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Leadership and Management – are they alike?

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Abstract

This paper tries to distinguish between the leadership and management constructs to clarify the confusion caused by the loose usage of the terms in popular language. The two concepts should be understood as distinct for theoretical clarifications but not to argue for any hierarchical relationship. The paper tries to define both management and leadership, and then describes several ways the leadership construct is presented in the literature followed by a resolution of leadership definitions. Finally, the paper shares four criteria to distinguish between the leadership and the management functions. The paper concludes by arguing that leadership should be seen as a process and both leadership and management be differentiated from leader and manager, the former being the functions and later being actors. In addition, it is also fundamentally important that distinguishing between the two does not imply that one is superior to the other.

Introduction

Some authors have confused the terms leadership and management by using them interchangeably or arguing for either one subsuming the other or highlighting their overlapping characteristics (Selznick, 1957; Nicholls, 2002; Hodgkinson, 1983; Jaques, 1996; Jaques & Clement, 1991; Fidler in Gronn 1999). Looking at leadership from this perspective conceptualises it in either of two ways i.e. management being a function of leadership or leadership being a function of management or both being simply two names for the same set of activities. However, if scrutinized critically, leadership and

management appear to be different sets of functions having quite distinct characteristics from the other. This article will attempt to highlight the difference between leadership and management to argue that they are different. In doing so it will emphasise that the comparison between them does not necessarily entail a hierarchical relationship. Thus it seems imperative to think about the differences between them as similar to the differences between different human functions and group processes (e.g. reading distinctive from writing or conflict distinctive from cooperation). A better conceptual and practical understanding is necessary for the organisational, social and political environment that we live in.

The article will also try distinguishing between leadership and leader, and management and manager. It will argue that leadership and management are acts (or processes) while leaders and managers are actors. Act and actor cannot be similar, as acting is a process and the actor is a personality. Focusing our attention mainly towards the personality of the actor does not ensure that we also increase our knowledge of the process of acting and vice versa. A great deal of leadership literature (mainly influenced by corporate sector training for leaders) has tried to come up with the traits of effective leaders which implies that growing such traits in the personality produces leadership qualities and an act of leadership follows (which is not the situation in practice). Leadership is a complex process and emerges in chaos rather than orderliness (Barker, 1997, 2001).

In distinguishing between the leadership and management the I will initially highlight some of the confusions between leadership and management and will try to establish that the definitional debate of leadership and management is worthy of pursuing. This discussion will lead into defining management and leadership and highlighting the differences between the two. The article will conclude by further arguing that leadership and leaders are not the same just as management and managers differ.

A useless debate or a fundamental concern

The human mind works in a definitional style, it tries to understand things by labelling

them (LeDoux, 1994). The things that are not categorised easily create confusion in mind. It is this basic human desire for definition, for clearly labelling a phenomenon that needs to be fulfilled before progressing on any further debate in relation to the basic concept. Thus a debate on defining leadership and management is basic to any future discussion on distinguishing between them. Although some consider it a useless debate with little to achieve (Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Cuban 1988) others like Barker (1997) considers it indispensable before any further work on the subject; his article titled ‘How can we train leaders if we do not know what leadership is?’ captures this theme quite succinctly.

It is an important discussion because the way we act is determined by what we value and how we perceive the world around us, which is often contained in some meaningful way. It is quite easy to underplay the definitional issues as is done by many practitioners or theorists. Rost (1993) in his extensive work on leadership showed that out of 587 pieces of work related to leadership between 1900 and 1990, around 366 (62%) did not define leadership in their work. This lack of sensitivity towards defining leadership and reaching an agreement of scholars on the broader guidelines of what leadership means, results in a plethora of definitions which are at times confusing and contradictory. Such a situation leads authors like Cuban (1988) to argue that attempting to define leadership would lead towards more confusion. He therefore avoided defining leadership by claiming not to add further confusion and took refuge under Bennis’s laborious work of sorting out different definitions of leadership (more than 350 definitions were identified in his literature survey). He rather took the definition of leadership for ‘granted’ and claimed that it is culturally shared in the minds of leaders and led. This attitude attests Barker’s (2001, p. 475) conclusion that we take the meaning of leadership for granted; just like we do not define “what money is” we do not wish to define leadership openly.

