ENGAGEMENT FOCUSED LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Most people would like to realize something great, to contribute achieving an ideal, to have a successful career and be part of a remarkable structure. To convert these desires and capacities in tangible reality, great leaders come to support and guide them.

Besides economic livelihoods, job satisfies a number of specific human needs: that of belonging to a group, of self-realization, social status, respect and appreciation, energy consumption generated while working making individuals happier, when certain limits are not exceeded. In fact, for some adults, work is promoted only by economic reasons, this situation having negative repercussions on the general physical and mental health of the individual, but also economic and social echoes.

KEYWORDS: *engagement, performance, leadership, management, empowerment*

1. Introduction

"The oldest of the arts and the latest science", management is required when running any human activity, from organizing games between children, to conducting world wars and sending satellites into space. As Minister Mircea Malița remarked, "*Leadership is an ancient art, practiced from the first human community, whose rules have increased and become transmissible in recent decades, barely formulating its claim to the title of science*" (Malița, 1971 as cited Răulea, 2012, p. 92) [1]. The historic route of becoming a science is emphasized here by translating into clear patterns through rules and conceptualizations of what initially was manifested empirically at the level of common sense, as talent and intuition.

Given that all organizations have at least one manager, Universities give their best to offer educational programs that contribute to the formation of performing leaders, we wonder why actual results lie on a continuum from weak to efficient when talking about leadership. The answer we do not aim to formulate here, but we want to anticipate and argue our area of interest.

2. Key Features of Engagement Focused Leadership

2.1. Conceptual Insights

Subsequently emphasizing the general idea of this paper through short introductory explanations, in the context in which we operate, it becomes necessary to conceptualize the terms that are used for a scientific approach to the proposed theme.

Thus, according to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, management is defined as "*work and the art of leadership. The range of activities of the organization, management and business management. Science and technology of organizing and managing an enterprise*" (dexonline.ro) [2].

Moving forward, Cole (2004) considers that "*leadership*" is a dynamic process of group work, belonging to a person over a period of time and in an organizational context, through which group members are determined to engage themselves in achieving group tasks or objectives (Cole, 2004, p. 3) [3].

The plus leadership brings, seen as an art, is focused on those abilities of the leader to empower team members who do not feel obliged to do a task, but want to participate in achieving success, as they are not stimulated by coercive means, but willingly involved.

Following his research during the 80s, Warren Bennis formulated the famous phrase: "*Managers are people who do things right; Leaders are people who are doing the right thing*". The psychologist from Sibiu, Ciprian Răulea, who leaned theoretical and field studies on leadership, concluded that it "*becomes the process that transforms management into art*" (Răulea, 2012, p. 95).

In the literature, organizational practice and human resources studies, even if has not yet started to make a career, a new term is increasingly put under the spotlight in combination with the already classic concepts of "management" and "leadership". We talk about "empowerment", seen as a process through which individual powers are activated allowing an effective and efficient control of reality, the situations and everyday events, a greater ability to cope with change and produce changes in yourself when the environment requires (Constantin 2009, p. 399) [4].

Empowerment is important in organizational environment, in the context that the group members practically increase their value through their total involvement in work and includes using the best personal resources (skills, information, behaviors) in the interest of achieving team goals, contributing thus to achieving performance.

Of course, the interest in these concepts shown by researchers over time has a well-founded reason: the strong impact of these coordinates on achieving performance, the natural goal sought by every human being in the work they undertake.

Although controversial and with some connotations from sports sphere, achieving performance is the goal of any organization, the extent to which objectives are realized in the most efficient way possible. A number of studies (Torrington and Hall, 1995) [5] have shown that performance is positively influenced mostly by work involvement, reflected in loyalty to the organization, identification with the values and objectives of the company and engaging personal resources in achieving these objectives.

2.2. Professional Involvement in the Actual Context

Thus, Gallup conducted a series of research on predictors of individual and group performance, after which 12 premises of successful leadership were issued (The 12 elements of great management):

„*1. I know what is expected of me at work.*

2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.

3. at work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

4. in the last seven days I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.

5. my supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.

6. there is someone at work who encourages my development.

7. at work, my opinion seem to count.

8. the mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.

9. my associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.

10. I have a best friend at work.

11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.

12. In the last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow" (Gallup Q12) [6].

As Gallup researchers have pointed out, we should note that many of the previous statements converge towards employees involvement, commitment and dedication, "engagement" in English.

