HUMILITY AND TEAM EMPOWERMENT AS A DIMENSION OF LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Humility is characterized in this study as a dimension of successful leadership in the sense of humility being a core aspect of the inner beauty of the human condition. Humility has the capacity to move, inspire and touch. Humble leaders are also considered as approachable by followers. There is a certain degree of warmth in the engagement between humble leaders and their followers. Humble leaders evoke a sense of freedom in their engagement with followers.
Humility in leadership can be practice if leaders are able to model their behaviors on the basis of the metaphors that they find in nature. When leaders exhibit simplicity and child like integrity, they are able to exhibit humility in their relations with followers. Humble leaders lead by example rather than using the force of law, rules or the logic of governmentality. Leaders who are humble are therefore not prone to be coercive. This does not mean that leaders who are not humble are not strong.
KEYWORDS:

Humality, Leadership, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Humble leaders are usually stronger than those leaders who have to rely on force in order

to convince their followers. Weak leaders usually have to rely on flattery, intimidation or

bribes in the form of status or monetary rewards in order to persuade their followers.

Humble leaders, on the other hand stand up for what is right and communicate their

message in strong, but courteous terms. To be humble, and not react to situations in an

impulsive way, is therefore to be strong in character. It means that the leader

contemplates on the situation in rational and logical ways before taking a decision.

In order for leadership practice to be sustainable, it is unlikely that the notion of celebrity CEOs will work on the ground over a period of time. There has to be a significant interaction between humility and leadership in order for a sustainable and effective leadership practice to be established. At the same time, a strong personal will also has to be a part of humility in leadership. The lack of strong will can lead to humble leadership being misunderstood as the lack of capacity to make tough decisions and stand by the positions that the leader has taken.

Identity work that leaders engage in, comprises both conscious and unconscious processes. Leaders try to model their identities on the basis of the grandeur of the self that they imagine is required, in order to hold on to the requirements of the role which they are fulfilling. When followers respond to these self projections, they also end up emphasizing the unconscious elements which the leader had projected. This leads to a toxic culture being instituted in the educational institute. Elements which represent the grandeur of the leader, lead to cultures of anxiety where critique and disagreement lose their value.

The leader becomes more important than she should be, and followers find it difficult to disagree with the leader. It is important to remember that leadership needs to respond to the complex problems of society. It is leaders who have a strong grasp of the changes that are taking place in social and organisational spaces, who can acquire charismatic personality among their followers. It is always useful for the leader to be humble in recognizing that it is not possible for a single person to understand the range of complexities that are evolving in educational institute and society. It is necessary to

remember for the leader to be successful, the competence, confidence and morale of followers will play a crucial role.

Some of the features of transformational leadership have been described as the articulation of motivating visions, the forging of collective identities, building a sense of confidence and hope, and reiterating the values and ideals of the educational institute. These practices still do not focus on achievement generating traits of leaders and only pay attention to how followers may find collective affiliations and meaning making processes through the collective work of leaders. These transformational behaviors are more oriented towards an alignment of values rather than an achievement orientation. Further, due to transformational leadership, followers do find their work to be meaningful and are attached to the work that they are doing. Thus, translated into human resource terms, transformational leadership could play an important role in retention strategies rather than in achievement generating ones.

In fact, even research has indicated that transformational leadership may not positively influence job performance, and results in this regard have been mixed and contradictory. While on an average, transformational leadership has been known to have an impact on job performance, practices which concretely focus on generating achievements have been missing in literature. One of the reasons why transformational leadership may sometimes show a positive impact on job performance is that in some contexts, some of the achievement generating practices may be positively correlated to some of the features of transformational leadership. But this may not be a direct causal relationship. So there is a

need to pay attention to these specific leadership attributes which create an achievement generating orientation.

When team empowerment exists to a great extent, then there are two positive outcomes, process improvement and customer satisfaction. It has also been suggested that face to face interactions have a positive impact on team empowerment. But these face to face interactions are informed by engagements with leaders and a lot actually depends on the attitude adopted by leaders.

