

A Proposed Leadership Competency Model for Effective Organizational Change Intervention

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KEYWORDS Leadership. Leadership Competencies. Leadership Models. Leadership in Change. Leading Change. Organisational Success. Values and Culture

ABSTRACT There are still several myths around leadership in spite of the fact that it is one of the most topical issues in modern organisations. The importance thereof and contributions of leadership in high performing organisations can never be underestimated. Leaders play an important role in an organisation as social architects by creating vision and strategic direction, building relationships, establishing culture and values and leading change. This article attempts to address specific requirements, by referring to relevant leadership competencies and providing more empowering views on the essence of leadership when dealing with organisational change issues. By referring to various models of leadership, emphases have been placed on the evolution of change leadership. This article also attempts to provide a new framework applicable to leading change successfully by applying a mixed method. The existing framework in the relevant company was reviewed in order to develop a new framework.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership competency is probably one of the most topical issues in the human resources field. Much has been written already and opposing views worldwide emphasize remarkable differences. The leadership challenges associated with the world of work today will not only require better but also different leadership competencies to deal with ever changing workplace. There is a wide range or scope of competencies required in leading change according to various literatures (Robin and Judge 2009).

Beyond all doubt, leaders play an important role as social architects, providing strategic direction, building relationships, establishing culture and values and leading change. In other words, leaders may be regarded as different from other people because they possess outstanding competencies and characteristics. It needs to be emphasized that the research findings referred to in this article will be a reference to the framework currently used by the relevant company where this study was conducted.

Research Objective

The main objective of this article is to identify specific competencies required for a future-fit change leadership framework. In constructing the new framework, there is a need for an in-

depth analysis of common leadership competencies of existing framework. From existing literature it is evident that a variety of views and explanations are in existence. However, this article explores trends and tendencies in a selective way.

Literature Review: Leadership Defined

Dubrin (2007: 3) defines leadership as “the ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organisational goals.” He further refers to the importance of interpersonal influence through communication, the given of orders, which causes others to act or respond in a certain way and the art of influencing people, which is also a dynamic force that motivates. Puccio et al. (2011) refer to the relationship between change, leadership and creativity. They emphasize that creative people and leaders are one and the same, but acknowledge the fact that effective leadership requires traits, skills and knowledge that lie outside the scope of creativity. Rowe and Guerrero (2011: 2) maintain that “leadership is about influence.” They also indicate that leadership operates in groups, which includes the achievement of goals and sharing of objectives. Ungerer et al. (2013: 269) maintained that leadership is not about intent but about infecting others. Hence, “Leadership is the capability to influence positively and

impact on situations and people in order to make a difference. Leaders exert their influence and power in such a way that they impact the status quo and others in a positive way” (Ungerer et al. 2013).

An interesting and significant view was presented by Binney et al. (2005) who made reference to ‘*getting connected*’ which means enough openness and trust to confront difficult issues, enough respect to make people want to work with others, enough shared values and perspectives to enable joint working and enough constructive conflict to deepen the exchanges that make real trust possible. Most definitions on leadership refer to influencing others, directing efforts and abilities towards attaining group or organisational goals. The 21st century leaders should “*embrace a new paradigm of change and crisis management, empowerment, diversity, a higher ethical purpose and humbleness*” (Nel et al. 2011: 313).

Considering the above statement, it is evident that the essence of leadership in a changing business environment includes the ability to create a vision and excite people to achieve the impossible. Possession of an external energy and an inner strength to pull through difficult times; possession of a mental agility that enables them to make effective decisions faster than most other people; supporting team members to grow by empowering them; they must be emotionally intelligent and enhance people’s confidence by understanding and dealing appropriately with their emotions and concerns; and leading change warrants integrity and trust from the leader. In order to explore specific competencies and characteristics appearing in different definitions it is important to reflect on some leadership framework, in order to develop a future fit framework, which could be more reliable in leading change.

