



TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is a topic that has attracted much deserved attention over the centuries. Some have held the view that leaders are born not made. Several conceptual frameworks have been provided to explain this phenomenon starting with the "Great Man" theory which has its origin in the trait school of thought. Behavioural and contingency theorists have also provided additional dimensions to the concept of leadership. Modern theorists focus on many dimensions of leadership and how effective leadership can be developed. The recent financial crisis and failure of large corporations such as Enron have heightened the interest in this subject. This topic is of great importance in Africa where the right leadership can have significant impact on

societies and countries. About a decade ago, a workshop was held in Ghana where this subject was discussed. Participants came up with a framework for leadership that addresses many of the gaps of earlier theories and provides a more context relevant approach to understanding and fostering leadership development in Africa. It starts with values and ends with renewal which addresses the ability of the leader to adapt his or her style to elements of the model which change over time. This model should be used to assess leaders and should also be validated through research. If research substantiates its efficacy, it can be seen as holistic approach and adopted to foster leadership growth in Africa. This Article critically reviews the essential dimensions of this leadership framework.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, I was interviewed by a few students about my thoughts on leadership and whether I believe that leaders are born or developed and what should excellent leadership characteristics look like. It was an interesting discussion which took me back to 2002 when I attended a workshop on "Developing an Indigenous Leadership Model" by the Kwaku

Hutchful Foundation in Ghana. In the lead up to the workshop, several people were interviewed to capture their opinions on sustainable development as well as leadership. The workshop that followed these interviews came up with interesting consensus on prescriptions for economic development for a country like Ghana and equally important, a conceptual framework for leadership. Mintzberg, (2010)

discussed the challenges associated with the concepts of "developing countries" and "leadership development". In this brief paper, I will use the framework discussed at the workshop as the lens through which leadership can be viewed. It is an integrated framework that takes into account the various elements that constitute leadership. It does not limit itself to the trait school of thought, nor does it dwell solely on either behavioural or situational viewpoints of leadership. It is a consolidation of all these schools. In addition, it articulates that leadership outcomes result from a renewable dynamic process that might begin at childhood through parental nurturing and impartation of values, centred on the context of the individual and influenced by his or her engagement style, the expectations of the group being led and the mindsets of both the individual and the group.

Leadership is an important phenomenon which has attracted a lot of attention from business schools, corporations, and organizational theorists. Each issue of *The Economist* magazine has a session devoted to leadership in the economy, of countries, in politics or on issues. The *Harvard Business Review* has many articles on this subject. The quest for good leaders and the characteristics that define leadership started a long time ago. In times of economic or social difficulties, people tend to seek a leader who can help meet the challenges of the day. In the book of Samuel, we see how Israel asked for a King like all the nations in spite of the fact that God was their leader and Samuel the judge provided human leadership (1 Samuel. 8:19-22). Saul, the tall handsome man from the tribe of Benjamin was chosen as their leader. We know from that story that Saul started well but later fell short of what was required and expected of a leader. Though human leaders are not perfect, there is always a

desire to seek a leader who can capture the aspirations of people and bring them to their desired state without demonstrating the natural flaws of men. This desire to have leaders who model our expected values and who lead people to a desired destination could be the reason why people seek charismatic and heroic leaders. Khurana (2002) discusses how corporations in an irrational manner search for charismatic CEOs. This need for charismatic leaders or heroic leaders has also been emphasized by many other scholars and the business press is full of stories of such leaders (Mintzberg, 2010). Whether we look back to 4,000 years ago or today, people seem to be obsessed with a single leader and what that leader can do as if the leader single-handedly drives behaviour towards goal accomplishment. This is not to say that leaders are not important. What must be looked at is the very view of leadership, and what fosters leadership growth. The framework that will be discussed here is only one view point which came from the deliberations of many individuals from different disciplines and sectors. It does not try to propose a single effective style or approach but offers a lens that magnifies the elements that impact leadership. Further research to validate whether these elements and the interaction between them result in good or poor leadership should be undertaken. Most importantly, the effect or contribution of these elements to leadership must be studied.

