Leadership in the Time of Change

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Abstract
Last years, the environment has placed more challenges for the organizations to cope with. The economic crisis brings new issues in the front of the leaders, forcing them to question again the ways of leading and the possibilities to get most of value from their human resources potential.

The passage to the new society and economy, the knowledge based economy, which was seen as the highest level in humanity development, proves to be a process that is not smoothly at all.

Developing the change competency for the leaders means to acquire that knowledge and abilities that are able to provide the best answer for a certain working situation or a challenging external context, with getting the best results for organization and its stakeholders.

Keywords: *change, leadership, credibility, learning, competitivity*

1 Introduction

Succesful leaders enjoy during their activity a high appreciation and support from the majority of organization's members. One of the major explanation is that of the way in which the leader behaves with the people around him: bosses, colleagues, subordinates a.s.o. In many cases, the leader is treating the others as family members and stimulate them for professional and personnel development.

We refer to the leaders able to build up the shared vision over the wanted future, where most part of personnel is able to find himself, to discover that his own needs are part of organization's priorities and that their future is strong connected to organization's future.

Leaders connect the values that support their decisions and actions to the capacity of working in team with his co-workers. This connection is a strong foundation for company's evolution (Năstase, 2007).

By their vision and trust depend the energy and the commitment (Fullan, 2001) of all organization's staff. They are the ones that are able to set attractive targets (Ilieş, 2003) for the employees and find the best ways to attain them.

But they don't do all these things alone. They rely on their followers, on all the persons who believe them. The challenge for leaders is a growing one, as they interact now, at all levels of the organization, with a better educated workforce.

If trust becomes a component element of the organizational culture (Ionescu, 2001), then the whole range of activities and behaviors will take advantage of an important support. The organizations members will consider as normal such an attitude, and knowledge sharing will be considered as a natural issue.

Credibility and leaders commitment are important as, still, for many organizations, knowledge sharing is regarded as a threat, as an exposure of the employee, who reveals the knowledge, to the atack of those around him.

But, the leaders offer the possibility as the personnel, to the large extent, to find itself, to identify with the promoted elements. They promote the dialogue and they are under permanent interaction with the organization's members.

The strong dialogue, the trusting presentation of the vision and its translation to decisions and facts are elements of consistance for leader's credibility. The personnel trusts those who speak loudly and openly, those who are able to dispatch clear messages.

It is a way to send the energy to those around them, who feel motivated to join and support the leaders initiatives. An hesitant language, a difficult explanation of what is intended don't do anything else than to distort the launched message. Additionally, it can be induced the idea of not knowing some important matters, issue that would project a shadow over the leader's performance.

2   Framework of change

In the knowledge based organization the pace of change is high and it is supported by the large volume and quality of the knowledge (Nicolescu, O., Nicolescu, L., 2005) used by the organization's members.

Organizations are subject to the change process with a higher frequency and intensity. The environment's complexity, the dynamics of its components, all of these force the organizations to permanently assess their position related to the context and to anticipate or to react to challenges they face.

The characteristics of the new economy don't refer to raw materials or technology, they refer to knowledge, to people and finally, to change (Kleim, 2004). The nature of work that has been carried out in a traditional way has evolved and we assist today to the challenge of the basic assumptions about work and life (Brătianu et al, 2006).

We can refer to the free movement of resources, to the development of information technology, but also to the fact that in many developed countries the work force is aging, that places an important question mark about the demographic factor in terms of using it in the best way.

From the cultural point of view we have a „melting pot", regardless of the fact that we talk about USA or European Union, where the creation of such political and economical entity stimulated the workforce to search, identify and take advantage of employment opportunities (Nicolescu, 2006) throughout the whole area.

The pressures to which these organizations are subject, determinate the individuals, the groups to adopt a more open attitude towards change (Collins, Porras, 2006). If till not far away in our professional life, we could assist to only two, three or just a very few of events that were able to significantly influence our professional and personal life, the things have dramatically changed for our days.

Under these conditions it's really important to exist a strong relationship between leaders and their supporters (Bibu N. et al., 2007). We could interpretate the following actions provided by the co-workers as signals for trusting their leaders:

- Foster the leaders' vision
- Intense and open communication
- Knowledge sharing and use address both to explicit and tacit one
- Pride feeling related to the organization is present
- Participate actively to the knowledge based networks
- Show a stong team spirit
- Promote innovative approaches
- Feel loyalty to organization
- There is a rich organizational folklore

Usually, there is no difficulty in expressing some thoughts, some ideas, some desires. But, as a leader, you have high responsibilities as you benefit of huge investment of trust from all the people around you.

Perhaps, for this reason, sometimes, the dissapointments are also high as we witness a huge gap between what is stated and what is implemented.

Today's leaders are asked to deal with youngers and adults whose basic assumptions about who they are, how to live and work, are different from previous generations on many coordinates. These are issues that influence consistently the organizational culture (Verboncu et al., 2008)

Learning is the result of higher interactions among people, even not often due to direct contacts but as a result of informational technology. We can see how the distances diminish and a large variety of bridges are built among professionals, who are able to crystalize and develop more general or specialized communities.

In order to enjoy success with these changes and personnel efforts to tally with the organizations' needs, it is vital to have the leaders able to trigger the innovative energies (Kleim, 2004) from the organizations and to value the intellectual capital (Brătianu, 2007) of the organization.

3 Learning to cope with change

Changing values lead to major change in perception and nature of relationships between people and the organizations where they work. Considered for many years just a mean to reach the organization's objectives, the employees are seen from a broader and broader perspective. They tend to be treated as the main capability of an organization, as a consequence, the specialists in management field using the term of human capital.

