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Introduction.

My chosen leader for a leadership role within the global tourism and leisure industry is Josh Damaro, chairman of Disney Parks, Experiences and products at the Walt Disney Company. Disney's Parks and Resorts are a major part of the international tourism sector, attracting over 50 million tourists a year, averaging at 159,000 visitors a day, making it one of the most popular tourist attractions globally. (Road Genius) In recent years, the organisation has faced many challenges, especially being the COVID-19 pandemic, this resulting in park closures across the globe, financial losses, and major disruptions to global travel. Due to all industries experiencing change in digital performance and customer expectations changing, leaders are required to adapt to these new normalities rapidly and strategically. This report aims to evaluate how Damaro has responded to these industry changes through his leadership, decision making, and managing organisational culture. By exploring how his leadership has influenced employees, operational strategies, and overall performance during uncertain periods and the changes. This report will apply relevant leadership and management theories and assess the effectiveness of his approach within tourism and events. Finally, it will suggest ways where leadership can be improved to help the organisation become more resilient, improve staff engagement and customer engagement, and achieve long term success in a changing tourism sector.

Leadership and Change Management.

In recent years, the tourism and leisure industry has experienced significant disruptions, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is because of its huge impact on organisations like the Walt Disney Company. Disney is a huge provider in

the theme park and resort sector, it faced unprecedented challenges, such as long park closure periods, a decline in international travel, and substantial financial losses. It is reported that Disney lost \$1.4 billion during the pandemic, as well as furloughing 100,000 staff. ("Disney Suffers \$1.4bn Hit due to Coronavirus") The industry has also experienced wider changes, such as the importance of digital technology, evolving customer expectations and a great focus on health and safety. Josh Damaro was required to respond to these challenges quickly as the chairman of Disney parks, which effectively ensured the organisations survival and recovery.

Managing crisis and uncertainty was one of the key leadership challenges during this period. Within tourism, the crisis management theory highlights the importance of quick decision making, adaptability, and clear communication. Damaro showed these qualities throughout the re-opening of the Disney parks after the pandemic. By implementing strict health and safety procedures, reducing the parks capacity, social distancing measures, and stricter cleaning procedures. Introducing park reservation systems also allowed the organisation to manage visitor numbers effectively, ensuring to comply with government procedures whilst keeping a controlled and safe guest experience. These strategic decisions prove a structured approach to managing change during an unpredictable environment. (Klykov)

As well as operational adjustments, Damaro showed significant digital transformation initiatives. Introducing tools such as Disney Genie+ showed a change towards a customer experience driven by technology, allowing visitors to plan their visits, manage queues, and personalise their experience through their phone. This app has mostly positive reviews, it is shown to be "a powerful feature for both new guests trying to navigate Disney's ever-expanding ride offering." (Wilkinson) This matches with wider tourism trends, where digitalisation has become more important in enhancing efficiency and meeting customer expectations. Investing in digital innovation, Damaro ensured Disney remained competitive in a rapidly evolving market, showing his awareness of long term industry trends outside of immediate crisis. In doing so, he ensures Disney uses its best marketing efforts using social media to interact with guests and informing them of Disney's newer technology. (Yinan)

Damaro's leadership approach can be further shown by using Lewin's Change Management Model, which consists of three stages. Those being unfreezing, changing and refreezing. The COVID-19 pandemic is the unfreezing stage, as it disrupted the usual operations and proved the need for change of ways to work. The change stage is shown in the introduction of new systems, such as health and safety measures, reservation systems, and digital tools. The refreezing stage happens as the changes become included in the operations, representing a new normal for Disney Parks and experiences. This model shows how damaro managed the transition from crisis to recovery. (Hussain et al.)

As well as this, aspects of Kotter's 8 step change model can be seen in Disney's response. The pandemic created urgency which forced immediate action, new technology and changes to how the parks operated shows how Disney put these changes into practice to ensure that changes are lasting and successful.(Prosci) Over time the digital systems became a casual part of how the parks are run. However, whilst these models show that Damaro managed change effectively, it is important to see whether these decisions had positive or negative impacts. Disney's approach to the change reflects the elements of Kotter's model, especially in creating urgency, engaging employees and finding new ways of working. (Sridharan)

Although many of Damaro's strategies contributed to recovery, some decisions have received criticism. For example, introducing paid digital services like Genie+ has shown to some customers as reducing the value of Disney's experience, as well as customers having to use their phone instead of enjoying their experience . (Gibbs) Also, cutting costs and changes to the park's operations can be shown to have put more pressure on staff. This affects service quality and employee morale. Showing that even though the organisation adapted well to change, there are also downsides, like balancing profit, efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Overall, Damaro proved to show strong leadership throughout a difficult period, by responding quickly to challenges and recovering the business with its changes. His focus on change and implementing new ideas helped Disney stay competitive in the tourism industry. However, the mixed responses to some changes made show the importance of balancing operational efficiency with customer experience and

feedback, as well as the wellbeing of their employees, therefore achieving sustainable long term success.

Leadership Style, culture and people.

