

Lead from Within

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Motto: "Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Abstract: *The world nowadays is different, through a series of essential steps, from the one we had been familiar with for a long time. The crisis has revealed not only the flaws within the dominant economic model, but also the flaws in our society. The workforce needs a change in the leaders' mentality. Leadership, more than ever, implies self awareness and self-control. The people nowadays have a great need for integrity. They want to be able to trust their leaders and to enjoy their leaders' trust. There is a need for the reconstruction of confidence. The present paper outlines a leadership alternative – the spiritual leadership, presenting this model's advantages and principles.*

Key words: crisis, leader, leadership based on spiritual values, trust

Introduction

Leadership is a hot topic. We all want to know what is new in leadership. But since we are talking so much about leadership,

what new things can we still come up with? How can we still keep this topic fresh? Very often it is difficult to notice what is new. And it is difficult because the fundamental features remain unchanged: as the time passes,

the behavior and the actions of an effective leader seem well-known because they are so commonplace. What is not so commonplace, however, is our workplace. (Daskal, 2012).

The world nowadays is different, through a series of essential aspects, from the one we had been familiar with for a long time. What is changing is our culture. Things are different today from how they were five, ten or twenty years ago. The workplace culture, also, is completely different. First of all, technology has changed everything. Information is instantly available, ideas travel fast and far. With a workforce almost permanently online, the line between the work time and the personal time is very fuzzy. The internet has shaken our world to the ground. We can have connections (and interactions) with a human resource that is increasingly heterogeneous. The variety of cultures and nationalities has changed the professional environment, so that the context for leadership is completely different. (Daskal, 2012). What is the new reality of leadership? We know that, at least, we are dealing with a different human resource: now it is a diverse, dispersed one, a human resource which generally has an increased need of communication and with new expectations regarding the coordination and the specific collaboration. How can we capitalize on it at the desired efficiency? How can we use communication as a support to guide them and to satisfy their needs?

On the other hand, "the crisis has revealed not only the flaws in the dominant economic model, but also the flaws in our society. The senseless pursuit of profit and raising self interest at the highest level of priority seem not to have led to the hoped for prosperity, but they have definitely contributed to the creation of the moral deficit". (Stiglitz, 2010).

Young was considering in 2009 that the present crisis represented the most recent and the most serious consequence of neglecting ethics and responsibility in the decision-making process in the business environment, and Gore and Blood stated in 2008 that the market economy is at a crossroads at present. In order for it to go on, major transformation is needed. They believe that the following causes are fundamental for the recently occurred crash: short-term thinking, poor management and set of rules, wrong compensations, lack of transparency, mediocre leadership and an inoperable business culture.

The workforce needs a change in the leaders' mentality. There is a need for an open-minded leadership and for a leadership with open heart. Today, leadership needs to be born within us.

Leadership today, more than ever, implies self-knowledge and self-control. The workforce is requesting authenticity and transparency from its leaders.

People have a huge need for integrity. They want to be able to trust their leaders and to enjoy their leaders' trust. (Daskal, 2012).

1. A Crisis of Confidence

"The spreading of distrust in a society... imposes a kind of tax on all kinds of economic activity, a tax that societies with a high level of trust don't have to pay". Francis Fukuyama

Stephen Covey and Bob Whitman (2010) were stating that in turbulent times the level of trust is falling. Stock exchanges are crashing due to a lack of trust. People are losing faith in their own organizations. When driving on an unsafe road, one that is full of traps,

everybody brakes. It's why they are calling it "slowdown".

A crisis of trust gives rise to fear. Fear and anxiety lead to a loss of focus. And the loss of focus endangers the implementation of strategy.

Trust always affects two measurable results: speed and cost. When trust decreases, speed decreases and the costs rise. Lack of trust slows everything down. Sales diminish, customers go away and the team members are discouraged or fired. Lack of trust has steep costs. If you are untrustworthy, people will suddenly refuse to do business with you and your income will decrease.

Lack of trust has taken on global proportions. A crisis of trust has overwhelmed the economy. We have witnessed the fall of great corporations due to a lack of trust. We have witnessed an unprecedented lack of trust on the financial markets. We have witnessed a global economy slowing down to the point where the flow of credit has completely frozen.

Another authority on trust, Stephen M. R. Covey, phrases it like this: "The serious, practical impact of the economy of trust is that in many relationships and interactions, we pay a hidden tax on mistrust... Lack of trust doubles the cost of business. I consider that, just like the tax created by mistrust is real, measurable and very high, the dividend of high trust is also very real, quantifiable and enormous... When trust is high, the dividend you get is a performance multiplier, boosting and improving every dimension of your organization."