The problem in not defining leadership is that as long as we avoid its definition it will continue to be perceived in the conventional and popular belief sense. Since the conventional sense of leadership associates with it heroic deeds of one man at the top, the scholars will continue to view it in the same way (for discussion on distributed leadership see Gronn, 2000; 2002; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2000). It is also not necessary that

the scholarly understanding of leadership should also match with the popular belief; many of the terms in social sciences have quite a specialised meaning different to shared-societal meaning (e.g. conflict, group etc.). The clarity in definition will also reduce the confusion associated to the notions of leadership and management.

Confusion: Leadership and management

As noted in the beginning of the article many of the authors use leadership and management quite interchangeably which creates problems in understanding. Rost (1993, p.129) observes that most of the work in the field still obscures the meaning of leadership and often understands it as ‘good management’. Bryman (1996, pp. 276-7) also shares the same feeling in a milder sense and suggests that authors in the early and mid 1980s tended to match leaders’ behaviour with ‘managerial behaviour’. Barker (2001) rather more bluntly expressed the view that the conventional view of leadership expressed in Newtonian language still equates it with management. He further argues that the confusion is not only limited to equating leadership with management, but that there is an even bigger confusion of seeing leadership as personality traits, styles, leader-follower relationships compared to the view of leadership as a process.

There logically seems to be two major contributors to this confusion between leadership and management. One is a set of scholars like Nicholls (2002) who have been frustrated from this long debate about distinction and propose to consider leadership as high profile management. Within this same group a sub-set of scholars consider leadership being subsumed under management (Hodgkinson, 1983; Jaques and Clement, 1991). The second group of people is composed mainly of practitioners and corporate trainers who tend to focus on the traits of leaders and suggest instilling certain kinds of skills to produce leaders and leadership (Cuban, 1988). They present leaders as being heroic and charismatic to transform followers (Bass, 1985; House, 1977; Zaleznik, 1989; Jaques and Clement, 1991).

Having highlighted the nature of confusion prevalent in the field – i.e. the distinction

between leadership and management and defining leadership in terms of the traits, styles, follower-leader duo or as a process – I feel it logical to clarify my own position amidst this chaos. I agree that leadership is different than management just as reading and writing are different human functions, but there is no hierarchical relationship between them and one is not better than the other. I further share the view that leadership is more of a process than personality (traits, styles, attributes), however the qualities of leadership remain latent unless they are tested in a practical situation. Hence, to increase the potential of any future leader the debate of traits, attributes and styles is also important. I also believe that leadership is a group process in which followers are an equal and important contributor. Leadership is also an influence relationship between group members and there can be multiple and shifting leaders and followers at different time.

Management

A thesaurus presents words like run, control, administer, handle, supervise, cope etc. as synonymous to “manage”. These words collectively define the underlying characteristics of management, that is, it deals mostly with controlling and supervising the organisational situation to achieve a desired outcome. The managers mostly work under the premises of rationality and authority; and with their persistence, tough mindedness and problem-solving skills achieve goals (Zaleznik, 1989). Jaques (1996) defines management in terms of the act of manager as follows:

A manager is “someone who is in a role in which he [or she] is authorized to get work done through employed subordinates for whose work he (sic.) is held accountable” (p. 35).

Rost (1993, p. 145) in an attempt to define management in opposition to leadership comes up with the following definition:

Management is an authority relationship between at least one manager and one subordinate who coordinate their activities to produce and sell particular goods

and/or services.

Management is more concerned with maintaining structure in organisation and ensuring that the things are rightly done and it does so through the vested authority in its defined organisational role (Barker, 2001; Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Leadership

As most of the scholars in leadership agree about the defining characteristics of management, only few would agree on any universally accepted definition of leadership. In fact some scholars claim that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are numbers of people who have attempted to write about leadership. Yukl (1994, pp. 4-5) has put this dilemma of definition in a precise way by suggesting that the field of leadership has still not reached a stage where it can come up with a “correct” definition, rather there are some definitions that better explain the phenomenon than others. Definitions usually depend on the subjective interpretation of an individual researcher.

Nevertheless, there are some major trends and broad grouping among scholars over an understanding about leadership. The scholars have broadly defined leadership in terms of:

- Leadership as personality traits of leader
- Leadership as attributed by followers
- Leadership as reflected in the behavioural styles of leaders
- Leadership as process

I feel it justified to briefly discuss the above categories and try to outline their defining features, before siding with one of the mentioned views.

