

Leadership in A Cross Culture Working Environment

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Leadership in a Cross-Cultural working environment
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ABSTRACT: *Internationalization and globalization have made organizations not to escape hiring professionals from different cultures. In the modern world, leaders should be ready to deal with people from different cultures. Leadership in cross-cultural working environment has become complex since some leaders do not know what they are doing and how they have to do it. This research attempts to enrich the understanding of Leaders in cross-cultural organizations. The exploratory study consists of 9 different leaders of an organization with different culture and background. These leaders belonged to different countries and with team members of multicultural people. The respondents represent top private educational institutions in Malaysia. Few of them are academic staff and few are non-academic staffs but all of them are holding managerial positions leading team in the same organization that consists of multi-cultural background. The findings from the study lead to the proposition that it is important to apply the four dimensions of culture as depicted by Professor Hofstede. These include analyzing the power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity of other societies.*

KEYWORDS: *Leadership, Competence, Cross-cultural, Multinational Organizations and Communication*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Leaders have the responsibility to bring together all individuals involved in their organizations and treat them with foremost priority. This does not only imply providing people with what they require and catering for their needs, but it also means providing a safe working environment to make the workers more productive. The major role of a leader is to learn how to utilize what he has and not necessarily to make a change. Leadership is an integrated procedure whereby an individual impacts on the behaviours and attitudes of other people from different background with the aim of achieving a common objective (Minseo, Terry & Matthew, 2018). Leaders should have HEART. This means that they should be human relationship builders, have empathy, value awareness and acceptance, embrace respect and have trust (Samaha, Beck & Palmatier, 2014). With internationalization and globalization becoming stronger and louder, few successful organizations can escape the need to operate across different cultures. In the modern world, leaders should be ready to deal with people from different cultures.

Today's organizations are complex bodies. Nevertheless, one important principle of success remains unchanged-the requirement of effective communication. Communication is established in various methods including verbal and non-verbal. One of the ways of enhancing business performance is through nurturing and maintaining an appropriate communication between workers. As businesses continue to expand in other countries and workforce becomes more multicultural, the homogeneous work has continued to become extinct. It is vital for management today to ensure that they comprehend and be understood by other cultures. The paper aims at discussing leadership in cross cultural working environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sahar Consulting (2016) inspirational leadership is hard to come. The reason as to why leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther were inspirational was that apart from knowing how and what to do, they knew why they were doing. While most leaders know what and how they are doing, very few know why they are doing. In this way, some leaders lack the aspect of sharing leadership vision, which is important since it makes followers to follow the values of their leaders and make them as their own. According to Sahar Consulting (2016), cross-cultural leadership is an important issue not only for the success of an organization, but also for the purpose of developing employees. Leading innovative, multicultural, productive and diverse teams in an evolving working environment and marketplace has become more complex than the past. Smart and focused leaders as noted by Magala (2005) are aware that cross-cultural competence improves organizations' success and revenue.

The significance of global leadership is the capacity to impact on people whose behaviours are not like those of leaders and come from various cultural backgrounds. Sahar Consulting (2016) stipulates that to achieve success, global leaders need to embrace global mindset, portray cultural flexibility and adaptability besides

tolerating high levels of ambiguity. On their part, Bass & Bass (2008) indicates that diversity entails valuing diversity, respecting and acting as human being, aspects that all of us embrace. Diversity does not entail race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation but also parental and marital status, education, titles, jobs, geographic location and socio-economic factors.

Schneider & Barsoux (2003) specifies that diversity does not cover political correctness, tolerance, black and white, meritocracy and blame. One of the most important factors that leaders in a cross-culture should adopt is inclusion. An inclusive working environment allows workers to maximize their personal ability as well as the potential of the business. Inclusion is all about removal of hindrances including work discrimination, prejudice and favoritism in order for workers and their organization to achieve their objectives. The culture of inclusion creates an atmosphere that support people in addition to welcoming fresh ideas with the objective of tapping hidden talents from all the stakeholders. DelCampo et al (2010) stipulates that the first advantage of diversity is that it helps to create synergy. Other advantages of diversity include enhancing communication skills, building fairness, increasing productivity, lowering litigation expenses, expanding market share and enhancing cooperation.

The two contrasting cultural dimensions are collectivism and individualism. Hofstede (2001) study revealed that most independent individuals were from Pakistan, Venezuela, Taiwan while most fiercely independent ones are from Great Britain, the US, Netherlands and Australia. Hofstede (2001) stipulates four dimensions of culture as discussed below;

Power Distance

This dimension covers the level of equality or inequality between individuals in a specific society. A state with a high power distance indicates that it emphasizes on inequality between people for instance where the society follows caste system and limited upward mobility. On the other hand, a country with low power distance is an indication that power, status or wealth is not emphasized on. Due to unlimited upward mobility, equality is achieved in such a society.

