The Role of Leaders in Innovation

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Leadership is a skill that can develop over a period of time. Although, there is not a concrete action one can pinpoint and claim to know the fundamentals of effective leadership, executives continue to test processes to determine the best practice for leading an organization to success. Leadership is a revolving process, which continues to train subordinates to become future leaders for the next generation. This method ensures that the organization will continue to function after the current leader or CEO resigns from the company or passes away. “Leaders must exhibit high levels of courage with a willingness to listen to others in order to collect and analyze information” (Fry et al, 2004).

Most organizational decision-makers focus on “minimizing costs and maximizing revenues, so it is no wonder they are turning their eyes to the rest of the world. The global economy gives corporations huge opportunities on both sides of the cost/revenue equation. They can increase revenue by filling the appetite of a billion new consumers; at the same time they can reduce their fixed costs (manufacturing, capital, R&D, and branding) and their variable costs (labor and materials)” (Hesselbein and Cohen, 1999).“In the new global enterprise, another leadership skill is the preservation of core skills and values. As organizations become increasingly diverse and amorphous, the notion of who you are and what binds you together becomes a matter of strategic importance. You cannot successfully enter China, Chile, or Chad unless you are a value-driven company. Simply setting up shop, even with a very good product or service, and telling the locals whatever they want to hear is likely to turn problems into disasters. Without core values driven by the customer's interest, you will find it even more difficult than it already is to sustain success” (Hesselbein et al, 1999).

Absence of genuine leadership results in chaos, miscommunication, lack of initiative from subordinates, decrease in productivity, reduced performance, and low moral. Leadership is about securing an organizations future. Effective leadership generates an opposite outcome, which prevents a negative impact from occurring. There are a myriad of reasons why leadership is important. The most common reason is that leadership provides a sense of direction for the organization and its counterparts.

Subordinates or staff members crave direction from their leaders; they desire to be inspired from their leaders. Company morale is increased when a leader speaks the language of the people. A leader may evaluate changing market trends and predict an organizations future market potential within the corporate landscape. Leaders are often relied upon to resolve conflict. In most cases a leader maintains a neutral position when opposing parties face difficult challenges. A leader may assess the problem quickly and render a fair and amicable decision. Leaders delegate tasks and responsibilities to subordinates. For example, most subordinates or employees in the retail industry work according to an applied schedule in which case the employee acknowledges when he or she is required to work and what their roles and responsibilities are during his or her shift.

It is stated that an organization is only as strong as the leaders who run the organization. An effective leader will ensure organizational processes are operating efficiently. Leaders will ensure employees are properly trained and managed. Leaders will also enforce regulatory compliancy. Leadership is the most important entity in an organization because they are responsible for maintaining the quality assurance of products and services. Most organizations suffer as a result of ineffective leadership. It is my belief that the measure of leadership is often determined by his or her ability listen to consumer demands and to listen to subordinates when necessary. “Leadership is a main ingredient in developing and maintaining interpersonal work relationships, coordinating information, motivating and developing followers, making decisions, and structuring work” (Rusaw, 2001).

**Leadership Models:**

Evaluation of the different leadership models as presented in Fry & Hatwick’s research and how style dramatically impacts a leaders ability to influence behavior and be innovative in an organization. Just like in the Innovators DNA, disruptive and innovative leadership is essential for progress and growth. In Dyer’s research, the authors use numerous real world examples of great companies such as Apple where their motto is to “think differently” which is what disruptive DNA is in a nutshell (Dyer, et. al, 2011).

Fry contends under the “trait theory” leaders may be born, or made if they have specific qualities such as intelligence, responsibilities, and ethics (Fry, 2004). In examining how this theory supports innovation, it is obvious that in order for a leader to invoke innovative change, they must have the intelligence to comprehend such changes. Also, they must practice responsible behavior and use ethical approaches, otherwise, their methods would be flawed and they would fail. Trait theory demonstrates that innovation is a combination of key indicators that are essential for defining who may be leaders and who may not and this helps set the bar in organizations that wish to excel.

Another theory that plays heavily into innovation or destructive DNA is the “Transformational Leadership” theory. This describes that rare breed of individual leader who has a natural ability and capacity to motivate and inspire employees and get their buy in and drive change. Transformational leaders are good innovators because of their ability to reach desired and often challenging outcomes through their people’s desire to work hard for them (Fry, 2004).

**The Role of Discovery and Delivery Skills:**

The Discovery and Delivery skills give one great insight into their own leadership style and helps one gauge their ability to deliver appropriately. How this impacts a leader can be better understood by analyzing the Innovators DNA (Dyer, et.al, 2011). The leaders DNA points out that the ability to be creative is not purely a cognitive trait as often presumed. From the author’s research, they have found that creativity in leaders is a mixture of their cognitive skills as well as their behaviors. So, if one struggles for example with discovery and delivery, they could greatly improve this by not only studying and improving their cognitive understanding, but, they could also change their behaviors and improve their skills as well (Dyer, et. al, 2011).

So, therefore, it can be explained that one’s discovery and delivery skills impact their innovation and leadership qualities. In order to be a destructive DNA driven leader, one must possess the appropriate discovery and delivery skills necessary to impact their employees and motivate them into new changes. In Dyers research, the authors point out the case example of Jeffry Bezos, CEO of Amazon. Bezos it is noted ranks very high in experimentation as a key trait to his success. His constant drive for innovation and pushing employees to be creative has lead his company to the front of their industry. This demonstrates how all leaders who are determined to make a consistent improvement in their business must be innovative and never settle for the norms. By testing out new theories and pushing an innovative spirit mixed with a good sense of how to balance employee relationships, leaders can obtain the DNA characteristics necessary to become extraordinary (Dyer, et. al, 2011).

**Self Evaluation- Strengths and Weaknesses**:

The strong areas that I possess that help me as a leader is the fact that I embrace challenges and am a bit of a risk taker who likes to experiment with the norms to try and find better methods. However, this could be a weakness in an organization that practices rigorous policy where there is little room for variation in the process. Another Strong point is that I am adamant about following through until closure, which generally serves me very well. I do not let timelines slide very often and I stay on task. Again, this could be a weakness however if my drive to results and meeting timelines means that I overlook an important step accidentally or fail to see a flaw by being to overzealous.

Overall, the combined discovery and delivery score identifies some great areas of improvement where I could become stronger and be more innovative by changing some behavioral skills and improving some of my cognitive abilities through study and hard work. Effective leadership is paramount to organizations.

**References**

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