Are Leaders Born Or Made?
: A Point Of View

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is believed as skills or abilities to influence others in order to reach a shared goal by making some changes. Thus, one who influences and mobilizes others to attain their common goals can be defined as a leader. Regardless a considerable amount of literature and discussion on leadership among scholars and practitioners, there is still no agreement about where do leaders come from or who the leaders really are. Are they born or made? This question still seems to be a debatable topic. This paper presents my point of view in the matter. Based on the analysis of the five essential components of leadership in this paper, only two components character and emotional intelligence specifically support the idea that leadership is both innate and learned. The other two credibility and ethics stand for leadership can be developed through learning. On the other hand, only one componen spirituality supports the idea that leadership is unlearned, but innate. Thus, these findings are enough to conclude that leaders are both born and made. In other words, it is my contention that leadership is ability which both inherent and can be learned.

Keywords: leadership; character, emotional intellegence, credibility, ethics, spirituality

INTRODUCTION

In the field of business and management, there have been many definitions of leadership. Based on a survey, Barker (1997) has identified that most practitioners defined leadership as skill or ability, some defined it as a role or position, or an action, while a few defined it as an experience or influencing relationship. On the other hand, from scholarly point of view, leadership can be defined as an influencing process which occurs within a group setting and involves shared goals or visions (Schreuder *et al.*, 2011) or a relational process between leaders and followers to accomplish their common goals by managing positive changes (Funk, 2002, p. 45). Similarly, Rost (1993) has defined leadership as an influence relationship among leaders and followers which changes are involve in the process of their mutual goal achievement. Simply stated, leadership is a skill or an ability to influence others in order to reach a shared goal by doing some changes. Thus, one who influences and mobilizes others to attain their common goals can be defined as a leader.

It is widely believed that the existence of leaders in organizations is essential. This is inline with Hewlett (2006) who states leadership is the quintessential ingredient that sparks the organizational fire of greatness. However, there is still no agreement about where do leaders come from or who the leaders really are. Are they born or made? This question still seems to be a debatable topic. Regarding this issue, there are two widely differing points of view. Cawthon (1996) has identified that some people, based on their beliefs in the "great man theory" have strong view that leadership is innate, not learned. On the other hand, others argue that it is learned (Bennis & Nanus, 1986 cited in Cawthon, 1996) or both (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to take a position on the issue. Moreover, for the purpose of this paper, some essential components of leadership—credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 1990), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998), character (Barlow, Jordan, and Hendrix, 2003), ethics (Ghoshal, 2005), and spirituality (Strack and Fottler, 2002)—will be analyzed. In addition, for many reasons, it is my contention that leadership is ability which both inherent and can be learned. In other words, leaders both can be born and made. The paper is in two parts. Firstly, it will focus on analyzing the five essential components of leadership. Secondly, a conclusion will be drawn.

RESEARCH METHOD

A literature review was conducted to address the main research question of this paper. A literature review can be described as a systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research (Snyder, 2019). One of the advantages of conducting a literature review as a research method is it can create a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development (Webster & Watson, 2002). Moreover, by integrating perspectives from many empirical findings, a literature review can address research questions powerfully. It can also provide an overview of areas such as leadership in which the research is interdisciplinary. Additionally, a literature review is a way of synthesizing research findings to show evidence on a meta-level and to uncover areas in which more research is needed, for creating theoretical frameworks and building conceptual models (Snyder, 2019).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Following are the five components which have been proposed as the *sine qua non* of leadership by many leadership theorists (see for example Goshal, 2005; Kauzes & Posner, 1990; Leavy, 2016; Sarros et al., 2006; Strack and Fottler, 2002, Wong, 2011). It is beneficial to analyze them in order to support the stance on the paper issue.

