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Introduction

The development of leadership has always been vital for organizations because of the constant challenges that must be dealt with. Leadership is a process whereby a person influences others to achieve a set of common objectives within an organization. Leadership and authority can be often confused with each other. That is because authority describes the assigned power one person has over another; however, having authority does not make someone a leader—it makes him or her “a boss”. Effective leaders have the ability to cause followers to want to achieve desired outcomes; therefore, the exercise of power becomes less important (Hancock, 2012). Because of numerous existing theories, it is difficult to define leadership as it is usually “equated with the numerous “fads” of management literature, which emphasize on techniques for successful business organization” (Andersen & Ashton, 2003).

This paper’s objective is to present the Adaptive Leadership Theory by analyzing how adaptive leadership is portrayed in the film called “Lean on Me”. The paper is a literature review project based on textual analysis. Secondary research has been conducted in order to find out what adaptive leadership means, how adaptive capabilities can be build and what the adaptive leader's role is.

The project’s structure is as follows: The second section focuses on the adaptive leadership theory introduced by R. Heifetz and analyzed by other experts. There is a third part where it is shown how Joe Clark in the film “Lean on Me” acts according to Heifetz’s model of adaptive leadership, and finally the conclusion of the project is presented.

Theory of Adaptive Leadership

In 1994, Ron Heifetz introduced the model of adaptive leadership. According to him, leadership is neither a position nor it is based on authority. The dangerous assumption that "leaders are born and not made" fosters "self-delusion and irresponsibility" (20). For that reason, he believed that leadership is a practice that can be pursued by anyone. As a result, an adaptive leader is one that focuses in the efficiency of the adaptive work which "requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior" (22). According to him, the adaptive work is the required knowledge that someone should have in order to be able to address various conflicts because of the values that people have and the reality they face. Consequently, the adaptive work forces the need for a change that will encourage the necessary actions required to disrupt the status quo and incite a further push towards change.

Adaptive leadership is linked not only with the leadership theory but also with the scientific theory. That is because, according to biology, adaptation is "a process of change or modification by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment" (OED, 2015). This definition can be closely linked to adaptive leadership as a leader tries to make an organization or a society survive in a constantly changing environment by making adjustments to it. Consequently, a successful adaptation is the recognition that there is a need for a loss when change occurs, and that in order for a change to be successful time is of the essence.

Heifetz focused significantly on the challenge of building an adaptive capability in individuals, organizations and societies as a whole. According to his framework, individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in environments that are challenging (Cambridge Leadership

Associates, n.d.). They go through a process of change that makes them understand the practices needed for their future survival. At first, they diagnose the essentials and cause real challenges to the status quo. After that, they try to develop and test various practices in order to find which one will better benefit them in the future. Finally, when they determine the best and most effective practice, they integrate it in their future approaches. Consequently, adaptive leadership is the purposeful evolution in real time that creates the capabilities that will match the aims and desires of the individuals or the organizations. In adaptive leadership, if a system is broken, it must be diagnosed and cured by taking risks and challenging the status quo in order to stimulate the necessary change (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009, 14).

It becomes understandable that the work of an adaptive leader is not an easy one. That is because, when the required change challenges reality, uncertainty may arise which may lead to people feeling threatened. Therefore, the leader has to find a way that will foster change and simultaneously embrace the uncertainty (Torres, Reeves, & Love, 2010). In the book *Leadership on the Line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading* (2002) that R. Heifetz coauthored with M. Linsky, a guide is provided that helps leaders develop the skills necessary to take the people outside their comfort zone and help them with addressing and assessing the toughest challenges. In other words, in adaptive leadership, the leader is the actual agent of change. The leader is the one that mobilizes the people to deal with very tough challenges that will eventually give them the ability to thrive and become better (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009, 14).

Adaptive Leadership Portrayed in “Lean on Me”

A distinct example of an adaptive leader is reflected in the movie "Lean on Me" (1989) directed by J. G. Avildsen. Morgan Freeman, as the school principal Joe Clark, shows the ability of a leader to bring about change in a challenging school environment, that of East Side High in New Jersey. As the movie is based on a true story, the audience witnesses the challenges that Joe Clark had to face. Those challenges were related to drug and crime problems, as well as students' failure to pass basic tests. His motivation and desire to help his students made him succeed in creating a respectable high school where the teachers are devoted and committed to their work.

At first, Clark was an authoritarian leader as far as it concerns the teachers. However for the students not dismissed, he was a "lone warrior" and an individual that his "heroism and brilliance enabled him to lead the way" (Heifetz, 1994, 251). He was the one that enabled the students to thrive and become better. He did not "abandon them" as many others before him did. And that is because he was a true leader. He was the one that had to "bear the weight of the problems, for a time" (251) until they were ready to bear them on their own. For Heifetz, "even though the weight of carrying people's hopes and pains falls mainly, for a time, on one person's shoulders, leadership cannot be exercised alone" and that is because it will be a "heroic suicide" (268). Indeed that was what happened. Being an adaptive leader he realized that the system was broken, therefore he “cured” it by taking the risk of expelling all the students that could not be “saved”. Of course, as every change has a risk, Clark was in danger of losing his job as some parents were conspiring against him in order to get him fired.

Clark, at some point, realized that he could not do everything by himself; thus, he started to cooperate with the teachers. Some of them even helped him find his own blind spots and improve as a leader and a person. The cooperation towards a common goal benefitted significantly the students and saved the high school after all. Also, according to Heifetz "those who lead take responsibility for the holding environment", and that is what Joe Clark did (250). As an agent of change, he was the one who went to jail because of his effort to protect his students. Parents of expelled students sued him for his extreme but efficient and effective practices; therefore that was the risk of curing the system and challenging the status quo in order to stimulate the necessary change (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009, 14). However, being a true inspiration to his students, they were the ones that helped him get out of jail in the end.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in every aspect of our everyday lives, both in social and business environments, leadership theories are abundant and applicable. The moment a team that has common goals is formed, the same moment a leader has to arise in order to inspire, support and lead the way to achieve specific objectives. Being a leader does not mean having power but rather inspiring people and leading them in order to achieve common goals.

Leadership is not about giving commands because, as Joe Clark eventually realized, authoritarianism as a practice is not effective. He became a truly adaptive leader when he understood the real needs of his students, and the school as a whole, and managed to fulfill them. As an adaptive leader, he was a true inspiration for his students. He was the one that mobilized

them in order to deal with their challenges. He made them believe in themselves and thrive. He realized that the high school's system was broken and he had to "cure" it by taking all the necessary risks and often by challenging the status quo in order to stimulate the change needed for the wellbeing of the students and the high school.

Finally, the paper had some limitations, such as the lack of primary research and the further analysis of the film. Moreover, due to word limitation, the only leadership model that has been analyzed was adaptive leadership introduced by Ron Heifetz.

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