

Why do Some Leaders Want to Sideline Competent People who Could Add Value to their Leadership?

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ABSTRACT

From the standpoint of organizational studies, the contributions of competent individuals to leadership hold immense importance for an organization's progress. It is indeed paradoxical that some leaders opt to sideline competent individuals who have the potential to enhance their leadership. This article delves into several reasons behind the inclination drawing from the author's personal experiences and document analysis. It employs the theory of value-based leadership, as conceptualized by John C. Maxwell, as a framework to interrogate this tendency, with a particular focus on the Liberian society as the contextual background. The reasons that could be equated to the findings of the study reveal leadership by position, a sense of insecurity of competent people, a wrong sense of perception of competent people, and the protection of interest.

Conclusively, this article argues that leaders who engage in this behavior or inclination display a lack of understanding of the rudiments of leadership without the realization of contributing to their own downfall or failure.

Keywords: Competent People, Leadership, Organization, Value-based leadership, value-added,

INTRODUCTION

In the field of organizational studies, the value of leadership is widely acknowledged. According to renowned leadership expert John C. Maxwell (1998), enhancing leadership style is crucial in today's world. It is believed that improving leadership style is strategically important for an organization's success. Shah (2018) advises organizations to "Hire someone who can add value" to leadership. The author emphasizes the importance of hiring innovators, who are seen as critical to an organization's success. Similarly, Steve Jobs expressed the view that it is nonsensical to hire talented individuals and then instruct them on what to do; instead, smart people are hired to guide the organization.

Maxwell's statement, supported by Shah's warning and Jobs' quote, suggests that it is impractical to distance competent individuals from what can be considered the authors' claims. In simpler terms, to add value to their leadership and have positive implications for the organization, leaders should hire, appoint, or select competent individuals.

In Liberian society, it is observed that instead of retaining competent individuals in roles that are beneficial to the leadership, some leaders seek out justifications to either replace or sideline them. This contradiction has the potential to hinder the organization's progress. Considering this, this article will explore potential solutions based solely on the author's opinions.

The text is organized into four key segments. The first segment presents the theoretical framework of the paper by briefly discussing John C. Maxwell's concept of a value-based leadership style. The second segment provides a conceptual analysis of leaders and competent individuals. The third segment, which serves as the

crux of the article, answers the question at hand. Finally, the fourth segment wraps up the argument and concludes the article.

METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE AND MATERIALS

Qualitatively, this article employs observation, document analysis, and the author's interpretation to delve into the subject matter. The observation draws from the author's personal experiences, providing anecdotal evidence. The document analysis involves a thorough review of relevant literature on the theoretical and conceptual framework of leadership, sourced from the internet via the Google search engine.

The use of observation does not mandate the author to specifically identify individuals associated with organizations or institutions in Liberia. Mindful of potential misinterpretations, the author discusses the subject in general terms, without singling out specific individuals or institutions.

While readers may challenge the analysis and arguments in this article, the careful articulation and thoughtful analysis of the issues may render them less controversial or contentious.

Contribution to Knowledge

This article presents a novel viewpoint on leadership that may not have been extensively examined. It enriches the existing discourse and literature on leadership, contributing to the subject and suggesting potential directions for further research, especially in areas not addressed by the author.

Theoretical Framework/Underpinning

Concerning the title of this paper, there is a plethora of literature that offers valuable insights on enhancing leadership. For the purpose of this article, we will be employing John C. Maxwell's concept of "Value-Based Leadership" as the theoretical framework that will guide the argument.

Value Based Leadership

As per Maxwell, a distinguished leadership expert with over 50 years of experience in studying and teaching leadership principles, value-based leadership focuses on enhancing the lives of individuals and organizations through one's leadership approach. He asserts that value-based leadership is pivotal in driving positive change and attaining long-term success within an organization (Maxwell, 1998). According to him, to bring value to leadership, leaders should adopt essential principles such as integrity, empathy, vision, humility, and courage (Maxwell, 1998). Additionally, Maxwell suggests that leaders who prioritize values and ethics in their leadership style are more likely to generate a positive and enduring impact on their followers and the organization.

