

Unconventional Leadership

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Abstract: From the perspective of leadership change symbolizes the existence of the organization. Most assuredly, this is not a matter of change at all costs, but rather of increasing organizational performance and training people. As leadership is a creative activity, in this paper, we aim to show that the unconventional is closely connected to creativity. From the perspective of interpersonal relationships the leader has to continually create contexts in which people can express themselves. On the one hand, the success of leaders is contingent on the moment the development of their personal career starts. On the other hand, the team is thus given the opportunity to develop. In order for people in an organization to acknowledge a leader's point of view, it is essential that the latter be compelling. From our point of view, most unconventional leaders possess an informal educational component which allows them to reveal their true potential without any constraints. When we talk about potential we have the native constituent in mind, whence we can adduce a few terms that define realities such as: multiple intelligence, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, adaptive intelligence, spiritual intelligence. The examples that we share in this paper, regarding the development of projects and organizational systems, state the ways in which unconventional leadership can occur. The unconventional leader will be ingenious, innovative, creative, charismatic, a finalizer and an example in the eyes of the team.

Key words: unconventional, creativity, leadership, innovation, network.

JEL classification: M100 Business Administration; General

Introduction

Leadership suggests a constant concern for modern organizations. According to some researchers, leadership is not an ability that we are born with, therefore it is something that we acquire and later develop. However, others are of the opinion that it is a native ability. Leadership has to be the perfect combination between vision, motivation and passion. Landsberg claims that change is triggered by and diffuses from leadership (Landsberg, 2008, pp. 9-10). According to him, leadership uses creativity, thus generating innovative ideas, produces a fundamental change in interpersonal relationships, contends with unfavorable opinions by embracing proposals that are helpful to the system and is aware of propitious moments to strengthen and refine the team, the organization and oneself. The present article seeks to point out the important role played by the unconventional in the expression of leadership. The unconventional leadership becomes a way of identifying opportunities in contexts in which one would get poor results if the classical leading modes were used. The unconventional may surprise, and yet, it does not stand for anarchy. It is rather a happy combination of rigor and creativity. The examples that we provide in this paper are related to our own experiences and they put forward projects where manifestations of leadership can be found and in which creativity and innovation are constantly used. The projects that illustrate the way in which the unconventional leadership manifests are as follows: Team Work (Professional Association of Students, University of Bucharest), COSLUB (Centre of Organizational Strategies and Leadership, University of Bucharest) AERS (Scientific Centre of Business, Ethics and

Social Responsibility), CARO and CAEN (MA programmes in Business Consulting, with teaching conducted in Romanian and English, respectively), SPHER-AA (experimental education system. Chris Guillebeau proves in his paper "Happiness of pursuit" (Guillebeau 2014, pp. 11-12) that the main-spring of innovation, that is, that of unconventional leadership, lies in the passion of "delving" into reality. He argues that "Many quests lead to an alchemy-like transformation, either with respect to the quest itself or to the person undertaking it. Once you start down the road to adventure, you don't always know where you'll end up." All the examples that he puts forward refer to operating modes that are connected, and to the striking positioning of the one leading in connection to reality. This constant change in positioning gives one the opportunity to analyze a context from different angles. In point of fact, the unconventional does not entail relinquishing the conventional altogether, but aims to detect forms of manifestation of the system outside the rules, however not losing touch with the rules. In addition to that, the unconventional leadership brings about a change in mentalities, which could lead to certain risks, conflicting states and punctual costs. It is essential that one should not dispense with classical models altogether.

The aims of our paper are to briefly present the theoretical framework of unconventional leadership and to exemplify the case of the Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest. To the extent that the unconventional represents a form of proper leadership we aim to put forth some methods that can be useful in the training of future managers. The methods will be based upon the experiences that will be discussed in the paper.

Unconventional leadership: the case of the Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest

The exercise of power does not constitute only a form of leadership manifestation at the highest level. The purpose of leadership in great organizations is to produce leaders, networks of individuals and systems. The different perspectives of members of the organization may define, by fusing them together, a reaction that might prevent making a risky decision.

