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Case study

Self-organizing leadership

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is usually used as a measuring tool for organizational success. All the responsibility of a successful leadership lies on the shoulder of a leader. A failed organization marks with the failure of an unsuccessful leadership. The first section of this paper discusses overview of leadership. The second section discusses the successful traits of a leader followed by theories and styles of leadership. Here a different concept on leadership has been proposed. Self-organized leadership has been introduced here with an intension of change to be experimented by organizations for better functioning. Self-organized leadership will adapt the principles prevailing in the nature for seamless organization and leadership. Finally, we conclude the section by discussing the pros and cons of self-organized leadership.

1. Introduction

Leadership is a term that we commonly come across while measuring the success of organizations. The success of an organization is sometimes seen with respect to its leader. The more successful a leadership is the better the organization is supposed to be. Basically a leader has a potential to persuade and influence others to achieve the target. Leadership is the ability of a superior to motivate the subordinates to work with zeal and confidence (Click here to see reference). Leadership is a group work where two or more people interact with each other and leader is supposed to shape the behaviour of the group towards accomplishing organizational goals

(Reference). In short, it can be stated that leadership is situation driven and there is no best style of leadership. Leadership depends upon handling situation in the best possible way for desired results.

Though there are many successful traits of a leader discussed by various authors, but here we have discussed ten popular traits of a successful leader. While there are numerous theories and styles prevailing and being followed by leaders; but in this paper, we have covered ten widely known leadership theories and styles. An attempt has been made to uncover self-organized leadership theory for upcoming leaders and also successful leaders to try and implement it. The theory has also been analysed with benefits and drawbacks.

2. Successful traits of a leader

Leadership is an important management function and a leader has various roles like (Reference):

- ✓ Initiating action
- ✓ Communicating policies and plans to subordinates
- ✓ Motivating the employees with rewards in return of their work
- ✓ Assigning roles and responsibilities to subordinates
- ✓ Listening to their problems and their complaints
- ✓ Boosting their confidence
- ✓ Building healthy work environment
- ✓ Achieving co-ordination by reconciling personal interests with organizational goals
- ✓ Being consistent with the team
- ✓ Better growth and assessment can be attained by being honest and communicating effectively
- ✓ One has to be flexible to new ideas and approach
- ✓ A strong vision and being consistent on about the same is very important

These are some of the qualities of a successful leader. Leadership is a unique approach and some qualities can be different from leader to leader. The underlying principle is the growth and development of individuals and organizations. In the next section theories and styles of leadership is being discussed.

3. Theories and styles of leadership

Leadership is about coping with change. There are many ways by which people tend to lead their organizations or work force. Not all styles will work for all kinds of situation. You will have to choose the right one. In this section some of the popular leadership styles are discussed below (Reference and Reference):

- ✓ Autocratic Leadership: It is a leader centric style where the leader holds all authority and responsibility. Here the leaders solely take all decisions and that is communicated to the subordinates. The subordinates need to implement immediately. Under this leadership and policy, procedure or guideline are natural additions. Though this type of leadership is not widely followed, but some leaders do follow it like Donald Trump (Trump Organization) and John D. Rockefeller (Standard Oil Founder). Autocratic leadership style can vary from strict authoritarian military leaders to modern manufacturing department leaders. This leadership style can be stifling, overbearing, and demoralizing. It can be effective when decisions are made quickly and prevents organizations from being stagnant.
- ✓ Democratic leadership: This is opposite of an autocratic leadership style. Here subordinates are involved in decision making. Though a democratic leader holds final responsibility, but the role or responsibility is delegated by the leader. Participation from others is key to success in a democratic organization. Leaders with democratic leadership style is Steve Jobs (Apple) and Dr. William Mayo of Mayoclinic.
- ✓ Strategic leadership: This leadership style involves a leader who is the head of an organization. But this leadership style is not restricted to top level, instead it is applicable to all levels for improving performance. Strategic leadership is widely practised by military services eg. U.S. Airforce, U.S. army etc.
- ✓ Transformational leadership: Transformational leadership is about change initiation in organizations and individuals. Transformational leaders motivate individuals to do beyond their capacity and thought. They empower their followers. Nelson Mandela and Walt Disney are examples of Transformational leaders.