The competitive advantage on the market is held by the most trustworthy companies. They get high trust dividends. The moral authority comes from two commitments:

acting with an unshakeable integrity and with honorable intentions.

2. Leadership Based on Spiritual Values

Before proposing a definition of spirituality in leadership, we must examine the meaning of the two key words of the issue: spirit / spiritual and leader. A dictionary definition for spirit is "what is traditionally believed as the vital principle, or the driving force of all the living beings". In this sense, the spirit is the deeper meaning, the sense, the significance. Richard Wolman (2001) stated that, by „spiritual“ I understand that search, as old as the world itself, that man has started since the beginning of time in order to find a connection with something bigger, more profound and more certain than his own self – a connection with our souls, with our neighbour, with the world of history and nature, with the indivisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of life. A simple definition for leader is: "somebody who shows the way forward; person convincing others to follow a course of action."

Therefore, the leader is one who influences his followers to think and behave in a certain way. The combination of the two terms suggests that the leader who has embedded spiritual values in his approach will give a deeper meaning to his group's actions, which will end up having a significance beyond automatism and immediate perception (Barnett, 2006).

Some people are uncomfortable with the word spiritual and they prefer to talk more about values and ethics when they are trying to describe the same things that others would call spiritual. However, there are some

people who will talk about God as being their business partner. (McLaughlin, 2004).

Spirituality offers substantial implications for management and leadership. The way in which we rule depends on the kind of people we are. Spirituality is not a certain way of leading. If it exists in our nature, it will resurface in the leadership process.

Management is a challenge for spirituality. The connection is not intrinsic: it requires a lot of effort and care in order for it to be developed. The practices of management generate feedback; this in turn, changes our own perception on existence and on our spirituality.

There is plenty of evidence that the managers' interest in the spiritual values has started to grow. Kerns (2002) signals a large number of sites and books about the business that deals with spirituality and a large number of 'business gurus' that hold seminars related to this topic. Patricia Aburdene says in her recent book, *Megatrends 2010*, that the focus on spirituality in business is becoming so prevalent that one can say it is "the biggest megatrend today". She claims that more and more people are making choices at their workplace as "consumers focussed on spiritual values" and that the power of spirituality has a bigger and bigger impact on our personal lives and it is spreading in organizations in order to create a moral transformation in them.

White (2006) considers that the academic world will no longer have the choice and will become 'visionary in relation to new generations of students and their need for spiritual development, which will have to be stimulated in school.'

The spiritual leadership implies the implementation of spiritual principles and

values at the workplace. The spiritual leader must understand the importance of his employees finding a purpose in their work and must be able to discover the human being in the person of his employee. (Barnett, 2006)

How can he do this? the above-mentioned author asks herself. By answering, together with his employees, questions such as these:

- Who are we, as an organization?
- Is our work valuable?
- What values do we respect?
- What are we leaving behind?

A spiritual leader doesn't take only his position seriously, but also the responsibilities it comes with. Spirituality in leadership implies a focus on people, not on hierarchies; it is less about the formalization and more about transformation and diversity; less control and more partnership, collaboration and inspiration.

Kouzes and Posner (2011) suggest that: "The leaders we admire do not place themselves at the centre, it is others that place them there. They do not seek other people's attention, but they give their attention to others. They don't focus on satisfying their own goals and desires; they are looking for ways to answer to their team members' needs and interests".

Truly successful leaders firstly understand the needs of their team, and only then do they present their own needs. Then they make up a plan which will take both aspects into consideration. In this way, the expectations are clear, the compromises are negotiated, and thus the team goes further on a road that has no ambiguities.

Dee Hock, the founder and CEO emeritus of the Visa International company says that, if you want to be a leader you will need

to invest at least 50% of your time in your own person – goals, ethics, principles, motivation, conduct - at least 20% in leading those under your authority and 15% in leading your partners. “If you don’t understand that you are working for your employees who have no title, you don’t understand anything about leadership. You only know tyranny”, Dee Hock states. (J. Ridderstrale, K. Nordstrom, 2007)