Thus, it is important to explore the leadership attributes that create an empowering framework. It has been suggested that autonomy is very important for work teams in permanent situations, it is not important in the context of project teams. However, autonomy is not the only feature of empowerment. Self-efficacy is also an important feature of empowerment, and this dimension of empowerment may be important even in the context of project teams. But empowerment is not naturally created, it has to be enabled and created. Therefore, it is necessary to explore leadership attributes that help in creating empowering practices for followers.

TEAM EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Empowerment does have a positive impact on team performance. It is necessary to explore the determinants of empowerment, and in this, leadership attributes may play an important role. While empowerment has been conceptualised and analysed at the individual level of analysis, it has not been studied as the attribute of individual leaders. On the other hand, team empowerment refers to a collective analysis of the educational

institute's requirements by team members and their ability to respond to it. Conceptualising empowerment from a leadership perspective is important, because if at the individual level, the leader is able to develop attributes which positively contribute to performance, then this influences several followers and creates collective benefits. This study attempts to bridge this gap in leadership studies by conceptualising and operationalising the empowering attributes of leaders.

Thus, this study attempts to bridge research gaps by attempting to conceptualise some key leadership attributes like authenticity, humility, empowering practices and achievement generating practices, which have not been paid adequate attention in literature till now. These four attributes of leadership together constitute the successful features of leadership, which has not been looked at in literature till now. While many other aspects of leadership have been studied, the successful aspects have been largely ignored. This study attempts to systematically synthesise and integrate ideas pertaining to successful aspects of leadership. It is important to do so as many of these successful aspects of leadership can energise and inspire followers to give their best to the educational institute, and feel extremely nice from within in going about their jobs.

One of the outcomes that have been studied in literature till now is the aspect of ethical and unethical cognitions and behaviours among followers. However, this is still a sense of ethics conceptualized at the level of individual actions and behaviours and whether they are appropriate or not. A collective sense of ethical agency has still not been studied in detail in leadership studies. This study contributes to literature by addressing this gap through the outcome variable of sense of belonging. When the ethical agency of

individuals is in tune with the ethical agency of the collective space of educational institutes, then there develops a sense of belonging among teachers. It is argued in this study that successful features of leadership can positively contribute to such a sense of belonging among teachers. On the other hand, studies pertaining to organizational change have looked at issues of belonging. But the focus here is again on processes of belonging as creation of boundaries and identification of groups through which processes such as learning can take place.

Belongingness in these terms involves issues of engagement and disengagement, communication and trust. But a sense of belonging in terms of a cohesiveness in organizational functioning has not yet been integrated into leadership studies literature. Literatures of industrial relations and organizational effectiveness have dealt with the quality of working life. Thus, the sense of belonging will also have to be distinguished from industrial relations conceptualization of worker participation. Thus, there is a research gap pertaining to integrating successful aspects of leadership with outcomes such as sense of belonging. This study attempts to bridge this gap by conceptualizing sense of belonging as a response to leadership actions.

Leadership studies have looked at the issue of empowerment and have suggested that notions of empowerment cannot follow a one size fits all strategy. Thus, leaders can intervene to craft empowerment strategies for teachers which fit the context of the educational institute. Empowerment is also about exercising judgement and deciding how much to empower each teacher, and empowerment can be viewed as a dyadic relationship

between a supervisor and subordinate. Empowerment has also been considered in the context of identity related issues and the roles that teachers perform in this regard.

DISCUSSION

Empowerment has also been linked to creativity and motivation of teachers and it has been suggested more empirical evidence may be needed in this regard. It has been suggested that empowerment related practices are individualized at the level of subordinates, and the sense of empowerment is experienced as an individual level phenomena.

On the other hand, collective conceptualizations of empowerment have largely been ignored in leadership or empowerment studies. Empowerment as an organizational climate brought in by the actions of leaders where teachers feel the sense of freedom to freely express their opinions in the educational institute. Thus, the sense of freedom experienced by teachers in expressing their ideas and articulating their disagreements has not been paid much attention in literature till now. Sense of freedom is about the lack of insecurities and fears among teachers about expressing their disagreements with their leaders. When teachers begin to feel that leaders will not retaliate even when they have expressed contrarian opinions, then a sense of freedom has been achieved in the educational institute. This study attempts to bridge this literature gap by studying sense of freedom as on outcome of successful leadership.

