SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL AWARENESS IN LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

To understand the significance of culture awareness in leadership, it is important that we understand the two terms Culture awareness and Leadership. So through my article, I am trying to explain what leadership means and how it has been redefined and re-characterized from time to time in a changing world. Many authors have defined leadership in their own way. However, we need to understand what leadership is and what does it mean in a changing world.

There are many meanings and definitions of leadership but I would like to define the way it is commonly perceived. One may define “leadership as a process used by an individual to influence group members towards the achievement of group goals, where the group members view it as a legitimate influence.” Of course, many may disagree and define “it as a complex mix where there is an interaction of the leader, the followers and the demand/s of the situation.” The most important point stated in both these definitions is the interaction of people, and sometimes even influence of an individual (leader) towards a goal that may be termed also as demand of the situation. [2]

Next point to be understood is the changing world. What does the changing world mean to us, actually? One can say a world that causes to be different, if you like. This world may be perceived in any way and is contextual to every individual. After answering two of the many questions, we can move on to understand the main characteristics of a leader - someone who inspires us to accept changes and helps us to overcome these challenges of change, culture being one of them.

Leadership is that quality of a leader that adopts and adapts to changes. So who is a leader? If we try to bring out the true picture of a leader, we can say that a leader is a person who articulates and embodies a vision and goals and enables others to achieve them. Here, I would like to bring readers’ attention to the fact that leadership is power- as some might argue, but power is not necessarily leadership. Power is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do! So if we bring together the real meaning what leadership stands for and the role of a leader, we can say leadership is “Doing the right thing”. But sometimes circumstances may lead to misunderstanding leadership as “doing things right” which practically is “managing” and not “leading”. [3]

PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP HAS CHANGED OVER A PERIOD OF TIME

The basic meaning of leadership, as stated above, has been understood differently at different times. In the past, leadership was construed as the leader carrying the responsibility of leadership and was described as a hero, an inspiration, an active participant and someone who was able to predict future, and who directed the energy to achieve the goal with the help of his/ her super hero image.

The present has become dynamic. It would not be wrong if it is said that at present, one thing is constant and that is change. So today’s leaders, the custodians of leadership are proactive, have a holistic view, and are constantly adopting and adapting to changes. Therefore, we see more traces of style- “doing things right” [1].

There are many factors influencing the ways to adapting to changes and there are big challenges confronting leadership. These are culture and ethics. Culture is no longer limited to the boundaries of any given country. On top of it the process of globalization has made the world increasingly competitive. Therefore there is paucity of time to think the right way of doing things for leaders, who instead settle for adapting ways to doing things in the right way. Similarly, ethics having its roots in cultures are different in different culture and in order to succeed, leaders do things right and not indulge in contemplating to doing the right thing. Apparently, the manager, and not the leader in a person, takes precedence. This was highlighted in a research study we made with University of West Bohemia, faculty of economics students to understand culture awareness among the students. The study highlighted many facts but the one worth noticing was the direct relationship with leadership.

The sample group chosen for the study comprised of students from faculty of economics studying Business Culture studies, having a moderate understanding of culture and it’s relevance to business. This research was conducted in joint collaboration with The Centre for Leadership Effectiveness, LLC led by Mr. Frank Zafulik. The students went through an online assessment, answering varied questions that tested cultural intelligence with regard to motivational, cognitive and behavioral
intelligence. Below are some excerpts from the study made in April 2013 and CQ (Cultural Intelligence) summary report given to us by Frank Zauflik and Centre for Leadership Effectiveness, LLC.

The result from the research was divided into four parts:

**CQ Drive** - This part of the study is to understand the person's motivation, interest and confidence in functioning effectively in cultural diverse settings.

**CQ Knowledge** - This part of the study oversees the cognitive skills that pin points the person's knowledge about how cultures are similar and how cultures are different.

**CQ Strategy** - This part points out how a person makes sense of culturally diverse experience.

**CQ Action** - This part shows the person's capability to adapt behavior that is appropriate across cultural contexts.

The University of West Bohemia (UWB) sample group involved in this April 2013 study included 31 completed self assessments.

**Fig. 1: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Summary Report**

When comparing the aggregate University of West Bohemia sample group results with worldwide norms, the following summary observations can be made:

- Summary result across all of the cultural parameters: 4 were low; 13 were moderate and none were high.
Many of the summary scores from University of West Bohemia students rank close to the breakpoint for Low and Moderate. This means that it needs a lot of improvement to move from Moderate to High as “Moderate” in the viewpoint of a performance minded business person is not adequately equipped.

University of West Bohemia sample group showed strongest on 3 parameters in 123order: Extrinsic interest, Values & Norms, and Checking. There is no correlation among these specifications.

Point worth noting from the results, is that, University of West Bohemia sampled students showed weakest standings on the 3 parameters: Leadership, Socio-Linguistics, Business which are tightly grouped variables. Business refers to knowledge about economic and legal systems... Socio-Linguistics refers to knowledge about rules of languages and rules for expressing non-verbal behaviors... Leadership refers to knowledge of managing people and relationships across cultures. It may be eye-opening to get such a finding when the groups of students are from the faculty of economics here at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

Research and logic indicates there is a direct correlation between an individual’s level of motivation and follow-on performance. Low motivation generally leads to poor performance. Hence, motivation of a group is due to good leadership.

CONCLUSION

The present has become extremely dynamic. It would not be wrong if it is opined that at present, one thing that surely is constant - is “change” itself. So today’s leaders one might see ourselves are the custodians of leadership- they are proactive; they have a holistic view of the business issues at hand, and are constantly adopting and adapting to changes accosted. Therefore, we see more traces of the leadership style of “doing things right” as against “doing the right things” leadership style. [3]

There are many factors influencing the ways to adapting to changes and there are big challenges confronting leadership. These are culture and ethics. Culture is no longer limited to the boundaries of any given country. On top of it the process of globalization has made the world increasingly competitive. Therefore there is paucity of time to think the right way of doing things for leaders, who instead settle for adapting ways to doing things in the right way. Similarly, ethics having its roots in cultures are different in different culture and in order to succeed leaders do things right and not indulge in contemplating to doing the right thing. The manager, and not the leader in a person, takes precedence.

The future leader will have big challenges ahead of him because technology is likely to get complicated. In such a scenario the strength and character of an individual will be essential to standing out as a leader. In the present times leadership is all about doing things right. Amidst this, we have forgotten the right things to do. So integrity and character of leadership will also change the face of leadership. This will lead to new ways of thinking and evolving technology will be a great factor contributing to this wave.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Abstract

Through my article I have tried to establish a connection of Culture with Leadership. Culture awareness in a global context is not about exploring one's own but understanding its relevance and need i.e. individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity. This includes situations that are diverse in national, ethnic and organizational cultures and in many other ways. It also includes diversity in gender, age, academic major, functional background, and interests to name a few. The study carried out with the students of University of west Bohemia (ZČU) having some knowledge of culture and its importance corroborated our main point of the paper. The students carried out an online assessment as part of their studies. They were assessed on 13 different sub-dimensions, "leadership" being one of them. The University of west Bohemia (ZČU) students scored the lowest on this sub-dimension of cultural intelligence quotient. Also their scores weren’t very high on socio-linguistic aspect either. It is pertinent to note that the culturally intelligent people score high on these two sub-dimensions. It is further elaborated that these two dimensions contribute a great deal in making a leader in their community to start with. And, that may help these people in becoming a successful business leader in future.

Key words

Awareness, Culture, Globalisation, Leadership, Management

JEL Classification

M16