more effective than other leaders, who did not possess these characteristics. Thus, trait model of leadership explains that Steve Jobs had all the right characteristics that form the foundation of a successful leader. Trait theory also questions if a leader is born or made (Management Study Guide, 2012). Steve Jobs was more of a born leader as he did not take lessons of leadership management skills, but had it in him. His experience helped him sharpen these skills.

Skill Approach to Leadership

Skill approach is different from trait model because the former accounts for a leader's knowledge and abilities to predict leadership effectiveness rather than her personality traits. Katz recognises that the three distinct abilities that a leader should possess to be successful are technical skills, human skills and conceptual skills (Virkus, 2009). Technical skill is the technical knowledge and adeptness a leader has in her field of activity. Human skill pertains to the ability of a leader to communicate effectively with her employees and influence them towards a desired outcome. Conceptual skills

involve the capability of a leader to conduct situation analysis, build on conceptual ideas and make the right decisions in her area of work.

Steve Jobs had the right technical expertise that supported his creative vision and innovative orientation. His earlier training in creative writing gave him the right inclination in developing creative products. It also helped him give creative inputs to his team and get involved at every stage of product development and marketing. Steve Jobs approach to managing human resources was rather orthodox. He believed in a stick approach to get desired outcome from employees. He developed the culture of the organisation in a way that people feared termination for non-performance. However, his charisma, zeal and passion towards his work deeply motivated his employees. He was an effective communicator and believed in closely interacting with his employees and getting involved in minute details. He had conceptually skilled and understood his work environment well. He proved that he could work efficiently with ideas and deliver best solutions to the customers. Thus, from a skills approach, Steve Jobs had the required skills to become a popular leader.

Leadership Style

Different style approaches are used by leaders to achieve their common goals. The leadership style adopted by a leader may vary in its approach to motivating employees, degree of dilution of decision making power, process of implementation and extent of employee handholding provided to employees. The amount of approvals required from top management at every stage of business operations is also a determinant of type of leadership. Steve Jobs leadership style is unconventional, but tilted towards

the autocratic or authoritarian style of leadership. However, his autocratic style was also coupled with his charisma. Hence, he displayed a combination of autocratic and charismatic leadership.

He adopted a top-down working style and he was involved in product development right from the ideation stage. His approvals were required for everything. Kahney (2008) aptly remarks that no product escaped the company without meeting Jobs' exacting standards, which were said to cover such esoteric details as the number of screws on the bottom of a laptop and the curve of a monitor's corners. He chose a strict control over employees and believed in meritocracy and penalising for non-performance. He would stretch his employees to their full potential, so as to deliver quality to his customers. The negative side of autocratic leadership is that it impairs with innovativeness and creativity in employees. Steve Jobs charisma helped him overriding these negatives of autocratic leadership. His charisma, relentlessness and commitment to work differentiated him from other unproductive autocratic leaders. The charisma motivated his employees to give their best in order to please him and get accolades from him. In charismatic leadership, success of the employees is in having able to stand up to the expectations of their leader. This is the prime motivation for the employees.

Leader-follower Relationship

The ability of a leader to spearhead her team significantly depends upon her ability to develop and engage followers. Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) is an important leader follower exchange theory that focuses on quality of relationship and interactions between leaders and followers

(HubPages Inc, 2012). The theory suggests that it helps to enable a high quality and more frequent relationship between leader and follower. It improves the working environment and is mutually beneficial. It increases organisational commitment, reduces employee turnover, improves employee participation and better results. Though Steve Jobs believed in a stick approach to motivate employees, he did maintain high quality of relationship with them. He imbued his co-workers with messianic zeal and worked closely with them (Kahney, 2008). He gave instant feedback to people that helped develop a bond of honesty with his co-workers. His micromanagement enabled frequent interactions with his employees and avoided their drifting away from the organisational goal. He also welcomed ideas from his employees. Overall, there existed a good quality of relationship and interactions between Steve Jobs and his co-workers.

Behavioural Aspects of Leadership

Broadly, there are two common leadership behaviours. One is people oriented behaviour and the other is task oriented behaviour (Leadership-central. com, 2012). Task oriented leaders focus their behaviour on organisational structure, process orientation and close control (Leadership-central. com, 2012). People oriented leaders focus on satisfying the needs of their employees. They emphasise on employee relation and motivation. They largely display behaviours of appreciating, training and mentoring their employees.

Steve Jobs was clearly a task oriented leader. He was concerned about his people, but task fulfilment was his bigger focus. He believed in keeping

control, routing all approvals through him penalising people who did not meet performance standards. He laid emphasis to organisational structure and created well-defined roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

Product is the key in a high competitive and innovation driven industry, and Steve Jobs exerted control over the company's product at every stage. His task oriented behaviour is also apparent from his focus on exacting strict quality standards for his products and being a checker throughout the process. It pays off to be a task oriented leader in a competitive industry and it maintain focus and deliver the best to customers.

