

The Practice of Leadership

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Abstract- *Leaders make the difference. The person who takes initiatives and handle situations stand out as leaders. Though many studies have been conducted to understand leadership under different settings, still there is the need to understand leadership dimensions especially in industrial backward regions where organizational processes are not as systematic as in other industrially advanced states in India. The article is an attempt to study the practices of leadership in the state of Manipur, India. To serve the purpose a sample of 25 persons heading organizations of public and private in the state of Manipur was taken. The research instruments used are open ended questionnaire, interviews and observations. Questionnaires have also been served to the subordinates or followers of the leader in the organization to assess perspectives on leadership of the followers and to have a better understanding of the impact of leadership practices.*

General Terms Leadership, Follower and Management

Keywords Leadership; Situations; Barriers; Followers; Problem

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is something that every situation desires and those who take initiatives and handle situations stands out as good leaders. Leaders demonstrate certain characteristics and adopt certain styles to lead. These characteristics and styles when become effective the person has established his or her leadership credentials. The behavioral patterns of handling people in diverse situations make them distinctive and they are noticed. The behavioral patterns are best described as styles of leadership and styles mainly focus on how leaders perform. A leader's effectiveness often rest on how he or she executes tasks and maintain relationship with people. An interesting example is the great Caesar, who thought of conquering Britain, made up his mind and burnt boats and ships to ashes. He and his Roman soldiers had two choices -- either to prevail or perish. Caesar prevailed and the Roman ruled Britain for the next four hundred years. Leaders don't have readymade destinations, they find their ways and lead others to the destinations. Leadership is somewhat indefinable quality. It has many dimensions and attributes and in the words of Nancy et al. (1989) "It demands vision, cheerleading, enthusiasm, love, trust, verve, passion, obsession, consistency, the use of symbols, paying attention as illustrated by the contents of one's calendar, out-and-out drama (and the management thereof), creating heroes at all levels, coaching effectively, wandering around and numerous other things."

Leadership though common in parlance has diverse approaches and context. Over the years researchers and scholars have studied the practices of leadership and various approaches to leadership have emerged: traditional theories, behavioral theories, contingency/situational theories and recent approaches like attribution theory of leadership, charismatic leadership theory and transformational theory. The diverse approaches and context have the limitations of convergence in the understanding of leadership and despite the voluminous and multifarious research in the field of leadership there are gaps in the understating. There is even difficulty and limitations in defining the concept (Stodgill, 1974). Hughes, Ginnett & Curpy (1999) identified different definitions of leaderships and each of the approaches adopted in defining leadership has inadequacies. Vroom (1974) subscribes that the traditional theories and behaviors have oversimplified approach to leadership. So the contingency theories of leadership were developed because it was assumed that there is no one best way to lead in all situations. Though many studies have been conducted to understand leadership under different setting, still there is the need to understand leadership dimensions especially in an industrial backward regions where organizational processes are not as systematic as in other industrially advanced states in India. The article is an attempt to study the practices of leadership in the state of Manipur, India.

2. METHODOLOGY

To serve the purpose a sample of 25 persons heading organizations of public and private in the state of Manipur was taken. The research instruments used are open ended questionnaire, interview and observation. Questionnaires have also been served to the subordinates or followers of the leader in the organization to assess perspectives on leadership of the followers and to have a better understanding of the impact of leadership practices.

Three open ended questions are incorporated in the questionnaire to help analyze the leadership practices. The open ended questions were used to provide the freedom and flexibility in giving more insight into the leadership practices. The first open ended question serves to highlight situations where the leadership skills of the leaders were called for and the second question is about the leadership qualities of the leaders that helped in handling the situation. The third question is on understanding the barriers and obstacles in handling the situation and how the obstacles were overcome.

Organizational excellence starts with leaders of good and strong character who engage in the entire process of leadership. Leadership characteristics build on three main components of organization -- the structure, followers and leaders. These components overlap on one another and are inseparable; the area of overlapping represents the leadership domain. So there is the need to study the followers to understand leadership. Similar questions were also served to their followers to crosscheck the efficiency of leadership practices, understand the leadership qualities of the leaders that helped in handling the situation and the obstacles to leadership process. The crosscheck through the sample was conducted to understand the difference or gap, if any, in the perception about the practices of leadership between followers and leaders.

3. THE PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP

3.1 Situations That Demand Leadership

In the analysis of responses of the leaders regarding the situations the following aspects emerged: events, crisis management, routine matters, delegation, and systems (Table 1.). Most of the leaders have highlighted crisis situations as events where their leadership qualities were called for. It is understandable as leadership initiatives are the essentials of handling crisis situations. So crisis situations challenge the leadership qualities and handling them are the litmus test for establishing leadership credentials. The other challenging situation that test the leadership practices is organizing major events. Major events require planning, organizing and also giving directions. People involved in organizing events need to be motivated to deliver their best. So according to leaders under study, crisis situations and major events require leadership skills. Few leaders have highlighted other

challenges: expansion of operations, handling people related aspects, and system related situations while few have highlighted handling everyday matters. Scale is a challenge for one of the respondents. It is interesting to note that the respondent is an entrepreneur.