The leader competency framework of the relevant company was based on business results, which has three dimensions, namely business direction setting, driving execution and people engagement. The business direction setting was based on six critical aspects, namely strategic thinking, business acumen, market orientation, influencing others, integrity and values, and external networking. Then, driving execution was based on seven vital aspects, namely strategic action, information processing, judgment and decision making, resource management, custom-

er orientation, risk management, programme and project management. In terms of people engagement, seven dimensions were identified, namely communication, knowledge and innovation management, internal networking, talent management, high performance teaming, engaging diversity and leading change. The above leadership aspects can only be effectively executed by a very experience person in terms of performance record and technical knowhow (specialist knowledge/skill). However, this is stimulated or moderated by the personal characteristic of the leader such as taking action, courage and confident/conviction/condor, self-insight, emotional maturity, personal resilience, drive and energy and wisdom (Relevant Company 2008).

The fact that integrity and values as well as influencing others are clustered within business direction, leading change by engaging people will need critical evaluation and these competencies should be addressed when developing a new framework. Cohan (2003: 16) in his outline of value leadership emphasizes seven principles, namely value of human relationships, which means to treat people with respect; fostering of teamwork by getting people to work together; experiment frugally, referring to using accidental discoveries to create value for customers; fulfil commitments, saying what you intend doing; fight complacency by weeding out arrogance; to win through multiple means by using the strategy to sustain market leadership; give to the community by transferring corporate resources to society. From another vintage point, Lussier and Achua (2004: 33) refer to the different traits of effective leaders namely, high energy, referring to drive and hard work to achieve goals; self-confidence, referring to being self-assured and have the ability to influence followers; locus of control, control of own fate and taking responsibility for own behaviour and performance; stability in controlling oneself, being secure and positive. Integrity, which refers to behaviour that is honest and ethical, thereby making a person trustworthy; intelligence, where there is the ability to solve problems, thinking critically when making decisions; emotional intelligence, to motivate one self and showing empathy; flexibility, which refers to the ability to adjust to different situations; and sensitivity to others, which refers to understanding group members and how best to communicate with and influence them.

Mckee et al. (2008: 25) have demarcated the emotional and social intelligent competencies in leading change into three, namely social awareness, self-awareness, relationship management and self-management. Social awareness includes empathy and organizational awareness, while self-awareness includes emotional self-awareness. Aspects of relationship management include inspirational leadership, teamwork, coach and mentor and influence, while self-management includes positive outlook, achievement orientation, adaptability and emotional self-control.

Cameron and Green (2008) in exploring five key roles used by effective leaders enumerated the following: the edgy catalyser, the visionary motivator, the measured connector, the tenacious implementer and the thoughtful architect. In the understanding of these critical roles of effective leaders, it is evident that these roles are crucial in directing and leading any change intervention.

Leaders display certain patterns in behaviour. It is, however, to take note of the importance of leaders by understanding their own unique leadership strengths. Kouzes and Posner (cited in Puccio et al. 2011: 11) reflect on specific leadership practices by emphasizing what leaders do to achieve extra ordinary results. They are not too much concerned about personal traits but focus more on what leaders have to do to turn challenging opportunities into remarkable successes.

In the latest leadership theories, much emphasis is place on a humanistic approach in which the following competencies are highlighted according to Bester (2012: 152), namely hope; humility; values; realism; and temperance. Bester (2012) further argues that people tend to easily accept the leadership of others but do not really buy-in to their own. As initially mentioned, a very stimulating and meaningful trend on leadership was provided by Ungerer et al. (2013: 10). In their arguments they maintained that leadership studies have traditionally focused on individual leaders and their traits, abilities and actions and were chosen for their suitability.

A modernistic approach should be to describe the leader as a member of a group with strong emphasis on the potential to influence the group. In this sense, the reference is towards transactional and transformative leadership. The latest concepts on leadership place

more emphasis on authentic, neuro and distributed leadership where the task of leading is shared by more than one person in a team. Ungerer et al. (2013: 19) have identified authentic - principle centered and servant leadership as the three main leadership frameworks. Significantly they refer to six universal virtue themes identified in all three mentioned frameworks and these seem to overlap in terms of the 6 universal themes. The six universal teams are courage; wisdom; temperance; humanity; justice and transcendence.

