

Organizational Behavior

Student Name:

University Affiliation



Leadership as a subject or a position is not only vital in the social sciences; its reach extends to corporate life as well. Effective leadership, therefore, not only constitutes the personality and personal quantities of a leader, but also his/her ability to step up when the people who are led face situations that require clear unambiguous directions. Leaders fulfill vital roles in their area of influence; whether directly or indirectly, they influence the performance of their team, they generate a vision and communicate the same to the members of their team. Leaders oversee all the performed actions in order to ensure that the said activities are producing the desired results. This, in turn, means that the culture of an organization or any area under the influence of the leader is shaped by that leader.

Charismatic leadership is a style of leadership that has existed based on the current definitions of it for a while now. It has found varying degrees of approval among academics, sociologists, historians, and political scientist. The first definition of this leadership model was proposed by the eminent scholar Max Webber. According to him, this particular leadership model was based on the qualities of the leader that appealed to his/her followers. This kind of leadership is one that is sustained almost exclusively by the personality and the charisma that the leader possesses or is able to portray.

According to Choi (2006), charismatic leadership particularly has the ability, unlike any other model, to inspire and push its followers to perform beyond what they assumed their abilities were. He opines that, in spite of the relative consensus on the effects of charismatic leadership, there is a paucity of theory on what exactly is a proper definition of what constitutes charismatic leadership. He goes on to propose reasons why this is the case. Research on the subject has turned up an elusive and almost mystical connotation of the characteristics that define charismatic leadership. This stems mainly from the fact that the influence wielded by the charismatic leader almost always comes not from personal interactions of the individual with the said leader but from accounts of other people who have had personal interac-



tions with the said leader. This fact is particularly interesting because there exists a possibility of a Chinese-whisper-like effect when accounts of one event are related to other occurrences. The second reason is the nature of the study of charismatic leaders. Oftentimes studies on charismatic leaders are carried out in isolation either of the leaders or of the followers. Thus, the interaction between both parties does not receive enough attention; as a result, it is difficult to ascertain which qualities of the charismatic leader have certain effects on the followers (Choi 2006).

The paucity of these defining traits has led sociologists to seek a proper definition for charismatic leadership. The word “charisma” is of Greek origins and it connotes a “gift”. Max Weber defines it as an individual’s personal quality, or those exceptional qualities or abilities which confer on him/her the ability to transcend the normal qualities shared by all and by those same qualities legitimize his/her influence (Weber 1968). The manifestation of charismatic leadership to the followers is usually in two ways: the personalized and the socialized form. The former one is self-aggrandizing and exploitative; it usually ends up disastrously for all concerned, especially, the followers. A vivid example of this variant of charismatic leadership is the former Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. The social form of this charismatic leadership manifests itself in the ability of leaders to inspire their followers to greater goals, even if those goals are next to impossible to achieve.

The charismatic leader is able to achieve this by employing three core principles of charismatic leadership. The first one is the ability to envision a desired aim or destination and adeptly describe the said vision in a way that makes it appear attainable to his/her followers. Next, they are able to empathize, be tuned in and sensitive to the needs of their followers to such a degree that they are able to inspire a very loyal following; the ability to do this requires a very high level of emotional intelligence (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy 2012). The third quality of charismatic leaders is the ability to enable their followers have an enhanced self-perception through verbal persuasions or enlightened insight; as a result, they see that the set goals are

actually within their reach. An example of such a leader was Winston Churchill.

These traits have proved to be universal for charismatic leaders and the uniqueness of these qualities is possibly responsible for the myth that has surrounded charismatic leadership and the fixation of the general public with leaders who exhibit such virtues. This desire to venerate charisma is one that is often exploited by dictators and bureaucrats when they assume the rhetoric of charisma and all its trappings without the character itself. The irony of this is that the Weberian ideals of charisma are themselves rhetorical constructs, with increasing evidence pointing that the ideal Weberian charismatic leader might itself be a myth.

It is probably as a result of the specifics of the characteristics of the charismatic leader that the society is fixated on such leaders. As stated above, they are able to inspire very high levels of loyalty and followership. The ability to empathize is a core trait of the charismatic leader and this particular trait creates a bond or a relationship much unlike that created by any other defined leadership model. However, there is a tendency to take focus away from the demands of leadership and focus more on the characters of leaders or on their personality. The fact remains that, in spite of all the acclamation given to the much-hyped characteristics of a leader, leadership is in itself not essentially brought to the fore on the basis of rhetoric but in situations that require people to step up.