These elements of involvement have been used in many theoretical approaches of project management, so that leaders use them as a checklist: clearly stated objectives, existing concrete methods and resources necessary to achieve goals, we conducted a SWOT analysis, and so on. But these steps are not actual, or rather not just them. Because as mentioned above, leadership requires active team members engagement, their involvement to maximum capacity, not imposing a list of goals and tasks.

The group responsible for a project must begin from an open and honest discussion in which questions and answers come from all members, not unidirectional, a true leader trying to voluntary involve participants, making them responsible and interested in this way.

In the United States Gallup researchers interviewed more than 8,000 employees in various areas concerning the relationship with their manager with questions like: "*can I approach the manager with non-work-related issues?, do the managers know the projects or duties of their subordinates?, the leader helps them in prioritizing tasks, setting goals and*

managed to keep them committed to the goals?, managers inspire credibility and performance?" (Mann, Darby). The results of these studies have revealed that leaders with the best results focus on employees strengths, concentrate on their involvement and are oriented towards performance, while developing deep interpersonal relationships with those in their team.

Involvement should be seen as a process, not an event, indicating the extent to which the team operates in optimal parameters. Although work engagement requires intent, it is not helpful when the manager only approaches it by a decision, establishing a plan and its implementation, neglecting the feedback from those who are actually responsible for the actual realization. Although time is one of the resources most often cited as insufficient in developed countries, on which many leaders and employees rely on when dealing with involvement, the results measured in money of those who pay attention to employee commitment, proves beyond the obvious positive psychological or social effects, the economic usefulness of a responsible approach to these issues.

Thus, only speaking about engagement or only measuring staff commitment, managers will not get more actively involve people at work. It takes everyone to be dedicated to improving the working environment conditions. Gallup researchers also noted that leaders often ask, "How can involve my team in action planning? How to specifically address the involvement problem?". These are two examples that illustrate a good starting point because some leaders deal with this problem in technical terms: identify, isolate, find a solution that can be implemented the shortest time, as if taking a medicine (or delegate these operations to a specialist). Finally they will say "I have no one to deal with", because while the manager or expert are trying to find a solution, the subordinates watch them confused and wary, from outside, wondering

if their organization is really changing something or is just another formality they will have to accomplish.

This happens when based on statistical figures certain areas of interest where intervention is desired are selected, without involving all team members in decision making. Although "top down" solutions are often clear and rational, well-intentioned, their logic neglects the specific dynamics of the group, some concrete features of the "working material" that could not be taken into consideration by theory. Even if the manager would know very well their team and the decision would be the most advantageous, members will not have a sense of belonging and personal contribution, so they will not feel attached to the solution found and therefore will not feel very responsible also.

Are made here in discussion issues related to organizational communication, which although is generally governed by formal procedures, through them also can be improved and adjusted to an optimum, focusing on efficiency and avoiding falling into the trap of excessive bureaucracy .

In organizations where members do not feel accountable for results (either negative or positive), 7 out of 10 employees consider themselves uninvolved (Mann, Darby, 2014). Therefore, the ideal team members contribute to setting goals, action plan, concrete steps, each coming with their own potential, consisting in creativity, availability, self-development and overcoming previous condition. Thus, each participant will have a place, he will be a part of something bigger than he is, will have a role to play, as well as other colleagues and so he will feel the result also belongs to him to a certain ratio.

It seems that regular meetings, in working groups, are a good first step when we want to involve the others. Thus, one can start by clarifying the terms used, because the different background of participants should not be neglected (when involving various departments – technical, human resources, IT, communication, for example).

One can then proceed with establishing an ideal, a point they desire to reach or a product they want to obtain and then tracing a path between the current state and the desirable. On this occasion already successfully completed steps should be acknowledged, congratulated those who contributed to it, creating an open and motivating atmosphere for the participants, making them eager to actively contribute. In doing so prioritization according to every aspect's impact on performance and organizational culture is essential because nobody enjoys talking for the sake of conversation, without tangible or practical use and thus whether the measurable benefit is neglected, employees will lose interest.

The ideal is that each participant at such a meeting leaves with at least one thing to do, clearly knowing what is the next step to do, as in social psychology is already known that people are more fervent defenders of ideas to whose genesis they contribute than of ideas imposed by others. Because in this way will feel that they matter.

