

Leadership in the Pandemic Times (Covid-19) - Pandemic Style Leadership: Proposed Practices to be Embodied by the Leaders

Saloni Kalra*

Research Scholar, AIBS, Amity University, Sector, Noida, India.

Dr. Nitin Arora

Professor, AIBS, Amity University, Sector, Noida, India.

Dr. Talal Nusair

Professor, City University College of Ajman (CUCA), UAE.

Received April 16, 2021; Accepted August 12, 2021

ISSN: 1735-188X

DOI: 10.14704/WEB/V18I2/WEB18347

Abstract

COVID-19 has proven to be a humanitarian crisis. The global economy has come near about a standstill with the spread of coronavirus, as restrictions are imposed to impact the spread of virus. The problem is a terrific problem, which has many unforeseen consequences. And we require a commander or a leader who can steadily see us through this. Leadership is very important element for crisis management. Leadership is the key component factor in shaping the crisis management. This paper provides a view and understanding of pandemic style of leadership. It is realized that COVID-19 is a complex problem, which represents varied challenges, and with challenges comes opportunities and strategies for the leaders. In this paper, researcher has proposed practices to be exemplified by the leaders (with the perspective of COVID-19 pandemic). The aim of this paper is to provide insights on the aspects of leadership in context of COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords

Leadership, Leadership Styles, COVID-19 & Pandemic, Pandemic Style of Leadership, Proposed Practices.

Introduction

Life has changed completely, and it has impacted the workplace immensely. People have lost their jobs, and those who haven't are working from home virtually, which further has impacted the workplace environment totally. Interaction with the team and clients is greatly affected, which has even affected the innovative capacity of the teams, which

could be due to the interruptions in the brain storming sessions. Jobs can no longer be taken for granted. All these changes have led to massive pressure on the shoulders of business leaders. Leaders have to come with all sorts of optimal outcomes, to face the environment and drag the company out of this difficult situation.

Tom Friedman has quoted, “In moments like these, when the choices we make are so impactful, people desperately want to believe that their leaders know what they are doing. But they quickly learn that in times like these, leaders either grow or swell—they both grow out of their weaknesses and rise to the level of the challenge or all of their worst weaknesses swell to new levels”. The leadership culture is totally alarmed, and a lot of researchers are trying to define fruitful leadership culture. The success factors which are concluded by researchers that include adaptability, innovation, ingenuity and dexterity.

Leaders can incorporate all these talents and features, which can make him positive and productive leader, creating a culture of development in organization, that ensures ethics and perseverance, and thus ensure growth of the organization. Leaders have to tether the employees virtually to the organization, in a way also accepting and tackling employees’ concerns and apprehensions. They have to replace apprehensions with confidence and trust. Leaders have to go way beyond their job descriptions, to trying to lead the people in pandemic times.

Pandemic Style of Leadership

Exceptional and unparalleled transformation has occurred due to the pandemic, forcing leaders to adapt to the changing business environment, and redefining leadership. (Steve Harrison, Chairman, LHH).

In these times, it is the responsibility of the leader to incorporate the leadership style, that acknowledges the current job characteristics and challenges and also considering employees’ apprehensions. The overall attitude has to be positive, towards employees, team development and adaptation to technological changes. It is his important duty to inspire the subordinates, by goal setting, ensuring effective performance, and showing trust in sub-ordinates, which will ultimately lead to efficiency and effectiveness in performance standards, Vilanova, 2020.

Leaders across the world have to respond quickly to the constantly changing environment. The major challenge during this pandemic is management of changes in human behavior. The model of trust-confidence and co-operation for management of risk developed by

Earle, Sitgrist and Gutscher, demonstrates the importance of trust created by the leadership. Trust is the most important factor. In the times of pandemic, situational leadership is to be relied upon with emphasis on leadership interactions based on trust sustained relationships, and this can be done with planning, which is supported with information and real time data, adaptation, transparency and following ethical practices, Ahern and Loh, 2020.

