Understanding Leadership And Its Value In The Workplace

Dr. Chaitanya Niphadkar

Lancaster University Alumni (UK),
Asst. Professor, Addis Ababa University,
School of Commerce for PhD Program in Business Leadership
Associate Professor, Open University of Mauritius,
Leadership Mentor, National School of Leadership

Abstract: This article highlights the value of leadership and describes its importance in regard to people and organizations. It explains the responsibilities of an ideal leader as a designer, teacher and steward. It clarifies the expectations made from a leader of a learning organization.

I. LEADER OF A LEARNING ORGANIZATION (LO)

Many scholars have commented on leadership and it has become today a commonly used word at work. But just talking about leadership at the workplace does not meet the purpose. That is the reason 'understanding and valuing leadership' is discussed separately from the concept of 'leadership'.

All of us are leaders in some respect but it would only make sense if those skills are explored in the right manner. Here, we refer to leaders in a LO.

The leader's role in a learning organization is much wider than just decision making and the leadership skills required for these roles are the ability to bring shared vision to the surface and challenge the existing mental models, along with ability to foster systematic ways of thinking in an organization.

Leaders in LO have to make sure that their people expand their capacities and shape their future. In other words, they are responsible for the learning of the organization and the people in it. Peter Senge believes that leadership in a learning organization is based on the principle of *creative tension*. This creative tension occurs when the leader sees clearly where the organization should be and understands clearly where it is presently. The gap between these two positions is a result of the creative tension. Peter Senge suggests that there are two ways to resolve this.

Firstly, raise the current reality towards the vision and secondly, lower the vision towards the reality.

Organizations which learn to work with creative tension know how to channel the energy created by that tension and move ahead facing the reality towards their vision. There are various responsibilities that a leader needs to undertake and described some of them have been discussed in various facets.

II. VARIOUS FACETS OF A LEADER

LEADER IS A DESIGNER

The role of a leader as a 'designer' is to give the organization an appropriate design. Thus, the leader has the duty of designing the governing ideas of the purpose, vision and core values of the organization. The primary task of the leader is to design the governing ideas followed by applying them in policies, strategies and structures that translate those ideas into business decisions. The effectiveness of these policies, strategies and structures depends largely on effective learning processes and it is the leader's responsibility in a LO to create such processes.

LEADER IS A TEACHER

One of the main activities of a leader is to define the reality i.e. a leader should help people to gain accurate and insightful views about the reality. In this sense, the leader assumes to be a teacher. According to Peter Senge, the role of a teacher in a learning organization can be developed by paying attention to people's mental models and systems thinking. The leader as a teacher has to bring the mental

models of the employees to the surface as a mental picture and visualize how the world works and how the workforce perceives it in terms of their various problems or opportunities and determines the courses of action and their choices.

LEADER IS A STEWARD

According to Peter Senge, "This is the subtlest role of leadership. Unlike the roles of designer and teacher, it is almost solely a matter of attitude. It is an attitude critical to learning organizations." Furthermore, Senge believes that people have realised the stewardship aspect of leadership and scholars have too widely accepted it but its source is not properly understood yet. A useful explanation of stewardship can be found in Robert Greenleaf's seminal book, *Servant Leadership* where Greenleaf says, "The servant leader is servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. This conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is a leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions." Moreover, as a steward, a leader can operate at two levels. Firstly, providing stewardship for the people in the organization and secondly for the larger mission that underlies the organization. At the first level, the leader understands the impact that his/her leadership has on the workforce. He/she understands that people can suffer economically, emotionally and spiritually under incompetent leadership. Besides, people in a LO are positively influenced by their leader due to their own commitment and sense of ownership. A leader who understands the above discussed facts, in my opinion, will act responsibly and meet the expectations of the people and his/her organization.

At the second level, the leader of a LO has a sense of personal purpose towards achieving the organization's larger mission. Senge maintains that a leader unleashes the energies of the workforce by appealing to their natural impulse to learn. This is done by engaging them into an activity that they consider worthy of their fullest commitment.

III. CONCLUSION

The concept of leadership is very vast and difficult to understand. Different authors have quoted the term 'leadership' based on their interpretations or experiences, but not many in the true sense have touched the importance of it. For instance, knowing about something relates to having knowledge about it but understanding and valuing it leads to preserving that something. Or the other way round, one preserves a thing simply because he/she knows its importance and is aware about the consequences in absence of it.