Leadership as personality traits of leader

Bryman (1996) suggests that the trait approach to defining leadership was the dominant theme in leadership theory and research since the beginning of the early twentieth century

till late 1940s. Zaleznik (1989) although favours the idea of seeing leadership through the lenses of traits of leaders, did not precisely define leadership and rather describes it mostly in relation to ‘managerial mystique’. A somewhat similar view to Zaleznik is offered by Cuban (1988, p. 193) who says that ‘the phrase organizational leadership ... refers to people who bend the motivations and actions of others to achieving certain goals; it implies taking initiatives and risks’. Some of the leadership thinkers took their views to extremes like Hodgkinson (1996, p.85 in Gronn, 1999), who considered leadership as ‘an incantation for the bewitchment of the led’. This practice created a feeling that somehow leaders are not only different but better than followers (Gronn, 1999).

Leadership as attributed by followers

Described by Miendl (1995) as ‘Romance of Leadership (RoL)’ the focus is laid on the followers rather than leaders. This approach to leadership definition believes that leaders are attributed the label of ‘leader’ by followers. Hence, the focus of study of leadership should lie in the social-psychological process that goes on among followers independent of leader traits. This approach to leadership calls for ‘substitutes of leadership’ and makes observers (followers) as in-charge of the situation rather than leaders. Just like beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, leadership lies in the eyes of followers. Leadership viewed through this perspective is an attribution to make sense of the situation and a social construction rather than a trait or style of leader. Such a conception highlights the important role played by agency and subjective interpretation of observers (Bresnen, 1995).

Leadership as reflected in the behavioural styles of leaders

Making its way in the late 1940s this approach to the study of leadership explains leadership as demonstrated through the styles of leaders. Contrary to the trait theory, the leadership styles theorists believed that the behaviour of individuals can be changed through careful training. Hence, this approach to the study of leadership called for ‘training’ of leaders based on the approach of Ohio studies on leadership (Bryman, 1996). What followed from this line of thinking were myriad studies determining the behaviour

patterns of successful leadership. These studies in turn provided a battery of tools to the trainers who have experience with developing different styles of leadership and habits (e.g. Stephen Covey) amongst senior management and top position holders in mostly corporate organisations. This practice ultimately made the top position holders in an organisation as the centre of observation, mostly ‘president-watching and clinically derived, psycho-dynamic studies of organizational executives’ (Gronn, 1999, p.107), for leadership practices and assumed followers to be silent co-workers who needed to be lead for the attainment of goals.

Leadership as a process

A new emerging trend amongst leadership thinkers views leadership as a process as opposed to traits, styles, knowledge and attributes of leaders. Barker (1997) supporting Gimmill and Oaklay (1992) and Gastill (1994) strongly argued that leadership needs to be defined as a process where all group members are involved and not a single person lead. He strongly criticised authors for not defining the term leadership in their works. In consistency with his ideas he defines leadership as, ‘a process of change where the ethics of individuals are integrated into the mores of a community’ (p.352). In his later writings Barker (2001) used the word ‘transformative change’ instead of ‘change’ in the above definition probably aligning with Burns view of transformative leadership.

Yukl (1994, p. 5) also defines leadership in process terms, according to him:

Leadership is defined broadly as influence processes affecting the interpretation of events for followers, the choice of objectives for the group or organization, the organization of work activities to accomplish the objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork, and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization.

This idea of defining leadership as a process was initially described by Burns (1978) who is considered as a prominent figure to re-energise the idea of leadership in late seventies. He

defines leadership as follows:

Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilising, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers (p.425).

Burns further emphasised the issue of goals and divided leadership into ‘transactional’ and ‘transformational’ on the basis of this. In a transactional relationship the individual people interact for their mutually exclusive (may be related) goals, however, in transformational relationship the individuals work for a higher order common goal.

This seems quite interesting; Burns proposed the idea of perceiving leadership as a process in 1978 but since then no particular achievement has been made in this line of theory development and leadership practice. Rost (1993) agrees that leadership has mostly been perceived as good management. Although the idea of transformational leadership has been taken up quite seriously (for example by Bass, 1985) little progress has been made towards the process nature of leadership.

