EMERGENT LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE

What Makes A Great Leader?

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INTRODUCTION

The essay aim is to critically evaluate Leadership Style theories to Richard Branson's Leader in Virgin organisation.

The study is going to be descriptive, factual and will rely totally on information sources collected and put together via many books, interviews, and articles.

Sir Richard Branson's Leadership Style

The man with the long hair and martini on the airplane commercial it what it come in mind when talking about Branson .

Personal Profile:

Richard Branson is an English business investor, author and philanthropist and the founder of Virgin Group with more than 400 companies in various fields with a net worth approximately $4.2billion.

In March 2000, Branson was knitted at Buckingham palace for "services to entrepreneurship" for his work in retail, music, and transport but also for his taste for adventure.

Sir Richard Branson has a rich history of success and an amazing story behind it- He is one of the most successful and influential people in the world business.

NATURE and NATURE

His business success was achieved by his own entrepreneur flair and the unique upbringing. His mother Eva used to create challenging games as dropping Richard off in a field close to their home and make him find his way back home. These lessons built character and leadership qualities too.

BACKGROUND

Richard Charles Nicholas Branson was born on July 18th 1950.in Surrey England. His father Edward James Branson was a barrister, and his mother Eve Branson was a flight attendant and an adventurist.

Despite all stories about his upbringing, he faced loads of personal challenges. He was dyslexic, near-sighted and unable to read at age of eight and dropped school by the age of 16 and build Virgin.

In 1989 Branson married Joan Templeman. They have two children Holly and Sam and happily living on his Necker Island.

EARLY INFLUECES:

Richard's career in the business world began in 1966 when he started with a magazine called Student, using the school Phone Box as his office, printing the magazine and using it for advertising popular albums and interweaving famous personalities like Mick Jagger and others.

In 1971 Branson opened a record shop in London and was under tax envision for unpaid tax on selling records that have been declared export stock. His parents re- mortgaged their home and paid the £70,000 fine.

He broke many rules and challenged himself with many record breaking adventures but managed to turn his life around and became the head of a multibillion-dollar empire.

Country type of Business

Virgin group is a British multinational venture with a diverse type of businesses which includes virgin airlines, virgin records, virgin money, virgin media , galactic and virgin transports.

Additional information regarding Branson's success will be described in the APPENDIX part of this paper.

Task 2.

Richard Branson Leadership Style

After exhausting research, Richard Branson's leadership style looked to be more complex than others. With all this in mind each of the leadership style will be described in parts.

Leadership

"Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor which binds a group together and motivates it towards goals." (Leadership Basics - Meaning, Characteristics, Theories, Qualities and Useful Articles, 2020.)

Leadership Theories

Leadership theory involves the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute towards the effeteness and success of a team' . (Stewart, 2014).

Trait Leadership Style

Trait theory focuses on the leader's characteristics.

According to Trait approach of leadership, Richard Branson is a successful leader because his fun, charismatic, friendly, adventurer, risk taker, dynamic, symbolic with multi-coloured ideas and cheeky attitude. Richard possesses the ability to motivate and communicate his vision which contributed to the Virgin Group success.

Richard is naturally born with those personal characteristics that differentiate him from other leaders. Richard treats his employee equally, like family giving them the freedom to be creative, appreciating feedback and suggestions.

According to Scouller (Scouller, 2020), trait approach of leadership is based on personality, background, self-confidence, intelligence, and other characteristics that disclose the leadership qualities.

It is important to see and understand that same traits can make a leader more successful, but no Traits can guarantee success.; The negative aspect of using this style is that limits the opportunities to teach, communicate and have the vision for the future so the people are always the same.

The criticism of Trait leadership is it believed to be too simple, as it mainly focuses on how the leader effectiveness is observed by the followers. Moreover, it does not help the organisation to select effective leaders who will perform well to achieve organisational goals. Despite of Trait leadership qualities, some argued that those qualities are not inherited, and it can be learned.

Democratic Leadership Style

Democratic leadership keys strengths are that encourages the creation of common goals.

