LEADER’S IMAGE IN AN ORGANISATION FROM THE SME SECTOR IN POLAND - BASED ON EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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Abstract

A modern leader is not quite a Rambo of business but more a fifth level leader whose character is a paradoxical mixture of personal modesty and professional determination. The leader is shy but aggressive, unsure of himself but fearless. A fifth grade leader is a person at the very top of the managerial skills hierarchy, capable of leading the business on the path to sustainable success. The fifth grade leader is also the person who has left the effective leader on the fourth level. The effective leader “only” stimulates members of the team to work at the full speed in the strive for achieving its clear and inspiring vision of the future or a “competent manager” – at the third level - as the leader can “only” organise his resources to achieve this targets. The second and first levels are not worth mentioning [1]. This article has been written to present an image of a leader in an SME sector organisation – will the leader be the fifth degree leader or an effective leader or maybe only a competent manager?

Key words: leader, organization, SME sector.

Introduction

Technical progress and innovation make the world to change at a dizzying speed. The number of people who travel around the world exceeds all that we could image only 50 years ago. ICT remains right in the heart of the emerging global economy as it helps uniting and strengthening global production capacities, consumption and market needs. Apart from differences of race, ethnic origin and sex, there will be a larger differentiation of believers and religious practices, age, life style and broader participation of the disabled in a life of organisations. The pace of changes brings a question about the shape of the effective leadership model in such an unpredictable reality.

1. Reflections about the Essence of Leadership

J. Collins’s deliberations [1] lead to the conclusion that the author is very much confused in his understanding of the applicable leadership terminology. A leader, a manager – these are different levels of the same ladder. This approach is quite innovative. According to most analysis, these terms are considered antonyms in their full right. According to Koźmiński and Piotrowski, definitions of a leader and of a manager are very different. “Leader has a task (...) to set out a remote and ambitious goal and mobilise his people to follow that direction while a manager should be, first and foremost, capable of managing any processes which have been launched. Leaders set out the target and an exemplary manager leads their team effectively to achieve this target taking the best approach or road possible. Jasiukiewicz, Oczachowski, Soroka indicate that differences between a manager and a leader may differ depending on the source of their authority. “A manager enjoys a formal authority arising from the position which they occupy and which gives them a right to give, control and exercise instructions. Manager’s authority is technical in nature, based on their knowledge and motivation, while a leader has a personal authority based on his personal features [3]. In turn, Merillyn Beeman defines a leader as a person-oriented person and a manager as a resource-oriented person [4]. As much as it is possible to find a difference between a leader and a manager, the term “leader” means the same in all contexts. The literature on leadership uses the concept of a leader in various contexts. A leader can be a person who formally occupies an official position, who is generally recognised because of their position (hierarchy). The term “leader” can be also used in a less formal sense. Someone may be perceived by others as a leader. When trying to understand who a leader is, we can refer to sports, e.g. cycling or the popular Formula 1 car races where the winner of a race (or a stage of a race) wears the yellow leader’s shirt. There are some privileges that come with the shirt. This person is followed and shows the way. Gareth Jones, London Business School and INSEAD professor shares this view. He believes that a leader is a part of non-hierarchic leadership and cannot result from a promotion [5].
It is also interesting to learn that the management guru, Peter Drucker, has to say about leadership. In his opinion, leadership is now the latest cry of fashion. It seems that every general manager must look like Elvis Presley, while leadership is certainly important but, unfortunately, it is something very different from the features that are usually labelled as leader's features. Leadership has little in common with "leadership skills" and even less with charisma. Leadership is down-to-earth, deprived of any romanticism and simply boring (...). Leadership is a means to achieve a goal. For this reason, the most important leadership question is a question about the goal (...). Effective leadership is: responsibility and not position and privileges, consequence and not cunning, effective leadership is hard work [6]. The real mission of a leader is to focus a particular attention on employees (their competencies, self-assurance, and work motivation) and not on themselves [7]. A contemporary leader must pay particular attention to optimal tailoring of their leadership style to the style of work of their team and the type of employees [8, 9]. A competent leader must appreciate the importance of new human capital management strategies, including variety management [10, 16]. Culturally varied groups need different leadership styles [12]. A contemporary leader is facing great challenges but also many limitations, significant opportunities but also many threats. And what, in the context of the above-specified expectations, is a leader of an organisation in the SME sector?

2. A contemporary leader of an organisation in the SME sector

My empirical research was to identify the image of a leader in the eyes of employees of an organisation in the SME sector in Poland. The research tool was a questionnaire of 21 questions, both open and closed. Men represented 36,92% of the research sample while women represented 63,08% of the same. They came from different age group and had different educational background.

1. First, organisations are in a great need of leaders – this opinion was expressed by 85,15% of respondents.
2. Second, anyone can be a leader, including our colleagues (Fig. 1).
3. Leader is the key decision-maker in a company. According to 86% of respondents, it is the leader who is responsible for decision-making.
4. In most cases, the leader influences a decision-making process through discussions and collecting opinions in the team and taking other actions (Fig. 2).
5. Typically noticed features of SME organisation leaders include: firmness, organisation skills, energy, ambition, self-assurance.
6. The least noticeable features of the leaders include: extraversion, arrogance, conformism, persistence and sense of humour.
7. Leader is a man of principles. According to most respondents, they are “responsible” (14,46%), “honest” (11,24%), “trustworthy” (9,24%), “respecting others” (9,24%).
8. The leader personifies model leader features behaviour. A leader is charismatic and also presents to employees his vision of developing the organisation and motivates them to work.
9. Leader influence a group in different ways. Typically, leaders show people their goals and targets and also encourage them to optimise their action (Fig. 3).
10. According to 85% of respondents, leaders motivate them to improve their performance at work.
11. A Polish leader has different ways of asking their staff to do things. The most typical style of a Polish leader is to give specific instructions "do it exactly this way" (according to 50,77% of respondents). According to 30,77% of respondents, leaders are supportive when asking their staff to do something “how can I help you” while, according to 18,64% they give orders “you must do it”.
12. A leader remains cool, calm and collected when under stress which should be certainly considered to their advantage. It has been appreciated by employees as shown on the Fig. 4.
13. Most respondents look at their leaders with a kind eye. Feelings they show in the “me and the leader” relation are presented on the Fig. 5.

Conclusions – a bit on the funny side

The following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of facts collected in the research:

- there are no doubts that the boss is the leader,
the leader tries to ask their colleagues about their opinion,
- leader rules by instructing their staff,
- a colleague may become a leader,
- a leader has a large impact on the decision-making process,
- the leader has a large impact on a group/team,

- in a company, a leader is perceived as a firm, energetic person and a good organiser,
- outstanding leader’s competencies include: self-assurance and employee motivation skills,
- leaders motivate by encouraging improving performance and showing the
- in crisis, a leader is perceived as a support and a person capable of staying calm while trying to control the situation,
- leader’s principles are predominantly responsibility and honesty,
- a leader is perceived as a colleague or a nice person,
- 70.38% of respondents do not believe they are leaders.

Leaders according to employees - below find some (selected) drawings made on request by members of some SME organisations (Fig. 6).

![Fig. 6. Leaders according to employees - in a little funny way](image)

Source: own study

References