

Leadership Development and Personal Development: Is there a Connection?

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Leaders play a critical role in leading an organization. May it be the direction of success or failure, onus for the results ultimately lies on the organizational leader. Hence it becomes imperative for the behaviors of these individuals in leadership positions to be closely tied to the future of the organizations they lead. Every human being is not equipped with leadership qualities and hence the need for aspiring leaders around the world to go to school to learn to be leaders. Therefore it is important to emphasize the impact of the role of personality traits and development as it encroaches itself upon the development of a leader. There are great variations among human beings as far as the personal attributes, the qualities, as well as the psychological make up. Therefore, performance of a leader with regard to trustworthiness, reliability, and or the effectiveness as a leader will be logically influenced by the social and interpersonal skills. Perhaps, this is why this intertwined performance of the personal and the leadership activities appears to have prospects for improvement.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the connection of leadership development with personal characteristics, personality traits and development of an individual. Further, the potential of developing a leader by means of development of personal behaviors will be emphasized.

Leadership Behaviors are grounded in Personality Traits

The impact of personality traits' contribution towards the shaping up of the leadership behaviors of leaders in politics, corporate businesses and the leadership students emerged as one of the main themes. This is true for the leaders regardless of the type of leadership role. Depending on the type of the leadership position, persons' personality traits can support or hinder the progress of the leadership task at hand. Lilienfeld et al. (2012) presented the essence of this correlation among the political leaders; the US presidents. The authors portrayed the positive influence of effective social skills and well balanced temperament on successful leadership practices and titled this phenomenon; Fearless Dominance (FD). Keeping in mind the nature of the challenging leadership tasks the US presidents are expected to undertake, some of the otherwise maladaptive traits such as impulsivity, interpersonal dominance, and fearlessness were concluded by the authors as being advantageous for a political leader. Van Eeden et al. (2008) evaluated the perceptions of the corporate industrial leadership team members as they relate to the functionality of the leadership behaviors. The authors enlisted the most common leadership styles utilized by the team members and highlighted the perceptions of the members that the most common leadership styles utilized by the team members were grounded in effective communication skills and task oriented nature. The author's findings further supported the above findings that the need of the leadership task might require a change in leadership style. Further, the prospects for development of leadership skills through self-development is supported through early emphasis on effective interpersonal and social skills among young students, Odom et al. (2012). Importance of interpersonal skills for effective leadership is presented in the next section.

Strong Interpersonal Skills: Key to Effective Leadership

Importance of strong interpersonal skills emerged as a foundational element for effective leadership. Effective social skills were termed; Fearless Dominance (FD) by Lilienfeld et al. (2012) and transformational leadership by Van Eeden et al. (2008). FD and transformational leadership were shown to be associated with vision and leadership for a variety of leaders. The strength of interpersonal skill development and self-development was further supported as the students in the undergraduate leadership course experienced leadership growth as a result of a personal growth project focusing on their self-development. Self-awareness, self-confidence and communication skills were utilized as integral components of self-development of the participating students, Odom et al. (2012). The advocacy of interpersonal skills for effective leadership appears to be convincing but is this all that is needed to be an effective leader. Synergy from diverse leadership styles can accentuate the performance of leaders as emphasized in the next section.

Diverse Leadership Situations call for Diverse Leadership Styles

Despite the predominance of social and interpersonal skills as effective leadership attributes, the leaders must be diverse and flexible in switching to other more task oriented styles of leadership when needed. Precisely, “one size does not fit all” phenomenon seems to fit with the leadership needs. Circumstances may arise when the leader must achieve tasks, meet deadlines and handle emergency situations where instant decision-making would be crucial. Therefore, the leaders must be diverse and flexible in taking ownership and getting the team members focused on a given tasks to achieve instant results. Similarities in the needs for diversity in leadership styles and skills will vary based on the type of goals set by the individual and organization as well as the needs of the hour. This was evident among the corporate industrial leaders as evidenced in Van Eeden et al. (2008), political leaders as illustrated in Lilienfeld et al. (2012) as well as the leadership students as demonstrated in Odom et al. (2012), as the most leaders leaned on more than one leadership trait and required various personal traits to support the same.

Conclusion

Organizations depend on their leaders to lead them in the direction of prosperity and success. Importance of a leader's position in an organization can be fairly compared with the role of a human spine as far as keeping an upright position. While many leadership behaviors can be modified and learned to a great extent,

what determines the shape of those learned behaviors is the baseline personality of a leader. While effective social and interpersonal skills can facilitate majority of leadership tasks in a shared governance structure, some leadership situations may call for leadership styles that dictate the team activities. Therefore, the leaders should be carefully selected based on the needs of the leadership position. Ultimately a careful focus on ongoing leadership development through personal development; specifically, interpersonal skills development is critical to assure effective leadership.

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