Selecting first-class leaders among students in universities

Sarah Binti Sabir Ahmad[1] and Mhd Azmin Bin Mat Seman[2]

[1]Faculty of Business Management, University Teknologi MARA Kedah

[2]Faculty of Civil Engineering, Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, 06000 Jitra, Kedah.

ABSTRACT

Leaders are backbone in an organization. They are the one that determine the direction of an organization whether to be further victorious or not. Leaders have an undeviating and massive impact on the followers as well. Past research indicated that when followers are selecting their leaders it is based on many indistinct characteristics. Thus this study is to identify the characteristics that develop into the factors to select a good leader among students. Findings from this present study indicated that from the five dimension of independent variables (responsibility, education, personality, skill and gender), three (education, personality and skill) were directly associated with selecting a good leader among the students. Among the three, education had the biggest impact on selection of a good leader among students. Education being the most imperative factor because a leader with first-class education will gain reverence without much difficulty, be trusted and their words are considered to be more significant and grant greater impact on the followers. It is highly hoped that information gleaned from this present study will shape and produce leaders with first-class qualities for the world of tomorrow.

Introduction

Preface

Leader is an important person that leads or guides others. Organizational viability depends in part on effective leadership. Effective leaders engage in both professional and personal leadership behavior for instance setting a mission, creating a process for achieving goals aligning processes and procedures, building trust, caring for people and acting morally. Interestingly, most of what we know about leadership comes from the examination of how employees relate to their immediate supervisors. Further, although leaders may come and go, appropriate ways to handle tasks and treat people can and should be institutionalized in high-performing organizations (Mastrangelo A. et. al., 2004).

There is a great deal of literature on leadership and the field has many specific streams such as decision making, leader-follower interaction, power of the leader, cultural and gender differences of leadership and many other concepts that have made important contributions to our understanding (Robbins *et al.*, 1994; Caciope R., 1997). Irene H.S.C. (2005) has pointed out that study of gender differences in leadership styles. Numerous authors have supported the argument that women inherently possess certain feminine characteristics (such as good communication skills, good listening, empathy, negotiation and conflict handling skills, as well as interpersonal skills) that diverge sharply from male leadership characteristics. The opposite position in this argument perceives little or no gender difference in leadership styles. Any disparities are attributed to home and family responsibilities or workplace norms. There may be differences in how male and female subordinates/direct reports perceive the qualities and characteristics of leadership (Irene H.S.C., 2005).

Leadership is studied here because it is significant for community development, organizational learning, business effectiveness, project quality, and stakeholder satisfaction. It is generally accepted that there is a strong conceptual link between influence and effective leadership. Management science reveals that leadership efficiently integrates and coordinates division of labor across the organization through influencing employee attitudes and behaviors (Ford and Randolph, 1992; Strang K.D., 2005). Leaders are few and not many are ready to face the challenges expected in this role (Mostovicz E. I. et. al, 2009). Their effectiveness is evaluated by the measurable impact that they immediately make on individuals and organizations.

Cooper C., et. al (1994) suggested that "in order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it; they must not do too much of it; and they must have a sense of success in it". Since leaders or managers are primarily responsible for ensuring that these three exist for their followers or subordinates, it is important to understand the link between leadership and stress. Stressed leaders create stressed organizations and employees.

Thus, it is very imperative to choose a suitable person to be a leader. With so many different characteristics of a leader, which one is the most dominant and least dominant characteristic that a leader should have? What are the characteristic that might influence leader's effectiveness in order to make the organization more effective? And how does the community choose a leader?

Leaders and leadership

According to Anantatmula V. S. (2008), a good leader is one who focuses on doing the right things, compared to a project manager who focuses on doing the things right. Leadership is viewed as the ability to influence the behavior of others to align their goals with that of the leader. Leaders must not only be

confident, but also inspire confidence in the people they interact with. However, one must understand that leaders must understand the type of leadership that must be employed because they are perceived as role models. The project leader should ensure that the project team is "creating purposeful, strategic action that will augment the organization's business strategy".By communicating clearly and effectively, managers can establish an environment of openness and transparency. It can lead to a work environment where team members willingly share information, experiences, and knowledge. These factors also instill trust – among all the participants – in their leader. Therefore, it is imperative that KM leadership should understand and support the personal aspirations of the people and align them with the objectives of the organization.

Irene H.S.C. (2005) stated that there may be differences in how male and female subordinates perceive the qualities and characteristics of leadership. In contrast female middle managers perceived managers to have the characteristics these are leadership ability, competitiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, aggressiveness, forcefulness, ambition, and eagerness to assume responsibility. Women are related directly to the notion of transformational leadership, whereas men are related to transactional leadership. Thus, effectiveness of leader behaviors will be contingent on the cultural characteristics of the organization that reflect cultural dimensions of national culture as well. In addition, four additional characteristics that the leader should have these are value-based leadership, authoritative leadership, bureaucratic leadership and humane orientation leadership. In sum, different gender will have the different leader characteristics to performing their work.

