Effective Leadership Amidst Crises: A Critical Review of Leadership Role During COVID 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This review examines whether a particular type of leadership is more effective in containing critical crises situation like the COVID-19 Pandemic that affected the world a few years ago. An x-ray of the peaceful business life of various countries, communities and organizations and the sudden attack of the pandemic was reviewed.

A critical look at the way leaders took decisions to enable them cope with the pandemic and the manner in which its devastating effect was curtailed was considered. In addition, an attempt at conceptualization of leadership that can best be prescribed during crises was reviewed.

It was realized that the world is yet to get a one fit leadership approach that can handle crises of this magnitude. It also became clear that at least early decisive decisions and policies helped many countries such as in Africa and Asia in spite of their lack of preparedness compared to America and Europe. It was also realized that gender sensitivity can be a solution to leadership, as female leaders were seen more apt to deal with the matter than their male counterparts. (Luoto & Varella, 2021) An area recommended for more studies to establish if gender sensitivity can be developed into a theory in leadership to mitigate crises. In conclusion of the critical review, it was realized that, no any single leadership style was viewed as sufficient in handling COVID 19 Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The trend of continuous development to achieve the desired goals and objectives was in vogue, as businesses, communities and Governments of different nations were working assiduously in order to meet their targets. Just as leaders of various companies operating as Chief Executives in the normal course of business were engaging in the primary functions of their businesses which, according to Flynn (2019), is by planning, organizing, staffing, Leading, controlling and taking initiatives as well as making decisions for maximum benefits without any suspicion that the way business are undertaken will suddenly experience what happened during the COVID -19. Everyone was aiming at recording impressive business results. As rightly pointed out by Gallos (2008), it is pertinent to note that individuals in the front burner of organizations must always live up to expectation as their roles require not just to lead but also manage the resources in such a manner that profitability, one major objectives, shall be attained.

In the same vein, different communities exercising dare need activities such as would better the life of their subjects, spearheaded by various leaders with set goals and objectives that can truly turn around their fortunes, were in top gear. No one, according to Wood (2007), desires any less from the order of events led by Personalities with vision that characterizes authenticity in the precise likes of a transformational leadership style with high involvement of charisma and behavior totally aiming to inspire subordinates to function overly the usual limits. No doubt, the status quo is required to be maintained as vision to motivate

subordinates through rewards, the process which make organizations to always resolve to continue to build trust by improving the development of the staff with the hope to make better their lives for maximum productivity.

Government on their part being a tool for maintaining peace and security, as rightly put by Rapnapala (2008), to ensure safety of life and property was obviously engaging as usual. In other words, the citizens look up to Government to provide leadership that aims at ensuring the security of individual lives and properties. This is a basic need recognized and valued by every society. Another critical requirement of Government is summed up in its responsibility to create an enabling environment so that economic factors can strive. Government which is composed of Legislature, (Law making arm), the Executives, (implementing arm), and the Judiciary (the interpretation arm) is expected to meet its requirements of security and enabling economic environment creation. Government assumed powers and authority that is recognized as the peak of leadership in any giving country. World Leaders, according to Ratnapala (2008), are seen to have a responsibility, and are expected to have capacity to lead all Nations to perform optimally in all engagements. He however, observed that Government has at several times led the people without attaining the basic purpose for which its leadership stands for. In this work, a critical look will be taken on the various leadership roles and what kind of leadership style was effective in the COVID 19 Pandemic that recently hit the world.

COVID 19 PANDEMIC: HUMAN AND ECONOMIC CRISES

According to Platto, Wang, Zhou & Carafoli (2021), Corona Virus, known as COVID 19, was discovered in 2019 in Wuhan, China. The city of Wuhan became very popular as the virus travelled to other parts of the world. Platto et al (2021), noted that the spread was rapid because the world was not aware of its severe consequences, thereby did not take measures that would have curtailed the colossal damage it caused to both human and the economy of Nations. According to Coulibaly & Madden (2020), the whole world including developed nations like countries in Europe and America were faced with devastating effect of the virus. Martinez, Benito and Garcia (2021), observed that the health crises were unquantifiable and unimaginable with a far-reaching effect on the economic landscape of many countries including Europe, America, Africa and Asia. Millions of people died. The World Health Organization figures as at 26th November, 2021, agrees with Martinez et al (2021) position when it reveals that America alone accounted for 96, 522, 123 cases which was highest in the world. Europe accounted for the second highest of 85,404,262 cases out of the total world cumulative cases of 259, 502,031. (World Health Organization COVID-19 dashboard, 26th November, 2021). The review on leadership effectiveness in crises situation using COVID 19 as a case study will further consider briefly the following analysis.

HUGE COMMOTION RELATED TO CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19) IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS,COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

According to Gashaw, Hagos & Sisay (2021), the world was like taking a nap when suddenly the news of COVID 19 broke out from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December, 2019. The report about the virus was very disturbing and a big threat to the socio-economic life of the society. The World Health Organization, (WHO) as noted by Travelled Medicine and Infectious Diseases (2020), initially observed that there was a global public health danger, and subsequently declared (COVID-19) a Pandemic. Shortly after the declaration its effect became phenomenal. Businesses began to feel the impact of its shocking effect. Communities started crumbling while Government of many countries began to make adjustments through policy formulation in order to curtail its spread. The process of mitigating the spread led to very rapid decisions that crumbled socio-economic lives of the people those decisions were meant to help.

ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND TRAITS IN TIMES OF CATASTROPHES

COVID-19, no doubt, brought to test the ability of leaders to manage crises and champion the course of making decisions that are impactful. Luoto, Antonio and Varella (2021) observed that the true test of the Pandemic was demanding. All citizens were looking up to the political Leadership for solutions which were not soon found. The Leaders themselves were looking everywhere for options that could guarantee hope. It was a period to test which leader or leadership style could fit in. Please permit me to consider some leadership styles and whether any of the leadership approach could be deployed in dare circumstances of this magnitude.

According to Badshah (2012) and Northouse (2021), Leaders can be identified either through the Trait Approach or Skill Approach.

The Trait Leadership Theory

Badshah (2012) presented a historical work that recognized the status of a leader which enable the subjects acknowledge the innate capabilities of the leader to be above all other members of the group. The Leader in this respect is seen as more intelligent, granted, dependable in executing duties, is actively sociable, exhibit self-confidence, is always on alert and insightful, cooperate and popular among the people, is adaptive to situations and outspoken. Likewise, it was aptly noted in Northouse (2021), that there are born Leaders with traits of physical look as being tall, extraversion or personality, and being intelligent and fluent thus:

  i. Being intelligent- where it is acknowledged by others that the IQ of the leader is perceived to be outstanding.
  ii. Poise (Self-Confidence)- The leader is seen as sure of himself in taking initiative and action
  iii. Determination- The Leader is noted for doggedness to achieve set goals
  iv. Truthfulness (Integrity)- The Leader is perceived to be honest and trusted.
  v. Sociable- The Leader is seen to interact freely with followers which earns him admiration and popularity thereby winning their cooperation and friendly relationship.

In summary, Northouse (2021) views a Leader as someone perceived to be able to overcome depression, anxiety or simply neurotic. He tends to be recognized as a socialite and shows extraversion. He is open, agreeable and conscientious.

THE SKILL LEADERSHIP THEORY

According to Badshah (2012) the Skill Theory referred to as the Fiedler's Leadership Contingency Theory, involves deliberate training and couching that is developed by a leader to acquire technical and other skills which enable him to manage an organization. Using the acquired skills, he is able to plan, direct, control and administratively achieve goals set up by the company. It is also noted that skills differ, and that different leaders perform better in different circumstances. He Further looks at Fiedler's Leadership under Three Perspectives thus:

  1. Relationship between Leaders and Followers- It is presumed that a Leader can be more powerful and influential where cordial relationship of like, trust and respect exist for maximum performance
  2. Task Structure – a well-organized structure of an assigned task with clear programme usually leads to better results.
  3. Authority (Position Power) – This confers imbedded recognition that aids followers to submit with

loyalty or risk penalty. In view of this once the leader's personality is built through deliberate change initiative the system is bound to record significant success.

Agreeably, this view is considered in the context of personnel ability to be technically compliant, develop good human relations and conceptually upgrade. (Daryabor, & Jeshni, 2018; Rasaki & Abioye, 2018; in Kakouris, 2021). According to Northouse (2021) there is the need to emphasize the Skill Theory in terms of whether the Leader is at the top, middle or lower management in the organization. It is stressed further that leadership can be assigned or emergent, signifying whether the leader occupies a recognized position like director or head of department. On the other hand, leadership can be noticeable through the variant response accorded by team members. (Wong, 2017; Carte & Becker, 2017 in Kakouris 2021)

Apart from the Trait and Skill Theories, a brief look at other leadership styles like Path-Goal theory is important for holistic understanding of the leadership conceptualization and which approach is most viable in a crisis situation like the COVID-19 Pandemic.

PATH-GOAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

According to Badshah (2012) the theory is referred to as Expectancy Theory as it is conceived through subordinates' expectation of reward that is motivational to goal accomplishment. Northouse (2021) summarized this in the form of goal definition, path clarification obstacle removals and support provision. This is also viewed in behavioral leadership work template as leadership through directive, leadership through support, leadership through participation and leadership through orientation to achieve set goals.

THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP AND PROCESSES TO THE ATTAINMENT OF GOALS

Leadership in the business terrain has its orientation. According to Badshah (2012) and Northhouse (2021), There is a path-goal approach that requires the attraction of a behavioural pattern which will motivate followers for goal accomplishment. Similarly, Gallos (2008) views two paths to this approach as he considers Management and Leadership as not quite the same. He however, perceived Mangers as Leaders, and that they must motivate their followers to achieve their set goals. Motivation can be in the form of a clear vision and goals without ambiguity. Blockades or obstacles must be removed, while supportive measures are enhanced. He opined that when leadership is directional in this form it will yield required results in a time of need.

