

REDEFINING THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP: SOME NEW DIRECTIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores certain facets of the crucial subject leadership. It does not pretend to capture all of the salient issues that permeate this important and complex issue. The paper will deal with leadership issues that confront South Africa from the perspectives of certain political and social issues. In addition the paper will discuss leadership issues in general and will situate the subject matter within the realm of leadership in the introduction of the paper. The paper deals with leadership from the perspective of broad societal issues and outlines certain important issues in respect of leadership that is required in South Africa, twenty years down the road to democracy.

Key Words: Leadership, Direction, Performance, Corruption, Service Delivery, Bureaucratic, Community, Uncivil.

INTRODUCTION

Terry Gillen (2004: 159) asks, How many of us have the power to rip up the rule book or ‘reinvent’ our organization while our staff or for that matter citizens dance to our tune. For all but a handful, this is utterly impractical, yet this appears to be the guru’s solution to today’s leadership challenges. Practical leadership is about orchestrating better performance, not by coercion but by creating the conditions for better performance. It is necessary to clarify performance expectations and thus harnessing opportunities to increase motivation and expectations, and harnessing opportunities to increase motivation and development potential. It is the question to aspire beyond merely managing things to becoming leaders of performance.” Practical leadership boils down to two things: efficiently managing performance – related processes and connecting emotions to results needed and related to achievement.

Technology is changing the way our organizations including the politics of government and their bureaucracies function. There is more downsizing, more layering, more empowerment, more mobility, more globalization, and more team working and so on. However, there is also less traditional work activity, and less control. There are serious implications for staff loyalty and retention, especially

in view of increasing skills shortages. The tail of the 20th century saw a build – up of work pressures and a growing need for a balance between work and life outside work. High salaries have proved insufficient to retain good staff. Talented people demand more than fair remuneration.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Organizations and governments exist for a very simple reason, to turn resources into something of value and according to Terry Gillen (2004: xvii) “this applies whether an organization is in the commercial sector, public sector or voluntary sector. It is a question of management and leadership.” In other words one needs to discover how to transform your own thinking, acquire practical skills and thus boost performance. This will enhance credibility amongst staff, peers and others. As practical leadership skills are so scarce, one will realize that one will become more sought after and more marketable. It is therefore important according to Terry Gillen (2004: 2- 3) that the following must be given high priority by the commercial, political and voluntary sectors in relationship to their staff:

- Thinking holistically;
- Thinking descriptively;
- Outlining objectives;
- Incorrectly quantifying objectives and their ramifications;
- Monitoring performance;
- Helping staff with performance feedback; and
- Developing performance potential;
- The manager or leader must understand leadership;
- Differentiate between leadership versus management;
- Understand economic changes;
- Understanding motivation; and
- Be involved in team building.

LACK OF SERVICE DELIVERY AND LEADERSHIP IS THE CAUSE OF CORRUPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The reality is that inefficient service delivery in South Africa by one arm of government has created the environment in another where corruption could thrive and prosper due to the lack of commitment and sustained leadership (Business Watch, 2013: 18). What is the root cause and reality of inefficient service delivery by one arm of government has created the environment in South Africa in another where corruption could thrive and prosper? This is due to poor management controls, a lack of accountability, poor supervision that is exacerbated by very poor leadership within organizations generally. In dealing with the scourge of corruption that has become endemic in the public and commercial sectors of South Africa, the government should carefully consider the efficiency and level of service it provides because the potential for corruption increases dramatically when there are breakdowns in service delivery. This scenario is due to the all embracing fact that government and the commercial sectors do not display the leadership required to stem the tide. This is an occurrence that has crept in at all levels of the private sector and within the three spheres of government in South Africa.

THE ROOTS OF PROTESTS LIE IN STAGNANT LEADERSHIP

Ruchir Sharma (2013: 18) states that “still - smouldering protests from Egypt to Brazil and to South Africa have set of a race among scholars and journalists to identify the roots of this summer of discontent in the emerging world.” According to data from the Brookings Institute, in twenty of the largest emerging nations, the middle class has grown over the last fifteen years by an average of eighteen percentage points to comprise a bit more than half the population (in Ruchir Sharma, 2013: 18). Brookings defines “middle class” individuals as those who can spend \$10 and \$100 a day (roughly R100 to R1000 a day). The situation in South Africa is exacerbated by a corrupt government that has failed to deliver basic services to the poor, hence the continuous and unabated violent protests, mayhem and destruction. It is a question of the political and bureaucratic functionaries and the private corporations failing the masses with their high salaries, their inability in leveling the playing fields, extremely poor management, compromised by patronage, the failure to take action against those involved in corruption and the lack of displaying levels of leadership requisite to the development agenda of South Africa. “Protests represent the perils of success, as growing wealth creates a class of people who have the time and financial where – withal to demand from their leaders more prosperity, and political freedom” (Sharma, 2013: 18).