A resolution of leadership definition

Despite a common disagreement over any single definition of leadership, Gronn (1999) identified a broad general consensus at least among educational leadership scholars over some basic characteristics of leadership. These include: that leadership is a relationship of influence either direct or indirect among leaders and followers; that leading is a ‘symbolic’ activity whereby leaders and managers communicate symbolically and make sense of a situation based on their values; and that leadership is not rigidly associated with headship, management or administration. Nevertheless, there are some disagreements within this general consensus, like Hodgkinson’s (1983) emphasis on equating leadership with administration or Zaleznik’s (1989) intent to treat leadership as superior to management.

Following this broad outline of features, leadership can best be seen as an outcome or effect emanating from a process (Gronn, 1999) and the leader emerges during the ‘course of interaction’ (Hosking, 1988, p.154). This interaction and interplay of influence is reciprocal, with both leader and followers influencing and influenced by each other. In fact, leadership is an act or process and leaders and followers are actors. Leaders use cultural symbols to manipulate a situation and followers interpret the symbols contrasting them with their own set of values and can attach the label of leader to the personality that conforms to their value structures. The only difference in the influence is of degree rather than of one causing the other (leader causing the outcome) (Gronn, 1999).

Another view that is not so typical advocates that different focuses in defining leadership are to be seen complementarily rather than competing. Leithwood and Duke (1999) suggests that in the context of educational leadership six major forms of leadership (instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial/ strategic and contingency leadership) point towards different aspects of organisation practice. Such a conception of leadership considers the ‘relationships’ of at least four sets of elements, which are: the leader, the follower, organisation and environment (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 65). Thus any understanding of leadership looks should look at all these aspects as an essential whole.

Difference between leadership & management

In the beginning of the article it was laid out that management and leadership are two distinctive functions and should not be confused with each other. An effort was also made to highlight the importance of this distinction and the reason for confusion followed by the definitions of both management and leadership. Given this distinction, it appears logical to differentiate leadership from management based on their major characteristics. Rost (1993) provides a useful discussion of the differences between management and leadership based on his analysis of a vast literature of leadership spread over entire twentieth century. Although I will attempt to make a similar kind of distinction, I will not fully subscribe to his idea of management and leadership as ‘relationship’ as opposed to ‘process’ or

‘behaviour’ (p.146). I agree that management should not be seen as behaviour of a manager, but it should rather be seen as a process and not merely as a relationship. The process obviously involves relationships among actors; hence, this subtle distinction made by Rost does not seem to hold too much in reality.

From here onwards I will try to distinguish between the leadership and the management (both will be seen more as a process). However, in doing so, no attempt will be made to develop any hierarchical relationship between them.

Nature of relationship – influence vs. authority

Leadership entails a relationship of influence among actors i.e. leader(s) and followers. The key element of this relationship remains the ‘influence’ that they exert on each other, which in turn shapes the process itself (Gronn, 1999; Rost 1993). The influence flows in many directions among followers, among leaders and among leaders and followers. It is also reciprocal, hence, the actors influence and are influenced by each other during the process. In this relationship values play an important role to influence the behaviours, while in addition power and behaviour patterns also provide an impetus for influence (Yukl, 1994, p.224).

Contrary to this view, management works under an authority structure to maintain the balance of the system (Rost, 1993; Barker, 1997, 2001). The very nature of the act of management demands a chain of authority and division of labour so that a task can be well coordinated and performed as idealised by the managerial authority. Authority mainly entails coercion, which is perceived as legitimate by both manager and subordinate but this is not a very frequently occurring phenomenon, especially in the present day democratic environments of organisations (Rost, 1993).

Actors/Members – leaders and followers vs. manager and subordinates

Leader and followers are the labels attributed to the actors involved in the leadership

process (Gronn, 1999; Meindl, 1995). Weber's Charismatic leadership also supports the idea of attribution. Again it is to be reiterated that the followers are not passive participants; rather, they are active contributors and there can be more than one leader in a process and different sets of followers. Gronn (1999) suggests that two things play an important part in this attributive process, i) interpersonal qualities of leader and ii) identification of followers with leaders. Both leader and follower influence each other, only the degree of influence differs. Leaders and followers are not the incumbents of a formal role, either a manager or a subordinate can be a leader (Rost, 1993).

On the contrary, a manager is an incumbent of an executive position of authority in a formal organisation; likewise, subordinates are the people in lower ranks than the manager. Managers and subordinates do not necessarily have to be leaders and followers (Rost, 1993). The label of manager and subordinate is allocated to a person by virtue of possessing an office or position whereas leadership roles are attributive based on value judgements of individuals.