Managing Contingencies

Managing for contingencies is integral to effective leadership. Fiedler's contingency model suggests that there is no best style of leadership and a leader's effectiveness is based on the given contingency situations (Mind Tools, 2012). It is a four step model. The first step is to identify whether a leader is task oriented or relationship oriented. Fiedler developed a Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC scale) that measures a person's leadership style. High scores mean relationship orientation and better capability of handling complex decisions. The second step is analysing situation favourableness. The three distinct factors that make a leader's situation favourable are high trust of team members, clarity and structured-ness in task, and high position power (Mind Tools, 2012). The third step is to determine the most effective leadership style in each situation (Mind Tools, 2012).

Steve Jobs had a strong position power, dealt with structured innovation and his people trusted him. Based on Fiedler's model, the situation of Steve Jobs

required Low LPC for effective management. Low LPC is associated with task oriented approach to leadership. Thus, Steve Jobs' task leadership oriented leadership style was in sync with his situation favourableness and low LPC scores.

Motivation for Subordinates

The path-goal theory of Evans and House proposed that there are three basic motivations for employees in an organisation. First is a feeling of self-efficacy second is a belief of effort being rewarded and third is faith that the rewards will be worthwhile the efforts put in (HubPages Inc, 2012).

Steve Jobs motivated his people by rightly matching a task with employee capability, facilitating people to stretch their potential, showing a clear path to work towards and being achievement-oriented. Monetary benefits were no concern for employees if they delivered results, but Jobs worked otherwise. He discouraged people to be a non-performer by fear of job loss. His result-oriented behaviour ensured people worked really hard to prove themselves and attaining more satisfaction in their work. Thus, Steve Jobs was able to motivate his team to deliver the best results.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership theory suggests that leaders choose their leadership style based on the maturity or developmental level of the follower (HubPages Inc, 2012). The four types of leadership styles that a leader can adopt are directing, coaching, supporting and delegating (HubPages Inc, 2012). Steve Jobs dealt with a mature workforce. Given the nature of workforce and its need for support, he adopted coaching technique. He was aggressive and

gave high directives to his employees given the level of competition in the industry. But he also supported and motivated them during interactions.

Transactional, Transformational and Servant Leadership

Transactional leadership is less future-oriented and ensures that the status quo is maintained. Such leaders ensure compliance from their team

members through stick and carrot approach. In 1977, Robert

Greenleaf's Servant Leadership argued that CEOs should think of themselves as slaves to their workers and focus on keeping them happy (Kahney, 2008).

Transformational leadership is a forward looking concept, wherein the leaders increase the motivation level and morale of their team members.

Steve Jobs followed transformational leadership by playing a role model to his team, communicating high level of performance expectations from people, encouraging people to innovate and considering their individual needs.

Authentic and Strategic Leadership

Authentic Leadership argues that self-awareness, rational transparency, balanced processing and internalised moral perspective are effective leadership traits (HubPages Inc, 2012). Steve Jobs was self-aware and unbiased. However, it is argued that he lacked rational transparency to some extent. He supposedly followed Buddhism, a life without material pleasures. But, he founded a company that offered advanced technologies of materialistic pleasures to people.

Steve Jobs was a strategic leader as had a clear vision for the company and

clearly communicated it to his team. His organisational structure ensured proper coordination between departments and seamless task completion.

Aspect of Culture and Women in Leadership

Steve Jobs highly influenced his workplace culture. His control even extended to basic administrative decisions. He promoted a culture of clear accountability. He instilled a high-performance corporate culture. In spite of this, employee turnover was low as he inspired people and encouraged them to perform. Cultural or gender bias was not seen in his leadership. But, gender balanced policies were also not adopted in his reign.

Conclusion

A leader is a person who steers and stimulates a group of people towards a common purpose. His role is critical in success of any organisation. The analysis of Steve Jobs' leadership approach and practices reveal is effectiveness as a leader. An assessment of his traits and skills based on trait theory and skill approach to leadership respectively suggests that Jobs had the right characteristics to be an effective leader. Steve Jobs leadership style was autocratic. But, his charisma, relentlessness and commitment to work differentiated him from other unproductive autocratic leaders. He had a high quality of relationship with his followers. Behaviourally, he was a task-oriented leader that served him right given his low LPC situation. He motivated his employees through his achievement-oriented approach and serving as a role model. The role model quality he possessed was his messianic passion and commitment to work, his foresightedness and a knack for perfection. Adding to this, his transformational and strategic leadership

approach helped him become a successful leader and a powerful businessman.

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