The trends and latest philosophies on leadership were briefly touched on in the above section. It is important to understand that leadership is a key strategic issue for organization, because people look to their leaders when navigating within a turbulent and complex environment in order to ensure sustained profitability through engaged employees. It is essential that leadership and business strategies work together to drive a culture and performance ethic that leads to the desired business performance.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this article a mixed method research approach was adopted. While there are various definitions for mixed methodology, this article will follow the definition by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009: 286) who define mixed method research as: “...research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, and integrates the findings to draw conclusions using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study or programme of inquiry.” A mixed method design is particularly suitable to the purpose of this research for the following reasons: It allows the researcher to gain complementary insights in the conceptualisation, experiential and inferential phases about the relative contributions of leadership in navigating change; It provides a more complete and meaningful picture of the nature and dynamics of leading change; An initial qualitative research approach allows the researcher to refine the initial research propositions in research hypothesis that can be tested quantitatively; It will allow the researcher to expand on the initial understanding of the type of leadership and provide a more comprehensive explanation at a later phase in the research process; It provides the oppor-

tunity to assess the credibility of the inferences that are made about leadership during one phase and thereby strengthen the credibility of inferences that are made at a later phases in the research (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2009: 287).

In terms of the qualitative method, a convenient sample of 5 senior leaders was selected. While data was obtained from individuals, organisational-level measures were used to compare the differences in change navigation and leadership. Semi structured interviews were conducted and digitally recorded. All interviews were transcribed and content analysis of verbal response was undertaken to identify and verify different dimensions. With regard to the quantitative phase, one of the divisions in the company was purposefully selected and 301 questionnaires were distributed to all the employees in the said division. A survey questionnaire was developed and piloted at the company amongst a number of non-randomly selected employees who were not part of the initial focus group. Afterwards, 301 employees were requested to complete the questionnaire. A factor analysis to identify and confirm the questionnaire structure was used. Comparative statistics to identify differences and similarities were applied during this process. In compliance with ethical issues a pseudonym (relevant Company) was used in the treatise.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the data analysis, the researchers focus on the results regarding leading and navigating change. The main research objective was to identify leadership competencies in leading change. This was done in two separate phases, namely qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Phase 1: Qualitative Analysis

With regard to the question pertaining to the vision and whether it was clearly communicated, all five of the participants responded positively to the question. The focus was on the importance of clear communication, which was achieved through various and regular discussion within the organisation. Another important element that was highlighted was that these discussions were conducted at all levels within the organization.

In terms of the question relating to guidance and support during the change intervention, all the participants agreed that effective guidance was provided. These included regular communication, human resource practices such as early retirement, staff retention and up-skilling, a change management strategy as well as counselling. Also significant is the elements pertaining to strong leadership practices such as availability, accessibility and assurances to staff regarding the future.

Quite significant were the comments by the five participants regarding the important aspects of change leadership. These included creating a clear vision and goals, obtaining buy in from all stakeholders, leader's commitment to the change and finally ensuring proper implementation/execution. One participant mentioned that the key for any leader during a change intervention is to energise, engage, enable and empower people during the process.

Finally the leadership competencies required for successful change implementation according to the participants are the following: ethics, values, trust, consistency, commitment, building and maintaining relationships, ability to influence, transparency, honesty, integrity, wisdom, courage, execution and emotional engagement with people.