In his paper "Simply Effective", Ron Ashkensas states that one of the highest difficulties a manager will encounter is setting objectives that ensure maximum performance, and that this generates an unnecessary complexity (Ashkensas, 2010, p. 124-127). In this respect he identifies a series of common mistakes that tend to occur in the process of setting objectives and these mistakes will arise even in the best of organizations: "back away from expectations"- setting bold objectives without constantly monitoring them; "engage in charades"- tacit acceptance of the fact that the objectives may not be achieved; "accept seesaw trades"- lack of determination when dealing with employees, regarding prioritization of activities; "set vague or distant goals"- focusing on long-term objectives which are not clearly defined, thus hindering their fulfillment; "don't establish consequences"- not sanctioning those who have not succeeded in fulfilling the objective leads to mistakes such as these not being taken seriously in the future; "set too many goals"- setting so many objectives that each employee can take on any responsibility they choose; "allow deflection to preparations and studies"- delay in the pursuit of objectives in order to collect further data and information.

Given that such problems do not occur (only) in "underachieving" organizations, but also in the ones that are generally considered examples, it becomes clear that the problem is systematic rather than punctual.

We believe therefore that it is important for leaders to become more open to using unconventional methods. Leadership can highlight the power of diversity, the potential of autonomous teams, the authority willing to "orchestrate" the various interests and the capacity of the unconventional to provide great and productive solutions. As organizations heavily rely on new ideas and methods, unconventional leadership plays a key role in today's business world.

From the perspective of practical experiences, we have developed this approach within the Team Work system (Marinescu and Toma, 2012). Ever since the day we founded this association of students (<http://www.teamwork.org.ro>), 13 years ago, we have decided to form future leaders for all fields of activity (economic, social, cultural, political). We have always sought to give emphasis to the potential of diversity. Therefore, we have brought into this association students from all 20 faculties within the University of Bucharest. The students have been working together on various projects, each providing unique insights specific to their expertise and area of specialization. In the process of recruitment and selection of students who have blossomed within this organization we endeavored to identify the specific skills of individuals who have the potential to become a volunteer, a leader, or an entrepreneur. In the diagram below one can see the network in which Team Work has developed, as well as how the association represents a meeting point between different

environments (academic, family, state institutions, businesses, etc.), each devising their own visions, priorities and abilities.

The challenges that the business environment but also the world in general face nowadays, do not accept anymore solutions generated by comfortable and conventional explanations. As a consequence, it becomes important to answer a question about our attitude towards logic: "are we willing to defy logic?". It is clear that by asking ourselves that, we do not purport to support the removal of this type of thinking from the decision-making process and we do not intend to diminish its importance. We simply wish to point out the fact that there is a danger, that of the "trodden path", that most companies, organizations and groups appear to be taking for the sole reason it is the logical thing to do.

It is essential that we reinvent management practices and in order to that it is necessary that we change the methods used to prepare future managers. In the SPHER-AA system developed within the Faculty of Business and Administration, the University of Bucharest, we have focused mainly on informal training. Assuming that some of the skills that enable the unconventional leaders to excel, have been acquired through experiences that are not part of the formal training, we propose that the necessary contexts that have facilitated the acquisition of these skills have been produced by atypical situations encountered within the family or the socio-economic environments. The educational concept SPHER-AA aims to become a laboratory in which the experiments conducted will appeal to the potential of the participant. Building on the principle of the educational "round", several classes have

been introduced, such as: music, dance, drama (diction, oratory, gestural communication) and media education for businesses. They are foregrounded in both the formal and the informal framework.

The notion of nonconventional starts to become uncomfortable from the very moment we try to define it. The individual's natural reflex is to be conventional and therefore take into account the customs, collective wisdom, procedures and the generally accepted good procedures. On the other hand, the nonconventional individual will have the tendency to leave this comfortable space of existential restrictions and embark on an uncharted territory where he will be able to experiment, adapt and risk and, in so doing, he may sometimes find exceptional solutions.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that a nonconventional individual will lose contact with reality; on the contrary, he evolves perpetually at the interface between the real and the virtual. There is a danger that by taking these steps, one might no longer be able to draw a clear distinction between the unconventional and anarchy, and this leads to hazardous decisions. In order to give meaning to our own perception of the unconventional and its use within a modern successful organization (company, NGO, scientific circle, etc.), we will be building upon on the conclusions drawn by two authors, Gary Hamel and Bill Breen (Hamel and Breen, 2010, pp. 244-248), referring to a series of traits that a successful unconventional leadership infuses wherever it is present:

