Emergent Leadership Skills for the Workplace

BMSW6101

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Introduction

The role of the leadership is to provide inspiration, to influence and give guidance. Leadership can be defined as the ability to motivate individuals and to enable and influence them to achieve the objectives. Across time there have been developed different leadership theories which as it is the “most studied and least understood topic” (Almohaimeed, Saleh, 2014). The theoretical background related to the leadership concept involves various approaches and there is no single definition universally accepted, despite that the common theme orbits around directing a group towards a goal. According to Shastri et al (2010) leadership is defined as “the relationship between an individual and a group based on common interest and they behave as per the directions of the leader”. Cole (2005) define leadership as a “dynamic process whereby one man influences other to contribute voluntarily to the realisation and attainment of the objectives towards the common goal”. A different perspectives emphasis that the “Leadership is all about taking ownership and accountability aimed at achieving the end objective by applying the available resources and ensuring a cohesive organisation where an individual influences a group to achieve the common objective” (Amanchukwu et al, 2015).

The major role of the leadership appears to be related to the organisational goals, but is the process and the modality through which is selected towards that which gives complexity, by creating the climate that would influence employee’s attitudes, motivation, and behaviour. The essence of the leadership is represented by the aspiration, values of the group and which contribute to attaining sustainable development and business growth. The leadership is capable to determine change, to influence and generate learning, to ensure performance and to foster organisational growth (Harper (2012).

Organisational background

Zara is a known and trusted brand for the fast fashion industry and it is an international player. The organisation has its headquarters in Spain and it has been founded by Amancio Ortega. Through the years the business has grew becoming one of the industry leaders. The apparel retailer Zara is owned by Inditex, a large group who is known for other big brands such as Bershka, Zara Home etc. The first Zara store was opened in 1975 and nowadays it is present in more than 60 countries with more than 1500 stores opened, it also has a great online presence with a complex infrastructure for online shopping (Wang, 2018). The brand image is based on delivering affordable fashion trends

at high quality. The business model focuses on delivering exquisite designs with more than 11,000 new models per year. In order to remain competitive and obtaining competitive advantage the leadership has focused on creating innovation, being able to develop a new model and have it in stores ready for sale in just two weeks. As part of the organisational strategies it has worked on introducing technology and digitalisation for communication and information purposes (García-Álvarez, 2015).

In 2022 Marta Ortega Perez the daughter of the founder has been approved as the chairwomen and as the proprietary director, replacing the Executive Chairman Pablo Isla, who has led the Spanish company for 17 years (author, .

Management and Leadership Models

In an organisation the leadership defines the vision and mission that is intended to be achieved and will seek to inspire the team of employees to align with the company's goals. The management is the support for the organisation, forming the infrastructure to achieve the organisational goals, the processes and the set of systems involved in the running of the business (Gleeson, 2017). A strong leadership and an effective management will be able to pursue the objectives and be successful. The leadership has a visionary character whilst the management is creating medium and short term objectives. Effective leadership will include the ability to learn and understand the surrounding environment for the organisation, will be able to adapt to the environment in which the organisation operates (Louw and Venter, 2013).

Leadership theories have gained high interest in the corporate sector. Also academic researchers and practitioners have been concerned with the development of the concept. It has been enquired if leadership is born or thought and different beliefs have been proposed. The researchers identified that leadership is an adaptable developmental process (Avolio et al, 2009).

A classification of the different dimensions of the leadership has been the focus of various researchers as well as understanding traits, behaviours and leadership styles. It has been debated that leadership is defined by the number of variables associated with the concept which gives it great level of complexity and which encompass the entire social process. Leadership in itself is a somewhat fluid principle. Generally, most leaders adapt their leadership styles to suit their situation. This is particularly true the longer they lead; they adapt their leadership style as they learn and engage with their employees. Some of the most common leadership styles Transformational Leadership, Transactional leadership,

Delegative Leadership, Authoritative Leadership, Democratic Leadership or Participative Leadership, Servant Leadership. Looking at elements related to the personality and leadership traits, theories such as situational and contingency look into the impact of the of the factors that affect various leadership styles transactional, transformational and charismatic (Avolio.et.al., 2009).

