Literature Review on a Relevant Trend in Leadership

Leadership is often considered as a very strange paradox. This very same behavior can either be functional or dysfunctional, highly depending on motive, intent, consequence and context. It may also be viewed as constructive, especially by those in the senior management. On the other hand, it can also be viewed as destructive, even tyrannical at the same time, by the subordinates. The very same leader can either be loved or hated equally. The same symbols and powers of office may lead to illness in some, while offering intellectual motivation in others. The same strategies which result in improved performance may also result in suicide among some employees, thus making it a confusing paradox in itself. This is given the fact that the amount of money and the depth of legislation particularly focused at employee welfare, especially among modern organizations.

Garner (2006) suggests that it is a naïve thing to do to categorize leaders into "good" and "bad". This is because leaders who are effective in what they do may suddenly fail, while so-called mediocre leaders may shine suddenly. The author says that there are factors which may account for the difference between potential success and failure, and they are innumerable. At the same time, not all of them may be anticipated. Keith (2008) says that the behaviors of a positive leader such as confidence, assertiveness and creativity are often underpinned by modern measures of self-esteem while on the other end, behaviors of a dysfunctional leader clearly manifest in grandiosity, self-centeredness, exploitation and lack of empathy, and all of these can have devastating consequences.

This research paper looks into dysfunctional leadership.

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The literature on this subject of leadership is categorically vast. It seems that everybody has their own viewpoint on what leadership is. However, only a few agree on its actual definition. Despite over half a century of studies and research since Stodgill (1974) explained that "there are as many definitions on leadership as there are people who attempted to define it". There is still a confusion as to whether it may be taught, or whether the effectiveness may be predicted or measured, and indeed whether it needs to be defined as an individual or as a result. (North, 2012). Nevertheless, he also pointed out that there is a level of agreement regarding the viewpoint wherein leadership is a process, requires influence, happens in groups, and common goals. This gives the suggestion that leaders need to know how to mobilize and galvanize a group of people, directing them in a way that will help them to achieve results without using violence or threats.

Even though most of the available literature focuses on factors that make leadership effective, while presenting leaders as perfect representations of virtue, there is also enough evidence that shows that some of them indeed resort to using violence and threats in order to achieve their goals. This research, however, will not focus on national despotic leaders who enjoyed seeing others suffer, and whose goals caused oppression and misery to many. The focus of this research paper is organizational leadership at its core.

Since Timothy's (2002) systematic examination regarding abusive supervision, there has been an increasing interest regarding the negative behaviors among organizations, as well as the impact of these behaviors on the life satisfaction and job of the employees, as well as organizational commitment. According to Keifer (2003), it has been recognized long enough that leadership has a 'shadow-side', negatively affecting other individuals within the organization. In extreme cases, however, may bring the organization down to its lowest point. The literature regarding stressors in the workplace support this view, showing that unhealthy work environments include different factors, including those that "threaten safety, while undermining the creation of various social ties which may either be violent or abusive" (Taypen et.al, 1999).

In a review of about 75% of the compensation claims among workers in the USA, Wilmer (1993) found that different mental stressors serve as the result of threats and abusive treatments from the managers. On top of that, studies on the negative behavior at work has discovered that between 5 to 10% of employees experienced bullying at any one time. Ungga (1999) also found that about 40% of the participants also experienced bullying from an employer or leader during his entire career. Lionaldo & McCollin (1985) found that out of 73 managers who were interviewed, about 74% of them experienced an intolerable boss when they were also employees.

There is little doubt left that the DCL model used in studying leadership lends weight to its overall definition. It shows that there is more than just a single type of behavior in destructive leadership. It also differentiates the behaviors, especially those that are directed towards the subordinates, as well as the organization, showing that leaders that are ineffective and destructive may behave constructively and destructively simultaneously. The model does not further discuss any intent on harming anybody based on intent. Destructive behavior in leadership has added light to what an effective leadership should look like.

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