- willingness to consider unconventional views of team members regardless of hierarchical level;

To start with, we should point out that “research on organizational effectiveness clearly shows that in order for groups to take effective decisions, they need information, knowledge, power, rewards that incentivize them and they also need opportunities to be able to fulfill their tasks.” (Brown et al., 2008, p. 168). As such, we have to acknowledge that the challenges we will be subjected to in the future, cannot be solved individually. This requires the contribution of a team whose members occupy different positions in the organizational structure. Furthermore, we should mention the experience gained in the AERS system (Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility), where the views of each participant on subjects of their own choice, have been promoted. Hence, several projects have been conducted in partnership with organizations or NGOs. Moreover, we have carried out projects in a school with 700 children with disabilities. Other projects were aimed precisely at aiding and supporting terminally ill children (partnership with Pavel Foundation), creating and developing a business incubator (partnership with a parish in which we have developed projects in order to support community members with financial and educational difficulties), and designing and organizing events with a view to supporting communities facing various problems. The AERS system endorses the unconventional views of its members, on the presumption that the unconventional leadership has to yield unconventional leaders. In the experiment herein presented, team members are likewise selected with respect to criteria that are related to the unconventional (creativity, adaptability, resourcefulness).

- Ability to improve the creativity of employees on a superior level

Creativity/Creative thinking is a mental and social process involving the development of new and unprecedented ideas or concepts. Likewise, it is a process that pushes the creative mind to forge new connections between already existing ideas or concepts.

Creative thinking is a multidimensional concept that emerges in several fields of activity. In designing this concept we must keep in mind the interdisciplinary components of psychology, management, economics, artificial intelligence, cognitive science, philosophy, art, etc.

According to Ellis Paul Torrance, Creative Thinking is a process that seeks out surprising and unforeseen solutions to unexpected problems, identifies ways to fill knowledge gaps, unravels disharmonies that lead to problems, evaluates hypotheses again and again, and disseminates results (Torrance, 1966).

The surveys carried out using contexts of creative thinking, establish that there are three factors that impinge upon individual creativity: expertise, creative thinking skills, motivation. As a result, we cannot solve problems if we do not have substantial knowledge of a domain in which we wish to provide creative solutions. On the other hand, creative thinking skills denote imagination, ingenuity and flexibility, all of which are influenced by personal traits (tolerance, risk acceptance, independence, and ability to generate revolutionary ideas by combining previous experiences). In truth, we are talking about a clearly defined component (foundation) which is linked to expertise, and a mobile component linked to creative thinking. In this regard, a multitude of alternatives for construction can be done on a

solid footing. For any creative solution there is the need of motivation. This said, we have to put a special highlight on self-motivation, as well as on the inherent interest in developing a project (the subject of creation) and the extrinsic motivation (recognition, rewards). Ergo, there is a strong link between the aforementioned factors that bear upon creative thinking.

Researchers have always been concerned with quantifying the impact of creative thinking on the individual performance and the organizational one and this has led to the emergence of indicators of creativity. We will now refer to the indicator proposed by Richard Florida, an indicator composed of three indices: Technology, Talent and Tolerance (the theory of the three Ts) (Florida, 2002).

R. Sternberg's research in "Handbook of Creativity" highlighted the fact that there is a close relationship between the components that influence creativity (synthetic ability, analytical ability and practical ability) and human intelligence (multiple, emotional, social, adaptive and spiritual).

Generating new ideas suitable for a specific task is a feature of the synthetic (creative) ability, therefore having an impact on divergent thinking. This type of thinking encourages the intuitive way of redefining problems and finding outstanding solutions. Ideas need to be filtered by defining the strengths and weaknesses of each individual in terms of analytical ability which requires critical thinking. Implementing creative ideas and promoting them within communities are ingredients of practical activity. In reality it can be demonstrated that there are dependencies between synthetic, analytical and practical skills that lead to those spectacular

solutions. Blending the three types of skills may at times require the use of benchmarking and synergy as operating modes within reality.

Creativity workshops that allow participants to put into practice these skills in familiar and comfortable contexts have been organized over time (within the MA Programme in Business Consulting and Conferences held under the aegis of CSOL-UB).

