DEVELOPING A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE IN MODERN CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Organizations need good leadership if they want to grow, be relevant, and provide good services for people. This basic principle of organizational development applies to all kinds of organizations, private and governmental, small and large, Christian or secular. For this reason, many organizations are investing large amounts of money to train their leaders or are paying immense salaries to CEOs that has proven leadership qualities.

For many years, Christians have considered that the leaders of their organizations do not need leadership qualifications … only spiritual guidance. Without minimizing the value of spiritual guidance acquired through prayer, studying the Word of God, and personal submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have to take into consideration that Christian organizations need skilled leaders in order to maximize their efficiency in serving God and people. In the third millennium, in the new religious freedom environment, Christian organizations must have trained and skilled leaders at all levels.

This article addresses the main leadership styles, namely Authoritarian, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Transactional, and Transformational. These leadership styles will be compared and contrasted with the purpose of helping Christian leaders define and develop their personal leadership style. However, because a personal leadership style is the result of personal characteristics, background, personal philosophy of life given by ethical norms and core values, and models of leadership a person has had in his or her life, the article also takes these factors into consideration as well.

Keywords: religious freedom, Romanian leadership

1. Introduction

Throughout human history, people have been interested in studying leadership. This interest has increased in the last 60 years when researchers started to explore the concept of leadership and its complexity. Many definitions of leadership developed as a result of this research. Bennis [1] found over 350 definitions of leadership.

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Earlier, Gini [2] reached similar conclusions, observing that almost every theorist provided his or her own unique definition of leadership. Bass came to the same conclusion observing that, "there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" [3]. These theorists looked at leadership from different perspectives. Hancott observed that "some theorists focused on leadership characteristics (Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948), and behaviors (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Fiedler, 1967), while others concentrated on situational variables (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; House, 1971) and desired ends or results (Bass, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 1990; Tichy & Devanna, 1986)" [D.E. Hancott, *The relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance in the largest public companies in Canada*, Capella University, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2005, 17].

Others, like Rock [4], defined leadership as a process of teaching people how to think. Before him, Barnard defined leadership as "a specialized work of maintaining the organization in operation" [5], seeing leadership more as a function than a position. Givray defines a leader from the perspective of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), rather than a leader because "leaders are shaped and defined by character. CEOs are expected to boost sales, improve profit margin, and make money for share holders. Leaders inspire and enable others to do excellent work and realize their potential." [6] Givray asserted that leaders' function is to inspire followers and model organizational culture. Bass defined leadership as the relations between two or more members of a group "that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members" [3, p. 20]. In other words, leaders influence followers and shape organizational relationships.

This article focuses on four areas of leadership. In the first part, the author addresses the main leadership styles identified by leadership literature, namely Authoritarian, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Transactional, and Transformational. In the second part, the author compares and contrasts different leadership styles, and in the third part a new leadership theory is presented. The fourth part considers other elements that are important in the development of a personal leadership style in Christian organizations. The article closes with conclusion.

2. Leadership styles

In general, leadership literature identifies the following leadership styles: Authoritarian, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Transactional, and Transformational. Although it is difficult to provide a definition for each of the five leadership styles, it is important to note the similarities and differences among them. In trying to define various leadership styles, the changes in leadership theory from trait to behavioural to contingency and situational models must be emphasized.

2.1. Authoritarian leadership

The authoritarian leadership model refers to the way power is distributed, how decisions are made, and how leaders solve a problem [7]. In the authoritarian leadership model, the leader defines the problem, diagnoses the problem, generates, evaluates and chooses among alternative solutions [8]. Aryee et al. [7], observed that an authoritarian leader has an internal need or control manifested in such behaviours as "ignoring subordinate suggestions, belittling subordinate contribution, and insisting on absolute obedience". Authoritarian leadership style is the dominant leadership style in Romania, even in Christian organizations. Partially, this leadership style is due to the long communist rule in the country [9].

2.2. Autocratic paternalistic leadership

The autocratic paternalistic leadership model is another form of the authoritarian leadership style, as both styles emerge from *patriarchism*. According to Lee, *patriarchism* is "a form of social organization in which the father is the supreme authority and is the highest-ranking member in the family, clan, or tribe" [10]. The autocratic paternalistic leader "acknowledges and considers the employees' rights and feelings. This type of relationship is analogous to a father who does not forcibly control or direct the activities of his child or children but guides them in an understanding and loving way" [10].