According to Kurt Lewis, Democratic style is the most effective and frequently used in organisational change. It is an excellent method to use among the employees creating awareness of the advantages of change. (Leadership Styles Explained (Kurt Lewin), 2020)

Richard approaches a Democratic style of leadership. This aspect relates to the highly interactive style of leadership, allowing employees to apply their skills in new projects, encouraging them to think and take their own decision and responsibilities. Branson is justifying this by saying “they are paid to think and self - lead not to follow”.

Branson believes that “no one can be successful alone, and you cannot be a great leader without great people to lead “. (Branson 2018).

Richard Branson earned his fame by putting Employees first!

Branson believes that if employees are treated well, they do better jobs and customers are happier and their experience reflect positively on the whole brand. He is well recognised for the emphasis he puts on his employees: His concept is that “Happy employers equals happy customers “.

Richard is a very good listener, very approachable, able to connect with people at all levels. He always carries a notebook in his pocket and interviews staff and passengers when on Virgin flights, listening to their comments and travel experience. Richard’s encourage communication and feedback by sharing his phone number with employees, appreciating any ideas, suggestions, or comments. “When things start going wrong, it’s often because staff members feel they are being ignored and good ideas are not bubbling to the top”. (Sir Richard Branson, 2012). Seeking to look always for the best in people for instance; moving them into different jobs within the organisation to transfer, develop and maximise their skills.

Branson achieved a level of trust, and the vast nature of investment enabled him to develop extensive leadership skills which had a great impact on his organisational success. As mentioned by Lewin, “Leadership and followership based on democratic principles take skills that can’t be relied on to come naturally.” (Crosby, 2020)

According to Hersey and Blanchard (1969) “no single leadership style is better than another”, Their Situational Leadership model is based on the leader’s ability to manage change in different situations. They suggest that the behaviour selected depends on the receptiveness of the people that are influenced. (Hersey and Blanchard Situational Leadership Model EXPLAINED | B2U, 2020).

Branson is a high-risk taker, taking Virgin Galactic space adventure which could “well pay off” in a matter of time, Virgin will offer a few minutes of weightlessness and see the curvature of the Earth’s surface for a substantial price.

The key risks of Branson’s wild ride space tourism are Virgin Galactic's long timeline, potential delays, high costs and potential for competition, which is a risky proposition. (Virgin Galactic, 2020)

Transformational Leadership Style

"Transformational Style can inspire positive changes in those who follow." Ronald E Riggio, an expert in leadership suggests that transformational leaders inspire and empower their followers. The groups led by transformational leaders have higher levels of performance and satisfaction than groups led by other types of leaders" (How Do Transformational Leaders Inspire and Motivate Followers?, 2020)

Some of the goals of Virgin Group include expanding into other markets of the world using new technology in its innovation, getting customers loyalty, and entering new ventures. Branson's transformational style of Leadership ensures that happy employees will always perform better together and as a company.

According to Transformational leadership style, Branson is a leader who set company goals to be achieved, focusing on the brand qualities, innovation, fun in work and adventure.

This is what Virgin and Branson are about, presenting customers a life experience and not simply a product. Virgin Airline offers business class travellers facilities that other airlines would not offer to first class passengers, such as reclining seats, in-flight massages, hair stylists, aromatherapists, and motor-cycle and limo home-pick-up service. The airline was the first to provide passengers video screens in every seat-back.

Branson's has ability to make change, creating a vision to guide the change thorough inspiration and executing the change with committed members of his group.

Richard Branson's transformational style highlight's the company's interest even if he makes himself a fool. One example is Richard dressing up as a female flight attendant serving drinks, other time dressing up in a pirate costume staying in the spotlight. The transatlantic flight was offering unique entertainments as clowns, band playing in the aisles, Miss World dancing with passengers, butlers handing out caviar, brandy, and cigars. (The Virgin group of companies). Richard Branson is great in building dedication, however, some people are also turned-off by this outlandish personality and egotism.

Creativity Approach

Virgin Group has a unique management structure which defines its unique style. Creativity leadership style is "based upon the concept of working cooperatively to develop innovative ideas". (Creative Leadership, 2020)

Branson is very creative to attract customers to new products and bring new increase in the brand's reputation with remarkable promotions that kept the organisation in public attention such as breaking a world record flight attempt in a hot air balloon with VIRGIN Logo on it.