Credibility

As has been advanced by Kauzes and Posner (1990), building and maintaining credibility is crucial in leadership. It also has been identified that credibility has three factors—honest, competent and inspiring. Leaders are considered honest by their followers when they taking actions on what they say. Simply stated, honest relates with consistency between leader's actions and words. Competent, on the other hand, relates with having both technical and conceptual capabilities. Similarly, Barlow et al. (2003, p. 579) have defined competent as capable of performing tasks assigned in a superior fashion and excels in all task assignments. They also state that it refers to being effective and efficient. Being enthusiastic, energetic and positive about the future, on the other hand, can be considered as inspiring by Kauzes and Posner (1990). In addition, Kauzes and Posner (1993 cited in Simons 1999) argue that credibility as a whole has a significant impact on developing followers' loyalty and commitment.

In relation with credibility as one component of leadership, it is asserted that credibility is earned and developed by times (Kauzes & Posner, 1990). However, they also state that credibility is a 'very fragile' thing. It takes years to be developed and earned, but it can be lost easily. Inconsistent acts by leaders may cost their credibility. Simply stated, credibility is not given for leaders. In other words, credibility can be learned and build by several actions. Therefore, in terms of credibility, it is argued that leadership can be developed through practice and learning.

Additionally, based on a research, Kauzes and Posner (1990) have identified five fundamental actions that can help build credibility. Firstly, it is important for leaders to know the followers well in terms of their hopes, values, and aspiration. Secondly, leaders need to stand up for their beliefs while remain open to other opinion and information. Thirdly, speak in a meaningful way is a must for leaders in order to develop positive images among the followers. Fourthly, leaders need to be role models for their followers. Lastly, leaders have to have high self-confidence to deal with new ideas and new challenges.

Emotional Intelligence

The study of emotional intelligence in the field of leadership has gained a considerable interest. The main focus has been wheter or not emotional intellegence is an essential component that could shape a leader's behaviour, practices and values (Tang, Yin, Nelson, 2010). Mayer and Salovey (cited in Campbell, 2007, p. 145) have defined emotional intelligence as a subset of social intelligence which allows one to be aware of one's own and others' emotion as a guide for thinking and taking actions. There are five components of emotional intelligence which have been identified by Goleman (1998)— *self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy,* and *social skill*. In details, he gives definitions of each component (p. 88) as follow. Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and understand our own emotions and their effects on others, while self-regulation can be defined as the ability to think before taking actions. Another

component—motivation—relates with high achievement, optimism and organizational commitment. The fourth component—empathy—can be defined as the ability to understand and treat others based on emotional reactions. Moreover, social skill relates with effectiveness in managing change, relationships and building networks.

In relation with leadership, besides indicated that there is a genetic component of emotional intelligence, Goleman (1998) asserts that psychological and developmental researchers have strong believe that emotional intelligence can also be learned. This is inline with Nelson and Low's point of view (cited in Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010) that has defined emotional intelligence as a learnt ability that can be gained through a transformative learning process in order to identify, experience, understand, and express human emotions in healthy and productive ways. Furthermore, it increases with age. Simply put, it can be argued that in terms of emotional intelligence element, leaders are both born and made/created.

Character

Lickona (1991 cited in Sarros, Cooper, & Hartican, 2006, p. 683) has defined character as doing the right thing no matter what the pressures are. Moreover, Sarros et al. (2006) argue that the central point of character is virtue. Simply stated, people's character can be observed from their action choices, whether or not they right in terms of morality and ethical. In other words, character represents what people have inside. This is inline with Martin Luther King's words that point out greatnes resides in an individual's character (Saros et al., 2006). Moreover, it has been argued that leaders need character in order to build trust in followers for moving toward their common goal (Barlow, Jordan, & Hendrix, 2003). Similarly, Cashman (1991 cited in Barlow et al., 2003) has strong believe that character should never been separated from leaders. In relation with the paper issue, while Sarros et al. (2006, p. 683) assert that character is something that can be learned and developed throughout the lives, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991 cited in Barlow et al., 2003) argue that leaders can be born with character, can learn it, or both. Thus, in terms of character element, once again, leaders are both born and made/created.