It's important to note that while Maxwell's original concept didn't explicitly emphasize the significance of having competent people, it's essential to recognize that the inclusion of hiring, selecting, appointing, and retaining competent individuals is closely tied to his concept of leadership. It's hard to dispute the idea that competent individuals add substantial value to leadership. It's highly probable that Maxwell, being a leadership expert, would support the incorporation of competent individuals in value-based leadership. The alignment of competent individuals with Maxwell's concept is particularly significant because vision, a core principle of his leadership philosophy, greatly benefit from their presence. Leaders rely on competent individuals to help bring their visions to fruition. Furthermore, followers, who are often competent individuals, provide crucial support, loyalty, and dedication to the leader's vision. They also play a pivotal role in executing tasks and implementing strategies outlined by leaders. In a similar vein, Gomez (2014) underscored the importance of focusing on an applicant's potential when hiring, as those with potential are vital for realizing the leader's vision. Additionally, Hall (2012) identified competence as the primary factor to consider when hiring employees. It is simple to answer why this is so. It is relevant to the organization or institution's vision and reflects its performance,

achievement, or success.

On the contrary, Suda (2013) argues that ineffective followers, who could be equated to incompetent followers, are equally responsible for the poor performance of an organization.

Throughout history, Maxwell's concept has been embraced by many successful leaders. For instance, today's prominent organizations such as Apple, PF Chang's, McDonald's, FedEx, Lockheed Martin, and Procter & Gamble owe their success to the practice of hiring competent individuals who add value to the organization. Despite its merits, Maxwell's concept, like other theories, has also faced criticism due to its shortcomings. Abhinav (2023) identified two noteworthy downsides. The author argues about the potential subjectivity of values, which can be interpreted differently by individuals, as well as the potential lack of objectivity in decisions based on values, which may not always lead to the most efficient or effective outcomes. In my candid opinion, Abhinav's critique is genuine, although it appears to be incomplete as it lacks a proposed solution. Nonetheless, constructive criticism is an integral aspect of the academic discourse.

In summary, Maxwell's concept of value-based leadership is founded on the notion that leaders must enhance their leadership to ensure the success of the organization and positively influence their followers.

Conceptual Analysis of Competent People

Defining competent individuals can be a complex task due to the diverse job descriptions found in various organizations. In essence, each organization has specific job descriptions that are deemed essential to its values, vision, and overall performance. It is on this basis that people are recruited, selected, appointed, and retained. Therefore, this article seeks to provide a conceptualization of competent individuals from a more universal standpoint.

Hall (2012) emphasizes that competence is the key consideration when hiring employees. It encompasses the essential skills, experiences, and education required to effectively complete necessary tasks.

The Health and Safety Executive website clarifies a competent person as someone who has sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities that allow them to assist you properly (HSE, n.d.).

The Ranger YouTube channel offers a standard definition of a competent person. Accordingly, it is defined as a person who has, through a combination of training, education, and experience, acquired knowledge and skills enabling that person to correctly perform a specific task (Ranger, n.d.).

Similarly, the WorkSafe website (n.d.) defines a competent person as someone who has the appropriate skills, training, knowledge, and experience to perform the task or role.

Granted, the existing definitions did not categorize the positions held by competent individuals in organizations. However, it is important to note that competent individuals typically hold managerial positions, such as senior-level managers, middle-level managers, and front-level managers. These positions are crucial for adding value to the organization's leadership. Therefore, it is essential to exercise care in appointments, selection, and retention.

The analysis of the general definitions of competent individuals reveals several key elements: skills, training, knowledge, experience, and education necessary to carry out a particular task, duty, or job description. These elements illustrate that competence goes beyond academic qualifications, which some leaders may rely on as the main criteria for appointment, selection, hiring, or retention. Now, I will delve into each of these key elements.

Skills

Skill can be defined as the ability, stemming from one's knowledge, practice, aptitude, etc., to do something

well (Dictionary.com, n.d.). It's noteworthy that the adjective “well” is used in this definition. According to this definition, skill is acquired from knowledge and is further honed by practice and experience. While this definition provides valuable insight, to fully understand it, it's important to explore Robert Katz's three types of skills crucial to organizational performance and leadership. These skills, introduced in 1955, encompass technical, human, and conceptual skills. Let's now explore what each of these skills entails.