- Eagerness to invest in the future by accelerating the transfer of capital and talent;

In most organizations there is competition in the process of resource allocation between long-term and short-term goals. Even though all leaders recognize the importance of strategic objectives and that of clearly defining that strategic approach of an organization, in practical work, more often than not, most of their energy moves towards solving immediate challenges, "fires" that have to be "put out". In such a context we are likely to overlook valuable ideas that might generate significant long-term competitive advantages. It is therefore requisite that leadership manage to find a balance, a "middle path", that allows members to allot some of that energy to sift out ideas that are likely to fail at solving "the problems of the future".

Within Team Work and AERS members are encouraged to devote a part of their activity to personal projects that engage their interest, and which they will subsequently "sell" to their co-workers. The most valuable projects will get the necessary resources to materialize.

Moreover, these organizations offer their members the opportunity to attend

training courses conducted with the support of specialists from consulting firms and the academic community.

The necessary conditions for “investment in the future” are thus created and forms of transfer of human capital towards organizational contexts that add value to it are configured.

- identifying the “collective wisdom” and using it in order to make important decisions;

One of the problems that today’s followers of pyramid organizational structures often encounter is generated by the exponential growth in environmental complexity. We must bear in mind that decision-making responsibilities lie in the hands of very few people, and so, they are made increasingly vulnerable to “blind spots”. Inasmuch as no person can store all the information to address the challenges nowadays, and yet decisions are generally concentrated in the hands of a person or a small group of people, intrinsic errors can have huge consequences on the entire organization. One of the essential features of unconventional leadership is therefore the building of a climate of trust and safety where each member of the organization should be encouraged to state their views. If this were the case, each member would feel encouraged, and even though decisions lied in the hands of one person, leaders would be compelled to pay heed to the views of each member. Richard Hackman argues that his approach creates advantages for both leaders and team members: “one of the great benefits of a challenging team purpose is that it frees leaders from the temptation to rely on their personal charisma [...]

Motivation that derives from a challenging purpose, by contrast, can become self-sustaining as members work together to achieve it.”(Hackman, 2011, p. 71).

Ever since the day we started designing CSOL-UB our aim has been to create a forum for stakeholders in different fields (academia, business, NGOs, public institutions, international experts, etc.) on the evolution of leadership in Romanian higher education (Marinescu, 2012), starting from the idea that each part of a system has its own point of view on the directions to be followed and that the optimal solution most likely lies at the intersection of these visions.

- power to remove the old mental models;

Despite the fact that it is beneficial for an organization to establish an environment for dialogue where different viewpoints converge, it is toxic that the organization stay anchored in “universal truths”, those generally accepted truths that nobody dares to call into question as it would be deemed to be heretical. Even though they used to be generally accepted and some organizations still embrace them today, it is not mandatory that they be the only alternatives. There are countless organizations that have been successful especially because they questioned such truths, or even tore them apart. The main problem entailed by this approach, however, is human nature itself. People are accustomed to that comfort-giving concurrence, and “diverters” are almost always sanctioned by the general opinion, at least until they become geniuses, billionaires, visionaries respectively. The courage to step out of the ordinary and think differently is a trait that most leaders

share. Nonetheless, training programs that are supposed to train future leaders, hardly ever teach them to do that. By virtue of this finding, Team Work organizes Summer schools (national and international) annually where students are encouraged to think unconventionally by taking turns training (the participation of students from diverse cultural backgrounds has made this possible). We have created the premises for developing other mental models starting from cultural diversity.

- transition from a community of subjects to a team of volunteers;

The very notion of leadership is based on that of the follower, the leader leads, the follower follows orders. It has been like this since the beginning of time, regardless of the type of organization. Surely the degree of authority or autonomy varies depending on the type of organization, historical period, the prevailing tide of opinion in the literature, etc. It is generally agreed that leaders cannot exist without followers, nor can followers exist without leaders. People need to be motivated, controlled, and organized. The success of structures such as Linux or Wikipedia has led to a revolution that proves the fact that the idea of voluntarism is viable and helps the community. The capacity of the leadership process to collect and manage the intelligence of thousands of people on the internet is great due to the fact that the network can gather more ideas than a traditional organization. We offer people the chance to join us voluntarily and they will give their best to help the organization. We will have to move from "establishing" to "choosing" duties. This way of thinking

will produce new system architectures that will give rise to great products and services that no one would have considered producible. In this case, we can refer to the relation between the virtual and reality. A virtuality might encompass several realities. Group decision can define realities that might change radically the world of tomorrow. On the basis of the results of the analysis carried out on the evolution of Linux, we determine that the lack of a central authority has its advantages. Prejudices regarding the education of those who contribute to the construction of the system dissolve. Thus, we have the possibility of coming upon "the right person at the right time and place".