The disadvantage of the autocratic paternalistic leadership style is limited communication between the leader and followers and little teamwork. For many centuries Romanian society was a patriarchal society, with strong authoritarian leadership [11]. Leaders were father figures with absolute authority and followers were children with limited or no personal responsibility [12].

2.3. Democratic leadership

The democratic leadership model is defined by the way the leader relates to followers and how decisions are made. According to Chen et al., democratic leaders foster a climate of empowerment, "enabling subordinates to feel a greater sense of power" [13]. Showing respect and consideration, the democratic leader pays attention to followers' needs and creates a collegial atmosphere in the organization that encourages followers' contribution in the decision process [14]. According to modern studies, Romanians have a considerable preference for a democratic leadership style, but they have limited ability to use their freedom in professional settings, especially in Christian organizations.

2.4. Laissez-faire leadership

The laissez-faire leadership model refers primarily to the extent which leadership is avoided. Bass described the attitude of laissez-faire leaders as allowing followers "complete freedom of action, providing them with materials, refrained from participating except to answer questions when asked" [15], and without giving evaluative remarks on their performance. Laissez-faire leaders exercise little control over their followers leaving them to set the direction for their actions, define their roles and describe their tasks.

The laissez-faire leadership style is almost non-existent in the Romanian Christian leadership culture because Romanians, in general, wait for their leaders to decide for them. They do not want to make risky decisions if there are other options [16].

2.5. Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership uses social exchange as a means of leadership. According to Bass and Reggio, this exchange, "is based on the leader discussing with others what is required and specifying the conditions and rewards these others will receive if they fulfil those requirements" [15, p. 4]. Transactional leaders motivate subordinates "by appealing to their personal desires" [17]. According to leadership theorists, transactional leaders do not encourage their followers to think creatively, and innovation is not a requirement. These followers may be monitored on the basis of predetermined criteria and on standard procedures.

In their study, 'Transactional and transformational leadership impacts on organizational learning', Zagorsek, Dimovski and Skerlavaj described three dimensions of transactional leadership [18]. The first dimension is contingent reward leadership that describes the behaviour of the transactional leader interested in clarifying the role and task requirements for followers and providing material or psychological rewards after the followers have fulfilled their contractual requirements. The second dimension presents the transactional leader as an active vigilant interested only in fulfilling organizational standards. The third dimension describes the transactional leader as a passive manager waiting to take action after followers make mistakes. Passive management by exception presents a leader that neglects to take action until problems become acute.

In Romania transactional leaders are developing the second and the third dimensions of transactional leadership. Many Romanian managers have an engineering background and are task oriented, interested only in fulfilling organizational standards. Other Romanian leaders, including Christian leaders, use a passive management by exception style because of poor management skills, uncertainty in dealing with their tasks, or lack of organizational direction [19].

2.6. Transformational leadership

Before defining transformational leadership, it is important to observe that transformational leadership is not a well-known concept in Romania. Transformational is translated many times into Romanian as *transformative* [20] and the four components are not well defined. Nevertheless, Amar and Zlate emphasize the need of the transformational leadership style in modern Romanian society as an instrument for increasing organizational efficiency.

By providing both significance and understanding, transformational leadership has an inspirational impact on followers, motivating them to achieve extraordinary outcomes. Bass defines the transformational or charismatic leader as "a person with strong convictions, determined, self-confident, and emotionally expressive" [3, p. 220]. For Bass and Riggio [15], transformational leadership has four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Using the multifactor leadership questionnaire for transformational leadership, Snodgrass et al., defined transformational leadership, and emphasized that idealized influence relates to a leader being "admired, respected, and trusted" [21]. Inspirational motivation happens when "the leader provides meaning and challenges their followers' work. Individual and team spirit is aroused, and enthusiasm and optimism are displayed. The leader encourages followers to envision the future." [21] Intellectual stimulation is the result of "followers' effort to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" [21]. Individual consideration occurs when "the leader considers each individual's needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach and mentor" [21].