Experience is the best teacher to be a good leader according to Thomas R. J. and Cheese P. (2005). The experience-based approach represents a comprehensive new way of developing leaders. It knits together on-the-job experience, life experience, and specific skill development, rather than presenting employees with a smorgasbord of classes and programs that is tenuously linked to career development, succession planning, or business objectives. The experience-based method can be adapted to the developmental needs and opportunities of people at all stages of their careers, and also to the changing needs of organizations operating in complex and uncertain environments. Experience-based leadership development consists of three major processes – preparing, developing, and preserving – that together produce skills needed by leaders at all levels as well as a concept of leadership practice that encourages lifelong learning.

Sogunro O.A. (2003) affirmed, leaders should learn critical thinking and develop interpersonal skills including conflict management, negotiation, influencing, team building, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, and communication. Other than that, an empathetic leader is able to internalize the predicaments or situations of his or her followers and will be able to make the right decisions toward solving a particular problem. There are 3 role of a leader which are autocratic, democratic and 'laissez-faire'.

Autocratic leader will make all decisions and discourage participation. He told people what to do and did not solicit nor compromise input from group members in decision making. This role will lead to increased productivity, but decreased satisfaction among members. Democratic leader facilitate decision making by encouraging members to participate take responsibility for the task that faced the group and respected

ideas from them. Democratic leaders are more liked by followers, and thus, they tend to sustain their power over a long period of time. The 'laissez-faire' roles of the leader are more passive and relaxed. He will give little or no direction to the group. He virtually provided no direction regarding group's task and allowed members to do whatever they liked.

According to Darling J.R. and Fischer A. K. (1998), leadership is divided into relater, analyzer, director, or socializer. The Relater behavioral style tends to be sympathetic to the needs of others and is quite sensitive to what lies below someone's surface behavior. Relaters are most likely to use empathy and understanding in interpersonal problem solving. The Analyzer behavioral style tend to take precise, deliberate, and systematic approaches to their work, and usually gather and evaluate much data before they act. They also generally industrious, objective, and well organized. They also prefer clarity and order, but often are viewed as being a bit formal. Directors tend to be task oriented, know where they are going and what they want, express themselves succinctly, and get to the point quickly. They are usually independent; willing to take risks, and are valued for their ability to get things done. The Socializer behavioral tend to look at the big picture, often take fresh and novel approaches to problems, and are willing to take risks in order to seize opportunities. A Socializer's ability to charm, persuade, excite, and inspire people with visions of the future can be a strong motivating force. Usually they are tending to decide and act quickly on management issues. They are creative and innovative individuals who have lots of ideas and love to discuss them at length.

On the other hand, Beerel.A. (1997) says that a leader must supposed to guide, advise, facilitate, question or educate others. He or she also must play a far more proactive and pervasive role, be analytic, unempathic and viewed as the politician, or the academician. Other than that, to be an effective strategic planner, he or she must excel in dealing with people; energizing them, mobilizing them, holding them, and stretching them. Moreover, the leader helps shape the sense of destiny, so they must sees what others cannot and/or choose not to see. A primary role of the leader is to assist his or her followers to embrace change and to deal with the value conflicts that that might entail. The leader does not impose, coerce or manipulate, but rather gives space, provides direction and holds and stretches. He or she needs to exercise leadership by mobilizing the resources of the organization to honor their values effectively. Mobilizing resources is not limited to resource allocation based on strategic cost-benefit analysis. Mobilizing means providing space, inspiring and activating energy. Without these skills, the planner will not be able to get others to do the work that they need to do, and the strategic planning exercise will not have the potency that unleashed creative energy and commitment generate.

Findings

A correlation analysis was conducted and the result indicates that skill, personality and education have the strongest relationship whereas there are no relationship between gender and responsibility to selection of a good leader.

Result shows that selection of a good leader among students in UiTM Kedah basically is based on the leader's skill, personality and also their education. For the respondents, leaders without these three qualities will not lead them to a better future in the university. Education is view as an important factor because with good education, it will bring respect from others to

the leader. People will view the leader as someone who walks the talk and information provided is normally trusted more.

Skill is also viewed as an important factor to select a good leader among the students as skills will determine the leader's confidence, abilities as well as their capabilities to persuade others. Besides, a leader who has good soft skills like good communication skill will be able to build good relationship with their followers. These will create a better working environment for the leader and followers.

Personality is another determinant that has been viewed as vital to choose a good leader as personality is always the first impact that people have on others. Leader with good personalities like kind, empathy, guiding and educating others, willing to take risks and inspire people with vision of the future will be among the criteria for a leader to be selected. Most important of al is a leader must always be transparent and has no behind-the-scene agenda.

The finding also shows that there is no relationship between gender and selection of a good leader. These means that nowadays people are being more open minded and less stereotype when determining who will be their leader; be it a lady or a men. Although past research shows that these relationship exist but results indicates the other way round. People are being more analytical when choosing a leader and less emotional as gender is no longer a main factor.

Conclusion

From the research done, it can be inferred that there is a connection between the relationship dependent variable and independent variables. However, education has the strongest impact on the selection of a good leader among the students compared to other independent variables.

Leaders need to be respected and believed by their followers and this can be achieve through many ways and one of them is by having good education. Education will determine the leader's not be underestimated and their words to be trusted and followed. Besides, education is vital as it will lead the leader to be a model for the followers to imitate.

It is said that leaders are born not made. But this research proves the other way round. Leader could be trained and taught and by training with proper medium, a leader will definitely be among the best and be chosen to represent the community. Leaders just need to have the right skills, personality plus education to help them to be trusted, favored, voted and selected.

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