Somebody might ask: what is wrong about being popular or rich? There’s nothing wrong, but when this is the only goal of our existence, we get attached to these “external” things, which are, due to their very nature, transient. As long as we build our existence on these ephemeral values, we fall down either when we lose them, or when we feel threatened by another popular (or rich) figure. Our (extrinsic) fight for wealth or fame brings with it an unbearable amount of stress, not to mention an unhealthy legacy for future leaders. A spiritual leader may have material ambitions, this is all right as long as he doesn’t cross the boundary of personal ethics and superior principles. When one crosses that line, it’s no more ambition, it becomes greed. If you don’t succeed at centering your life on stable principles and you are repeatedly deviating from them, it is no more enthusiasm or passion, it becomes restlessness and instability. Few people understand the reality behind the scenes: behind the smiling mask and the „winner” pose, a leader with controversial principles is never happy. Deep within him, he is always worried about keeping up the appearances, about plotting against his enemies and about fighting to keep his position. An authentic leader never takes the flatterers seriously. He knows that people are generally inconstant, and in time

praise may become critique. Glory is ephemeral: in a moment success may change to failure. (Swami, 2012).

What makes a truly great leader ? Some say it is his ability to make hard decisions. Others say that it is his ability to command, control and inspire loyalty.

However, the top leader has first of all vision – not any kind of vision, but one that we may appreciate as being intellectual, emotional and spiritual.

Intelligent Management from the spiritual point of view can be developed by applying 12 principles (Zohar, 2005):

1. Self-Awareness – Knowing what I believe in, value, and deeply motivates me
2. Vision and Value Led – Acting from principles and deep beliefs, and living accordingly
3. Positive Use of Adversity – Learning and growing from mistakes, setbacks, and suffering
4. Holistic – Seeing larger patterns, relationships, and connections; having a sense of belonging
5. Compassion – Having the quality of “feeling-with” and deep empathy
6. Celebration of Diversity – Regarding other people for their differences, not despite them
7. Field – Independent – Standing against the crowd and having one’s convictions
8. Ask Fundamental “Why” Question – Needing to understand things and get to the bottom of them
9. Ability to Reframe – Standing back from a situation/problem and seeing the bigger picture: seeing problems in wider context
10. Spontaneity – Living in and being responsive to the moment

11. Sense of Vocation – Feeling called upon to serve, to give something back

12. Humility – Having the sense of being a player in a larger drama, of one's true place in the world

A leader who applies the 12 principles of spiritual intelligence, can provide the kind of inspiration and energy that it releases.

3. The Servant Leadership – Influence on the Character

Just like an archer, who, before releasing his arrow, calmly stretches his bow and carefully calculates his moves, so is also a leader before launching a grand project or before engaging in a major effort, he has to take a few steps back and to build a foundation of simple and solid principles. Quite often, the obsession with success shields the principles; many neglect or even violate ethical codes in order to fulfill their ambitious goals. It is tempting to think big, to try Herculean labours and to burn stages in order to achieve rapid growth and success (Swami,2012).

The positive and sustainable influence is obtainable when people trust their leaders, when the individuals perceive the leader as being honorable. If the leader's vision and character generates trust and acceptance from his subordinates and awakes in them the natural desire of being led, then leadership is successful.

How can someone become such a leader? A leader with the fundamental mentality to serve: a cause, a group of people, his company – exerts the greatest influence.

We all know this deep within us, and we have seen its outcome any time we have applied this principle in our personal relationships and we ourselves have been attracted

and conquered by those who have helped us selflessly: our parents, teachers, etc; in this way, we were much closer to accepting and adopting their ideas. (Swami,2012).

A leader who truly wants to “serve” and who is in a mission which is in accordance with the good principles attracts followers who naturally like and follow him.

Some management gurus sometimes use the “servant” principle as an efficient leadership technique. But we have to be cautious! We are not talking about a mere manipulation device: it is a special feature which cannot be produced on the spot with over-used texts. You cannot fake sincerity for too long. The real character gets revealed too quickly, and this is especially true for a leader who is always facing difficult situations, who shows the kind of material he's made of.

If we meditate seriously, we will understand that the others have the same needs, desires and fears – either physical, emotional or spiritual ones – as we ourselves have. By deeply internalizing this to the level that enables us to apply it, this is the secret of an exceptional leadership.

4. Spirituality at the Workplace

Spirituality in leadership cannot be understood outside the general framework represented by the workplace. Many employees regard the workplace as a way of finding meaning and as a social component.

Nowadays the workplace is being shaped as a “community”, while other communities are disintegrating because of the change in lifestyles. It is a common thing nowadays for neighbours not to socialize with each other, and generally people are lonely, even in small towns, without feeling

they belong to a community (Barnett, 2006).