Transformational Leadership is specific to leaders who seek changes and transformation. Leaders who adopt this approach strive to inspire their followers to achieve more than they ever thought possible by tapping into their potential. This type of leadership can be highly effective in organisations looking to make significant changes or transformations. The key characteristics are the focus on the future and visionary thinking, future steps and actions that needs to be done to achieve the goals and for that purpose they also influence the team to do the same. Another characteristic is the focus on change which means that these leaders are comfortable with changes and managing change, as it is considered to be necessary for the organisational goals. Another main characteristic is that this leadership is focusing on people, identifying the potential in individuals, influencing them to reach their full potential.

The delegative leadership is also known as “laissez-faire” and involves task delegation and initiative delegation. It does not interfere majorly with the flux of activities and it is a very hand-off leadership style. Criticism to this theory is that the leaders rely heavily on the trust of their employees and lack of feedback and guidance can reduce productivity. It can be more useful in industry where creativity is the main focus and the delegative leaders allow the process of creation to be realised at own pace and choices of resources. It can reach objectives and goals if the team members are very competent and know what are they doing. It can lead to disagreements within the group and lack of teamwork spirit. Newcomers can found it too difficult to adapt and understand such an environment and can be overwhelming.

The Authoritative Leadership have precise vision for the future and leaders can play the role of the mentors as they know the direction they want to follow. It is very different to the authoritarian leadership and is a more “follow me” approach by displaying the overall direction. The traits of this leadership style include being able to motivate and inspire the team, giving feedback, hands-on, adaptable, guiding the team. This promotes a sense of accomplishment or achievement. The criticism to this theory is that it relies heavily on getting to know each team member and that may not be feasible in large organisations. Tendency to micro manage can also be overbearing for team members and create negative sentiments.

Transactional Leadership is referred to as managerial leadership, is a leadership style that relies on rewards and punishments. This leadership style makes use of structure, and assumes that the team members are not motivated to perform. The structure of a reward-based system is used by the leadership to achieve the set of goals. Leaders will clarify how their teams will be rewarded (or punished) for their work. Rewards can take many formats but typically involve financial recompenses, such as pay or a bonus. This system aims to ensure efficiency, creating routines and allocating roles and responsibilities for each team member. At one point the system might loose efficiency as employees can loose motivation when knowing the value of their efforts. The practice of incentives must be at consistent levels and supported by additional gestures of appreciation.

Participative Leadership know also as the democratic leadership will encourage the individuals to get involved in the decision making and share responsibilities. The leaders will listen to their employees, will have good communication skills and will be able to share power. Collaboration is crucial to this leadership style and accountability for team and individual efforts. The teamwork will be an instrument of managing employees and when issues arise, will aim to identify solutions rather than to blame individuals. The covid 19 pandemic has mad this leadership style more difficult to be implemented with working remotely and decentralised teams. That is why virtual teams might find it challenging to maintain focus and can loose spontaneity and openness. This leadership style has been very popular and often favoured as it helps establishing high levels of trust, it empowers employees to share views and ideas and demonstrating their value to a team.

The Servant Leadership is characterised by the creation of strong relationships. This style assumes that the needs of the others are most important and they are enabled to achieve their full potential. The primary role of this leadership is to create an empowering environment to trigger collaboration among the team members. It is emphasised the value of the team and its input to the organisation rather than each individual. Furthermore, this leadership imposes high level of communication, prevention of potential conflicts and builds a strong sense of loyalty and performance improvement in general.

Leadership styles

The Covid 19 pandemic has affected the business in many industries and has determined uncertainty economically. Organisations had to adapt to existing situation and have had to manage change in order to operate within the new economic environment. Internationally and in the United Kingdom, Zara has been affected by the pandemic, being a non-essential business has had to disrupt activity and to close its shops as imposed by the Governments measures. Understanding the leadership style is very important to determine the level of impact on the team, but also to identify which leadership skills need to be developed. Some leaders can already categorise their current leadership style, recognising whether this makes them effective. Or how their employees see them. But it is not always so defined. It is usually the case that leaders can categorise their style; however, they often exhibit traits of many other leadership styles. It is very important to choose a leadership style that will work for the individual and the team as it increases effectiveness. It is very important to have a clear set of goals, a clear vision so there are high levels of transparency communicated effectively. It might be the case of exploring different leadership styles and selecting the most effective one which leads to results. Being open is crucial, seeking feedback and being willing to adapt and adjust based on the outcome.

