

How can a Leader's Personal Contingent Leadership Paradigm, Rooted in Servant Leadership, Provide Guidance for Effective Leadership in Uncertain Times to Attain Desired Organisational Outcomes?

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Abstract— This paper studies the impact of the researcher's context on their leadership approach in two situations. Five years ago, high employee turnover occurred within the organisation the researcher is serving. The same scenario happened after the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The paper's principal contribution resides in the examination of each situation using a questionnaire consisting of five questions to gather information from respondents.

This paper will give insights from the impacts of the researcher's context analysis and their personal contingent leadership paradigm (PCLP). To this end, the researcher offers qualitative research to explore what it means to be an effective leader based on servant leadership theory and understand the ideals that will help them adjust their leadership approach and cultivate it to maturity depending on the situation.

The study reveals that a good leadership approach that is based on servant leadership theory can motivate employees towards high levels of performance. The paper recommends leaders foster interpersonal relationships with employees to encourage them to give their best.

Index Terms— Contingent, Leadership Paradigm, Effective Leader, leadership Theory, Servant Leadership.

I. Introduction

Much scholarly attention has focused on leadership development. These studies analyse leadership styles: from transactional and transformational to authentic and ethical to servant leadership. This chain is overwhelmed by lists and their consequences. The problem is these styles only represent ideals (Gahan et al., 2016, p. 9). This is more problematic when researchers merge leadership styles with consequences (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

This problem has led scholars to suggest other leadership frames. To discuss the impact of the researcher's context on their leadership approach, the researcher analyses two situations to provide a comparative study on how context and the organisation's internal position impacted the researcher's approaches to leading.

The study reveals that a good leadership approach that is based on servant leadership theory can motivate employees towards high levels of performance.

II. Case A: High employee turnover in 2017

Studies (Saeed & Shabir, 2013; Wells & Peachey, 2011; Wang & Yen, 2015) have shown that high employee turnover is a key challenge for businesses. Armstrong (2006) identifies employee turnover as the rate at which an employer gains and loses employee.

Research by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC, 2015 as cited by Simpson, 2015) found Australia has the highest rate (23%) for employees to leave their jobs within the first year, from a list of 11 developed countries. Evidence (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Wells & Peachey, 2011) shows employees' intention to quit may lead them to exhibit withdrawal behaviours, such as low work commitment. These withdrawal behaviours may affect employee morale and operational efficiency. Further, Thomas (2003) states employee turnover is a continuous phenomenon that negatively affects an organisation's results, performance and success.

Moving from research to practice, the organisation the researcher is serving (RO) was highly affected by employee turnover and associated financial and non-financial costs. The researcher plays the role of CEO consultant of a well-qualified humanitarian relief implementer at national and international levels that assist vulnerable people, children and families.

In 2017, after two managers out of ten staff in the Sydney office left, two out of four staff from the Melbourne office sent resignation letters to the researcher with a list of complaints. To integrate a task-and relation-oriented

leadership approach, the researcher has reviewed this situation by using the method used of data collection and analysis to examine the researcher's leadership approach to address the situation.

Research methodology

To tackle the issue of employee turnover at RO, the researcher conducted a study with a qualitative approach and open ended questions. This questionnaire focused on core leadership areas in terms of the researcher's values, qualities, character and effectiveness to generate actionable insights to improve their leadership approach.

Four questions were sent by email to collect data from four employees in the Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland offices who worked at the organisation in 2017. The questionnaire focussed on leadership traits and behaviours that influence employee retention. The research was conducted primarily to offer practical applicability for Case A.

Data analysis

Four questions were sent to four employees to acquire information about their perceptions of the researcher's leadership approach. The researcher explored perceptions of leadership from the employees' perspectives.

1-What does the researcher do to ensure staff retention?

Ranking the data, 75% of employees who completed the leadership survey agreed on the researcher's quality of valuing people. However, 25% across the performance factors indicated the researcher used "goals sharing", "fairness" and "teamwork" to ensure staff retention. This underlines the critical importance of intrapersonal leadership effectiveness in servant leadership.

2-How does the researcher create team-building exercises and a wellbeing atmosphere?

