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ABSTRACT

Leaders do not just manage people, they work with them to accomplish goals and add value to the organization. Getting employees may be easy, but to inspire and transform them toward goal accomplishment may be the hard part. The objective of this paper therefore is to examine some essential competencies that are vital to innovative leaders in organizations. The paper reviewed literature on competencies, innovation and leadership. The methodology employed for the paper is premised on the research findings and evidences of Dubrin (1995), Maxwell (1998), and Templar (2005). It attempts to examine the relationship between competencies and innovative leadership in organizations. The paper found out that certain competencies are required for effective leadership. Recommendations for effective innovative leadership include the use of charismatic/transformational leadership style, sharing of information through partnership, accepting dual responsibility/role of looking inward and outward, encouraging and recognizing team members and so on.

Keywords: Competencies, Leadership, Innovation, Personality, Satisfaction and Frustration

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in today's contemporary world is about the leader, the led and partnership. These are necessary ingredients required in leading people effectively. A leader's ability to lead is often regarded as a lid that determines a person's level of effectiveness, competence, and conformity. The lower the individual's ability to lead, the higher the lid on his potentials. A question is often asked: who is the real leader? The task of finding answer(s) to this question does not lie, either in the claims of the person professing to be the leader (world leader, educational leader, community leader, religious leader, business leader, labour leader, and so on), or it does not reside in the person's credentials (degree) or his titles (Chief, Alhaji, Chairman, Doctor and so on).

The answer to the above question resides basically in the influence the individual is able to exert on the followers and how he/she is able to partner with them. Several factors therefore, come into play in determining the extent to which leaders may influence team members (followers or subordinates). Some of these factors include the leaders:

- Character (who they are)
- Relationships (who they know)
- Knowledge (what they know)
- Intuition (what they feel)
- Experience (where they have been)
- Past success (what they have done) and
- Ability (what they can do)

There is no gain in saying that; "he who thinks he leads, but has no followers, is only taking a walk". If a leader cannot influence people, then the people will not follow him. If people do not follow, then the individual is not a leader. Many articles or literature on leadership usually tend to examine the concept from a broader perspective. Few of these articles have actually acknowledged the fact that innovative leaders (not just leaders) need specific competencies to lead more effectively. It is against this background that this paper is written.

PAPER OBJECTIVE

Based on the preceding, the general objective of the paper therefore is to examine the essential competencies that are vital to innovative leaders in contemporary organizations with a view of proffering solutions for more effective ways of leading anchored on sound leadership principles that are constant, the world over.

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CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

According to Hellriegel et al (1999) and Dugguh (2008), a competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that contribute to personal effectiveness. They are prerequisites for a wider range of leadership as well as management and organizational jobs. Bennis (1989) believes that the major and distinguishing factor between a manager and a leader is that of innovation. For example, a leader, through sufficient influence, brings about a longer term change in peoples attitudes, and makes change more acceptable by members.

Hollander (1978:153) states that "much that matter in leadership involves some competencies. "As earlier stated, the leader's role carries the potential to take innovative action in coping with new or altered demands. Techniques for developing competencies may include: stories, interventions that provide dramatic, memorable examples, challenge, support, and so on. Once a leader develops competencies, the organization must provide the resources necessary for transformation and goal accomplishment, (Ginnodo, 1997).

Innovation, according to Peters (1989:9) "is the translation of a new idea into a new company, or a new method of production". It involves creativity and the generation of a new idea. A leader who is not creative, innovative and resistance to change cannot be effective. Leaders do seek ways to encourage and foster activity and innovation on both individual and organizational levels. They adopt personal, active attitudes towards goals. They also look for potential opportunities and rewards that lie around the corner, inspiring team members and firing up the creative/innovative process with their own energy. Dummaine's (1991) findings on his study of Japanese companies indicate that:

The Japanese were more consistent across the board in their innovation practices. They plan like demos, lead well, execute brilliantly, and yet are consistently asking how they can do better (p. 58).

A leader therefore is one who influences team members to gain followership in an organization. But an innovative leader is actively involved in the process of creating and implementing new ideas to improve the organization as stated above. The types of innovation may include the following: technical innovation, process innovation and administrative innovation.

Innovation of any type requires organizational change or transformation in the design or functioning of that organization. Some change variables that require adjustment to a changing environment are: mergers, spinning off a business, and flattening the hierarchical structure of the organization. All of these variables need innovative ideas and leaders.