Under such circumstances the leaders have to develop new competencies of the nature to better understand the organization settings and the characteristics of their business context (Năstase, 2007).

It is a process of learning that has to be developed continously in time (Collins, Porras, 2006), to which they have to pay special attention. There is a plethora of papers about the change and its nature (Fullan, 2001), (Leibling, 2005) but, however, this doesn't mean that they are not many organizations, many people that have a lot of difficulties in mastering this process.

We feel the need for a closer approach of the academic and scientific research to the real business needs (Danielson, 2006), in order to identify and develop those concepts and tools that would offer better premises for managing this important organizational process.

In a fast changing environment, in order to have success, the leaders have to be preoccupied not only by their own development, but they will also focus on increasing the competencies of their co-workers. They have to foster the creative approaches (Burduş, 2006) that could lead to the redesigning of systems and procedures within the organizations.

It's not possible to set and achieve challenging objectives without creating a team of capable, creative and committed employees. The communication process get new value, regardless of the fact that we talk about horizontal, vertical or oblical communications.

In order to get the best organizational performances, the leaders have to get first the best human performances, as between these two issues there are a direct and strong connection. It means that the leaders must invest (Kouzes, Posner, Barry, 1987) and take advantage of the individual's required attributes for dealing with the change process, in terms of values, knowledge and attitudes.

The consequences of this investment will be related not only to the present established objectives, but will have a major impact over the people self-perception, on the employees loyalty to the organization and a higher motivation.

Finally, leaders can use it for transmitting a strong message about the importance that they pay to human resources and the ways in which they understand to manage and develop them.

In a way, it's also a kind of feedback to employees' concerns during the changing times, that strenghten the relationships between leaders and their followers and celebrate the success of their action.

Leaders will be able to use the organizational culture as a catalyst for coagulating the critical mass required for achieving the expected performances (Ionescu, 2001), and they will continue to develop together with their partners in a leader to leader relationship.

Leaders are persons who apply well the principle of continous learning. They monitor the evolutions from inside and outside of organizations and tend to understand the present and future features of the business environment and to set accordingly the new coordinates for the organizations.

Coping with change means coping with learning! Regardless of the fact that we talk about a pro-active or reactive attitude, we refer to the adjustments of organizations settings and the need to modify accordingly the people behaviors and the procedures that govern some of the professional interactions.

Organizations's evolution in today's environment is not longer linear, with a very predictible trend that would be able to allow a lot of time for leadership answer.

Instead, we assist to turbulent times, with factors from both inside and oustside of organization that move very fast, that are able to place great pressures for change over organizations and people.

So, the leaders have to face a wide range of discontinuities of different magnitudes that are generated by different events, but that have to be seen as a normality rather as a surprise.

It is important to be able to develop an organizational culture that supports the idea of change and where the people are stimulated to permanently learn.

Developing and posting the new values, attitudes and mechanisms that are required by changes will not be possible without a continous learning process that has to take place at all organizational levels.

Using predominantly the coercive tools in order to impose a certain strategy or certain steps to be done, can't provide the expected results. Even it can be used for short periods of time, the coercive approach must be subsequently accompanied by positive motivation and open communication.

When somebody experiences a discontinuity in his life or activity, usually a negative valence is associated to that stage. A leader can use however, such moments as examples of transforming some threats to opportunities.

We need a cooperation from the part of those affected by changes, to develop awareness of their potential and to become interested in developing their own learning program (Zecheru, Năstase, 2005).

This will depend by their own system of values, motivations and personal objectives, but it will fostered by the type of organizational culture and the relationship with the leader.

It can be created a sense of urgency in order to avoid for the employees to be stuck for long periods of time in the same mindsets, without any interest to modify them according to the new or potential conditions.

Leaders must understand that there is a natural tendency for the people to disregard or to abandon easily some of the things that they are told to learn or to do, as they are supposed to act under coercition.

Another important issue is the necessity to create a climate of trust. We talk about trusting others, but, perhaps more important, to trust yourself. It's difficult to embark upon a change process or learning process as long as your level of self-confidence is pretty low and you have the tendency to focus especially or your weaknessess.

Building a high self-esteem based on positive feedback represent a mission that stays with the leader's competence for creating a strong team, able to assure a competitive position for the organization.

Changing the organizations is very similar with changing your own person. You have to understand the context of change, to be able to analyse yourself and to set the new objectives.

Leaving from here, you will be able to make a distinction between you want to get rid of and what you want to keep, what are the best ways to acquire the neccesary competencies and what tools you have at your hand.

It's a personal development program that can support your personal and professional growth and facilitates your interactions with the people around you.

In order to be effective, the leaders will design and implement a comprihensive strategy for change that integrate objective, processus and people. Conditions for success of the change have to be created by using a conscious strategic thinking that will align organization's objectives and cultural elements.

The leaders succeed to expand this approach from the individual to group and organizational level, bringing together a bunch of people who will succeed to develop common feelings, to work and get success for them and organization.

Developing new business directions is not a simple task, but it can be successfully performed as the most part of employees are embarked on a common vision and share the same mindset in terms of the relationships between personal and organizational priorities.

The leader's competency in the change process means that he succeeds to see beyond the boundaries of the routine activities and classical settings and to create a fluid organization where the knowledge is flowing rapidly and people are networking intensively.

Coping with change means to have abilities to lead the process since the perception of the need for change and untill the changes are not only in place, but they are interanlized by most of the personnel.

It means that all the transition period has to be appropriately managed and the rational and emotional issues to be addressed, in order to get the best results from the people potential.

We could state that in today's high-pressure environment the quality of leadership that is practised represents a crucial factor for human resources development, for the degree of objectives achievement and for the evolution of organization, regardless of its size and field of activity.

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