The researcher explored how they create a wellbeing atmosphere and ensure team building. As shown, 75% of employees agreed on "teamwork workshops" being the tool used for creating team building exercises and ensuring a wellbeing atmosphere. More interestingly, a quarter felt it was the researcher's character being personable. Furthermore, equally 25% of employees emphasised the importance of "communication and trust workshops" and "regular meeting." This result affirms that servant leader engages in respectful conversation that demonstrates trust that is based on both character and competence which is the defining outcome of servant leadership (Covey, 2018).

3-What does the researcher do to improve employee morale and motivation?

The researcher wanted to explore employee morale and motivation plus the tools to improve them. Overall, 75% agreed on recognition as a primary tool and 50% agreed on encouragement. Concerning "empowerment", "share vision and mission", "understand strengths and weaknesses" and "professional development workshop", just 25% agreed on them being tools to improve employee morale and motivation. The low scores in these four areas complement the first question, so the researcher should use "goals sharing", "fairness", and "teamwork" building exercises to improve in this area. Servant leaders can do more than listen to staff: they should encourage them as encouragement is the hallmark expression of a servant leader.

4-How does the researcher communicate to their staff about changes within the business?

To explore communication about changes, employees unanimously felt the researcher allows them to be part of decision making, while 25% felt the researcher's charismatic personality helps with important communication through regular meetings. Therefore, the researcher should focus more on empowering employees and giving positive feedback.

The above data analyses for Case A provide a base to understand the researcher's leadership approach given RO's context. The researcher noted procedural delays and loss of initiative due to communication problems between managers and employees. This resulted in misunderstanding as well as an incorrect basis for decisions. Also, employees had no platform to raise issues and feedback. As a result, the researcher shortened communication channels by listening empathically and made staff part of decision making. They also clarified their values and communicated them to their team then lived by them (Kouzes, Posner & Bunting, 2015, p. 21). According to Kouzes at al. (2015, p. 19), people want to understand their leaders, what motivates them and the values that drive their actions and decisions. The researcher followed this sequence and demonstrated a servant leadership approach in getting others to engage with and follow them is to know and live their values (p. 23).

III. Case B: High employee turnover after the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 health crisis is unprecedented and transformed lives on personal and professional levels. In the face of this challenge, the researcher is concerned about the high employee turnover that is affecting their organisation.

Research methodology

The researcher conducted a research study using a qualitative research approach with same questions as Case A, which were sent by email to four employees who are currently working at the organisation.

Data analysis

Four questions were sent to four employees to acquire information about their perceptions of the researcher's leadership approach. In this data analysis, the researcher will conduct a comparative analysis against Case A to find out how the organisation's context and internal position affected their approach to leading in each situation.

1-What does the researcher do to ensure staff retention?

As shown, 75% of employees who completed the leadership survey agreed the qualities of "understanding" and giving "rewards and positive feedback" are the main tools to ensure employee retention. The 25% highlighted the qualities of "caring" and "listening empathically". However, the researcher should focus on how to "fit the right person into the right position", "collaboration" and "fostering respect", since these capabilities have low scores.

2- How does the researcher create team-building exercises and a well-being atmosphere?

Although employees unanimously felt that "team-work workshops" are the most important tool for the researcher, "collaboration" with employees and facilitating "flexible work time" need to be worked on to create team-building exercises and a wellbeing atmosphere.

3-What does the researcher do to improve employee morale and motivation?

Although 50% of the interviewed employees agree on "recognition" and "share vision, mission and values" as primary tools to improve employee morale and motivation, the researcher needs to pay more attention to "reward" the employees and "listen empathically". The other 50% said the researcher allows them to be part of decision making.

4-How does the researcher communicate to their staff about changes within the business?

To explore the communication about changes, there is unanimity among employees that the researcher allows for a frequent forum of "communication platform" for information about organisation changes.

Reflecting on the researcher's experience and knowledge, together with insights drawn from the analyses, provide impetus to implement PCPL.

IV. PCPL (Personal Contingent Leadership Paradigm)

Exploring the researcher's evolving context in cases A and B shows how changes over time positively influence their process of reviewing the most appropriate model. Building on this understanding, this section proposes the researcher's PCLP which offers a practical model based on five steps that, in combination, generate high levels of leadership performance in normal and crisis situations – the PCPL.