Leadership theory

A brief review of various strands of leadership theory will precede a discussion of the conceptual framework developed at the Accra workshop. It is not surprising that **traits** feature prominently in leadership theory. Personal characteristics, ability, skill and values have been considered in selecting leaders for years. Stogdill (1948) discusses the physical charac-

teristics and personal attributes of leaders. He identifies dependability, cooperativeness, high energy, assertiveness, dominance, stress tolerance and self confidence as some of the unique traits of a leader (Stogdill, 1974). As we all know, not all who possess these attributes are leaders and these attributes themselves may be valued differently in different environments or societies. Certain traits are heightened or diminished in certain cultures and this conceptualization of leadership fails to recognize this difference. Even within the same culture, the emphasis may change from generation to generation or in different circumstances. The limitations of the trait theory influenced the search for alternative theories to explain leadership.

Behavioural theorists starting with Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) have focused on the styles and actions of leaders. They focus on democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles and when such approaches can be used. These theorists consider the leader's task orientation or people orientation. Task orientation focuses on the organizational structures, rules and elements that affect how goals are accomplished. The people orientation addresses the interaction, interpersonal and people oriented aspects of goal accomplishment. Katz and Khan (1960) further built on this approach by categorizing leadership styles and actions into production orientation and employee orientation. These theories were still based on the attributes and traits of the leader and how they are combined by the leader to influence subordinates. Although they went further to include other elements such as the experience level of the group being led and their orientation, they are also limited since they did not address cultural and situational variations.

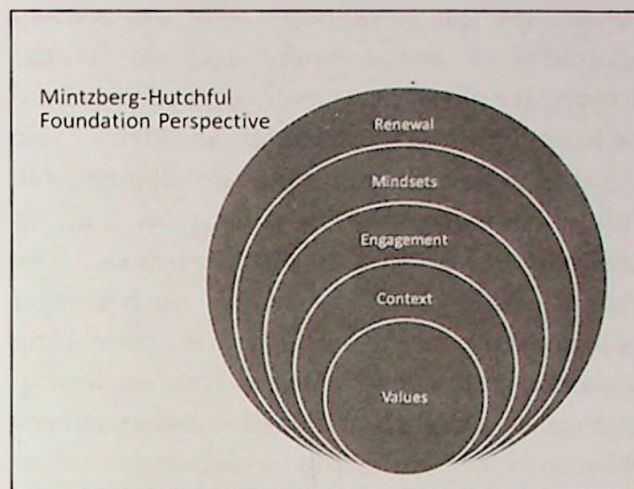
Contingency theorists on the other hand, recognize the importance of context and the impact of situational variations as they relate to leadership actions and styles and conceptualize leadership from this viewpoint. They recognize that the leader has many tools to employ in his or her craft depending on the situation. Fieldler (1964) emphasized the importance of context and articulated that the favourableness of the situation to the leader will influence the leadership style that is employed. Fieldler's approach ascertains the degree of fit between the leader's style and the receptivity of the co-worker who least prefers the leader's style in the situation. He uses the Least Preferred Co-worker Scale (LPC) to predict the style that will be used in a situation. This offers a path-goal theory that focuses on the situation as the determinant of the style that has to be employed. Generally, the leader's style is based on either task orientation or people orientation. These can be categorized into directive, supportive, participative or achievement oriented styles (House, 1971). Vroom and Yetton, (1973) and Vroom & Jargo (1988) build on this contingency approach focusing on the participation style of the leader in decision making as well as task complexity. Emphasis is placed on the leader's participation style (consultative, autocratic or democratic) in this model. Although contingency theories are excellent in recognizing that personal attributes and situations require varying leadership approaches, they still limit contextual factors to units and subordinates excluding the fuller organizational and cultural context. They are further limited when they are applied to more integrated organizational environments where people manage across geographies and cultures.

Recent theories like the **Leadership Member Exchange** examine the relationship between

the leader and members of the group led. For examples, Graen, Linden and Hoel (1982) predict that where the leader is more similar to group members, it is more likely that the leader will provide them with more responsibility, recognition and rewards. Where they are different, it is likely the leader will manage through more formalized rules and structures. This is highly significant in today's environment where work places are multicultural and reporting lines cross regions, countries and cultures. Other theorists have focused more on **engaging leadership** in an environment where heroic and charismatic leadership seem to be on the rise (Khurana, 2002; Mintzberg, 2010). Other leadership theories are emerging focusing on network leadership and emotional intelligence of leaders. The purpose of outlining some of the theories on leadership is not to discuss them but to recognize that leadership can be viewed from many different perspectives and that some of the perspectives are more limited in their application.