Individualism

The dimension of individualism relates on the notch to which a society reinforces interpersonal relationship as well as collective and individual achievement. If a society has high degree of individualism, it shows that individuality is dominant and the rights of individuals are emphasized. Various relationships with other people are common even though such relationships are weak. On the other hand, low level of individualism is an indication that the society is more collective making ties between people to be strong and families remaining united. Societies adopting individualism makes people to value collective responsibility.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance as noted by Hofstede (2001), relates to the degree of acceptance for ambiguity and uncertainty within a particular society. A society that has high level of uncertainty avoidance has low level of tolerance towards ambiguity and uncertainties (Divine, 2015). This means that the society is rule oriented and follows defined regulations and laws. Low uncertainty avoidance is also an indication that the society is less concerned and it relates towards experimentation and variety. The society is willing to take risks and any change is acceptable.

Masculinity

The dimension of masculinity relates to the degree at which a society reinforces or does not reinforce the traditional masculine responsibilities and male achievement, authority and control. A high masculinity score according to Hofstede (2001) is an indication that a society experiences a high level of gender differentiation. In such a society, male dominate a major part of the society and power structures. Low masculinity score implies that a society has low level of differentiation and genders experience inequity (Goodall, 2014). Another vital aspect of societies embracing masculinity is that females and males are treated equally in all cultural issues.

Sahar Consulting (2016) accentuates leaders to adopt cultural competence. This refers to the ability of leaders and people to interact properly with individuals from different cultures. By developing cultural competence, Hofstede (2001) notes that people are able to understand, relate with, as well as effectively communicate with people from different cultures. Culture entails the norms, values as well as traditions that impact on how individuals within a given society think, perceive, make judgment and behave. Some of the major culture influences that leaders should consider include meeting styles, communication, work styles, time management, conflict resolution, entertaining and negotiation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Globalization has become a major issue that activates several topics and research related to movement of organizations, capital and labor. As the distinction of states boundaries decrease, new opportunities for business expansion have emerged. Rapid expansion of global companies and international economy has resulted to an increased number of professionals operating across boundaries thus forming a multi-cultural workplace. Based on the fact that different cultures perceives different ideas and though in relation to leadership and management, cross-cultural leadership competence has become an important concept since it allows individuals to understand cultural norms and context (Johnson, Lenartowicz & Apud, 2006).

The research questions that will be applied by the study are;

1. Do you think you are an inspirational leader?
2. You as a team leader, do you have your own vision or you carry forward the vision of superiors?
3. Do you think being a leader in cross-cultural environment; competence can lead to organization's success?
4. How do you tolerate uncertainty in your leadership responsibility?
5. As a leader do you encourage your subordinates to demonstrate their personal skills?
6. How do you respond to criticism from your subordinates?
7. Are you willing to take any risk (going beyond common practice) for your organization's success?

The research entailed collecting data to study differences in relation to leadership style and connection between leaders and team members in multinational organizations. To investigate the notion of cross-cultural competence, the research entailed collecting data from different people from different background. Through cross-cultural competence, managers are able to understand the perceptions of host countries in an appropriate way. In this way, managers can operate and work effectively in unfamiliar culture.

The data material, which is collected from leadership perspective with the aim of properly understanding approaches, adopted by leaders and has answers to the research questions. The methodological approach entailed obtaining data through interviews. As indicated by Bryman (2008) qualitative reserch is important since it assists researchers to gather adequate information regarding the thoughts of individuals as well as their reflections. The reserch used abductive technique, whereby reserch questions were formulated using theories. In addition, interviews were conducted in order to establish the thoughts and behaviours of individuals who involved in organizational context (Polak & Green, 2015).

The organization under research is an established educational institute with campuses across the world. The organization's original location was in Malaysia but it has been active in different countries around the world for a number of years. Since the study aims at establishing the multicultural working environment between foreign workforce and their leadership, the studied organization was selected. The major criterion for the study was an organization with people working from different cultures and background, thus researchers were limited on their options. The interview conducted was of Project Managers, Program Leaders, Program Coordinator, Department heads, Year Leader and Principle Lecturer. Project Manager entailed someone with experience in the field and who had worked in different countries on different projects. Department Heads and Program Leaders were the young people with less experience but with more enthusiasm and motivation towards the job and carrier. Networking Manager was someone with a lot of experience in fieldwork. Additionally people related to education and academic field were also interviewed.