Phase 2: Quantitative Analysis

Figure 1 reflects the responses of employees regarding the proposed benefits of a large change intervention, the effectiveness of the communication during this process as well as the leadership displayed during the said change process. Relevant questions from the questionnaire regarding dealing with change navigation where based on the following: Question 17: You constantly received guarantees regarding your position. Question 24: You received a clear vision of where the organisation intended to go with the decoupling of financial services and traditional retail. Question 25: You were informed on the end results of the intended change. Question 26: You were informed of the benefits of the change. Question 29: .You had confidence that the leaders in the Organisation could succeed with the change. Question 30: You received the necessary guidance during the time of change. Question 33: You were encouraged to persist during the change process. All the

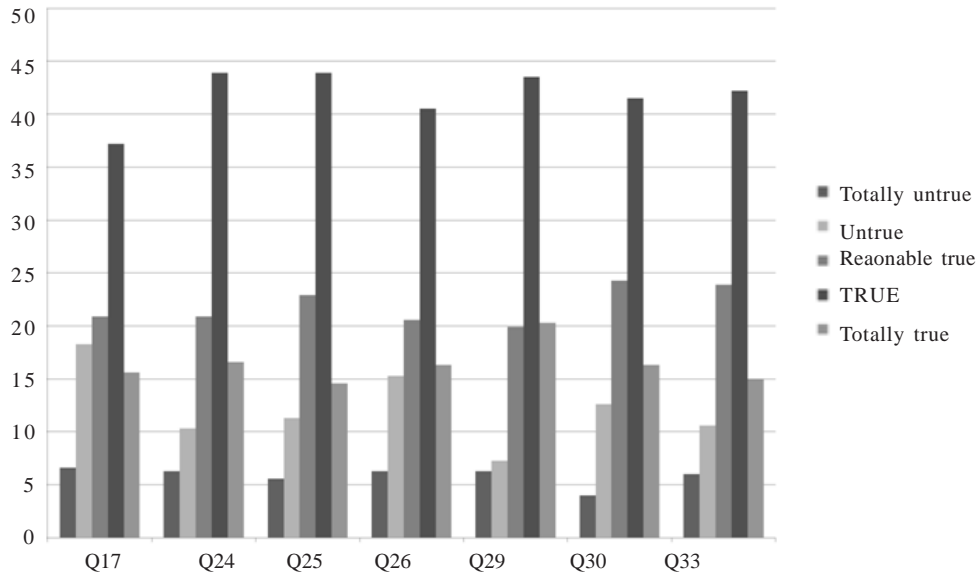


Fig. 1. Summary of employees responses

enumerated factors were above the Chronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.732 and a result of 0.88 was obtained, thereby indicating adequate internal consistency.

DISCUSSION

With reference to the question pertaining to whether employees received guarantees regarding their position, 73.7% of the respondent answered positively. Three participants clearly and distinctly referred to the importance of giving some degree of assurance to employees. For instance, assurance that sufficient and suitable positions will be available and that no employee will be adversely affected by the change. One of the qualitative participants stated: “there have been changes where job losses were part of a change process – this time around we had to assure people that would not happen”.

Question 24 dealt with the fact that a clear vision was communicated during the envisaged change intervention. A high positive response (81.4%) was received indicating that the majority of staff was aware of the intended direction. Participant 1 in the qualitative interview has remarked: “continuously referring back to the Vision – selling the Vision”. In addition, a majority of participants (80%) unconditionally supported the fact that the vision was continuously communicated throughout the change process.

In the case of communicating the end results, 81.4% of the respondents felt that this was done efficiently whilst 77.4% agreed that they were informed about the benefits of the envisaged change. Different participants referred to employee wellness, business success and future opportunities for the business to grow and expand. It can therefore be accepted that the benefits and the results of the change intervention was constantly communicated to the staff members.

Regarding the question of having confidence in the leaders during the change intervention respondents was extremely positive (83.7%). This finding corresponds with literature, which emphasized the importance of leadership ability to set a clear vision, continuous communication and providing constant feedback on progress. Participants in this study mostly referred to ‘reliability’, ‘individual counselling’, ‘leadership availability’, and ‘assurances’. Moreover, “the strategy must be articulated, communicated and executed” and “as leader one must first embrace the change and change as well”. Question 30 dealt with the guidance received by employees during the change intervention and 82.1% of the responds felt that they received clear and sufficient guidance. A similar response came from all participants with regards to making communication a fun, building trust, providing counselling, implementing staff retention policies, being change ambassadors, explaining the

change strategy and constantly enhancing staff engagement. It is significant to note that respondents and participants were totally convinced that this change intervention was conducted in an appropriate, effective and supportive manner.