3. Comparing and contrasting leadership styles

In comparing and contrasting different leadership models, the scores for delegation ability are higher for authoritarian leaders than for laissez-faire leaders. Authoritarian leaders "maintain their success, either because of the social prestige of their position and their personal capacity to impress and dominate their followers" [3, p. 419]. The authoritarian leaders show their power by giving frequent orders, changing commands, praise and approval, and non-constructive criticism [22]. Laissez-faire leaders are at the opposite end of the spectrum: they give group members complete freedom of action, do not give direction to followers, and do not make evaluative remarks [23].

However, the main distinction among different styles of leadership is not between the most controlling (authoritarian) versus the least controlling (laissez-faire). The biggest distinction lies in the different ways power is distributed, whose needs are met, and how decisions are made [24].

Considering this criteria, authoritarian versus democratic leadership provides the most interesting comparison.

Another element that makes a difference in leadership style is leaning skills. Concerning learning skills, McCauley and Van Velsor observed that "learning new approaches, behaviors, and attitudes is no simple task. It is neither easy nor automatic." [25] Good leaders recognize that learning from experience is easier, so they consciously try to maximize their learning experience. McCauley and Van Velsor identified five reasons learning from experience can be difficult: (1) everything else seems more urgent, (2) inertia and past success hold us back, (3) learning signals risk and triggers anxiety, (4) personal orientation and preference get in the way, and (5) support for learning is often missing or inadequate. None of these five reasons hinders the transformational leader's learning experience. The transformational leader promotes change and is a quick study, but prioritizes their time and satisfies their curiosity to acquire the most important information. However, the other leadership styles, especially authoritarian and laissez-faire, learning from experience is more challenging.

Each leadership style influences the culture of an organization. The influence of each leadership style can be positive or negative depending on when, where, and how a particular leadership style is used [26]. In times of change or crisis, permissive authoritarian or transformational leadership styles are the most appropriate [27]. In these circumstances, an organization needs the versatility and cooperation that come from trust and friendly relationships promoted by a transformational leadership style. In the long view, the democratic leadership style is more beneficial than the autocratic leadership style. Multidirectional communication will improve relationships in the organization between leaders and group members.

The laissez-faire leadership approach is associated with dissatisfaction, unproductiveness and ineffectiveness, as well as with withdrawal from responsibilities and lack of involvement in the decisional process from both the leader and followers [28]. However, one must consider that every leadership style can be misused. Authoritarian styles can become dictatorships; democratic styles can degenerate into laissez-faire approaches; and transformational leadership can degenerate into a personality cult.

4. A modern leadership theory

Leadership theories are not static; they evolve with society. In recent years, researchers have developed leadership theories by adding more styles to the list of leadership models presented above. For example, Yeo uses a global philosophy of life, named by him as a 'worldview' [29] to define seven leadership styles: autocratic leader (type A), autocratic leader (Type B), bureaucratic leader, enabling leader, charismatic leader, servant leader and visionary leader. According to Yeo, there are two types of autocratic leaders; both share an oppressive attitude toward their followers. The difference

between the two types of autocratic leaders is how they view their followers. Type A leaders favour employees who do things the right way rather than doing the right things, and Type B leaders treat their employees as children with a "benevolent paternalistic or maternalist attitude" [29].

Yeo observed that bureaucratic leaders are interested in hierarchy, and they "subconsciously impose rules and systems that obstruct workflow. They are easily motivated by goals and targets, and are largely governed by rules." [29] Similar to bureaucratic leaders, enabling leaders are motivated by goals and targets.

Yeo stated the difference between bureaucratic and enabling leadership styles is that enabling leaders focus "on unleashing the potential of each team player" [29]. Charismatic leaders focus on emotions and attitudes. Yeo observed they develop "a sense of empathy towards people and aim to please them by being good listeners and smooth talkers. Frequently, they adopt a consultative approach, making sure people's feelings are taken care of before any execution of action is considered." [29] In conclusion, Yeo emphasized that charismatic leadership is the theoretical foundation for transformational leadership theory.

5. Elements that collaborate in the development of a personal leadership style

A personal leadership style is the result of personal characteristics, background, personal philosophy of life given by ethical norms and core values, and the models of leadership a person has had in his or her life.