A dynamic changing environment makes innovation and change very important to the extent that even the most successful organizations can't rest on prior successes. If they become, for example, complacent competitors are likely to woo customers away. To be effective, organizations must learn how to deal creatively and innovatively with day-to-day conditions that require adaptation. It is against this background that innovative leaders are needed to bring about the desired change and transformation to survive and also thrive strategically in a changing and globalized world (Zaleznik, 1998).

An innovative leader, as stated earlier, carries the potential to take innovative action in coping with new or altered demands and challenges. He is regarded for this purpose, as a change agent based on the perceptions the followers have of his actions and motivations. An innovative leader's relevant actions and motivations are premised on the contact the leader (or would be leader) has established with relevant others. Hollander (1978) states that in the idiosyncrasy credit model of leadership, an innovative leader gains his credit by signs of a contribution to the group's primary task and loyalty to the group's norms: a situation of competence and conformity.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INNOVATIVE LEADERS

This framework is premised on the fact that effective leaders use the right mix of appropriate personal characteristics, leadership behaviours, and techniques to facilitate productivity, performance, and satisfaction and by so doing, attain organizational goals. In summary, a leader may use the above components of the framework as presented in the figure below:

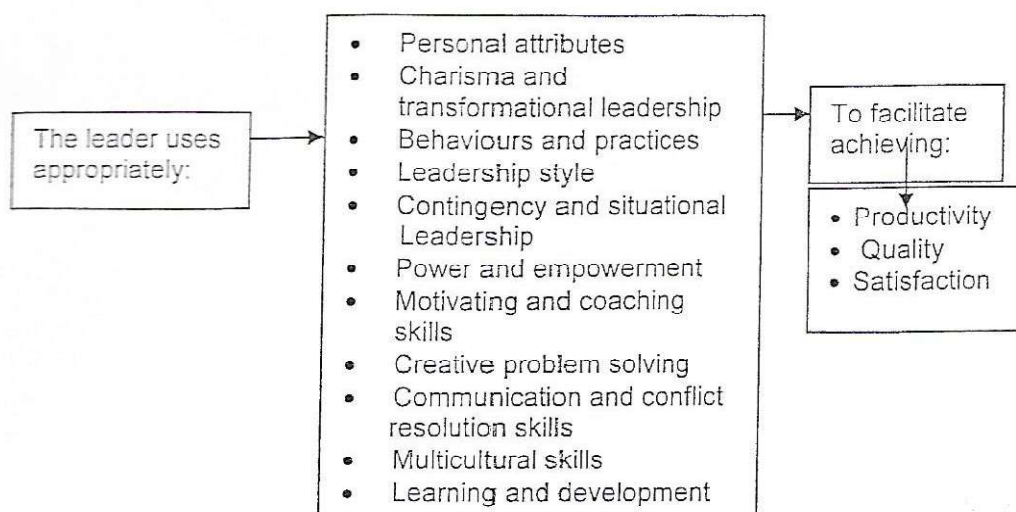


Figure 1: A framework for innovative leaders

Source: Dubrin, A. J. (1995). *Leadership: Research Findings, Practice and Skills*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company p. 18

SOME ESSENTIAL INNOVATIVE COMPETENCIES FOR LEADERS

Based on the research findings of Carey (1992), Mason (1992), Kouzes & Posner (1990), Bass (1990), and Pfeffer (1992), two basic categories of innovative competencies are captured for this paper. The first category is the general personality competencies while the task-related personality competencies constitute the second category. The variables in these categories are presented below:

General personality competencies of an innovative leader

- Self-confidence (self –assured without being overbearing).
- Honesty, integrity and credibility
- Dominance (imposing will on others)
- Extroversion (ability to contribute to team discussions/activities)
- Assertiveness (forthright in expressing demands, feelings opinions etc).
- Emotional stability (ability to control emotions appropriate to the occasion).
- Enthusiasm (eagerness)
- Sense of humour (to reduce tension/boredom)
- Warmth (being welcoming/accommodating)
- High tolerance for frustration (ability to cope with the blockage of goal attainment).
- Self awareness and self objectivity (being aware of strengths/limitations).

Task-related personality competencies of an innovative leader

- Initiative (self-starter, problem-finding ability).
- Sensitivity to others and empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Internal locus of control
- Courage and
- Resiliency (ability to bounce back quickly from setbacks).