Virgin employs people that are diligent and are prepared to take charge without being pushed to do so. For example, 60 members of the staff climbing Mount Kenya to obtain £35,000 for a Kenya village). Engagement of employees as well as communication is another great strategy in Virgin, which is based on how Richard has been involved in writing what he calls "chatty letters" to his staffs to let them know what is happening within the organisation, encouraging them to respond with remarks and ideas b (Grout & Fisher ,2011 pg .38)

Branson’s leadership approach makes employees feel truly appreciated. He trusts and empower them not ruling over them. Branson gives employees unlimited leaves, allowing them to take longer holiday, freedom to express themselves and take own decisions. As a reward, employees will enjoy more their work, feeling valued and loyal to the company.

Despite of his business success, Richard had suffered from dyslexia, which made both reading and learning certain things very difficult; but has never let it hold him back. He experienced loads of problems at the beginning of his career; including cash flow problems, tax issues , low violation and even a night in jail. But he used his mistakes for future guidance, inspired and educated him in certain areas to succeed. (Sir Richard Branson, 2020)

In an interview Branson admitted having a Leadership style called “Rule Breaker “; He said that he never learned the rules in the first place and that the company VIRGIN slogan stands for: “Don’t sweat it, rules were meant to be broken “. (Bowyer, 2017)

This “Rule breaking approach refers to the way he encourages every employees to become an innovative thinker, who can add value to their own way: “ You don’t learn to walk by following rules, You learn by doing and falling over”. (Sir Richard Branson, 2012)

A criticism came from Richard Fuller the conservative MP for North East Bedfordshire claiming that Branson is after the Government money to pay Virgin Airline’s staff who have been forced to take eight weeks unpaid annual leave due to coronavirus pandemic. But then Richard turns around to safe his employees, and offers a rescue package of $250 million to protect the 70,000 staff ,money that comes from Richard and Virgin Group and not paid by Virgin Airline. (Dawkins, 2020)

Task 3.

Leadership and Motivation

Motivation is defined as the power that triggers action that follows". (Cheng and Cheng, 2012).
According to the Motivation theory, Richard Branson is motivated by the possibility to change people's life. This theory refers to "The impact you have on yourself and the impact you have on people around you". Richard is not motivated by money even though money may have measured his success but for him the excitements is the challenge.
In an interview Branson revealed that his motivation is to focus on the staff first, and by giving them the write tool to deliver the job properly will make them happy and proud of their job, making them smile, make customers smile which all lead to the success of the company.

Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of needs is the most basic framework and relates to the need - based perspective on motivation. According to this theory, employees need to be satisfied in order to upper layer needs to be used as motivational factors. (Pichère, Cadiat and Probert, 2015).

Branson's style is to motivate, therefore Virgin employees' motivation is divided in incentives and extrinsic groups.

Virgin employees are driven by extrinsic motivation based on financial rewards with bonuses to those with high performance. But this is not always a good way to motivate, because some individuals have different way of working and are not aiming for the same goal.
The intrinsic motivation is based on employee's personal growth, and Branson provides them with regular training sessions improving their skills, motivation, and confidence.
Even though Democratic style has been more used in Virgin organisation, the Laissez-Fair style could have been also used because Richard's leadership style heavily depends on well-motivated and skilled workforce that knows how to get things done.

"Having a personality of caring people is important. You can't be a good leader unless you generally like people". (Pendexter, 2018).

Conclusion

“Leadership isn’t about a position or a person we associate sometimes as our boss, person, CEO etc, Leadership is about who can inspire people to do thinks they never thought they could.” (Roter, 2020)

Branson’s leadership style and personal characteristics contributed to his success in business. “

There has been a concern over the idea that leadership qualities are gained through life experience. Richard Bolden agrees that individuals who grown up around influential people shows more credibility of being leader. (Bolden, 2007).

