Importing Complexity Leadership Theory Into Bureaucratic Organizations in Non-Western Environments: A Perspective and Agenda for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

Criticisms of bureaucratic leadership in the public sector literature are increasing, and as such, a growing number of scholars in public administration are calling for a more complex and conceptually sound theoretical models of leadership that are collaborative and reduce the power of the leader and create hybrid governance models. With a multifaceted perspective, detailed conceptual underpinning and a growing body of empirical study support complexity leadership theory (CLT) as a potential to address many of the issues where an individual is seen to possess all the knowledge in the organizational goals. The intent for proposing the importation of CLT in PSOs is to offer a paradigm for thinking about leadership to explore issues that confound those from the traditional view to the shared and adaptive leadership process. In conclusion, the HR practitioners within the entity should be seen to be responsible for their actions. Therefore, adopting complexity leadership theory in today’s PSOs will enhance the performance of employees.

KEYWORDS

Bureaucratic Leadership, Complexity Leadership Theory, Enabling Leadership, Entanglement, Importing Management Concepts, Interactions, Interdependence, Public Sector Organizations

INTRODUCTION

In the political and administrative environment, leadership influences how individuals or organizations achieve their objectives. New Public Management (NPM) reforms may have worked to achieve particular milestone (Osborne, Radnor, Kinder & Vidal 2015) in most developed and Western economies but achieving success in most non-Western economies have been a daunting task for political elites and their specialized administrative, bureaucratic leaders over the past decades (Fritz 2016; Andrews 2013). The traditional leadership styles focus on the behaviors and traits of individual leaders who are introduced by the government as specialized bureaucracies to manage these Weberian departmental strategies intended to be separated from politics (Cohen 2016). In most public sector enterprises in non-Western economies, these theories of bureaucratic leadership approach and decision-making strategies persist even though technology and innovation supposed to have taken the most significant part of the way of management. The development of postmodern theories has adjusted the thought of leadership for both scholars and practitioners in public sector leadership to shift their attention to the contemporary approach of leading. Entities are seen as a complex subsystem...
that can be adopted for effective leadership (Donkor & Zhou 2019). In order to improve efficiency and effectiveness, NPM reform focused attention on the importation of private-sector management strategies, which are purely outcome-based (Cohen, 2016). This importation of management ideas and concepts meant for private sector enterprises are supposed to shape the public sector bureaucracies (Weiss 2017; Radnor & Osborne 2012), and the focus of the administrations should be able to compete effectively. The adoption has encountered setbacks (Kim & Hong, 2013). Many public management studies have offered an insight into the rationale behind the importation of management concepts in public sector organizations but have been overlooked (Nielsen, Waeraas & Dahl 2019).

Criticisms of the traditional bureaucratic leadership perspective in the public sector literature are increasing, and as such, a growing number of scholars and practitioners are calling for a more complex and conceptually sound theoretical model of leadership that is collective and reduces the power of the leader but allows for emergence to occur and embrace it. Research on leadership and organizations points out that organizations are operating in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment (Marion & Uhl-Bien 2011). The fluctuating global business environment has added complexity to the topography of the organizations. PSOs find themselves in a stormy business environment that challenges them to respond expeditiously and positively to the environment as citizens are not satisfied with the performance of public sector organizations (Donkor & Zhou 2019). There is a lack of trust for political and administrative leadership in most non-Western economies, and this is what is having ripple effects on PSOs. The leadership style within an organization is a significant determinant of the attainment of goals and objectives, as well as the day-to-day operations of the corporation. Public administration (PA) research has suggested that improving leadership in the public sector is critical to increase organizational performance (Jensen et al. 2016; Rainey 2014; Van Wart 2013). For organizational change and its adaptive circumstances to be effective (Abbasi & Hollman 2000) think that there should be useful and competence in one’s leadership style. This leader should be able to perceive what is desirable and deal with it tactfully. Chen, Wang, Huang, & Spencer-Rodgers (2012) also believe that managers have what it takes to determine the future direction of the entity independently. Drucker (2012), has it that organizations of today are engulfed with the complex and competitive system of the environment known as ‘the threshold of chaos mostly led by globalization and technology revolution. To understand the full potential of leadership in public organizations, we ought to recognize appropriate leadership strategies that suit the sector at any given period (Jensen et al. 2016).

The authors, therefore, draw attention to the need for PSOs to adopt the complexity leadership approach as a private-sector management strategy as recommended by NPM reform to change and foster opportunity for the informal structure to thrive. It is through this that intrapreneurial skills can be harnessed to facilitate organizational success and creates a hybrid governance model within the public sector. This context will further enhance employee involvement that seeks to affect organizational performance and employee well-being (Hussain, Lei, Akram, Haider, Hussain & Ali 2018). The authors premise this call on the fact that leaders in PSOs should adopt social exchange theory (SET) and inculcate in the informal structure to develop positive reciprocity to achieve organizational success (Latorre, Guest, Ramos & Gracia 2016). This should be in tandem with ability, motivation, and opportunity, the AMO model, where the focus on organizational benefits on performance results in the neglect of employee welfare (Latorre et al. 2016; Segal and Lehrer 2012). This has been the norm in the state enterprises in most non-Western economies.

In an attempt to apply complexity leadership theory in the PSOs environment where the bureaucratic system is the status quo, the authors extend the contribution significantly to the existing literature through proposals. To this extent, the researchers propose that state enterprises should adopt strategies that are a knowledge-based, innovative, and creative thinking that enhance quicker decision making. At the same time, the approach should foster a change in the traditional bureaucratic structure to a contemporary paradigm of leadership that resonates with new system development and are flexible when it comes to organizational decision making (Byrne & Callaghan 2013; Adams & Stewart 2015).