Technical skills

Katz (1955) defines technical skill as the knowledge, competency, and proficiency in a specific area of work or activity. In simpler terms, these skills are closely linked to an individual's particular expertise. For example, an accountant's ability to understand cash flow statements, income statements, and balance sheets, or a graphic designer's proficiency in color theory and the latest design software. While these skills are specific to certain areas of expertise, there are also general skills that are applicable across various fields. For instance, the ability to effectively use common computer software like MS Excel, Word, and PowerPoint is increasingly important in the 21st century. This doesn't mean mastery of all software but possessing at least some of these skills is crucial for modern competence. It's concerning for individuals in strategic positions to entirely depend on their office staff for technical skills related to their roles, as it raises questions about their competence.

Human Skills

In Katz's (1955) view, these skills are related to an individual's ability to interact with others effectively. The ability to work with people essentially includes understanding their diverse backgrounds, strengths, and limitations.

These are the skills that make some individuals great team members and others terrible. These skills allow some people to succeed as managers and others to fail. They allow individuals to multiply their abilities by interacting with others. Examples include but are not limited to empathy, active listening, effective communication, adaptability, leadership, and decisiveness (Sharma, 2023).

Based on the premise that people or employees are the most important asset for adding value to leadership and the success of an organization, this article unequivocally emphasizes that human skills also referred to as soft skills or interpersonal skills, are the most critical among Robert Kartz's three skills. This is because organizations, whether formal or informal, are comprised of individuals who are responsible for driving the agenda, strategies, and vision of the organization. Therefore, competence in soft or human skills is essential. In summary, human skills are crucial for adding value to leadership, with far-reaching implications for the success of organizations.

Conceptual Skills

Kartz (1955) asserted that conceptual skills involve the ability to think critically and conceptually, enabling individuals to see the bigger picture and comprehend the complex interrelationships between issues. These skills empower individuals to develop innovative problem-solving solutions, work efficiently, and maintain focus on their goals (RallyBright, 2023). They encompass making informed decisions when addressing problems and involve envisioning the future and translating this vision into a series of actionable steps to achieve the desired outcome. Examples of conceptual skills include but are not limited to Innovation, analytical and critical thinking, decision-making, interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, etc. (RallyBright, 2023).

Knowledge (Training/Education)

Knowledge, as a concept, encompasses a theoretical and practical understanding of a subject and is not acquired incidentally (Agarwal, 2022). This indicates that the acquisition of knowledge is intentional and purposeful, obtained through education, training, and experience. Education is a broad concept that encompasses not only university learning but also practical training or hands-on training and real-world

experience, all of which contribute to a well-rounded education that speaks to competence. In real-life situations, some individuals may have obtained a university education but lack the necessary hands-on experience and training for specific jobs or roles. For instance, a person with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice may struggle to contribute effectively to an organization if they lack practical experience in the Basic Police Recruit Course. Similarly, consider the competence of a medical college graduate without practical experience. Can such an individual truly add value to the leadership of an organization? The university degree provides theoretical knowledge but may not be sufficient to enhance an individual's competence. To enhance the individual competence, the hands-on experience or training is imperative. This is why most job descriptions prioritize years of experience in a specific field as crucial. It is assumed that experience indicates individual competence progression.

Unlike academic knowledge gained through formal education, practical experience or hands-on training obtained by applying knowledge in real-life situations provides a more comprehensive learning experience, preparing individuals for the demands of professional life. Additionally, it offers an understanding of the organizational "culture," allowing individuals to gain insight into how to effectively interact and collaborate with colleagues and superiors in their respective fields. In summary, while academic education is crucial, hands-on experience delivers a more comprehensive learning experience that equips the individual for the challenges of professional life (Hartley, n.d.).

How Competent People Add Value to Leadership

Before we address the question, it's crucial to have a clear understanding of the concept of value-added or adding value.

In the words of Ward (2024), the concept of value added is commonly used in the startup and corporate setting to describe anything that makes a given product, service, or feature more or far better than it was. As per the definition, the term "anything" encompasses competent people or individuals as well. For an organization to add value to its current product, it needs to have competent employees. Hobson (2021) and Palmer (2021) emphasize that people or employees are the most valuable asset in organizational studies. Being the most valuable asset speaks to competence as well.