He strongly believes that things should be kept simple and that the company’s success are its people. By having a great relationship with his employees his achievements success is attributed to his leadership style.” (Crosby, 2020)

The democratic style showed a positive approach to Branson leadership style providing him with problem solving ideas from employees and by involving them in the decision making process made him a loving leader ,respectful and collaborating rather than controlling.

The criticism of using democratic style is that is not beneficial if the problem needs immediate solving and the time is short.

Even though Branson’s organisation does not have procedures on how things should be done, employees can work without interfering to much with superiors which demonstrate his democratic style. He developed a level of trust with his top managers by setting the direction and then stepping back to let them navigate.”

The Transformational style has been proved to be a win-win attitude in Branson’s leadership, because if the employees are empowered and allowed to use their skills they win from promotions and bonuses as well as job satisfaction and the organisation wins by promoting excellent service and strategic innovation . (Dearlove, 2007).

The key difference between Leadership and management as reflected in Branson’s style is that Leadership has power and the people follows the leaders when in management the just people works for them.

In real life of business, leaders must meet diverse circumstances with suitable leadership style approach because a good leader should be able to change styles.
“The style choses the right leadership style”.

Part 2.

Personal Reflection in Leadership

The purpose of self-reflection is to create time to review myself as a leader and improve skills and understand myself and others better. It is important to examine my strengths, weaknesses, behaviour and how I influence others.

Base on the Leadership and Behavioural Style Questionnaire, I have been surprised to hear that most of my colleagues that I thought to be autocratic leaders have turned to be Democratic leaders just as well as me.

Democratic Style

Branson's leadership style fits me as a leader in my personal life. Good leaders are not only the ones who direct a Fortune from 400 companies, they are also parents, grandparents, teachers as well as many more. I want my child to always look out for good leaders and become a good and effective leader one day.

My favourite part as leader is one that influences others. My reflection will reveal the one I am proud to lead in my life.

As a parent I realised that leadership is a learning social and emotional curve, and that my child develops skills based on her interaction with her friends and family and any personal challenges that she is forces to overcome.

I am a very friendly, thoughtful, fun, and charismatic with a participative personality. I have a good relationship with my daughter which contributes to our family harmony.

I always look to teach her good habits. I am very much into sport and healthy eating. I limit fast food and serve more salads, fruits and vegetables at meals and snacks daily. But then with all my effort, she is going off the track when she goes to meet her friends every weekend:" KFC and McDonalds "the favourite places for teens to eat!

As a creative person I used to set challenges providing my daughter with opportunities to build confidence and learn how to deal with obstacles and how to undertake personal challenges. When I moved to UK, I had opportunities to fly many times with my daughter to bring her to UK from Romania and holidays to other European counties. I was teaching her what she needs to follow in the airport and security track. Larisa has developed flying experience and knew the routes of travelling.

When she reached 16th year of age, I have allowed her to take the plane and fly to UK from Romania. She had the choice to put in practice a travel plan and choose to fly to Bristol or London Luton. Both flights involved taking the coach from Romania to Budapest -capital of Hungary to the Airport. As one of Democratic leadership characteristic I involved Larisa in the decision-making progress.

I have shown her trust and encouraged her that she will be able to travel no matter to which city. Confidence and Tacking personal challenges are healthy risks. The goal was set and Larisa has travelled and arrived safely to UK.

I was very proud that she has managed to cope with the challenges she has faced on her journey; as making sure she gets to the airport on time, follow the signs correctly, arrive to the gate and the plane she was catching.

With a participative role I am involved in my child's life, knowing her friends, and having a good discussion about things that happening in her school and life.

Behavioural Emphasis

In reaction to the Trait leadership theory, the behavioural theories focuses on the leaders behaviour rather than their mental, social-characteristics. In other words, leaders can be made, rather than born. ((Behavioral Theories of Leadership, 2020)

In March 2020 Coronavirus pandemic has affected her social life and she was facing a difficult time due to the fact that the school was forced to close, the classes were taken online and she could not meet and socialize with her friends. The world did not seem to be the one she knew. This was a worrying situation ! As a teen she might feel overwhelmed by the intense emotions and concerns about the school's closures, exams cancellation and the fact that she cannot connect with her friends will affect her.