Josh Damaro has proven that his leadership style has had a big impact on how the Walt Disney company has dealt with the changes in the tourism and leisure industry. Particularly in difficult times for the company, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the way a leader behaves is very important as it shows how companies deal with change under pressure as well as reassuring customers their safety is the main priority. During the pandemic, there was a clear struggle in the tourism industry, but this was turned into a transformative opportunity. (Sigala) It can also affect how employees are motivated, how the company works as a whole, and the success of the business. Damaro often shows himself to be a transformational leader, showing that he focuses on motivating staff and encouraging them to adapt to the changes whilst working towards and achieving the shared final goal. ("Driving Employee Engagement: The Expanded Role of Internal Communication - Bing")

Using the transformational leadership theory, inspiring leaders to change their expectations, perceptions and behaviours to reach a goal ensures to inspire employees, support their new ideas, and give them a clear sense of direction. Damaro shows by focusing on the Disney experience even in challenging times that he encourages employees to give high levels of customer service as well as keeping the Disney magic alive. This is important in the tourism and events industry as customer experience is the most important factor for success and keeping the business growing. (Kim et al.)

Damaro's leadership style also shows signs of servant leadership, meaning he focuses on supporting employees and ensuring they feel valued in their roles. Disney is massively well known for treating their employees with importance in the business, helping to make the environment they work in positive and enjoyable. Studies show that when employees feel as though they are being supported and respected that they are more likely to be motivated and provide a better service to customers.

Which is immensely important in tourism, proving how servant leadership can empower employees and encourage them to go above and beyond in their roles, similar to how Damaro's leadership motivates staff to give high customer service during tough times to keep up the Disney magic. (Momani)

The culture of Disney is well known to be very strong and cheerful, it plays a key role in how the company operates. Using Schein's organisational culture model, this can be explained as at the surface level, culture includes things you see, like uniforms, branding and themed parks. At a deeper level, it shows the company's values, like providing great customer service and creating unforgettable experiences. At the deepest level, a strong sense of belief that the customer should always come first is always portrayed. Even when the company is going through changes and difficulties, Damaro helps maintain this culture. (BusinessBalls)

However, during the pandemic, a lot of tourism businesses including Disney faced a shortage of staff and increased work loads, proving that having a strong sense of culture does not mean there aren't any problems. It was reported that Disney put 100,000 staff on definite unpaid leave, to save the company \$50 million. Making it difficult for Disney employees to stay on track with their high expectations, therefore lowering morale and customer satisfaction. Although the company tries to keep a positive work environment, pressures surrounding these problems still may affect staff inevitably. ("Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Walt Disney Company")

New systems introduced by Damaro, like digital tools, apps, and paid services, change how employees and customers interact with the parks. Employees are then required to learn new systems and work differently from their normal, which can be stressful without the correct training and support. As well as this, some customers also believe that the original disney experience is being taken away due to modern technologies and in particular, paid services. (Shin et al.)

Overall, Damaro's leadership style has shown to be mostly positive for the company, by focusing on motivating employees, supporting them, and maintaining the well known disney values, it has helped to deal with drastic and unexpected change. Unfortunately so, there are still challenges, when it comes to balancing the efficiency

of a big business with ensuring the well being of employees and customer satisfaction. Proving that while his leadership is effective, improvement can still be made.

Recommendations for leadership.

Although Josh Damaro has managed change effectively, there are still areas for improvement. Such as; communication, it is very important during change that leaders explain their decisions clearly to employees, this is so they understand what is happening and feel secure in their roles. This ensures to build trust and lessens staff feeling uncertain.

As well as, employees can also be of use in decision making, linking this to participative leadership, in which employees are given opportunity to share their ideas and opinions. In doing so, Damaro could improve how changes are introduced, making employees feel of value and importance. This also could increase staff morale, motivation and overall job satisfaction, which are massively important in the tourism and leisure industry, where a businesses main success comes from customer service and satisfaction.(Somech) As new technologies are introduced, more training and support should be provided for staff. Systems like digital booking tools and apps are now massively used in Disney, this being said, it is important that staff are confident using them. Providing regular training reduces staff feeling stressed and improves their overall performance. (Kourtiti et al.)

Whilst adapting to change, damaro should focus on maintaining Disney's organisational culture, meaning balancing the need to increase profits whilst still delivering a high quality of customer service and ensuring customer experience is the main priority. Keeping Disney's original values, like creating memorable experiences, is essential to ensure long term success, good reviews and repeat visits. (Williams)

Finally, the importance of improving the balance between paid services and customer satisfaction should be given more attention to. Although these services bring in extra revenue, research shows that pricing strategies can negatively affect

customers overall satisfaction if not matched by service quality. To ensure that customers are kept satisfied, damaro needs to make sure that prices do not reduce the experience, again proving the importance for Disney's success. (Matsuoka)

Conclusion.

In conclusion, Josh Damaro has shown strong leadership skills during a time of difficult change in the tourism and leisure industry. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by reopening parks, introducing new systems, and use of digital technology, helped the walt disney company recover and continue opening in a challenging environment. His leadership style focuses on motivating employees and maintaining Disney's values has played an important role in supporting staff and keeping a consistent positive customer experience.

However, whilst his leadership has been effective in a lot of ways, despite the strengths, there are still challenges. Changes like introducing paid services and new technology, have received mixed reactions from both customers and employees. Highlighting the need to carefully balance business goals with customer satisfaction and employee wellbeing. If the balance is not managed effectively, it impacts both the company's reputation and long term success within the industry.

Overall, Josh Damaro has played an important role in achieving the walt disney companies great response to change whilst staying competitive in the industry. However, for continued success, the organisation must focus on communication, providing better support for employees, and keeping a high quality experience for customers. By balancing goals with staff wellbeing and customer satisfaction, Disney is certain to be in a stronger position for achieving long term growth and success.

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