Nobody likes to be ignored, although generally a quarter of employees fall into this category (Brim, Asplund, 2009) [7]. Managers focusing on employees strengths are preferable, but when there are deficiencies that must be remedied, the solution is to address the problem, not avoid those people, because everyone wants to receive feedback, even critical, instead of not receiving any response. We can illustrate this with an American manager's view: "*I've worked with and for every type of manager*". Bottom line: A manager who ignores employees is a person who has no business being in that role. People bother them. People are the 'nuisance' aspect of their job, so they ignore them as much as possible. "*If you are the kind of boss who ignores your employees, you shouldn't be a manager*" (as cited in B. Brim, Asplund 2009). Like Henry Ford said: "*Why every time I need a pair of hands come across a human being also?*".

His reply is emblematic for the industrial age, when efficiency was increased as shortcomings of the production process were removed as a result of technological progress. This strategy has been to some extent inadequate extrapolated into the knowledge age when human resources began to receive recognition, some managers believing that trying to "fix" employees problems, things will get better. But people are not machines, and this approach is not very efficient, although it is still better than pretending not seeing shortcomings.

2.3. An American Engagement Example with Military Origins

USAA is an organization that provides a range of financial services on favorable terms for current and former members of the US military and their families and has now over 10 million persons. General Josue "Joe" Robles Jr. leads its destinies since 2007, with remarkable results in the popular time of financial crisis and will retire in 2015 after 25 years dedicated to military career and 24 years in various management positions at USAA.

When talking about the factors that contributed to the success of the organization even in these years of recession, the General stated that he approached a management style aimed to involve employees so that they are motivated to put in the game all the energy and creativity available, guided by the philosophy: "If you take care of customers, they will take care of the company".

To this adds the members profile, marked by honor and discipline, patriotism and dedication without asking for too much in return, qualities with which success is easier to achieve, considers Robles. In addition, the organization's financial strength and conservative approach to management, with bosses treating employees as they would want them to treat customers, creating work facilities at the San Antonio campus, such as gyms or cafes, also contributes to strengthening USAA as a strong and profitable organization.

At the first White House summit dedicated to balancing work and family life through implementing family-friendly practices, USAA has been recognized as a leader and a good example in this area.

2.4. Germans, the Europeans Most Eager to Work

When asked what they would do if they gain a huge amount of money that would allow them to retire from the profession, more than 7 in 10 Germans said they would continue to go to work. Here, according to the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey [8], is recorded the highest number of employees compared to the other 30 European countries investigated.

According to Bundesagentur fur Arbeit the number of unemployed people is down slightly, but Germany is facing the problem of skilled labor because the elderly are specialized in these areas, so retirement age continues to grow in this country.

According to undertaken studies (Nink, 2013) [9], has been noted a rooting of faulty management policies regarding human resource and employee involvement. The Germans who feel ignored at work declare greater dissatisfaction with their job situation than those who are unemployed, even if those in the second category report having gone through economic problems that have threatened even the possibility to feed or maintaining their house.

German people desire to work is determined in many cases not by the pleasure that labor produces, but by the specific responsibility of those Europeans. The costs of occupational diseases rates Germany at the top of European states (Fourth European Working Conditions Survey – Impact of work on health), demonstrating disadvantages of performing

work only out of a sense of duty or as a liability, without too much involvement, can bring.

These results can be explained, given the conceptualization model of burnout, Maslach and Leiter [10] considering that work engagement and burnout can be seen as the two opposite ends of a continuum. We thus justify once again our scientific interest toward involvement in the organization at all levels, with emphasis on leadership actively oriented towards members engagement.

3. Conclusions

Involvement brings benefits at several levels: for the individual who will be pleased with his work and so of oneself, leading to increased self-esteem, self-confidence and wellbeing, with effects on personal and organizational health, by reducing absenteeism due to illness, the medical costs and employee turnover.

Employees commitment helps increase performance, reflected in financial gains, strengthening the image of the organization as a reference one in its field, bringing benefits for the community and society as a whole.

Unfortunately, from fear of becoming "petty managers" – "micro managers" or thinking they would seem intrusive, some chiefs keep very far towards employees, without getting involved too much in their lives. What these leaders neglect is that while a small manager controls everything, down to the smallest detail, a true leader only contributes to the guidelines, then leaves it to individual choice the detailed aspects which correspond most to each person.

The attention that notorious organizations such as Gallup and USAA expressed in this field demonstrates once again that our scientific interest facing this issue is both justified and welcomed.

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