Ethics

According to Connock and Johns (1995, cited in Orme & Ashton, 2003), ethics refers to fairness—treats people in an equitable, impartial, and just manner (Barlow et al., 2003, p. 580)—and deciding right or wrong. It is also about defining the practices and rules which highlight responsible conduct between individuals and groups. Similarly, Hodgetts, Luthans, and Doh (2006) state that ethics is about morality and standards of conduct. Moreover, Orme and Ashton (2003) state that ethics represents one's values which fundamental to the very essence of who people are. In relation with leadership issue, Goshal (2005) argues that ethics is essential in leadership. This idea is inline with Ciulla (1995) whose has declared that ethics is in the heart of leadership. I also have a strong believe about this point. Imagine that if leaders are unethical. Personally, I do not want to have leaders who unethical. I do not want to be led by a person who unfair and does not know what is right or wrong. In other words, being ethical is a must for leaders.

There are three types of ethics that has been identified by Orme and Ashton (2003): *social ethics, transcendental ethics,* and *tactical ethics*. The first one—social ethics—has a closed relationship with specific values or principles which group or society have. In this type of ethics, one group or society may have different ethics with

others. The second type of ethics—transcendental ethics—relies on the absolute concept of right and wrong and a sense of justice, which is applied equally regardless of any social, geographical or cultural restriction. The last type—tactical ethics—is based on obeying rules or laws in order to avoid any penalties. Moreover, it is argued that this ethics is practiced out of a convenience and self-interest rather that a sense of right or wrong. Thus, personally, I believe that it is important for leaders to move towards the transcendental ethics, instead of social or tactical ethics only.

As has been advanced by Ciulla (1995), ethics is the subject that people know about from experience. In other words, ethics has little to do with genes. It is something that people learned. In addition, according to Orme and Ashton (2003), self-development is the key to understand ethics. Thus, in terms of ethics as one of leadership component, it is argued that leadership is learned, that is something that can be gained in by study, practice or being taught.

Spirituality

As has been advanced by Strack and Fottler (2002, p. 5), spirituality can be defined as relationship with something intangible but also real beyond oneself which is known as many terms such as '*Creator*' '*God*', or '*Transcendent power*'. It is argued that the values of spirituality are differs among individuals with different backgrounds and cultures (Barlow et al., 2003). Moreover, Strack and Fottler (2002) assert that spirituality is an essential component of leadership since it can be considered as a source of one's values and meaning. They also argue that spirituality has significant impact on shaping leaders' way of thinking. In addition, based on a review of empirical researches, Strack and Fottler (2002) have identified that compared to their counterparts, spiritual leaders are more effective and better in their performance.

With regard to the paper issue, Hamer (2004 cited in Campbell, 2007) claims that genes have strong influence on spirituality. In other words, it is argued that in terms of spirituality component, leadership is unlearned, but inherent. It is a quality that an individul possed from birth.

CONCLUSION

It has been made evident that leaders are pertinent for organizations. It is the quintessential ingredient that sparks the organizational fire of greatness At least, there are five components—credibility, emotional intelligence, character, ethics, and spirituality—which have been proposed as the *sine qua non* of leadership by many leadership theorists. Based on the analysis of the five essential components of leadership in this paper, only two components—character and emotional intelligence—specifically support the idea that leadership is both learned and inherent. The other two—credibility and ethics—stand for leadership can be gained in and developed by study, practice or being taught. On the other hand, only one component—spirituality—supports the idea that leadership is innate, or it is unlearned. Thus, these findings are enough to conclude that leaders are both born and made. In other words, I have a strong view that leadership is both innate and learned. Leadership is a quality that a leader possed from birth and that quality can be developed over time through learning. However, there is a need for a further research in the area of ethics in terms of how ethics can improve leaders' performance.

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