The leadership style is defined as the “leader’s methods, characteristics, and behaviours when directing, motivating, and managing their teams. A leader’s style is shaped by a variety of factors, including personality, values, skills, and experiences, and can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of their leadership” (author...

The leadership style is decisive for developing strategies, planning and implementing plans and how the organisation is responding to change such as the pandemic, whilst managing the stakeholders expectations.

Based on the high level of changes the most suitable leadership style for the selected organisation will be the transformational leadership style. The transformational leadership theory was first introduced by Burns (1978) and is defined as the “process in which the leaders and the followers engage with each other to create a connection and increase both sides’ motivation and morality”. By adopting this style it is ensured a proactive approach and a very open attitude. Zara is considered to have a unique business structure that helps the company to achieve efficiency. The people within the organisation are important in setting the organisational structure as it should increase results and efficiency. The culture in an organisation is defined as the pre-defined policies that give guidance and

sense of direction. It involves organisational values but also shared beliefs, rituals and assumptions and is governing internally the employees. The totality of this elements form a distinct working environment. The transformational leadership style focuses on sharing visions and ensuring good communication and engagement, being visible to the teams which are empowered to act. Being an effective leader is important for the team and successful results as people will follow the leader because of the inspiration he provides and trust. The transformational leadership implies that the interaction of employers and employees is based on common beliefs, values, and aims. This theory can be applied to Zara because the company's authorities are focused on both the performance of group members and each person in particular. It is evident from the company's hierarchy that involves the management personnel of various levels aimed at supporting employees (Mullins, 2009).

Therefore the emergent leadership skills to increase effectiveness will be in relation to the transformational theory. According to Indeed (2022) Emergent leadership is a "management structure that allows leaders to arise naturally from within an organisation". The main traits of the leadership is creative thinking, ability to influence, self-management and self-motivation, adaptability, being team-oriented. The leadership should focus on promoting independence to allow levels of freedom to the employees to take decisions for the business, reducing the time of bureaucratic processes, managing shifts based on the team interactions, creating a supportive culture, allowing ownership to avoid delays and most important developing trust. This will show the team they are valued and that the leader is acting to their best interest.

Zara's leadership strategies

In an uncertain economic business environment the capability to manage change is very important to obtain high levels of performance and to ensure competitiveness of the business. Reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation helps assessing the capabilities and in identifying the strategic direction.

Under Ortega's leadership Zara has managed to build a strong brand image, has developed internationally and has pursued growth strategies. He has been a strong leader for the organisation who has provided the visionary direction for the company (Economist, 2016). He has displayed a unique leadership and management style, being a reserved person in personal plan, but down-to-earth, hands on leadership style. He always kept a low profile, but instead has focused on developing the business in a very pragmatic way.

Zara has strong values which reaffirm the strong leadership which is defined as a democratic leadership. The organisation encourages communication, values their employees, offers high standards and provides guidance for their employees. The company structure is used to achieve efficiency, the lean and decentralised structure is enhancing the organisation performance levels. The managerial functions are reduced in order to maintain high levels of flexibility and produce fast responsiveness to local circumstances. The leadership in Zara focuses on cooperation, empowerment and motivates the store managers to act as entrepreneurs by giving high levels of powers regarding the decision making process for the stock they need, being "first observers of what is selling more and what is not selling that well". The main and the only control body is represented by the Board of Direction form their headquarters who have a direct control for every market they operate. Initially the leadership of Ortega has been identified as an autocratic leader, but with the grow of the business has been transformed to a democratic leadership style (Crofton, Dopico, 2007).

The leadership style has been impacted the business model, the organisation and the brand image is constructed around building and maintaining high levels of productivity which represent the organisation as a whole, rather than spending money on marketing and advertising. The low profile leadership translates also in the corporate culture with a representative strategy of investing in products and stores more than showcasing in public. The strong leadership has always promoted a clear vision and direction of the brand image, wanting to be perceived as a high-end store where they are often located in high-end shopping centres near to luxury brands (Buck, 2014).

In Zara the focus lies on the customer, by looking at fulfilling their needs and wants through their product offering. The store managers have an important role to manage the teams and voice the leadership direction, promoting an entrepreneurial culture for each store, encouraging employees to work together towards the common goals of the company. One of the main values in Zara is the teamwork, departments have sale targets daily set up and the whole team is focused to achieve. Zara is also relying on their store managers to provide intel in relation to the customer demands and which influences their manufacturing. The leadership in Zara is a participative leadership where open communication is promoted, teamwork values, self imposed high-standards through a clear direction and guidance for their employees and the organisation as a whole (Inditex, 2023).