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No.	Gender	Age	Highest Level Education	Position	Experience	Country
1	Female	26	Masters	Project Coordinator	04	Indonesia
2	Male	26	Masters	Program Leader	03	Malaysia
3	Male	32	Masters	Project Manager	08	India
4	Male	25	Masters	Year Leader	04	Malaysia
5	Male	46	PhD	Program Leader	20	Libya

6	Male	44	PhD	Networking Manager	22	Sudan
7	Female	26	Masters	Department Head	02	Pakistan
8	Male	38	Masters	Principal Lecturer	10	Pakistan
9	Female	48	Masters	Principal Lecturer	25	Malaysia

Data Collection

Interviews were already scheduled with the participants. These interviews were held at their respective offices. The participant was informed about the nature and need of this interview. Each of the participants was interviewed for 20-25 minutes. The subject of the interview was not disclosed to the participants till the last minute. The questions were open ended and the participant had no time or words limits, participant could answer short or long, as they preferred. The questions for the interview were derived from the literature review. All the answers were audio recorded with the consent of participants. Important points in the response of participants were noted down along with the recordings.

Data integration and analysis

Data collected is recorded and integrated accordingly. All the data is examined carefully repeatedly. The identities of the respondents are kept confidential. The participants are coded as R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8 and R9.

IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Detail study has been organized in context of 7 different issues. These all issues were discussed with participants and their views were taken on these matters

1. Inspirational Leadership

Leadership never comes when a leader is too strict and dominant on his subordinates. A leader needs to be inspirational for his team and subordinates to follow his footsteps. A leader should know what he/she is doing and what will be the outcome. A leader should know where would his/her steps or decisions land the team.

Sahar Consulting (2016) stated that inspirational leadership is hard to come. The reason as to why leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther were inspirational was that apart from knowing how and what to do, they were aware of their main goal. While most leaders know what and how they are doing, very few know why they are doing.

R2 believes that he has to lead the way and rest it is on the subordinates whether to follow that lead or not. He tries his best to inspire them. R4 thinks that he might not be an inspiration to the people who are working since long in the organization but he tries to inspire and motivate the new people joining the organization. R9 asserted that it is important to motivate and inspire people by any means to get the required tasks completed in the given time.

2. Vision of a leader

A leader should have his/her own vision. They should carry the vision of superiors but those visions of superiors should not over come his/her own vision. It also depends on the leader’s communications and how he translate his vision to the rest. Some leaders lack the aspect of sharing leadership and make their own visions. (Sahar Consulting 2016). Scholars, corporate trainers and management consultants are of the view that supporting a vision is important and the vision should be effective, no one can tell what a vision looks like (Avery, 2004).

In regards to the above statement, R1 said, “... obviously I have to carry the vision of my superiors but in order to achieve that vision I will use my own vision and creativity to accomplish the desired task”.

One of the respondents (R7) believes that every organization has its own vision and goals but as a department to achieve these milestones one must have his own vision. Respondent 3 (R3) believes that being in the upper hierarchy he should be having his own vision. A leader should know how to integrate his vision to the organization’s goal.

3. Competence leading to organization's success

Leadership competencies are leadership skills and behaviors that contribute to superior performance. A leader can use competency-based approach to leadership. Organizations can better identify and develop their next generations of leaders.

Smart and focused leaders as noted by Magala (2005) are aware that cross-cultural competence improves organizations' success and revenue.

"When different cultures meet, there are more number of visions and ideas to choose from to plan for the success" these were the comments of R5 regarding competence leading to success. R6 had almost the same views about competence, as he believed that multiple cultures bring diverse ideas that can achieve a globalized goal. R1 disagrees with the others as she thinks that competence is not important, where as solid teamwork and good communication can lead to success.

4. Toleration of uncertainty

A leader should not have a structured mind. They should deal uncertainty with an urge to control the situation, and should learn to act without the clear picture of future but with an uncertainty on issues. To deal with ambiguity leader should be comfortable with uncertainty rather than panicking. It is more desirable for leaders to have Stable interpersonal skill in uncertain situations.

Characteristics of a leader according to Yukl (2002), to be able to tolerate stress, self confident, responsible for own actions (Yukl, 2002). Leaders should always remember that the predictions of future would never be 100% accurate thus they should always be ready to meet situations (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982)

R3 has the view that when an uncertainty strikes it is always good to seek advice from your subordinates as they may have a better view of the situation. R6 believes that the reason of uncertainty should be found and removed. One should emphasize on it so it, is removed and a solution is found which is in the interest of everyone. R9 says that ignoring the uncertainty and moving on is the best way forward unless it creates big hurdles in achieving goals.

