Chapter 4

Discursive leadership:
Developing a Scale to Evaluate Followers' Perceptions of Discourse in First–Time Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes discursive leadership in first-time leadership and introduces a scale that was developed to measure discursive leadership abilities based on seven distinct dimensions: overall effectiveness, tools used, guidance, modulating, empowerment, non-verbal cues, and climate and bonding. The scale was developed and pilot-tested at a private business school in Puebla, Mexico, based on followers' perceptions. Theory on discursive leadership was analyzed as a form of organizational communication and as a process between leaders and followers. An overview of the state of research in the field of business and management, specifically basic constructs, fundamental notions, and elements are presented, as well as new lines of research in the area.

INTRODUCTION

First-time leadership includes a first leadership position, the first time in a new organization, first time leading a new group, and others. First-time leadership is about the opportunity to influence a group of individuals to maximize their efforts towards achieving challenging goals with no prior experience in such roles (Johanssen, 2017). Discourse is essential in first-time leadership, as it helps understand how leaders can communicate with others, understanding that it is difficult to please everyone (Naglinska, 2016).

Van Dijk, Kintsch, & Van Dijk (1983) suggested that since 1970, several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences started showing interest in the study of discourse. At the time, it was recognized that the use of language in social contexts should be the empirical object of study, including how language is used, how verbal interactions occur, the way storytelling is constructed, among others. At the beginning of the new century, there was a turn in linguistic analysis in social sciences, with a growing interest in leadership from a discourse analytical perspective (Schnurr, 2009). Nevertheless, research into the discursive leadership paradigm remains fragmented (Jian, 2019).

Although discourse has been thoroughly analyzed in psychology, it has only recently been studied in organizational communication and leadership (Fairhurst, 2007). Torres & Fyke (2013) have suggested that traditional leadership psychology literature attempts to determine causality among the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements of leading actors.

According to Minei, Eatough & Cohen-Charash (2018), discursive leadership is a "communication-based style of leadership that relies upon framing statements within an organization that affect current operations, future operations, and/or the pursuit of organizational change." Discursive leadership takes discourse as the object of study to view how we think, see, and attribute leadership. In this sense, discursive leadership offers an optimal resource to view the communicative practices involved in the management of meaning and the communicative construction of reality, including resilient systems and processes (Fairhurst, 2008).

The objective of this chapter is to examine the discursive practices of the leader at a private business school in Puebla, Mexico. The theoretical analysis of discursive leadership starts with its historical evolution and a brief description of the notion, which remains somewhat ambiguous as it is related to numerous other concepts. The description of the method includes the procedure performed to select the variables for the scale. A section on pilot testing is presented describing how the questionnaire was administered and the overall results. Discussions of results analyze the dimensions with the highest and the lowest scores and areas for improvement.

BACKGROUND

First-Time Leadership

First-time leadership has been randomly analyzed on literature, and there has been a lack of research on first-time leadership (Tughra, 2018). It has been suggested that entering a new leadership position might be daunting (Maliakkal, 2018). Examples of this type of leadership can be found in formal educational settings, especially for outdoor adults' leadership experiences (Enoksen & Lynch, 2017), politics, and new parties (Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2016).

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