Maybe or perhaps the place to start searching for a common thread is not in the streets but in the halls of power. In South Africa, as is the case in many emerging economies, governments that have been in office and power for more than eight years, there have been significant protests targeting national leadership in at least six - South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Turkey, Russia and India. (Sharma, 2013: 18). Sharma further adds (2013) that “these are revolts of a lack of leadership, revolts against the ancient regimes, revealing the peril of staying in power too long and that often, even successful leaders have become complacent or over – confident, failing to enact reforms fast enough to sustain a balance of growth across different regions and classes.”

The potential of these protests to reignite or continue to burn depends, at least in part, on whether people have the power to change regimes. In genuine multiparty democracies (Only on paper in South Africa) such as India and Brazil, upcoming elections provide that opportunity. However, democracy cannot only be determined by elections. There are an array of other variables that have to be factored into the equation when determining the success of constitutional democracy. In this regard Sharma (2013: 18) points out that in Mexico, the Philippines, Nigeria and even Pakistan, relatively fresh leaders have infused leadership traits and thus using their political capital to push needed reforms. In these countries, the young, the educated and the newly prosperous including pockets of the poor have no reason to demonstrate, for they are now content to watch politics unfold on television.

THE COUNTRY’S BUREAUCRATIC TAPE

Recently we have seen in South Africa that opposition parties have called on Members of Parliament (MP’s) to oppose “a preoccupation with race by not approving the amendments to the Employment Equity Act. South Africa is saddled with a lack of and of inefficient leadership on the basis that the government is failing to deal decisively with the issue of race. Business Watch (2013) states that “Johan Kruger, a spokesperson for the union Solidarity said, his organization maintained that if these amendments were passed, the act, “will no longer have anything to do with redress, but everything to

do with race.” In other words it would empower government to enforce the “national demographics” and to discount unique regional differences.

Section 42 (2) and 42 (3) of the amendment bill gives too much arbitrary power to the labour minister to pass regulations that could force the designated employer to make his personal corps a reflection of the national demographics on every job level and in every workplace. Law firm Weber Wentzel (in Business Watch, 2013: 18) noted that the final broad - based black economic empowerment (BEE) codes of good practice which were gazette, allowing for a tears ‘transitional period’ to allow organizations to align their affairs with the codes requirements. The generic scorecard provides that all enterprises would be measured in terms ownership, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, socio – economic development, and management control. From this it is easy to glean according to Business Watch (2013: 18) that “In South Africa, the bureaucratic tape is not red anymore, it’s black. In other words there is unhappiness with regards this move and that companies in the private sector and within minority groups believe that it is a negative and selective move which will stymie the evolution of management and leadership, in a country that purports to be democratic, especially twenty years along the road of democracy. There is a real perception that such a move will impact negatively upon the public service of South Africa and is not conducive to nation building.

IN SOUTH AFRICA LEADERSHIP IS LEARNT FROM THE COMMUNITY

The former generations of South Africans due to the history and savage nature of apartheid ideology did not provide role models for the predominantly black population. This was because those that could have provided the leadership were either in hiding and hounded by the apartheid state because there was no freedom in the country. The population looked up to its teachers, pastors and parents for roles of leadership and, leadership was taught at home. The foundations of principles and respect were instilled from home and there was a community network of raising children with values, high moral standards and distinct and workable principals. South Africa was then a society with properly placed boundaries and therefore, background and upbringing can have generational effects. Society should not look for leadership objectively only because greatness is within and therefore the responsibility of parents, the government and the private sector is to raise children as possible leaders, in order to manifest the greatness within them. This is where democratic South Africa post 1994 has failed miserably, this is where the poor democratic education system has failed the nation.

The nation as a whole is crying out for help, but the cry is misunderstood and paid scant reference to by a predatory elite and a government that is out of tune with the realities of transformation, management and leadership discourse in order to build a winning nation. The youth of the 1976 generation gave the impetus for freedom from the yoke of oppression and fought against the apartheid state. Today the youth are a lost generation because the government does not have a plan in respect to education, employment opportunities, poverty, and to break the cycle of inequality. In reality South Africa is one of the most unequal societies. It has failed the youth because of a lack of coherent leadership on the part of the government. In reality South Africa sits on the abyss of destruction and this destruction will be brought about by the youth and, will manifest itself in turmoil and, eventually reach a point of no return. The democratic government needs to understand this vexing issue or face the consequences in the years that lie ahead. Once the government and the youth know what their

purposes are, irrespective of their backgrounds the youth will begin to live a purposeful life and understand for themselves the importance of leadership.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL OR PUBLIC SERVICE

Nearly twenty years down the road of freedom and democracy, Dlamini and Strydom (2013: 1) state that “many of South Africa’s civil servants are incompetent, absent and broke because of a complete breakdown of management and leadership post 1994.” They indicate that:

- Most officials are drowning in debt.
- Suffer from high levels of stress and depression.
- Have a high mortality rate, and
- Are absent from work.
- The problem stretches beyond provincial governments and in the province of Gauteng alone the salary bill exceeds R42 billion a year. It stretches to the country’s 278 municipalities, which fail to function because officials cannot do their jobs.
- Key officials do not have the necessary competence, coupled with vital vacancies.
- Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), municipal managers and Supply Chain Managers (SCMs are in short supply).
- As many as 71 percent of the entities audited were dependant on consultants to assist with financial reporting.
- Outsourced services in Gauteng Province alone cost more than R378 million last year and is increasing.
- Reports indicate that the general state of governance is stagnant due to incompetence, very poor management, corruption, patronage, the lack of accountability, the absence of the rule of law and above all the absence of sustained and coordinated leadership.
- The overall audit outcomes have regressed year on year.
- Steps have to be taken to professionalize government.”

NO MORE UNCIVIL SERVANTS

In order to address the above and the catastrophic state of governance in South Africa Dlamini and Masombuka (2013: 4) state that the “government is to spend millions on training officials to do their jobs, and a new state school will come into being to teach public service workers how to do their jobs.” They add as follows:

- They will be taught how to dress and conduct themselves and how to think critically, manage people, and work with money, conduct disciplinary hearings and handle tenders.
- More than 1.8 million civil servants will be trained.
- Line Ministers will also teach and take charge periodically from learnt experiences.
- In future civil servants will require certification by the school to be considered for promotion.
- By 2016 no one will be allowed to enter the public service without certification by the school.
- Each public servant will have to be conversant with how the public service works, the laws of the country, how money is used, what the tendering procedures are and so on.

- The challenge civil servants must understand is to contribute to a developmental state as envisaged by the National Development Plan (NDP).
- Attendance will be compulsory for all public servants.
- The idea is to redeem confidence of the public service and to restore public confidence.
- To optimize service delivery.
- A host of other variables.”

This is a move in the right direction because the failure to optimize service delivery is a criminal act on the part of public servants. Much of the good governance challenge is not about lacking good systems, but the human factor, which must be robustly addressed, not just through training but also implementing disciplinary measures for non – compliance. This move has been long overdue. However, it has to be realized simultaneously that government must stop graft, make politicians accountable, deal with them unsympathetically for corruption, avoid political patronage, accommodate all sectors of society within the public service and become service oriented. This initiative will collapse even before it is implemented if management principles are not invoked without deviation and, if the necessary and required leadership facets are not factored into the transformation agenda, for purposes of building a new public service nearly twenty years into freedom and democracy in South Africa.

NINE CRUCIAL STEPS FOR TRANSFORMING ORGANIZATIONS

The leader needs to continually focus and re – focus organizations in respect to the vision and the destiny of where they are moving. It’s a question of leadership. A leader must implement a process, system or a way of always remaining in tune with the following, according to Groenewald (2013: 18) and Karodia, (2008: 255 – 272). These are as follows:

- The changing facts of their relevant responsibility, not only as they see it but as their team sees it. They have to keep listening.
- The constraints, obstacles, challenges of their respective responsibilities, together with the negative perceptions their people may have at any given moment, why? Because these impact directly on their attitude, which has a direct correlation with their performance. Again this must be viewed not only from the leader’s angle; his team must always be part of identifying and addressing these.
- The positive opportunities, options and strengths at their disposal, together with the positive perceptions that exist. Also for reasons of attitude, to remain sane and positively focused on solutions and even on ways to miraculously leapfrog their pressured environment into proactive space where they achieve profitable movement.
- Exactly where they are leading their people to, the destiny. This must be on every agenda and always top of the mind.
- The clear and relevant plan or strategy that will take them there and continually raise the believability levels of followers that they can get there.
- The relevant resources and structures needed to follow the plan towards the destiny. If this is not done, structures will get out of hand, irrelevant and expensive and will consume energy and should be expended in other areas.

- The above six points need to be evaluated together with the leader's team, on a regular basis and in accordance with the pace of change of their environment.
- Only when it is felt that one is on top the issues raised above may any adjustment where relevant and also to act tough when appropriate.
- The leader needs to continually focus and re – focus the organization on the vision and destiny of where the organization is moving to.”

CONCLUSION

This paper is by no means all encompassing in respect of leadership. Its concentration has been on leadership within the public service of South Africa and its crucial importance to development of organizations in general. Leaders must be in a position to culturise, haitualize or institutionalize the processes discussed on all levels of organizations. These are some of the realities under which leaders must operate and if they do not master these steps discussed, they will become crisis managers and feel out of or lose control. Leaders will lose their passion, resulting in people losing their passion, which can only move one way very fast, failure.

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