Main activity/process – purpose

Leadership deals with change and is the process of unfolding (Rost, 1993, Barker; 1997, 2001). It is desired when an organisation needs to change and is ready to deal with unforeseen circumstances and jolts as an inevitable ingredient of the process. The complex nature of change is unpredictable and innovative approaches are needed to address the problems in hand. This uncertain situation also allows a space for innovation and playing with new ideas.

Management deals with stability and maintaining structures and is a process of 'building' (Barker, 1997). It is desirable when organisations need to maintain their present state of affairs and when predictability is desired. There are limited opportunities for innovation and experimentation in this structure. Jacques (1996) following Weber's notion of bureaucracy, argues that management process is done best through following routines and chain of commands which would bring efficiency in the organisations.

It must also be kept in mind that not all organisations are in need of change; some need equilibrium and balance to function properly. Hence, if all that we look for in an organisation is ‘change’ then there would be too much emphasis on leadership and too little on management (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990). In addition management of change also needs to be channelled since the change process cannot go on for an uncertain period of time and has to go through a stabilising phase to create an order of structure. Hence, management bears an equal importance in this chain of processes for organisational effectiveness.

Collectiveness – mutually shared vs. coordinated

Leaders and followers are engaged in a “collective purpose”, in which the goals are individually held. In the process both leaders and followers benefit from this relationship, which Burns (1978, p.425) calls transactional leadership. Alternatively, leaders may invoke higher order goals among followers and both work together to achieve this for the collective good, which Burns sees as transformative leadership. The outcomes of the process of leadership are assessed by gauging the self fulfilment of the participants during the process.

Managers and subordinates collaborate and coordinate a process to get things done in an orderly and predictable fashion. The efforts are geared toward the production and sale of ‘goods and/or services’ (Rost, 1993, p.151). The outcome of management function is gauged through its productivity.

Conclusion

The confusion between management and leadership is caused by the ways different writers have used these terms in their popular meanings, especially in the case of leadership. The confusion has further been heightened by the media, which has used the term in a whole range of meanings. This confusion has resulted in some scholars arguing for leadership as

good management (Rost, 1993) or assuming leadership within management functions (Jaques and Clement, 1991). Against the backdrop of economic recession in US, some authors like Zaleznik (1989) presented leadership as a cure for worsening economic situation in US, hence implying that leaders are better than managers and we need more of them. Within this confusion, the discussion pertaining to the definition and distinction becomes central and not peripheral, as opposed to claims by people like Cuban (1988). In order to avoid the confusion of meaning attached to leadership and management, one needs to understand them separately and then needs to distinguish between the two (as is done in this article).

I agree with Barker (1997, 2001) and Gronn (1999) that leadership should be looked at as a 'process', which slightly differs with Rost's (1993) view, who insist on seeing leadership as a 'relationship'. Leadership and management essentially differ from each other in terms of the nature of their relationship; actors' attribution and organisational nomenclature; purposes; and collectiveness or coordination of goals. With these basic distinctions in mind there is a strong base to suggest that leaders and managers are not the same people. Managers are not automatically leaders and not all leaders need to be managers (Rost, 1993; Yukl, 1994).

It is also worthy to note that there is a difference between leadership and leader, and management and manager. Some prominent scholars in leadership like Zaleznick (1977, 1989) although distinguish between leaders and managers, they equate leadership with leader and management with manager. Equating leadership with leader and management with manager is actually 'confusing a process with a person' (Rost, 1993, p.134). This distinction is important because just like every act of an actor is not acting, similarly every act of a leader is not leadership and the same holds for management. This tendency of equating process with person (leadership with leader and management with manager) results in a speedy race among psychoanalytic scholars to identify the exact traits that are needed for leaders as distinctive from managers, hence, Burns (1978, p.1) shared his observation that we know 'too much' of the leaders but 'far too little' of leadership. It is argued here that having identified a number of traits in a person does not ensure that an act

or process of leadership occurs. This hunt for the right ingredients has also resulted in undermining the importance of management and managers in an organisation. It might be true that most of the time what we need is to do more with management than leadership, hence, we need to keep a balance between not overemphasising one at the expense of the other and avoid tracing any hierarchical relationships.

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