So what should we make of all these theories and how should leadership be viewed? None of the above theories can fully answer the question. How can leaders be developed or trained if we did not have a model that explains leadership. Leadership can be examined on its own and applied in different contexts or situations. This is regarded as an "inside out" approach. Here is where trait and behavioural theories can be seen. On the other hand, leadership can be viewed in the context of many factors. This is framed as "outside in". Here, leadership is viewed from the standpoint of its context. The limitations of earlier theories suggest that we should interpret leadership by taking an all inclusive approach. This all inclusive approach will consider both "inside out" and "outside in" approaches. The "outside in" approach looks at the context and the

elements in the environment and how they influence a leader's style while the "inside out" approach emphasizes the leader's own attributes, traits, capabilities as well as how these elements work together.



A New Leadership Perspective

One of the people interviewed before the workshop in Accra was conducted was the late Dr. Bediako, then Director of The Akrofi Christaller Institute of Theology in Aburi, near Accra. He responded to Mintzberg's question about the models they use to teach leadership by saying "they didn't use any models but that "they show it". By this he meant, they assigned various tasks to groups of students and after the groups had worked together for a while, each group was asked to point out the leader and explain why that person was considered a leader. They discussed the qualities of those leaders and how they related to other group members through their de-briefing sessions. Values and engagement styles played significant roles in their construct of leadership. Similarly, the group that had gathered for the workshop who had been drawn from several sectors also formed a consensus on the elements to focus on to foster leadership. These elements included values, context, engagement, mindsets and renewal.

These were placed in the conceptual framework illustrated above.

Values

Values play a key role in the type of leadership that is experienced. "Values" was the very first reason for the workshop. The late Kwaku Hutchful, a management lecturer at the University of Ghana was concerned about the lack of legitimate leadership in Africa. He wanted to develop a model that will positively influence leadership behaviour as well as recognize local African circumstances. The model should include values as a central component and highlight the prevailing disconnect between values and leadership outcomes. There was a need to reflect on how Africans view leadership as well as the values that underpin the behaviour of leaders. These values at the individual level included integrity, honesty, fair play, respect, humility, and many other values. Some values may be unique to an organization or group. Most private and public companies articulate their values to their employees and evaluate their staff on the extent to which they demonstrate their values.

The current concern over executive pay, failure of the stock market in 2008, Enron and many other corporate failures can be traced back to the type of values espoused, rewarded or omitted by leaders of various organizations. There are, of course, national values that drive the behaviour of certain nations. For example, dominance is an important leadership trait in the United States and that posture is seen by many countries although some Americans might not see this because they operate within a system that makes that value a naturally intuitive concept. A comparable value in Canada will be balance. All through Canadian history, leaders have sought to create balance between opposing views so while that will be

obvious to non Canadians, some Canadians who live in that value system intuitively act to accomplish balance without recognizing that as an important value. This will therefore be reflected in the leadership styles of most Canadians.

Why is it important to understand cherished values in relation to leadership? The financial crisis has taught us the importance of not taking this for granted. Business schools are beginning to focus on ethics and values. However, it is not certain that if certain basic values are not taught earlier either through families, churches, mosques, etc. they can be effectively imbibed at a later stage. The courage for governments to act is also affected by the extent to which those who are governed perceive their leaders reflecting the cherished values of society. Legitimacy for leaders and their ability to influence is highly influenced by the extent to which those being led consider the leaders to demonstrate their values. Formal authority alone does not guarantee legitimacy.

In assessing leaders on national or organizational level, it is important to identify and assess the congruence between a leader's values in action in relation to what is cherished by the group or citizens. While dominance is a trait that may be valued in the United States and in many US organizations, it may not be equally recognized in many societies. For example, humility in a chief or a leader and the ability to obtain consensus is what most Akans will respect from a leader. Mintzberg (2010) discusses the style of Kofi Annan at the United Nations and references the fact that his approach is more African. So where do we go from here? Organizations must assess their values and the extent to which their leaders demonstrate them. In fostering leadership development, values must become central to the discussion.

Context

Context has been highlighted by many organizational theorists. It must not be ignored in leadership discussions. A leader who fully understands his or her context is able to effectively influence his or her team. Often, in global organizations, edicts are issued from headquarters with little understanding of how those who receive these edicts in distant lands perceive them. They therefore fail to achieve their objectives. People may have different sensibilities towards certain things which people from the headquarters organization may cherish. The size of a country, its history and culture are factors that must not be taken for granted. The leader in a country that is communitarian by nature will act differently from one in a society that cherishes independence. Consequently, issuing edicts from head office and assuming they will work everywhere else is not only naïve but undermines social legitimacy of those who issue the edicts and the credibility of local leaders.