Zara has an effective leadership and management in place, they value their employees, they promote learning, they have effective communication coordinated from the

headquarters in Spain which creates synergy within the organisation. The management hierarchy places the CEO and chairman of the Inditex Group, who is now Ortega's daughter, the Board of Directors who represent the highest decision making body setting future goals and long term approach. Zara's vision is "To offer products of the highest quality to all its customers at the same time as striving to develop a business that is sustainable" (Inditex, 2023).

Conclusion and recommendations

The recommendation for Zara is to adopt different leadership styles to suit their business needs. It has been evaluated that the transformational leadership can benefit the organisation more and can manage change better in regards to pandemic led changes and any future changes that could be faced in the uncertain economic environment. Maintaining high levels of communication is key to the business efficiency and in meeting the needs and demands of the customers. The leaders of Zara identified the importance of quality, supply chain management and the dynamics of fashion industry where value is created by listening to the customers through the stores and communicating the information up the chain to the design and production teams.

In conclusion Zara's leadership can be considered efficient and the participative management and the democratic leadership style is meeting the expectations of the stakeholders, but new challenges might incur along with the new leadership and new appointed executive Marta Ortega. Leadership plays an important role so the transformational leadership can benefit the organisation and generate more business.

Reflection

The aim of my reflection is to outline the learning and my acquired skills from the module "Emergent Leadership Skills in the Workplace". This reflection will contribute to my self awareness and my development. It will give me the knowledge and tools to establish employment goals. I consider that an effective reflection would be realised by using Gibs reflective cycle (1988) which is developed in 6 steps: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan.

Description: This is an important step because recounts the learning experience. The experience during my module is part of my learning at the University which I will graduate this year. This module has had a great importance for the importance of the topic, but also from the perspective that is last learning experience during my journey as a student. The learning experience has been realised over 10 weeks, where each week has been allocated a specific topic to discuss such as: Understanding Leadership, Recognising leadership traits, Leadership Philosophy and Styles, Tasks and Relationships Behaviour of Leadership, Developing Leadership Skills, Leadership in Uncertain Times, Leadership Vision, Establishing a constructive climate, Ethics in Leadership, Motivation and Organisational Performance. I participated at the classes along with my colleagues and the lecturer has delivered presentations each lesson, has explained the philosophies, has asked us questions to solidify understanding and has answered our questions.

Feelings: Capture the emotional response to my learning experience during this module. I was very excited to learn about such a controversial topic of leadership, I have positive feelings about the lecturer's approach to teaching.

Evaluation: It was a good and positive learning experience. The negative aspect relates to a lack of resources for understanding better the concept, I consider that we should have had more practical approaches for example meeting and discussing with an established leader from any sector or at least with one of the University leaders as an example of leadership. It would have had a great impact for the learning experience.

Analysis: I have learnt that leadership skills can be developed and I have learned that choosing a specific leadership style involves a variety of elements related to the understanding of the internal and external environment of the organisation. A strong leadership and an effective management will be able to pursue the objectives and be successful. The leadership has a visionary character whilst the management is creating medium and short term objectives. Effective leadership will include the ability to learn and understand the surrounding environment for the organisation, will be able to adapt to the

environment in which the organisation operates (Louw and Venter, 2013). According to Indeed (2022) Emergent leadership is a “management structure that allows leaders to arise naturally from within an organisation”. The main traits of the leadership is creative thinking, ability to influence, self-management and self-motivation, adaptability, being team-oriented. The leadership should focus on promoting independence to allow levels of freedom to the employees to take decisions for the business, reducing the time of bureaucratic processes, managing shifts based on the team interactions, creating a supportive culture, allowing ownership to avoid delays and most important developing trust. This will show the team they are valued and that the leader is acting to their best interest.

Conclusion: My learning could have been more efficient if I would have been more active during the class and not be reserved and anxious to ask more questions. The overall experience has been positive and has given me the knowledge for employment situations

Action Plan: I plan to use all the knowledge about leadership professionally. I have now a clear idea of different philosophies on leadership and I intend to continue my learning through independent research and observation at the workplace.

References