

Chapter 3

Leaders Are Born: Should Institutions Stop Investing in Leadership Development?

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is the ability to connect with people and create an environment that unlocks the potential of individuals, groups, and the organization at large so that every member has the upper hand to make the best contribution to the success of the organization. Great finish resides on great leadership. Leaders are known for their remarkable success or a significant failure in their leadership endeavor. This continuum of success and failure makes it wise to ask what is the truth behind that curtain of the success and failure? What is the contributing factor that makes a leader great leader? Is the golden position left for selected few? There is an abundant volume of literature on the study of leaders and leadership, but little is said on first time leadership. The purpose of this chapter is to create a thorough understanding of the contemporary leadership empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, volatile working environment, and break-through technological advancements it is demanding to think of leadership as much more than setting directions and organizing and monitoring work (Manuel London, 2002). Leadership is an act of switching on or off the breathing system of an organization. If the leadership goes right the life of the organization and of course the life of everyone and everything around goes right. Failure in leadership amounts to the collapse of everything. Unlike other things, leadership failure causes a massive destruction to an organization, to a nation, and the universe as a whole. We find leaders in every decisive corner of social, political, economic, and environmental environments or organizations. Hence, one can easily understand what leadership amounts to. Most importantly in leadership we are dealing with human beings – great creatures who can construct or destruct the world. For every failure and success in our universe leadership takes the lions share.

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The explosion of interest in leadership underlines this truth. Each day the world discusses the remarkable successes and significant failures of leaders in every dimensions of human activity. Scholars are trying their best from past to the current to create a platform to better understand leadership. The subject indeed deserves attracting the attention of scholars and practitioners.

This chapter is about shading light on better understanding of the leadership competencies that one requires to become an effective leader. It examines in some depth the developments in leadership studies that support leaders are made not born. In addition, the chapter provides a comprehensive set of skills, qualities, and knowledge that first time leaders need to acquire to become a successful leader.

Background

Leadership is a universal phenomenon. It occurs among all people, regardless of culture, be it organized or unorganized groups. The peculiar nature of the practice of leadership nowadays is the dominance of leadership positions by traditional leaders who jump from one position to the other (Bernard M. Bass, 2007). Traditional leader is a leader who came to his/her current position climbing a ladder of leadership from bottom to top. It seems the leadership world is in favor of these leaders giving little space for first time leaders – people who came to position for the first time.

Here, it is necessary to raise some crucial questions: who is really legible to take leadership position. Can anyone learn to lead? Are leaders born and should institutions stop training leaders? What matters most in the realm of leadership? It seems the world has been reacting wrongly to these questions. Once there is leadership there exists a leader–follower relationship. The existing practices of leadership, most of the time, shows these two categories remain to be viewed distinct from each other. Leaders are usually considered as unique people born with innate qualities that everyone cannot acquire. Actually, the traditional leaders themselves play the major role in building such beliefs in the minds of others. They are known to build their own empire that gives them a tremendous freedom to act, give order, deploy resources, etc., but little or no space for others. They collect people with similar thought around them (Nannerl O. Keohane, 2010). Following this, through time everyone around the leader takes position that leadership is left for few selected individuals. This thought builds a big wall between the leader and follower and impedes the coming of first time leaders into leadership position.

This proposition dates back to the 19th century. Great man theory of the 19th century philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle is a good example that advocates this type of view to leadership. The theory assumes that the traits of leadership are intrinsic and the belief is leaders are exceptional people born with innate qualities destined to lead. Having a look at leadership in this way creates discrimination among individuals based on gender and trait. First it states it is only men who can be effective leaders and at the same time being men alone is not enough. Men should be born with some inherent characteristics to be a leader.

It seems senseless to even think that some predetermined inborn qualities that usually remain the same throughout the life of the person are the only instruments to deal with the world of dynamism and become a successful leader. For example, the great man theory is criticized for the fact that all the leaders may not possess all the traits and on the other hand many of the non-leaders may possess most or all of them. Recent developments in the field prove these types of propositions that solely depend on prescribed set of characteristics for successful leadership are no more valid. The behavioral theory of leadership of Douglas McGregor in the mid-1940s and early 1970s which assumes leadership capabil-

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