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES AND THE ADVENT OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

The broke out of COVID 19 put to test how prepared the leadership map is spread. According to Journal of Public Economics (2020), it was the most uncertain moment in recent history. Apart from the health complications and death rate upheaval, the uncertainty was also measured in volatile stock market situation. The media likewise blew beyond proportion any available information and, the eventual social media propaganda trying to dominate the world with fake news was another contending issue. In the wake of these enormous uncertainties which leadership style would be recommended to mitigate the problem?

The emergent of Authentic Leadership though always highly valued, could not fix the challenges that came up with the Pandemic. It was considered that many countries that were dossal, paid costly in daily rise death rate. For example, America and European Countries did not fair sufficiently comparable to Asian and African Countries. This was evident in the divergent devastating effect of the Pandemic in different

communities. (Gashaw, Hagos & Sisay 2021).

TEAM LEADERSHIP AND GENDER SENSITIVITY AMONGST OTHER LEADERSHIP STYLES IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Leadership, according to Chin, Trimble & Gracia (2017) can be cultural and divers. Globally, the world is in search of leaders who can chart the way forward for effective performance. During the COVID-19 Pandemic for instance, Luoto & Varella (2021) opined that effective leadership can be gender sensitive. Their assertion was based on an investigation across nations where women leaders due to psychological risk evasiveness were able to handle the COVID-19 crises better than their male counterpart. This school of thought is said to require more work to develop the theory and make generalization. According to Ajibo (2020) even though Nigeria for instance, was not prepared to handle the pandemic like most African countries, drastic measures like nation-wide curfew were taken by the political leadership which resulted in low spread and minimal fatality though with severe post COVID financial and economic crises.

UNCERTAINTY AND TEAM WORK DURING COVID 19: A COMPARATIVE OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

In their research Martinez, Benito, & Garcia (2021) studied how countries in Europe, America, Asia and Africa managed the pandemic. They discovered that the pandemic was destructive, and that countries in Africa and Asia were able to control the pandemic more effectively as their leaders took more pragmatic decisions that produced positive results to minimize casualties. This made Nations to mutually work together to strengthen regional and international relationship to enable them stop the spread of the virus. It was necessary, according to WHO COVID 19 Dashboard (2021) that Nations must cooperate to ensure the administration of vaccines and its effectiveness to control the pandemic. According to Martinez et al (2021), Political Leaders, Traditional and Community Leaders are by this singular event mandated to embrace team work to be able to push back the pandemic and its economic after-effect. Greater Cooperation is required in governance of economic and health management to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. According to Crossan, Gandz, Seijts & Stephenson (2010), Cross-Enterprise Leadership role to construct sustainable values is a basic need amongst communities. This is required to cut across economic, Social and environmental factors. It is non-contestable that everything possible must be considered by all and sundry. Leaders are to chart a course of actions to achieve conceivable goals. It is hoped, according to Gashaw, Hagos & Sisay (2021), the effectiveness of any leadership can only be interpreted in the scale up of food insecurity, vulnerable homeless population, unemployment and underemployment, increase health challenges, etc that followed the pandemic. They noted that in the wake of these crises, integrated strategic approach is highly required among nations in order to eradicate the pandemic and its after-effect on the socio-economic life. According to Travel Medicine and Infectious Diseases (2020), political leaders should not ignore warnings in respect of uncertainties as experienced in the pandemic. The WHO role is crucial. Leaders must rally behind science and summon courage to deal with matters decisively in line with situations. Mayer & James (2010) observed that while ethical values are important, skills paradoxically are useful in professional display but must be thorough as a significant need in leadership.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This article is aimed at reviewing the best leadership style required to handle uncertainties in crises situation like the COVID 19 pandemic. It is observed that behavioural leadership focusing on trait, skill and goal-path along other variants were considered. Women role was also reviewed alongside the comparison of different leadership styles. The critical review which was carried out in Nigeria in 2021 pointed out that Countries in America and Europe despite their perceived leadership capabilities performed below expectation during the

Pandemic (Ajibo, 2020; Luoto & Varella, 2021; Gashaw, Hagos & Sisay 2021). However, it is not established that any single practical leadership approach could be recommended as sufficient to adopt in a crisis situation like the COVID-19 Pandemic. It has been observed that a variety of built-up actions and decisiveness in taking initiatives and making timely decisions is recommendable. This has proven to yield positive results in Asian and African countries, compared to American and European countries, who despite their expertise and preparedness in the health sector failed to control COVID-19 Pandemic effectively, as they were not timeously decisive in approaching the crises with drastic actions.

In other words, an all-inclusive fit leadership style in handling uncertainties like the COVID 19 Pandemics is far from reality. According to Coulibaly & Madden (2020), Africa as earlier noted, for instance, was un-prepared but the effect was less severe compared to Europe and America. This means the proactive measures, acting in line with transformational leadership was rewardable.

RECOMMENDATION

More research should be conducted to develop theories needed to equip the world with leadership style that can best apply in times of uncertainties like the COVID-19 Pandemic., especially, as the economic crises, socio-cultural and health challenges etc seems to be prevalent to date. This is noticeable for instance, in the galloping inflation being experienced by countries like Nigeria. Also recommended is a study on whether gender sensitivity has any effect on leadership and crises management.

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