It has been suggested that when workers are valued and the educational institute creates a sense of contribution among them, then they are likely to remain in the educational

institute and unlikely to leave. It has also been found that those teachers who have greater political skill are thought to have more chances of promotability.

In educational institutes, when leaders promote their political interests rather than fairness, then those with political skills begin to do well. On the other hand, those who have seriously contributed to the educational institute may not obtain any rewards. Consequently, they may not cultivate any sense of contribution and they may only cultivate a disgruntled resentment. Thus, expected contributions need to be placed in a framework where inducements are provided to teachers to do well, if firm performance is to be improved.

One of the inducements is a positive sense of recognition and encouragement provided by the leader. It is the leader who is working very closely with teachers. Thus, if the leader makes the teachers feel that they are contributing to the educational institute, then they will feel motivated to do well. It has been suggested that transformational leadership has an impact on job related outcomes like job satisfaction only when the self determination needs of teachers are satisfied.

While leadership may provide teachers with the perception that they are determining the things they do on their own, it is still likely that teachers may not get the feeling that they are contributing to the educational institute. They may rely on positive reinforcements from their leader in order to obtain a sense of such contribution. Rather than search for an individualist sense of autonomy, the feeling of having contributed to the collective good of the educational institute may be a more effective organizational strategy. Perceived organizational support does not rely on a sense of top down organizational hierarchy

alone, but it also depends on the creation of a sense of organizational community. This means that leadership may also have to create a non-hierarchical and a greater community oriented practice in the educational institute.

One of the easiest ways of creating such a non hierarchical practice is to emphasize the contributions that teachers make. Once teachers feel that they are contributing to the educational institute they feel that they are a part of the larger organizational community, and this leads to greater cohesiveness. Yet, as has been seen, the sense of contribution has not been studied much in literature, and has particularly not received attention in the context of leadership studies. This study attempts to bridge this gap by studying sense of contribution as an outcome of successful leadership.

Normative commitments are greatly enhanced when effective surveillance mechanisms are put in place. But increasing commitment through an improvement in surveillance mechanisms often comes at the cost of rupturing the relationship between leaders and followers. On the other hand, when leaders are able to create a culture of excellence in the educational institute then that itself becomes a motivating factor for teachers. Rather than relying on commitment and surveillance, it might be a better strategy to rely on excellence. Self perpetuating authority regimes may often reproduce themselves in educational institutes and in order to rupture these regimes, a culture of contestation and refutation of domination by the elite may have to be created. It is this degree of refutation that can produce a greater degree of involvement among teachers.

CONCLUSION

Leaders who actively create a culture of excellence ensure that teachers are involved in their jobs to a greater extent. This leads to a greater degree of self esteem among teachers as the concept of job involvement is related to the self worth of teachers. Consequently, teachers may also feel a greater sense of belonging and contribution to the educational institute. Norms of reciprocity may ensure that leaders render support in the form of impression management gestures to reinforce the positions of other leaders who may not be performing well.

Such norms of reciprocity through which low performing leaders are supported do not lead to a culture of excellence. It requires a degree of frankness and candour to create a culture of excellence. Innovation diffusion is also strongly linked to the networks operating in educational institutes and is linked with identity based issues of recognizing excellence.

While corporate excellence may be indicated by financial performance, there are various other indicators of excellence like the educational institute being a great place to work or great products emerging from the educational institute. Again studies, especially leadership literature has hardly looked at how a culture of excellence can be conceptualized as an indicator of an educational institute's functioning. This study attempts to bridge this gap by studying culture of excellence as an outcome of successful leadership.

Having looked at the research gaps in the field of leadership studies, and having outlined the objectives to be pursued by this research, the key variables of this study are explored next.

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