Pandemic style of leadership is incorporated where the approach required is protective and led by facts and science, with the courage to respond immediately and requires quick decision making. This can lead to take a leap over the control for spreading of the virus, with the thought to save lives and limited breakdown of the economy. This can be seen by examining how prime minister of New Zealand has tackled the situation of spread of virus, Wilson, 2020. Grint, 2020 has proposed a framework for pandemic leadership, with the thought of sharing insights with everyone to help in challenge faced due to the spread of coronavirus, which has impacted livelihoods across the world. The framework suggested implementing a 3 step approach implemented by the leaders, following expertise, collaborative effort, ensuring planning and implementation with the common goal to save the livelihoods and thus ensuring trust and faith in leadership. Pandemic has forced the leaders to face challenges like uncertainty, obscurity, convoluted and inevitable change, which require precise and immediate decision making. Leaders have to upgrade themselves in a way that problem solving strategies are developed and ways to implement them can be adopted.

Dwiedienawati et al, 2021 proposed a collaborative approach to decision making, with consensus of leadership, management and command, to solve the complicated problem of the virus spread and control, and command is the most important if the environment is not taken into account. There is a need to follow collective ideas. The above study tried to examine the impact of transformational leadership style, quality of communication and team crisis over organizational reputation, which in turn is examined in relation to crisis management. And the findings suggested a positive influence and the study also claimed the importance of transformational leadership in times of crisis with high uncertainty.

Leaders adopt different leadership styles in different circumstances. But during these critical times, they are expected to bring upon novel strategies. These uncertain times are the opportunity grounds for the business leaders, to develop new managerial skillset and become an example of success for their peers and sub-ordinate to simulate. The leaders have to be empathetic, act maturely, follow an aimed strategy and ensure immediate

decision making. Leaders across the world have denoted the coronavirus crisis equivalent to fighting a war, Bhalla, 2021.

Chen & Sriphon, 2021 conducted correlation analysis to study the relationships between variables: trust, communal relationships, social exchange relationships and organizational leadership. Understanding of these relationships will give an insight on organizational sustainability. The findings suggested there is a strong relationship between all three variables and organizational leadership. Understanding of these relationships can help the CEOs to understand the important factors to implement in leadership to fight COVID-19. Researchers have predicted positive relationship between leadership and evaluations related to these decisions. It is confirmed that during crisis, organization functioning necessitates development of skills and competencies, reflected by adaptive leadership, alertness and communication channels, Nissim & Simon, 2021.

Abdullah, 2021 investigated the impact of ethical leadership on organizational creativity, in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, and found the relationship to be significant and mediated by trust in leadership. Windsor et al., 2020 found less significant support in relation to lower spread of pandemic, in countries led by women. The main reasons with the countries which have performed better during the pandemic is the data selection and prioritization. Leadership should deliberately focus on managers and leaders (not trained). Leaders' need formal training to cope with the challenges coerced by the pandemic can use this knowledge to deal with the current healthcare crisis, Hazelton, et al, 2020. It has been found that the UK leadership decisions shaping the pandemic response are founded on strong facts and knowledge, socially representative, collectively promoted, democratically supported, and can help to deal with the crisis. 13 strategies were also suggested to deal with the pandemic, Wardman, 2020.

Proposed Practices to be Exemplified by the Leaders (with the Perspective of COVID-19 Pandemic)

- 1. Leaders with proficiency and expertise:** In the current times of ambiguity and uncertainty, leaders have to be prepared. They have to be driven by expertise and should be driven by facts and science. They should believe in advanced planning and vigilance, and should strategize towards creating an early warning system to deal with the current crisis. They should also seek advices from experts, and be able to evaluate those advices. Leaders need to educate and train themselves: what, when, why of the current situation, the acquaintance of the reality of the current situation.