Competent people add value to the leadership of the organization in the following ways.

What they bring to the table

From an organizational studies perspective, the attributes and abilities of individuals who are hired, appointed, selected, retained, or nominated are of paramount importance. Their contributions significantly impact the leadership and, in turn, the objectives and vision of the organization. Having individuals who bring substantial value to the table is highly beneficial for leadership. In comparison to the past, competent individuals bring added value that ultimately shapes the organization. For instance, their innovative and creative contributions have resulted in increased revenue and a positive reputation for the organization. Competent individuals exemplify innovation and creativity by looking beyond the bottom lines. Additionally, through their innovative and creative initiatives, competent individuals realign strategies and tasks with the organization's objectives to further enhance the leader's vision for the organization.

Character/Mannerism

The concept of character or mannerism is often perceived as a product of one's behavior developed over time. As highlighted by Potter (2023), "The destruction caused by a lack of character is always greater than the competency provided." It is undeniable that in real-life scenarios, there are individuals who possess competence but lack good character. When such individuals are appointed, nominated, or selected for roles, society strongly reacts due to their deficient character. Conversely, the appointment, nomination, retention, or selection of individuals with both competence and unwavering character is embraced by society. These are the individuals who bring value to the leadership of the organization. Their retention, appointment, nomination, or

selection serves to enhance the positive image of the organization. They are respected by society not only for their knowledge, skills, qualifications, or competence but also for how they have consistently conducted themselves over the years. It's important to note that this doesn't imply perfection, as humanity is inherently imperfect. However, these individuals are characterized by their unwavering commitment to maintaining their integrity, even in the face of challenges.

Courage and Criticality

Suda (2013) asserts, "Followers have a responsibility to speak up when leaders do things wrong." Inarguably, it requires courage to do Suda's assertion. Only competent people dare to look into the face of a leader to courteously speak to the wrong. Regrettably, incompetent leaders demonstrate allergic reactions toward critical voices from competent followers who are concerned about the forward march of the organization. In their narrow mindset, these types of leaders see or interpret critical voices as undermining and an attempt for competent people to display their brilliance. Eventually, those with critical voices are often sidelined because "they know too much". Conversely, incompetent followers often resort to deceit, gossip, and sycophancy to maintain their positions lack the courage to speak up when leaders do things wrong. The fear of retribution prevents them from expressing dissenting opinions to their leaders. Interestingly, it can be argued that when situations require critical analysis, incompetent leaders are unable to trust or seek input from their incompetent followers or people because they have nothing critical to proffer in terms of solutions. Mindful or worried about the repercussions, some incompetent leaders will have no alternative but to swallow their egos and seek input from some of the competent people who they have sidelined. Once the situation or problem is solved, they return to the existing status quo.

Mentorship and Coaching

Through mentorship and coaching, a classic mark of legacy, competent individuals enhance leadership by adding value and avoiding creating a void when they depart or exit the position or organization. Conversely, incompetent individuals who are focused on maintaining their positions often neglect to mentor and coach others, even when they have the knowledge to do so. Consequently, their exit may create a serious vacuum.

The Crux of the Paper

Considered the crux of the paper, this segment answers the question reflecting the caption of this paper. **"Why do some leaders want to sideline competent people who should add value to their leadership"? Or "Why do some leaders sideline competent people who should add value to their leadership"?** In other words, considering how this article conceptualized competent people or individuals, why would a leader want to sideline competent individuals? Despite unsuccessful research attempts to find answers from textbooks, published articles, news magazines, journals, etc., via the internet search, the author of this paper through his ingenuity offers his opinion on the reasons peculiar to the Liberian context or society.

Leadership by position

In real-life situations, some people become leaders because of the positions they are appointed, nominated, or assigned to. These individuals may lack an understanding of the fundamentals of leadership. This is mainly because anyone who truly understands the essence of leadership, especially the importance of competent individuals, would not overlook such people. This behavior would be entirely ironic. In this paper's viewpoint, such individuals can be categorized as leaders by position. The main argument here is that regardless of the motivations behind the action, sidelining competent individuals who could contribute value to the leadership indicates a lack of conceptual understanding of what leadership truly involves or displays incompetence. More importantly, the inclination to sideline competent people is also repugnant to John C. Maxwell's concept of value-based leadership discussed as the theoretical framework of this paper.