The leadership attribute can be properly understood if the people and the organization explore these areas in a leader, namely, the leader's character, personal capability, competency and knowledge, interpersonal and team-building skills, power of motivation, sense of humour and actions leading to the overall learning and development process. Furthermore, I am concerned with the transformational style

of leadership since it, in my view, boosts leadership development.

REFERENCES

[1] Barsade, S. G., & Gibson, D. E. (1998). Group emotion: a view from top and bottom. In: D. H. Gruenfeld (Ed.), Research on managing groups and teams (pp. 81–102). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.

[2] Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. New York: Free Press.

[3] Burke, C. S. & Zaccaro, S. J. (in preparation). The influence of leader sense-making and sense-giving on team mental models and team adaptation.

[4] Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. New York: Harper & Row.

[5] Festinger, L., Schachter, S., & Back, K. (1950). Social pressures in informal groups. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

[6] Fiedler, F. E. (1964). A contingency model of leadership effectiveness. In: L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (vol. 1, pp. 149–190). New York: Academic Press.

[7] George, J. M. (1990b). Leader positive mood and group performance. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 25, 778–794.

[8] Hackman, J. R., & Walton, R. E. (1986). Leading groups in organizations. In: P. S. Goodman, et al. (Eds.), Designing effective work groups (pp. 72–119). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[9] House, R. J., & Shamir, B. (1993). Toward an integration of transformational, charismatic, and visionary theories. In: M. Chemers, & R. Ayman (Eds.), Leadership theory and research: perspectives and directions (pp. 81–107). New York: Academic Press.

[10] Jacobs, T. O., & Jaques, E. (1987). Leadership in complex systems. In: J. A. Zeidner (Ed.), Human productivity enhancement: vol. 2. Organizations, personnel, and decision making (pp. 7–65). New York: Praeger.

[11] Kahai, S. S., Sosik, J. J., & Avolio, B. J. (1997). Effects of leadership style and problem structure on work group process and

[12] Katz, R. (1977). The influence of group conflict on leadership effectiveness. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 20, 265–286.

[13] Kerr, S., & Jermier, J. M. (1978). Substitutes for leadership. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 22, 375–403.

[14] Kerr, S., Schriesheim, C. A., Murphy, C. J., & Stogdill, R. M. (1974). Toward a theory of leadership based upon the consideration and initiating structure literature. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 12, 62–82.

[15] Kivligan, D. M., Jr,. (1997). Leader behavior and therapeutic gain: An application of situational leadership theory. Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 1, 32–38.

[16] Kozlowski, S. W. J., Gully, S. M., Salas, E., & Cannon-Bowers, J. A. (1996). Team leadership and development:

Theory, principles, and guidelines for training leaders and teams. In: M. M. Beyerlein, D. Johnson, & S. T. Beyerlein (Eds.), Interdisciplinary studies of work teams: vol. 3. Team leadership (pp. 251–289). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

[17] Larson, J. R., Jr,., Foster-Fichman, P. G., & Franz, T. M. (1998). Leadership style and the discussion of shared and unshared information in decision-making groups. Personality and Social Psychology, 24, 482–495.

[18] Lord, R. G. (1977). Functional leadership behavior: measurement and relation to social power and leadership perceptions. Administrative Science Quarterly, 22, 114–133.

[19] Mumford, M. D. (1986). Leadership in the organizational context: a conceptual approach and its application.

[20] Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 16, 212–226.

[21] Nygren, R., & Levine, E. L. (1996). Leaderhsip of work teams: factors influencing team outcomes. In: M. M. Beyerlein, D. Johnson, & S. T. Beyerlein (Eds.),

Interdisciplinary studies of work teams: vol. 3. Team leadership (pp. 67–104). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

[22] Weldon, E., & Weingart, L. R. (1993). Group goals and group performance. In: D. Moreland, & M. Hogg (Eds.), British Journal of Social Psychology: special issue on social processes in small groups, 32 (4), 307–334.

[23] Yukl, G., & Van Fleet, D. D. (1992). Theory and research on leadership in organizations. In: M. D. Dunnette, &

[24] L. M. Hough (Eds.), Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology (2nd ed., vol. 3) (pp. 147–197). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

[25] Zaccaro, S. J. (2001). The nature of executive leadership: a conceptual and empirical analysis of success. Washington, DC: APA Books.

[26] Zaccaro, S. J. (2002). Organizational leadership and social intelligence. In: R. Riggio (Ed.), Multiple intelligences and leadership. Washington, DC: Lawrence Erlbaum. Mahwah, NJ: LEA Publishers.