5. Encouraging subordinates

Leaders should always encourage their subordinates in order to get better working environment. Positive working environment can help employee to give better input to generate more responsive and relevant policies.

Schneider & Barsoux (2003) specifies that diversity does not cover political correctness, tolerance, black and white, meritocracy and blame. One of the most important factors that leaders in a cross – culture environment should adopt is inclusion. An inclusive working environment allows workers to maximize their personal ability as well as the potential of the business.

Replying to the question regarding encouragement of subordinates to demonstrate their personal skills all the respondents were on the same page. All of them preferred encouraging the subordinates to use their personal skills to manage any sort of problems. R7 was of the view that everyone is blessed with a special skill of their own and by allowing them to display their abilities would help him to see who is good at what task and he can assign the tasks accordingly.

6. Response to criticism

Leaders who hide behind closed doors create barriers to colleagues and signal that they are not open to communication or criticism from their subordinates.

"None of us are as clever as all of us". A leader should listen to people whether he likes their criticism on his policies or not. They need to weigh up to their concerns. Embrace the people who look at the world differently because it is always great to get a contrary view or a view outside the box.

A state with a high power distance indicates that it emphasizes on inequality between people, For instance where the society follows caste system and limited upward mobility. On the other hand, a society with low power distance is an indication that power, status or wealth is not emphasized on. Due to unlimited upward mobility, equality is achieved in such a society (Hofstede 2011).

Facing criticism is not an easy thing sometimes but all of the respondents were open to criticism. R3 said that "accept them positively, take some time to analyze the criticism and identify your own weakness". R1 said that he responds to criticism with open heart and avoids doing things that might lead to conflict later.

7. Accepting Risk

Playing it safe and not taking any sort of risk is probably the most dangerous things a leader can do. In today's rapidly changing and highly competitive business environment a leader should be taking risks for the benefit of an organization. Risk taking is increasingly critical element of leadership and essential for leader's effectiveness.

Some of the major culture influences that leaders should consider include meeting styles, communications, work styles, time management, conflict resolution, entertaining and negotiation. (Hofstede 2001)

The last question was regarding the risk taking, R4 said that taking risk was important, as you cannot achieve things and desired goals by staying in the comfort zone. Respondent 3 said, “ Where there is no risk there is no scope of progress.” All the respondents were ready to take risks for the sake of organization’s success; while R8 said, “to achieve success we need to think out of box and once you are out of box there are always unknown risks”

V. CONCLUSION

The objective of the paper is to explore the competencies that are necessary in a management position in any organization. The multicultural context has greatly impacted on the way leadership is viewed. Cross-cultural competence is related to style of management in addition to organizational culture. Within the cross-cultural leadership, the competence to communicate has been supported by all participants. Notably, the issue of inclusion makes leaders dealing with individuals from various cultures to create openness in their organizations. cross-cultural leadership can be achieved through effective communication where employees should be involved in decision-making procedure thus achieving openness. As noted in this paper, different actors provide similar views when addressing cross-cultural leadership. Nevertheless, some variations exist in the way participants argued. For example, one of the respondents believed that competence is not important but solid teamwork and good communication can lead to success. Cross-cultural leadership is important since it does not only make organizations to be successful, but also it makes employees to develop. Global leadership is the capacity to impact on the behaviors of employees and embrace diversity. Diversity entails valuing people regardless of their race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, parental and marital status, education, titles, jobs, geographic location and socio-economic factors. A leader who is focused at making his organization and engage with employees from different culture can employ Hofstede four cultural dimensions, which include power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity.

As noted by Sahar Consulting (2016) leading multicultural and diverse teams has become a complex process. This is due to lack of sharing leadership vision among some leaders who do not value diversity in the workplace. Professor Hofstede four dimension of culture is a way to success for leaders working in multicultural environment. These include analyzing the power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity of other societies. In this way, they will learn more about the employees and apply appropriate leadership strategies.

VI. LIMITATIONS

Even though the research has established various important issues for instance proper communication and inclusion in cross-cultural leadership, it has limitation, which calls for future reserch. For example, the actors were engaged in an interview but the full context cannot be obtained just through interviews. It may not be possible to establish how the participants behave in practice. This means that observations can be used to supplement future research. This is based on the fact that majority on individuals within this generation are opting expanding their organization in other countries. Involvement of perspectives of male and female leaders will also make future studies to identify their views as far as cross-cultural working environment and leadership are concerned.

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