THE SATISFACTION AND FRUSTRATIONS OF BEING AN INNOVATIVE LEADER

To many people, the term 'leader' has a very positive connotation. To be called a leader – whether appointed or legitimate is generally better than to be called a follower or a subordinate. (Note: the term follower and subordinate are being replaced to become team or group member). However, being a leader – team leader, manager, chief executive officer (CEO), director, chairman, governor, head of unit, department or organization etc, does not always bring personal satisfaction. For example, some leadership jobs are more fun than others. As we contemplate becoming a leader or as we move further into a leadership positions, it is worthwhile to examine some potential satisfactions and frustrations many people find in being innovative leaders.

Potential satisfactions of innovative leaders

The satisfaction derived from being an innovative leader depends on one's particular leadership position on the organizational hierarchy. The factors that may influence satisfaction include:

- A feeling of power and prestige
- A chance to help others
- High income
- Respect and status
- Good opportunities for advancement
- A feeling of "being in on" things.
- An opportunity to control money and other resources.

Frustrations and dissatisfactions of innovative leaders

The factors that may bring about frustration/dissatisfaction to innovative leaders include the following:

- Too much uncompensated overtime.
- Too many 'headaches'.
- Inadequate authority to carry out responsibility
- Loneliness
- Too many problems involving people
- Too many paperwork or electronic mails and
- Too many organizational politics.

METHODOLOGY

The paper draws largely from the past research findings, evidences and cases to demonstrate the relationship between competencies and effective leadership. The paper therefore adopts Dubrin (1995), Maxwell (1998) and Templar (2005) and Eims (1996) premises on effective leadership in organizations. These studies revealed that there are significant correlations between competencies and effective leadership: effective leaders need some competencies to transform their organizations in line with the innovative global trend.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the methodology employed, the findings of this paper are as follows:

- i) That there is casual relationship between competence and innovative leadership. This implies that the more the innovative competencies, the more a leader is innovative in an organization.
- ii) That the more a leader acquires the general competencies, the more effective and efficient the leader gets followers. The implication is that for the innovative leader to be more effective, efficient, productive, and so on, the more he/she is expected to acquire a variety of the general personality competencies more than the task-related personality competencies.
- iii) That innovative leaders derive satisfaction from certain factors that relate to leadership positions in the organization. Such satisfaction is derived specifically from feeling power and prestige, an opportunity to help others, an opportunity to control resources and so on.
- iv) That certain factors like uncompensated overtime, loneliness, too many people-oriented problems and so on may bring about frustrations to innovative leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the preceding, the following recommendations are made:

Innovative leader should be charismatic as well as transformational in their style of leading people. They must be able to significantly change an organization based on vision, masterful communication skills, trust, emotional expressiveness, warmth, willingness to take personal risks and so on.

Leadership is about the lead, the follower and partnership. This process should involve sharing of information that will empower and permit others to participate in making decisions about the situation and also about their environment. If followers are not empowered to partner with the leader, they may not follow the leader effectively.

Furthermore, innovative leader should accept the responsibility of having a dual role of looking outward as well as inward. The dual role permits them to deal with external as well as internal environment. They should not bind together with followers exclusively in an internal system. The external system should not be disregarded because; it has the potentials to spring surprises to leaders and the organizations.

Lastly, an innovative leader should also encourage. This is done by recognizing his team members. If an innovative leader does not let team members know that he is pleased with them, they will wilt. The more responsibility a leader gives people, the more he trusts them, the more he praises them, and the more he encourages them, the more they will be prepared and willing to follow. Encouragement cost nothing but may bring in loads to the individual, the organization and the society.

CONCLUSION

Whether in the affairs of nations, or in many components of the society, the quality of leadership does matter. Specifically, leadership affects all of us. It generates a great deal of interest due to the day-to-day experiences we have in situation where we may serve as leaders or faced with others who are leaders. Because leaders are usually at the centre of activity, their innovative competencies become essential and the focus of attention to many people.

In actuality, the behaviours recognized as "Leadership" must include the reactions of followers or 'relevant others'. Therefore, leadership is not confined to a single individual in a group but depends upon other members as well. Although leadership is not just one person, it is easier to see it embodied in an individual. This is because leaders like, George Washington, Nelson Mandela, Wilson Churchill, Barak Obama, Nnandi Azikiwe, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, and so on were usually more active and their actions commanded attention, made thing happen and added value to individuals and the society. If goals are to be attained more effectively with satisfactions, team members need to be alert to leaders, and leaders to followers. It must also be noted that when a person is not an innovative leader, he/she can as well be an effective team member (follower). After all, leadership is all about the lead, the led and partnership.

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