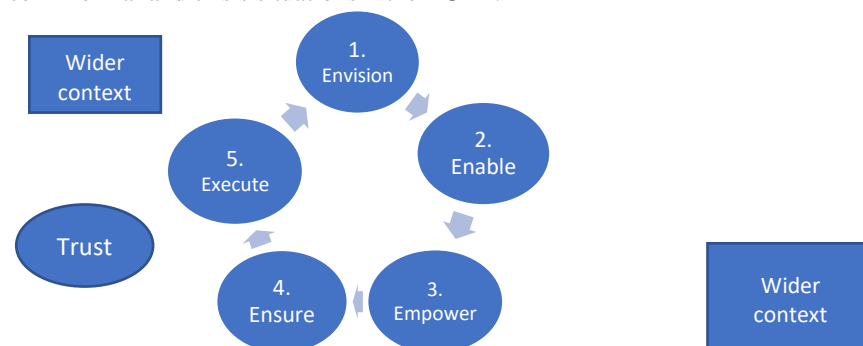


Fig 1: PCLP

Source: R. El Ayoubi

Values

The core of the model is “trust”: In the researcher’s experience, successful team building and effective change implementation have a prerequisite: trust. When people trust each other, they enjoy clear communication, empathy, synergy and productive interdependency (Covey, 1992, p. 31). Ethical leaders act in alignment with their personal values and ensure these align with the organisation’s values.

Envision

Envision is the first step in the PCLP and means the leadership style springs from a shared vision and how to translate this vision into reality (Nanus, 1995). This is about envisioning how the organisation will get from the current reality to where it needs to go to be successful. The findings of the case studies confirm “envision” is a key step as sharing vision and mission and employee recognition are primary tools to improve morale and motivation.

Enable

Enable means people can perform their tasks and organisations successfully accomplish goals by emphasising the importance of a collective mission and taking risks to innovate while demonstrating high standards of ethical and moral conduct (Bass & Riggio, 2014, p. 6). According to Kouzes et al. (2015, p. 74), people’s evaluations of their leaders’ effectiveness are strongly related to how often they observed them enabling others to act.

Moving from theory to practice, the researcher enables staff to be part of decision making and create communication platforms to make personal contact with people by asking what matters to them about work.

Empower

Karatepe et al. (2019) argue that servant leadership encourages employees to ask questions and take on challenges and rewards them with promotions for doing so. Thus, servant leadership manifests as providing employees with talent activation, and career opportunities to develop their skills, activate their talent and empower them (Van Dierendonck, 2011), and such efforts promote employees’ psychological safety.

Khan et al. (2020) used a serial mediation model to find that servant leadership led to trust and then to job crafting, which promoted employees’ innovative work behaviours. In addition, the researcher noted from the analyses that significantly more staff have suffered from stress due to the coronavirus or because they have lost close family members. The researcher already employed a counsellor to help staff deal with their stress.

Ensure

This is about ensuring the continuity of commercial relations and acumen that will make a business viable. Looking at the case studies, the researcher found one essential: growing talent. When employees were asked to pinpoint how the researcher created team-building exercises and a wellbeing atmosphere, they mostly agreed on the teamwork workshops being the most important tool. At the same time, the researcher should focus on growing talents.

Execute

According to Greenleaf (2007) servant leadership is service-oriented to meet the needs of subordinates. It also prioritises their needs over the needs of managers and provides them with resources (Van Dierendonck, 2011; Liden et al., 2014) to execute. On the other hand, Van Dierendonck (2011) expanded to say that servant leaders meet subordinates’ needs, provide them with learning opportunities, and improve their self-management capacities. To implement “Execute” with deliberate action, the researcher communicates this mechanism as a tool available to everybody.

V. Conclusion

A servant leadership approach has helped the researcher create a practical model for guiding them on how the organisation’s context and internal position impacted the researcher’s approach to leading in different situations. This great effort to develop a leadership framework is evidence that no one model fits all organisations.

As has been realised after conducting the analyses in two cases, the leadership approach is a continual endeavour if a leader wants to tackle everyday challenges. It is about developing and practising a personal leadership approach to achieve the positive change they want to see in the social purpose sector.

This paper further reveals a good leadership approach that is based on servant leadership concept could motivate employees towards a high level of performance.

VI. References

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