Sense of Insecurity of Competent People

Arguably, various factors contribute to the sense of insecurity. One of these factors is the fear of exposing their own incompetence. Incompetent leaders may feel insecure about retaining or appointing competent individuals, as they are concerned that the strong performance of these individuals could bring attention to their own inadequacies. As a result, they may be hesitant to promote, retain, appoint, or hire competent people due to their own sense of insecurity. The second factor underscores the presence of an incompetent inner circle. Every leader is influenced by a group of individuals who can either positively or negatively affect their leadership. Incompetent leaders often surround themselves with similarly incompetent individuals or followers, whereas competent leaders generally have a circle of competent people or followers.

As detailed in this article, incompetent individuals maintain their positions through dishonesty, gossip, and flattery. Their insecurity around competent individuals compels them to defame and deceive the leader about these individuals. They effectively create a false impression for the leader that competent people will undermine their leadership. The existence of an incompetent inner circle stands as one of the greatest perils of leadership, often unbeknownst to incompetent leaders.

The third factor contributing to the sense of insecurity emphasizes ideological differences. Inarguably, incompetent leaders and competent individuals do not share the same ideology when it comes to certain aspects, values, principles, or beliefs that embody an organization's culture. Therefore, considering the different ideologies, it is unlikely for incompetent leaders to retain, appoint, or nominate competent individuals. Instead, they deliberately choose incompetent individuals who are more likely to accept their ideology.

Wrong Sense of Perception of Competent People

Unfortunately, some leaders, especially those who are not very competent, fail to recognize professional and capable individuals. Instead, they often see them as confidants of their immediate predecessors. As a result, they may be hesitant to retain these competent and loyal individuals, despite their undeniable skills and dedication to the organization. Doubtlessly, every leader has their trusted confidants, but what's crucial for retaining them is their loyalty and commitment to the organization over the years, despite the changes in leadership and circumstances. These are people whose loyalty to the organization never shifted.

More importantly, these are people who enjoy society's admiration for their job performance. As such, any attempt to touch them or remove them from positions attracts legitimate and constructive noise from the public. This is because society doesn't see them the same way perceived by some leaders. In eyes of the society, they are professional and competent. Society could only support their removal based on their conspicuous incompetence and unprofessional conduct observed throughout their performance over the years.

The protection of interests

Practically, no workplace exists without interest or favoritism. Leaders in every field may have preferences for certain individuals to protect their interests. What's crucial, however, is the emphasis on competence as conceptualized in this article. Regrettably, some leaders undervalue the significance that both society and organizations place on competence. As described in this article, when competent individuals are replaced by equally skilled counterparts, it cannot easily be framed as sidelining through propaganda or organizational politics. The real issue arises when an incompetent individual replaces a competent one to protect the interest of the leader.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is a critical aspect of any organization as it drives the organization toward its goals. To achieve this, it is crucial to hire, appoint, and retain competent individuals. In Liberia's context, this article has outlined and

discussed the reasons why some leaders tend to sideline competent individuals who could add value to their leadership and contribute to the success of the organization. It did not exhaust all the answers or reasons behind the motives of some leaders. However, despite being opinionated, these reasons proffered by this article are uncontroversial because they are context-driven. Essentially, these reasons contradict John C. Maxwell's theory of value-based leadership used as the framework of this article.

Conclusively, this article argues that leaders who engage in this behavior or inclination display a lack of understanding of the rudiments of leadership without the realization of contributing to their downfall or failure.

DISCLAIMER

The author of this article is solely responsible for the views expressed herein. The organizations including the academic institutions the author is attached to do not take positions on the scholarship of the faculty and this article should not be interpreted or portrayed in any way as reflecting the official position of either organization.

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3. Introduction to Liberia Criminal Justice System: A Concise Edition available at <https://www.morebooks.de/store/us/book/introduction-toliberia-criminal-justice-system/isbn/978-620-3-04123-1>
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