3.2 Leadership Practices to Handle the Situations

The leaders highlighted how the challenging situations were handled (Table 2.). Crisis and major events are highlighted by most of the respondents as the situations where leadership credentials matter. Leadership is required to solve a dead lock situation and also when there is difference in the outlook. Here the role of the leader is to communicate, provide meanings and explain why the solution is essential. People having different background and experiences who are in the organization could have diverse opinions and so leadership is needed to bring about an amicable solution. According to the sampled leaders misunderstanding are solved through effective communication and personal contacts. Leadership is also required when there is misunderstanding between groups and such problems are solved through negotiations and providing the picture of win-win situation. The leaders have observed that negotiation is an important instrument for bringing a win-win situation. They emphasize that the approach to solving problems should be honest and the leader should demonstrate loyalty towards the organization. Leadership experience and coordination skills help in solving difficult problems. Further, the leaders have emphasized that patience and control are essential in taking decisions and human aspects in the organizations should not be ignored. Human values should be addressed while taking decisions.

3.3 Barriers to Practice of Leadership

The leaders have cited barriers and obstacle that impedes decisions making and become barriers in leadership practices (Table 3.). Many respondents have pointed out law and order situations. The other major barriers are the people's attitude and mindset. Organizational learning and organizational culture are also challenges. The analysis of the obstacles faced by the leaders in discharging their responsibilities highlights the following major obstacles: interference, pressure, infrastructural bottleneck and integrity. The situations highlighted by the sampled leaders can be broadly classified as situational factor in the environment, crisis situations in the organization, and people related problem in the organization.

Law and order situations as major barriers are cited by majority of the leaders and communication barrier pose as a source of misunderstanding. The approaches highlighted to handle the barriers are highlighted in Table 4. According to the sample leader sincerity in approach and conviction are essential components of leadership to handle barriers and obstacles. It is important to understand the problems first. Many problems can be prevented and solved through detailed planning and coordination. The

practical approach in communication is the use of simple words. Active listening boost the morale of the followers and leaders need to explore means to enhance confidence of the followers. It is important to understand the problem in the first place.

The leaders also faced problems of non-cooperative staff. They emphasize that solving such problems need taking initiative and providing clear concepts. Leaders need to focus on understating the situation, providing confidence to the people and continuously motivating them.

4. FOLLOWERS' IMPRESSION ABOUT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

According to the sampled followers, grand events, crisis and system problems are the situations that demand leadership (Table 5.). Crisis situations brought out inherent leadership role. Sampled followers have the opinion that at the time of major events their leaders exercise leadership roles. Both crisis situations and major events need team efforts. The sampled leaders have to exercise leadership roles to bring normalcy in crisis situations, to organize major events, and to urgently improve the systems of the organization. The elements of uncertainty bring out the leadership qualities and roles. Many respondents are of the opinion that hard works, sincerity, timeliness in taking initiatives, and sensitivity to situations are the components essential for solving crisis situations. The sampled followers have observed that listening, analysis and taking initiative contributed to the successful practices of the leaders. Many respondents have cited that socio-economic situational factors influence performance of leadership. The major barriers to leadership are work pressure, outdated systems and interference from outside their work environment. The followers have emphasized that favoritism, sycophancy and integrity are the issues that test the credentials of the leaders.

5. LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES OF LEADERS vis-à-vis FOLLOWERS

The leaders under study play vital roles to maintain the system. Whenever there is deviation in the system leadership initiatives are essential and that is the reason why significant number of the followers under study have highlighted system related issues. However, the sampled leaders did not highlight many systems related issues and the reason could be because leaders generally pay attention to the larger picture. The followers generally confined their understanding of leadership practices to attending to system related issues. The reason could be because followers were mostly concerned with system process as failure in the system adversely affects their performance. Both sample leaders and followers understand crisis management and organizing major events as important task of leaderships. Crisis situations and major events affect both the leaders and followers. Such situations come

across uncertainty and leaders need to give directions when situations are uncertain. Respondents also highlighted the significance of detailed planning, coordination, analysis and maintenance of systems which are in the management domain. Taking initiatives and vision are highlighted as important requirement in leadership practices. Both leaders and followers have emphasized the significance of human values.

Figure 1. Situations that demand leadership

Crisis situations
Organizing big events
System related problems
Expansion of operations
Handling people related aspects

Figure 2. Leadership practices to handle situations

To communicate, provide meanings and explain why the solution is essential
To address human values while taking decision
To have patience and control while taking decisions
To be honest and demonstrate loyalty towards the organization
To provide the win-win picture while solving problems through negotiations

Figure 3. Barriers to practice of leadership

Law and order situations
The attitude and mindset of people in the organization
Organizational learning stage and culture
Interference from outside the work environment
Infrastructural bottleneck
Work pressure
Integrity of the people in the organization

Figure 4. Leadership practices that overcome barriers

Sincerity in approach and firm resolve to solve the problem
Understanding the problem clearly
Detailed planning and designing proper coordination
The practice of active listening
Taking initiative and providing clarity in understanding
Providing confidence to the people and continuously motivating them
Providing a clear vision

Figure 5. Followers' impression about leadership practices

Grand events, crisis situations and system problems demand leadership.
Elements of uncertainty bring out the leadership qualities and roles
Hard work, sincerity, timeliness in taking initiatives, and sensitivity to situations are the components essential for solving crisis situations
Listening, analysis and taking initiative contribute to the successful practices of the leaders

Socio-economic situational factors influence performance of leadership
Major barriers to leadership are work pressure, outdated systems and interference from outside their work environment.
Favoritism, sycophancy and integrity are the issues that test the credentials of the leaders

6. REFERENCES

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