5.1. Religious background

Religious background plays an important role in defining and developing a personal leadership style. For example, an evangelical Christian with a strong belief that both meaning and core values are developed in human life through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the mind, wants to lead with integrity, dedicating his or her life to the welfare of their people.

At the same time, it is known that the Protestant tradition has often placed religion in one category, and reason (and sometimes science) in another, separate category, believing that each has little to say to the other. One advantage of this approach is that it protects religion from critical examination in the sense that one's religious beliefs are not subject to rational scrutiny or critical analysis. However, this approach comes with at least one disadvantage. It marginalizes religion from the mainstream of reasoned debate and relegates it to a purely private realm where it is often not taken seriously as 'real knowledge' and is not regarded as rational. Christians consider the Bible the propositional revelation from God, but they know that it "does not give us immediate and ambiguous entrée to truth" [30].

Another aspect of a Christian's knowledge is that God is the supreme Truth. Our relationship to God confronts us with an as-of-yet unresolved problem of its own. Many people talk *about* God but they miss the point because what is important is talking *to* God through prayer, as the only way to communicate with Him. Because He is so different from us, the only appropriate way of knowing Him is in prayer and adoration. This writer's knowledge of God is a combination of spiritual relationship and intellectual exercise. Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, Saint Bonaventure and other Christian philosophers have spoken about this topic, and their theories are good starting points.

In the life of a Christian who is passionately committed to the love and pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, there is the further commitment to supernatural faith that extends beyond reason. Christian belief and life and the theology to which these give rise are often in a territory that is beyond the limits of epistemology. This is called 'spiritual illumination' when we talk about understanding the Bible and 'spiritual empowering' when we talk about living the Christian life. Both are beyond human understanding because they are gifts from God but can be appropriated and experienced by faith. This writer states that the *gnosis* of faith has a different character than philosophical knowledge. As a Christian, he is on the way to a better understanding of the revealed truth about the human universe, but this does not necessarily mean that he grows in conceptual possession or mastery. In this aspect, he is more like Kierkegaard who concluded the existence of God unscientifically, "in the mode of absolute induction … starting and finishing with absolute faith" [31].

5.2. Ethical norms and core values

Another important element in defining a personal leadership style is by establishing personal ethical norms and core values. Ethical norms and core values exist at both a conscious and an unconscious level. To some degree, all of us are aware of the values that are most important and of highest priority. This writer considers that each person must discover and articulate his or her primary values. When they are articulated, people know why they do what they do. If someone has poor values, he or she will become aware of them and have the opportunity to change them accordingly. This writer also knows that people who hold their beliefs at a conscious level tend to be proactive. They are initiators who have thought through what they are doing in both their personal life and public life. They are true leaders who plan and understand the culture of their organization.

Contemporary leadership literature reveals that most scholars believe leaders are both born and made. Certain factors outside a person's control, such as personality and intelligence contribute to their aptitude to lead. However, inner factors are just as important, core values and life principles are part of the leader's makeup. In the beginning Christian leaders did not create or shape their primary values; they discovered them. As they were defining

their core values, they learned that: (1) seeking core values is to bring to the surface existing, not aspirational, beliefs; (2) you cannot fake core values, and (3) you cannot intellectualize them.

5.3. *Models of leadership styles*

The last but not least element that influences someone's leadership style is the model of leadership style he or she has had in his or her life. Many actual leaders lived in Romania under communism. In that time, Romania had only one form of leadership: communist dictatorship with an authoritarian style of leadership. As Bass stated, "such leaders discourage subordinates' contributions to the decision process and pay little or no attention to the subordinates' needs" [3, p. 417]. This is one of the negative aspects of Romanian leadership.

After the fall of Communism, the leaders were exposed to other leadership styles. In this way, they realized that they can lead according to their makeup, not only by following old models.

6. Conclusions

Growth is intentional. Without a plan, none of us will develop. Christian leaders should have a growth plan that covers both their personal and organizational life. Because both aspects of life are already interconnected, they cannot talk about one without the other. Besides theoretical knowledge, they need to work on developing their practical skills and character. The knowledge of the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit are crucial for Christian leaders if they want to acquire and grow in Christian character. Leadership and management books, courses or seminars are available for people interested to grow as effective leaders. This spiritual-human symbiotic effort will help Christian leaders become the leaders God wants them to be and make a difference in contemporary society.

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