A good leader must understand his or her context even beyond the local situation in order to achieve significant impact. Again, leaders who understand their context lead by adapting their style to meet the task at hand. Joseph provides a perfect example when he discusses what he was going to tell Pharaoh about the occupation of his family who had arrived in Egypt from Canaan (Genesis 46:31-34).

Engagement

This refers to how a leader engages his or her people. The theories around people orientation come into play here. Each culture has its own engagement protocol. It is important for the leader to figure out the proper protocol. Again, here is where leaders fail in a more integrated world. People transport engagement protocols across cultures and situations assuming that whatever their frame of refer-

ence is will be fine. Such unconscious incompetence in engagement is not easily forgiven and it goes against legitimacy. It also impacts values as some may be viewed as disrespectful behaviour.

Effective leaders look for the relevant signals and adapt in different situations to engage properly. Communication is a key element of engagement. Communication effectiveness must be addressed in leadership development programs. This is not only referring to cultural norms and practices but also substantive communication styles that inspire or annoy those being led. Leaders must learn to listen differently as well as speak differently in order to have the most effective impact on their teams. The ability of a leader to be flexible in the way he or she engages strengthens the leader's credibility and improves the degree of favourableness in the situation. For example, among the Akans of Ghana, the position of a linguist is a very important role that provides a buffer between the chief and those who communicate with him. The linguist ensures that improper language or protocol is not carried to the chief. In much the same way a chief who does not reflect and speaks inappropriately is saved the embarrassment through the translation of the linguist to the people. This shows the degree of importance that is placed on communication. The linguist therefore plays a lot more important role than a traditional spokesperson in politics.

Engagement is further influenced by institutions and organizational structures. Thus, context and engagement interact to determine the communication style of a leader. Misreading the impact of context as it relates to engagement can have disastrous impact. While the British assumed the Anglo-Fante Alliance of the mid 1800s to mean a contractual arrangement, providing them with

powers over the Fante states in the coast, the Fantes, who are part of the Akan group, only saw that as a relationship that met their needs not a contract that transferred their power to the British. The colonial administrator at Cape Coast castle in contrast considered the demands of King Aggrey in 1865 and 1866 to be annoying and undermining to the British authority. Mr. Conran, the colonial administrator of the castle failed to appreciate that the Fantes had no contract to surrender their sovereignty to the British in the western sense. The need for freedom and independence motivated the Akans from the Old Ghana Empire to migrate to Bono Manso and later southwards as far as the coast. They were determined to resist the Islamization process that was occurring around them. Consequently, they were not going to easily surrender their sovereignty. The exile of King Aggrey of Cape Coast did not eliminate Fante resistance. The Fante Confederation introduced a more formalized opposition to British rule after the king was exiled. This continued further through clashes with the Asante culminating in the 1900 resistance led by Yaa Asantewaa (the Queenmother of Edjusu). Ghana's current national anthem is filled with words to depict the need for "freedom and right". The Cromantine Negroes (slaves) taken from Ghana exhibited similar tendencies in the new world. Had the British understood the interaction between engagement protocols, value of independence to the people, the context and history of the people, a different type of engagement could have evolved with less heart ache to both parties.

Renewal

None of the elements discussed above is static. They interact and influence leadership behaviour. Different combinations of the elements may provide different outcomes. Individuals and their context may change. Values some-

times change as well. The renewal element captures the changing elements in the model and results in a new framing of leadership from the original state. It reflects the dynamism of the model and the changing context of leadership.

Conclusion

Whether leaders are born with special qualities or situations give rise to the concept that leaders are important considerations. However, the model discussed above provides another lens with which the concept of leadership can be viewed. This is particularly relevant at a time where the world is highly integrated and many people work across cultures and countries. The old arguments that focused on attributes to the exclusion of situational issues or the situational approach that limited itself to narrow organizational context cannot be sustained. A fresh look at all the attributes and situational factors combines into an inclusive view that has been outlined above. The leader must wisely demonstrate shared values comprehend the essential elements of his or her context and be adaptive in the way s/he engages, while reflecting more broadly about the issue at hand and how members of the group can be influenced to achieve goals. Prudently balancing these elements will earn what can be considered to be effective leadership. What is required is further research to validate the efficacy of this viewpoint on leadership and an assessment of leadership styles and approaches based on these elements.

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