- ✓ Team leadership: In this type of leadership the leaders create a picture of prosperous future and when and for what it will stand for in coming days. It does not recognize trust in cooperative relationships. The challenge is to make this leadership work which involves working with heart, mind of its group members. Ineffective leadership can dismantle the team. Example of team leadership can be found all around the world like the United Arab Emirates.
- ✓ Cross-Cultural leadership: This exists where there are multiple cultures existing in the society. Cross-cultural leadership involves leaders who are efficient in working in diverse environments. Leadership style prevalent in United States are cross-cultural and has cross-cultural leadership style.
- ✓ Facilitative leadership: This leadership style is dependent on outcomes and measurements. It is not skill dependent. Depending on the group performance, facilitative leadership communication patterns to help the group will be guiding, motivating and helping the group to function. Facilitative leaders use indirect communication patterns to help the group reach consensus. It encourages understanding and appreciation to build between team members, management and employees.
- ✓ Laissez-Faire leadership: In this leadership authority is given to the employees. It works well in case of highly trained and motivated direct employees. It is basically used to minimize face time. Eg. Mahatma Gandhi.
- ✓ Transactional leadership: In this style of leadership, the leaders maintain the status hierarchy. Here if the leader's orders are carried out with immediate effect, then rewards are given. Transactional leadership includes clarification on expectation and allocation of rewards on meeting set objectives. It is prevalent in large bureaucratic organizations where political considerations happen frequently, for e.g. Dave Lewis Tesco.
- ✓ Coaching leadership: This leadership is based on teaching and supervising followers. Coaching leadership motivates, inspires and encourages its followers. It helps people to improve knowledge and skills. An example of this leadership is Andrew Carnegic (Philanthropist).

4. Self-organized leadership

According to Wikipedia (Reference), self-organization is a process where some form of overall order arises from local interactions between parts of an initially disordered system (Fig. 1). The process is spontaneous, not needing control by any external agent. It is often triggered by random fluctuations, amplified by positive feedback. The resulting organization is wholly decentralized, distributed over all the components of the system. As such, the organization is typically robust and able to survive or self-repair substantial perturbation.

The self-organization of a complex system or a super organism AnimalHerdwith a unique behaviour results from a network of many individuals each acting independently, but following the same set of behaviour rules that tell each individual how to respond to the relationship with its nearest neighbours (Reference). Here each individual acts independently and behaves based on set of rules rather than being attached to a master clock, a blueprint or a leader. The set rules for performance and its feedback mechanism sets results of action and reapplies the rules wherever applicable. This process is ubiquitous in nature and supported by non-linear feedback mechanism and unpredictable behaviour. According to Francis Heylighen, author of "The Science of Self-Organization and Adaptivity" all self-organising systems are characterised by (Reference):

- ✓ Distributed control, i.e. absence of centralised control
- ✓ Continuous adaptation to a changing environment
- ✓ Emergent structure from local interaction
- ✓ Feedback, both positive and negative
- ✓ Resilience due to the system's ability to repair and adjust

The important point is what self-organization means in a business environment (Reference). It doesn't mean that workers will govern and have authority to make business decisions without any manager engineering the whole process. But it means controlling and monitoring the evolving behaviour and results for the smooth functioning of the organization. It's not an overnight process or task, but a continuous process which has to evolve with the situation and task. The whole process will repeat itself till an equilibrium is attained. Self-organizing leadership is not about assigning or monitoring the work or decision making for every task, but it is about pointing the requirement and the team selecting its task as per their expertise and requirement and working on them till

accomplishment (Reference). For example, in deploying a software, requirement analysis is done and team members are selected accordingly in accomplishing the task. Instead of the leader choosing the team members and assigning the task, workers or employees study the requirement and expected output and choose their role in accomplishing the task. Here the leaders just tracks the result towards attaining the desired output. The team interacts and evolves as per the demand to accomplish the task.

Fig. 1. Self-organizing leadership process in an organization.

In self-organizing leadership the leader depending on the situation and task will self-organize itself based on the feedback be it positive or negative. In case of negative feedback the whole process is repeated till positive feedback and results are attained. Here each component has its own importance and responsibility. Instead of monitoring day to day tasks and decision making the leader's role shifts in monitoring the behavior and continuously adapt to changing environment.

5. Conclusion

Some of the benefits of self-organizing leadership will be faster action and decision making, individual interaction and growth, strong self-organizing teams, redistribution and automatic feedback system for work between the team and leader, motivation and full usage of individual potential. The bottleneck in adopting self-organizing leadership, maybe ego, distance, time, assumptions, habits, lack of flexibility, lack of trust and adaptability, cultural difference, risk, beliefs and values (Reference). The key point is to help teams become self-organizing and leadership at both team and organization level is important to understand the implementation of it. Small projects must be first experimented using this strategy instead of implementing in the complete organization at one go. A positive attitude and mindset among team members and leader is very crucial in implementation of self-organizing leadership.

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