If the number of such network organizations will grow (presumably this will happen), the challenge we will be facing is how to prepare the members (or employees). In line with the new paradigm of decision making we must redefine the term "efficiency". What will the costs of bureaucracy be? Perhaps they will drop significantly. The relation between effect/efficacy and effort should be analyzed and we must consider both enthusiastic employees and those who are indifferent; it is apparent that enthusiastic individuals will be the perfect fit with these organizations, their enthusiasm being what motivates them to choose and follow objectives. The major problem will be the second category. These individuals will make no effort to assert themselves. We believe this will be one of the main tasks of future leaders, especially those from the academic community. Given that creativity and innovation are essential to the future, we agree with Praveen Gupta who argues that "such demand for innovative solutions will mean we need to transform the field of innovation from an art

to a science." (Gupta, 2009)

With these findings in mind, we have created an experimental educational model (Spher-AA) that aims to propel the development of such networks that engage in the upstream integration of the pre-university education system by means of partnerships with high schools in the country, as well as in the downstream integration of the business environment which is the main user of competencies and skills that students develop and which could have an important say on the directions they consider a priority – due to the activities organized by CSOL-UB. The tasks are diverse and allow each individual within the network to position themselves in relation to the competencies and the time available, however still being at liberty to satisfy their needs and offer opportunities to other members. Owing to the contribution of the members, networks such as these are original and it is very likely that they will be reconfigured taking into account the needs of the members and those of beneficiaries of services and projects they make. The innovators become the main catalysts for these networks; they “apply their craft to bring step-improvements to products, processes and the human condition” (McCaughlin, 2009). Projects come to life due to the initiatives taken by members and they are the ones who can observe the problems that affect them and their colleagues. A state of emulation is thus created, which leads to the recruitment of volunteers that will add value to the network.

Through the work of Team Work and AERS, in collaboration with students and Business Consulting graduates, we urge the creation of a cooperative learning process and personal development, in which

undergraduate and postgraduate students will share both their formal and informal experiences. The role of the leader is, in this scenario, to positively expedite the creativity of participants and the innovations that may result.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper has been to ascertain that the challenges that leaders face nowadays emerge from restrictions laid down by classical models of leadership. It is indisputable that classical models had a beneficial role in the development of organizations, but in a globalized world, these models ought to be reassessed. It would be erroneous to believe that what worked yesterday, still works today and will work tomorrow. We have to get used to the idea that leaders are required to consider not only failures, but also successes, because sometimes successes are incidental. The unconventional behavior of leaders may place a strain on the political, legal, cultural, social, economic, educational society leading to behavior change, rethinking of the legislation, and reconfiguration of systems.

Organizations with an unconventional leadership that support voluntarism can provide solutions to those organizations that use a traditional leadership.

The analysis introduced and our experience in the development of the systems we have put forward bring us to the conclusion that future leaders have to adapt quickly to environmental challenges but, at the same time, they have to create constituents of reality and fuse them with other individuals. The idea of “designer of contexts” will thus take on a new meaning and generate

new opportunities, because risk and initiative become the necessary ingredients for the successful creation of networks. The unconventional does not mean lack of responsibility but knowledge, intuition and assumption.

We believe that the experimental models developed within the Faculty of Business and Administration, University of Bucharest: Team Work (Professional Association of Students at the University of Bucharest), CSOL-UB (Organizational

Strategy and Leadership Center of the University of Bucharest), AERS (Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility scientific Circle), CARO and CAEN (MA programs in Business Consulting with teaching conducted in English, and Romanian respectively), SPHER-AA (experimental educational system) can be a valuable starting point on the role of unconventional leadership in the development of networks with a changing architecture.

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