In this context it is easy to explain the tendency to consider that the workmates are the most convenient social partners. Friendships, sport activities, even marriages are common occurrences at the workplace. Thus, the workplace is becoming more than just a place where people earn their living. It is becoming a place where they can be recognized as individuals, where they can find friends, share common ideas or hobbies. This reality is very favourable for leaders, and they should encourage and develop it. If the local leader possesses a strong spiritual sense, which is able to influence his attitude, emotions and behavior, then it is very likely for him to be able to influence his employees in their quest for finding the moral way in their lives. Some claim even that these are precisely some of the most spectacular features of leadership: finally giving meaning to people, the feeling of being part of a community, that they belong to a group which has principles and a purpose (Barnett, 2006). This point of view suggests that the spiritual way of leading is less concerned with directives and with a command algorithm, and more with defining the organization values and with helping its members to perceive their contribution to a set of valid and valuable goals.

Above all, people are constantly searching for meaning and purpose in life. And they will find them where they spend most of their time, i.e. at work. They want to work for a good organization, one that treats them and everyone else with respect. Research also shows that organizations which have learned to meet the spiritual needs of all stakeholders and employees are more profitable and productive. But equally important, they are happier places to work in (Mitroff, 2008).

Nowadays, people no longer want to leave their fundamental values at the enterprise gateway. Fogel (2000), a Nobel Prize laureate in 1993, is one of the economists who have stressed the importance of spirituality in the new economy. He identified fifteen vital spiritual resources that include concepts such as: a perception of the purpose, a perception of the opportunity, a sense of the idea of community, strong family morals, a strong work ethic and high self esteem.

The main challenge of spirituality is to overcome the false perception that spirituality is a taboo and that it does not apply to most organizations. Rhodes (2006) emphasizes that 'workplace spirituality' has become a respectable topic, discussed in management textbooks.

Although currently there are no data available, not even empirical ones, that could reveal in what way a particular approach to spirituality has proven more effective than others in promoting spirituality at the workplace, two approaches have been outlined as being closer to the concept of spiritual leadership: the servant leadership and the transformational leadership.

However, the contemporary models of leadership are especially focussed on the escalation of the force approach and on the verticalization and consolidation of hierarchy.

5. The Benefits of Spirituality in Leadership

There is very little research regarding this phenomenon, so we can't make any measurable statements on the benefits (and the costs) of spirituality in leadership. Still, we do know enough to be able to outline a few potential benefits. From the point of view of

the subordinates, the incorporation of spirituality in leadership has all the chances of building a workplace where everybody goes to with pleasure. As far as the organization is concerned, the incorporation of spirituality leads to trust, to a positive and stable atmosphere, in which people feel support and where they are themselves more responsible and scrupulous. (Barnett, 2006).

The incorporation of ethics and spiritual values in the workplace may also lead to a growth in the level of employee retention, to customer loyalty and to brand reputation. All these will grow the organization performance. But, again, attention must be paid to the natural, not pragmatic way in which the spiritual component is to be developed.

Such a leadership perspective is not yet mainstream. It is necessary a change in mentality, in the set of values and principles of leaders, of those who provide finance, of teachers and mentors who form them. The idea of perspective must be taken into account, the idea of the long-term effect.

We can imagine two scenarios: the first one, business as it is now – short-term interest, short-term gains, isolationist thinking; the second one – a business culture centered on deeper purposes that will generate a decent profit while working on the common good. The vital problem is how do we move from one scenario to the other?

If one wants to change systems, one must first change human behavior. But human behavior does not change easily. To get a real transformation one must change the incentives that induce the behavior. This is the responsibility of a visionary leader. Nowadays business, politics, education and society in general are driven by four negative motivations: fear, greed, anger and too much

importance given to self. When we cannot control these negative emotions, we have less confidence in ourselves and in other people, and strive to act from a tiny place within ourselves.

We can change our motivations in more positive ones if we are inspired to do this.

Conclusions

Many of the considerations above seem truisms, that is how obvious they are. At the same time, they also seem considerably utopian. Because every time we try to connect objective categories with the subjectivity of human nature, we are always ambushed by the traps of idealistic naiveties: Communism, as a social, economic and political solution – with its obvious nefarious consequences, is the best example.

At the same time, we can notice that imperceptibly, humanity has passed to another state, from a phase where it was riven in distinct systems, still relatively sparsely populated, to a system that tends to be unique, heavily populated, with an entropy that is totally different from that of the systems that made it up, a system governed by new laws and whose evolution is highly unpredictable. It is a system with a spirituality in transition and, for its evolution and stability it is probably important, if not decisive, that opinion makers, mentors and teachers insist on the explicit presentation and consolidation of moral principles (especially for the economic vectors), principles which, in fact, regarded from the historical point of view, have actually already saved and taken the human specie forward.

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