

QUALITY LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

To fill the need for leaders and change agents throughout all levels of federal agencies, public sector human resource managers are now called on to develop innovative leadership development programs. Developing leaders for the 21st century requires attention to workforce trends as well as flexibility and creativity. Federal government leadership concerns of public agency managers, including creative thinking, collaboration, and cross-organizational team building and leading for results.

Keywords: Leadership, Leadership in public sector, Strategies and Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership is integral to organizational effectiveness. Effective leaders create positive organizational cultures, strengthen motivation, clarify mission and organizational objectives, and steer organizations to more productive and high performing outcomes. The demands placed on the economies of developing countries make it necessary that public service attain the economic self-sufficiency it needs for autonomy in its operations. However, the economic gains are realized at a cost. There is always a social cost when human beings are reduced to the level of commodities. Thus there will be resistance to modernizing the public service by emphasizing efficiency and effectiveness and the people will have to be reoriented. In most cases the cumbersome nature of public service institutions makes reform of any kind difficult to effect.

Emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness has dominated the reform efforts of most developing countries. Various initiatives, ranging from reducing the size of the public service to introducing performance management systems, have been considered. Leadership plays a crucial role in the two factors believed to employee satisfaction – utilizing employee skills and teamwork – developing and sustaining effective leaders for the government of the 21st century is clearly fundamental.

This article contributes to the discussion of leadership excellence in contemporary public sector management in developing countries and in a globalized environment. It is built on the premise that developing countries, in their effort to modernize the public service, share the challenges of competing goals and inadequate resources. The discussion will examine the demands made on public service leaders in the new millennium and the strategies they apply to address these challenges. The article also proposes new strategies and practices to promote the development and maintenance of a high caliber of leadership in the public sector.

Kotter argues that many change efforts have failed because organizations are busy trying to manage change instead of leading it. He proposes a comprehensive eight-step action plan that emphasizes the need for a vision, the creation and communication of short-term wins and the empowerment of employees for leaders caught up in rapid change situations. Kotter also explains the difference between management and leadership. The mandate of management is to minimize risk and maintain the status quo through procedures, rules and regulations.

Stacey refers to the concept of ordinary management where the situation in an organization is characterized by relative predictability and certainty. Furthermore,

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ordinary management is practiced in formal groups that require the leader to arrive with particular skills developed beforehand. The required personality, skills and styles, or competencies, can be identified in advance since they depend upon the situation. In this situation, leadership is confined to a concern for securing efficient performance of known tasks as opposed to effectiveness.

Change compels managers to engage in a paradigm shift and apply what Stacey refers to as extraordinary management techniques. Extraordinary management enables leaders to operate in uncertainty and to apply ingenuity and different techniques to the new challenges that they face in the 21st century. It is a process that involves 'questioning and shattering paradigms, and then creating new ones. It is a process which depends critically upon contradiction and tension'. Stacey argues that successful organizations result from leaders who thrive on chaos and take pride in finding innovative and creative solutions. Finally, organizations in the 21st century need more leaders than managers. The challenges facing these leaders include:

- Leading organizations in an environment of dwindling resources and increased demands for quality service, sustainable development and retention of skills for organizational continuity;
- Cultivating a performance management culture with emphasis on results;
- Upholding good governance despite a hostile and ever - changing environment;
- Instituting effective staff retention strategies amid a change fatigue syndrome; and
- Keeping pace with advances in information technology and workforce renewal.

Furthermore, because of the un adapted reform initiatives and globalization, developing countries in particular have to deal with increased poverty, low performing employees, corruption and an acute shortage of financial, material and human resources.

One fundamental reality is that if developing nations are to succeed in their quest for excellence, it is critical to have a deliberate policy to develop public sector leadership with the potential to strike a synergistic balance among all competing goals in a reforming economy. The public sector must assume a strategic leadership position for national developmental purposes.

Strategies to address public sector leadership challenges

Competency refers here to the set of behaviour patterns that an incumbent needs to bring to a position to perform its tasks and functions competently. Specific skills, specialized knowledge demands and attributes that are considered to be important in performing tasks to the requires standards underpin competencies. Training and skills development of the current crop of prospective public sector managers is especially important because public organizations have traditionally concentrated on developing managers who can operate in an environment guided by specific rules and procedures.

The need for change raises the question of which managerial or leadership skills are appropriate for the public sector in the new millennium. To initiate, anticipate, monitor, understand, cope with and manage the complex processes of change demands various abilities which are difficult to analyze and describe, let alone teach. It is probable that those involved in the training and development of managers will have to look beyond the book and the formal classroom if they are to make meaningful contributions to organizational change and development.

Leadership competency in the 21st century should focus more on cultivating and encouraging the attainment of survival skills, which basically enable leaders to adapt to any situation and still remain flexible. These skills are of a technical, human and conceptual nature and derive from the fundamental generic skills that go with management ability. Successful leaders continually challenge the status quo by scanning the environment and are capable

of operating in uncertainty but still achieving results.

The trend whereby most organizations are investing heavily in the training retraining and development of their employees comes in the wake of the realization that people are the most valuable resource. In designing leadership development programmes, infusion of specific competencies must form the foundation of human resource management initiatives. It has also become imperative that leaders participate in international organizations whose core business is training and development. This will enable them and other employees to keep track of innovations and current trends in human resource management and to exploit technology as a medium for self development.

Most developing countries face challenges about how to plan their workforce to ensure continuity at all levels but particularly at the leadership levels. These challenges include finding and retaining qualified employees, staffing for the future and effective utilization of human resources challenges that have become more acute because of an increasingly mobile and enterprising workforce.

With unprecedented globalization, it is difficult to differentiate between the skills needed in developed and developing countries as nations find common challenges in human resources management and development. Dessler envisages for the 21st century a global workforce with increased organizational uncertainties and different training and developmental needs. The public leader's work has been drastically transformed; hence the urgent need to prepare leaders with the ability to cope with and adopt to change. Strategies for training and developing leaders must take account of the ever - changing environment by encouraging more thinking outside of the box. Several possible leadership strategies are as follows:

- Focusing on outcomes
- Reward and recognition strategies
- Shared vision

- Innovation, creativity and double - loop learning
- Organizational networks

LEADERSHIP AND COMPETENCIES

Nadler and Tushman identify three behaviours that are characteristic of leadership activities in complex organizational change.

Charismatic Leadership - the first one is charismatic leadership comprised of envisioning, energizing and enabling. Charismatic leaders possess a special quality that enables them to mobilize and sustain activity within an organization through specific personal actions combined with perceived personal characteristics.

Instrumental Leadership - involves building competent teams, clarifying required behaviour, building in measurements, and administering rewards and punishments. So that individuals perceive that behaviour consistent with the change is essential for them to achieve both their own goals and those of the organization.

Spreading the gospel of change through leadership - is a strategy that enables coalition building by identifying potential allies in the organization and developing their leadership ability so that they can spread the gospel of change.

Successful leaders involve various stakeholders made up of their senior team, senior management and leadership throughout the organization styles and develop a communication strategy capable of supporting desired change outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This article has identified major issues impacting on leadership in the 21st century and explained how a careful mix of practices and strategies, appropriately applied, can make a difference in an organization's efforts to keep up with the ever-changing environment. The major conclusion is that

people are to meeting current and emerging challenges; hence the need to involve them in the reform process and continually equip them with appropriate skills to facilitate the building of leadership competencies capable or responding to 21st century challenges and opportunities. The development of leadership competencies must not be confined to rank as defined by the organization's structure.

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