2. **Creating trust in Leadership:** Communication is the key to create trust in leadership. He should inform and educate the people about the correct situation and what's coming. Leader has to be empathetic, and be able to communicate directions and hope. Leadership has to be practical, and be science and facts driven. They should not seek defensiveness and should welcome feedback. The leaders have to develop trust with organizations, healthcare system, people, so that information when available is accepted.
3. **Collaborated logistics and Decision making:** Decisions sometimes may have to be taken prior or with the best available knowledge, experience, intuition, consensus and common sense, as quality data is scarce and is not available early. The leaders have to look towards superiors, peers, suppliers, and customers and other organizations for gathering the insight required for better decision making. In complex and unpredictable situations, leadership must be adaptive and collaborated at all levels. Leaders should receive feedback, critical to decision making. The command has to be centralized and co-ordinated.
4. **Novel strategies development and communication:** Novel strategies have to be developed and implemented to face the uncertainties. The strategies have to be such as they can minimize the damage. The leaders are responsible for collaborations, from all sources and relationships, and alliances. Communication and coordination go hand in hand; the system is irrepressible in times of uncertainty.

Conclusion

Leadership in context of COVID-19 pandemic is not at all easy and many systematic and individual weaknesses have been found in leadership capability. The leadership has to strategize in such a way that collateral damage is low. Effective leadership, implementing correctly can really mark a difference.

The insights on pandemic leadership offered here is just to help leaders to embody certain practices to sustain and minimize the collateral damage. Charismatic leaders can just deal with the problem by being positive, and trust is the major factor, needed for a collective and collaborative action, driving the impetus for transformational leadership. Leaders communicate hope, a believable vision for the future and how it can be achieved, and for that trust is important. To develop trust, the leaders should plan and prepare in advance, based out of expertise.

References

- <https://www.lhh.com/us/en/organizations/our-insights/leadership-pandemic-style>
- Talu, S., & Nazarov, A.D. (2020). Challenges and competencies of leadership in Covid-19 Pandemic. *Proceedings of THR Research Technologies of Pandemic Coronavirus Impact (RTCov 2020), Advances in Social Science, Education an Humanities Research, 486*, 518-524.
- Ahern, S., & Loh, E. (2020). Leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic: building and sustaining trust in times of uncertainty. *BMJ Leader*, leader-2020.
- Wilson, S. (2020). Pandemic leadership: Lessons from New Zealand's approach to COVID-19. *Leadership, 16*(3), 279-293.
- Grint, K. (2020). Leadership, management and command in the time of the Coronavirus. *Leadership, 16*(3), 314-319.
- Dwiedienawati, D., Tjahjana, D., Faisal, M., Gandasari, D., & Abdinagoro, S. B. (2021). Determinants of perceived effectiveness in crisis management and company reputation during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cogent Business & Management, 8*(1), 1912523.
- Bhalla, A.S. (2021). *Leadership Challenges and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. ORF Occasional Paper No. 299, Observer Research Foundation.
- Chen, J.K., & Sriphon, T. (2021). Perspective on COVID-19 Pandemic Factors Impacting Organizational Leadership. *Sustainability, 13*(6), 3230.
- Nissim, Y., & Simon, E. (2021). Flattening the Hierarchy Curve: Adaptive Leadership during the Covid-19 Pandemic – A Case Study in an Academic Teacher Training College. *Review of European Studies, 13*(1), 103-118.
- Kaul, V., Shah, V.H., & El-Serag, H. (2020). Leadership during Crisis: Lessons and Applications from the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Gastroenterology, 159*(3), 809–812.
- Sammy, A. (2021). The Effect of Ethical Leadership on Organizational Creativity in the Midst of Work from Home (WFH) System Due to Pandemic COVID-19. *Available at SSRN 3828905*.
- Windsor, L.C., Yannitell Reinhardt, G., Windsor, A.J., Ostergard, R., Allen, S., Burns, C., & Wood, R. (2020). Gender in the time of COVID-19: Evaluating national leadership and COVID-19 fatalities. *PloS one, 15*(12).
- Hølge-Hazelton, B., Kjerholt, M., Rosted, E., Hansen, S.T., Borre, L.Z., & McCormack, B. (2021). Health professional frontline leaders' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic: a cross-sectional study. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership, 13*, 7-18.
- Wardman, J. K. (2020). Recalibrating pandemic risk leadership: Thirteen crisis ready strategies for COVID-19. *Journal of Risk Research, 23*(7-8), 1092-1120.
- Rostami, R.R., Karbasi, S. (2020). Detecting fake accounts on twitter social network using multi-objective hybrid feature selection approach. *Webology, 17*(1), 1-18.