I believe the best leaders are the ones that have a good communication with the followers rather then what quality the leader has. "Remember that children often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives" (GOV.UK (COVID-19) so it is very important for me how I will respond to this situation. During this time, it is important to support and take care of her mental health.
I have provided clear information about the situation, honest answers to her questions and explained all the safety measures she must follow to keep everyone safe.

But the school system is failing to communicate with parents about educational plans , about COVID related illnesses in the community and about how to support our kids learning.
I think the gaps in parent's communication experience under pandemic is the area of performance because parent support for school is very soft and it is more under school's control.

I have set up a structure for Larisa to help to pass the lockdown period of two weeks as easy as possible. I set up Regular bedtimes and wakeups so she can focus on online school lessons. I prepared healthy meals and introduced short exercise routines to keep active and better sleeps.
I have set up a relaxing time such as watching movies with popcorn. As a reward for Larisa we did online cloths shopping to keep her motivated and happy ,looking forward to the time she will meet her friends again soon.

She has listened and involved in the set-up routine. Thanks to the modern technology she created a group on Zoom and connected with her friends. This had a negative effect on her studying time because she was chatting till very late in the night making it hard for her to wake up and attend the morning online classes. I got very angry, lost my temper, and shouted at her. To make sure this is not going to happen again I have set up a time limit she can spend chatting with her friends.

I have monitored the time, content, and the tone of communication between them. An article was stating:" Passive observation and watching of content is fine within limits, but don't let your child's mind go numb by consuming content that does not require thought". (School's Out: A Parents' Guide for Meeting the Challenge During the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020)

As a conclusion, I have learned that my strengths are all about my passion towards my family. Along with this I am a good decision maker and a risk taker with ability to motivate and influence others.

One of my weakness is that when things do not work out properly, I get angry and my behaviour changes around me. I do not listen, and I get easy irritated and shout, which is not a good characteristic on my personality because a leader should manage tackling situations calmy.

Parent is an important leader that can influence and motivate love ones to achieve goals, be creative and participative in difficult times and different circumstances.

“Research also shown that leaders who take time to reflect on past events stand out in their ability to test assumptions and make connections between seemingly unrelated events; a critical skill for success in this uncertain world”.(Wichert, 2018)

As a result of the questionnaires, I model myself through Vroom’s Expectancy theory by creating challenges with achievable goals such as my daughter flying on her own, ensuring that the task match with her skillsets as the experience about flying that she developed prior to her flight, and also setting connections between performance and rewards; such as watching movie at the end of the school classes.

The criticism of Democratic leadership style is that the leaders do not function well in an authoritarian role. For this reason, I have used Lewis Kurt’s Leadership model as a guide to my leadership reflection. By adopting this style, I have shown a participative/democratic style, expressing my values and priorities in setting goals and making decisions.

Lewis model outlined my behavioural leadership matching my strengths and weaknesses of each approach to the circumstances provided.

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APPENDIX

The appendix contains the Timeline mentioned in the Introduction of the essay listing important events in Richard Branson's historical periods.

Timeline

In 1960's Branson launches his first successful business a Student magazine with net worth estimated at £50,000 by 1969.

Branson launched Virgin Records in the early 1970's leading to creation of Virgin Group.

In 1999 Virgin Records goes international and Branson starts Virgin Holidays.

In 1987 launches Virgin Airship & Balloon Company

In the period from 1990 to 1992, Virgin Group goes through a major change. In 1992, Branon sold his most profitable business, Virgin Music to Thorn EMI for £560 million, capital invested in Virgin Atlantic's new business ventures.

In 1999 Virgin entered in the mobile phone business

In 2004, Virgin Galactic is launched, and I the same year Richard established Virgin Unite, the non-profit foundation of the Virgin Group which unites people's ideas to create opportunities for a better world.

In 2006 Virgin announces Virgin Fuel-a new company to produce a clean fuel in the future.

In 2007 Virgin announces Virgin Media

In 2009 Virgin Money is launched

2017Branso's became the chairman of Hyperloop one.

2018 Virgin Trains East Coast ceased trading and 2019 Virgin purchased Flybe and the

Virgin empire continues to expand.