During any change intervention it is of great importance to encourage and consistently support employees by clearly indicating the direction and the expected outcome. In this regard, 81.1% of the respondents felt that they were encouraged by the leadership team to persist. Although literature reveals that a high percentage of change interventions failures occur due to the lack of persistence. This finding significantly supports the current response. A similar finding with the employees leave little doubt that the leadership team succeeded in leading the process. Participants in the qualitative phase felt that "one has to be 100% sure and convinced he/she is doing the right thing, and then be tenacious and stick with the tasks at hand, in order to ensure that he/she follow throughout what he/she promised to do. In addition, a person needs to "have the stomach to take on the change process". Therefore one has to execute it by acting and playing his/her own part in the implementation of the envisaged change. In reflecting on the findings and outcomes of this research it is important to note that the leadership team felt satisfied with the change process, which was conducted in a constructive and efficient manner. It must also be kept in mind that the team was successful because they possessed the skills, characteristics and competencies to achieve their goals. The above findings in conjunction with other existing frameworks will enable the researchers to construct a new framework for the relevant organization, which could as well be useful to other organisations.

A Future-fit Change Leadership Competency Framework

A summary of definitions and theories of leadership clearly show that leadership can be viewed from different angles. In an attempt to select competencies to really depict the essence and requirement to successfully lead change, the guidelines provided by Nel et al. (2011: 319) seem to be significant. They include credibility, trust, fair treatment; sense of mission and purpose; willingness to take risks; able to commu-

nicate a vision; able to perform at a high level; able to inspire others; emotional intelligence; able to participate fully with all; strength to resist peer pressure; open mindedness; and life-long learning. De Vries (cited in Ungerer et al. 2013: 47) states "that most effective leaders possess clusters of competencies in three areas, namely cognitive competencies, such as conceptual thinking and holistic overviews; Social competencies, such as empathy, presence and political awareness; and Personal competencies, such as energy, self-confidence and personal effectiveness." It must be emphasised here that these aforementioned elements and traits have been supported by literatures (Campbell and Samiec 2005; Weiss and Molinaro 2005; Isaksen and Tidd 2006; Herold and Fedor 2008; Grimshaw and Barron 2010). Recent articles published that reflected on trends and change leadership competencies also concurred with the above (Smith and Wolver ton 2010; Battling et al. 2010; Gentry and Sparks 2012). Considering the above analysis and perspectives of leading change, a future-fit leadership change framework, will add to the previous enumerated aspects in terms of business result, a fourth dimension of leading change, which include the creation of a vision, creation of a change strategy and place emphasis on values. In terms of personal characteristics, additional dimension of building and maintaining relationship, open mindedness, creativity and innovation, and honesty may be included based on participants feedbacks.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article attempts to define and outline leadership traits and competencies needed for a change intervention. In order to construct a framework of leadership competencies that will help in change intervention and navigation, it was necessary to revisit the different definitions and views of other existing treatises in order to establish the core elements of leadership. These definitions clearly indicate the complexity of understanding the different elements and dynamics of leadership in terms of navigating change. A few frameworks were scrutinised to identify certain leadership dimensions such as competencies (driving business results, business direction, people leadership and interpersonal relationships), capabilities (cognitive,

personality and creativity) and values (honesty, integrity, trust, courage and execution).

The major findings of the research conducted in the relevant company, indicated beyond all doubt, that the leadership displayed in the change intervention proved to be highly successful in terms of creating a vision for the envisaged change, providing the necessary guidance during the change process and ensuring the application of relevant change leadership attributes to support the implementation of the proposed change. The literature review together with the positive responses from participants will enabled researchers to articulate a future fit approach that place emphasis on the key prerequisites to lead a successfully change intervention.

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