Taking the above information into cognizance, it is safe to state that possessing all of the aforementioned characteristics of leaders leaves no guarantee that the person in question will be able to provide leadership when the need for it arises. This is because leadership is largely contingent and situation-based. Thus, an examination of the contingency approach to leadership might provide a better grasp of the demands of leadership. There exist schools of thought that favor the contingency approach instead of toeing the line that values personal traits and qualities over all else. They opine that situational factors are a more definitive measure of leader-



ship; typically they specify the situational variables that will assist in the evaluation of leadership. The best examples of contingency thinking in relation to leadership are described by Fiddlers; he states that the effectiveness of leadership is a function of the leader's motivation and the situation in which the leader finds himself/herself.

It appears that situational and contingent leadership is more effective than purely charisma based leadership. A leader who is able to rapidly adjust to situations at hand and issue orders that require immediate completion in order to influence the current state of affairs is a more effective leader. The situations and the reactions of the leader are the best indicators of whether they are true leaders. Conflicts are almost always inevitable in any area of human interaction. Most often conflicts arise when two teams or groups have interests that are incompatible with each other. Researchers have found out that even first-line supervisors have more than 25% of their work time occupied by conflict resolution activities. The bigger the area under the control of the leader, the higher the propensity for conflicts to arise and the more the skill sets the leader possesses will be tested. Irrespective of the skills the leader possesses, there are generally five approaches to conflict resolution; the ability of the leader to choose the right approach or combination of approaches largely determines his/her mettle (Parry 1996).

The first of those is the abrasive or competitive approach, this usually arises when there is a conflict of interests between two obdurate situations, neither of which has any intentions to budge for the other one. The leader at this time steps up in a feat of dominance that stems from a win-or-lose mentality. The polar opposite of this is the accommodation approach, which involves a large amount of acquiescence on the part of one leader without necessarily pursuing their own ends; essentially, it represents a tactic of appeasement. Another approach to conflict resolution



is the tactic of compromise or sharing; this approach represents the middle ground between domination and appeasement. It requires that both concerned parties give up something but eventually get something that they are satisfied with. It does not provide the thrill that domination provides but, at the same time, it provides the involved parties with a tangible reward.

Some leaders when faced with conflict usually prefer to completely ignore the interests of other parties to push through the agenda of the leader. This leadership approach is a product of unresponsiveness of the leader to the concerns experienced by another party, whose interest are mutually exclusive to that which he or she is pursuing. Collaboration is the final approach to conflict resolution; it requires that the leaders of the two opposing groups show a commitment to provide satisfaction to the members of both parties. This approach to conflict resolution involves studying the demands and concerns of opposing parties and then trying to find a way that best achieves the goals of both parties. In any conflict situation, the response of the leader could be any combination of any of the aforementioned approaches.

Leaders are persons who have a clear destination in mind and are able to provide clear directions to their teams. Bad leadership is usually associated with people who have the ability to raise and motivate a team to achieve a goal but one which can be morally or ethically challenged. Take the case of Hitler, for example. He was able to raise and motivate an entire nation and led, whether directly or indirectly, to the deaths of millions of people following the end of World War II. That was a classic case of bad leadership and it should not be confused with managerial incompetence which is when a person is unable to build a team or get results through others. It can present itself in a number of ways; the ability to build a team but lacking technical or personal nous to motivate that same team to attain desired results. On the other hand, the person might be able to actually attain results but is unable to sustain the life of the same team; the result of such incompetence is the fact that

the team breaks up or loses its cohesiveness. The third appearance of incompetence is the inability to both build the team and motivate it to achieve any results.

Leadership requires a steady and calm head, a person who understands the demands that are before them and has a clear view of where he/she intends to lead their team or followers too. It is not about a personality cult of the ability of the leader to be the one that the followers aspire to, but the innate ability to lead the people to success. Effective leadership, irrespective of the level, is essentially situation based and contingent. The situations that test the leader's mettle are those that really show if he/she is a leader or just a person with a title.

