

LEADERSHIP AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN SHAPING 21ST CENTURY ORGANIZATIONS-EXAMINING SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP CONSTRUCTS AND HOW THEY INFLUENCE TRANSFORMATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Abstract

This chapter will examine a few contemporary leadership constructs and how they can create transformational excellence for organizations. Leadership as a phenomenon has been studied hugely and existing literature and scholars have contributed immensely to the better understanding of leadership and how it impacts organizations. 21st century organizations need to battle a more intense VUCA world, and here the emphasis of leadership only gets pronounced. Through examining existing literature, this chapter will explore the impact of leadership for 21st century organizations and explore a few leadership constructs that would enable organizations to solidify their position in the global economy. While no specific model may fit all organizations, it is up to each organization and the leader themselves to navigate situations and complexities to arrive at what seems most optimal to them as a specific leadership style or a combination of methods to enhance organizational capabilities and create pathways for transformational excellence.

Keywords: VUCA, Leadership, Transformational Excellence

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I. INTRODUCTION

The business world continues to be influenced and informed by macro environmental forces including economic, political, legal, ecological, social, cultural, and technological factors [1]. This would mean that organizations established in the 21st Century requires leaders to manage these macro environmental forces effectively, while steering the organization ahead. Current day leaders are required to constantly engage and struggle with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that arise on account of rapid changes in technology and disruptive innovations [2]. While several scholars have made contributions to understanding leadership of the modern day, it still rather seems to be true that “more has been written and less is known about leadership” [3]. Perhaps, the root cause of the problem in understanding leadership lies in the varying and vast perspectives about ethical duties that leaders need to fulfill [4]. One of the paradigms that provides a framework to enable leaders to examine and fulfill their ethical duties is Leadership Ethos (LE). LE can be described as the way in which leadership is embodied, enacted, and exercised within specific influence relationships based on shared convictions including moral judgements [5]. The three important qualities of LE are a) Vision b) Virtues and c) Values. Several scholars have described vision as “attributes of brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability, and desirability, plus vision content relating to employee and customer satisfaction” [6]. On the other hand, virtues describe the strength of character required to achieve excellence and enhanced quality [7], while scholars have gone on to describe values as abstract, trans-situational notions of what is good, right, and desirable [8]. According to Reference [9], combining the three attributes of vision, virtues, and values, leaders must aim to go beyond their own self-interests, constantly focus on higher organizational goals, motivate followers to achieve organizational objectives by providing them with the required resources, enabling them to fulfil their individual tasks and goals.

II. CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF LEADERSHIP DEFINITIONS

Leadership remains a very complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It has been studied extensively and its importance is heightened in today’s ever-changing complex and globalized world that we are part of. Researchers over the years have proposed several definitions over the years. Some of the definitions that seem applicable to today’s context is shared in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Some Interesting Leadership Definitions

Reference [10]	An influencing process aimed at goal achievement, that focuses on leadership as a process of influencing others to accomplish specific goals
Reference [11]	Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for accomplishing shared aspirations
Reference [12]	Leadership in essence in simply ‘influence’
Reference [13]	Leadership is not a person and is different from Management. Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes. Four essential elements that must be present for

	leadership to exist are: 1) The relationship is based on influence, 2) Leaders and followers are people in this relationship, 3) Leaders and followers intend real changes, and 4) Leaders and followers develop mutual purposes’
Reference [14]	Leadership is a multi-layered dynamic system of collaboration and coordination
Reference [15]	Leadership entails acts of spontaneous, bottom-up emergent innovation
Reference [16]	Leadership is an ongoing activity of collective and relational accomplishments

Source: Author’s Construct

Over the years, the importance of effective leadership, managing human capital and organizational management has increased [17]. Reference [18] in their paper on evolution of leadership, throw light on how leadership evolved from the Great Man Theory and today there are several new leadership theories that have evolved including the contemporary leadership that encompasses complexity leadership which simply emerged owing to the enhanced complexities that we are part of, where this theory takes a whole system view, considering various context related interactions that occur across an entire social system [19]. Table 2 below highlights the summary of the main leadership theories.

Table 2: Evolution of Leadership Theories

Trait	1840’s	Great Man Theory	Focus on natural born leaders.
	1930’s – 1940’s	Trait Theory	Focus on identifying traits and characteristics of effective leaders.
Behavioral	1940s-1950s	Behavioral Theory	Focus on leaders being largely made and that specific behaviors can be learnt to become effective leaders.
Situational	1960s	Contingent and Situational Theories	Focus is on the situation/context and how leaders can display effective skills contingent to the situation on hand.
New	1990s	Transactional Vs Transformational	Focus on leadership as a cost benefit exchange Vs. Inspirational style of leadership that pushes followers to go beyond and accomplish higher goals.
	2000s	Shared/Collective/Collaborative/Servant/Inclusive/Complexity	The emergence was on account of realizing that organizational success did not need just a few leaders at the top but coordinated leadership

			<p>throughout. Also, the importance of leadership in the context of followers, empowering followers, working with them closely to build their leadership acumen all became pronounced. With massive macro level changes and the environment becoming complex and robust, contemporary theories have taken center stage.</p>
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Source: Reference [18]

III. COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP

The complexity in the world at large has been on the rise owing to enhanced interconnectedness and reduced geographical boundaries on account of technological upsurge, connecting resources, practices, and opportunities at a global level. The certitude of the global pandemic was widely predicted [20] and plans were outlined as part of preparedness [21], and despite this, when the pandemic struck, there was glaring examples of failed leadership. The US and UK despite being voted as the most prepared for a global pandemic [22] had a rather poor response to when the pandemic occurred a few months later. The unpreparedness of both leaders and followers may lie in the complexity of the issue. When complexity is a reality and institutions or organizations are compelled to become adaptive, if they get it right, it is invariably on account of instinct [23]. However, when they get it wrong, it is because they simply reject that they are amidst complexity, and they adopt an order response [24]. The Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) is a theory of leadership for adaptability where there are evident complexities in the macro environment, and it provides a theoretical skeleton for leaders and followers to work together with the intent of gaining adaptability in a social system that is highly complex and interconnected [25]. Any complex system is generally characterized by a rich interconnectivity, and when the systems interact with each other, it can trigger unexpected or unpredictable events that will create an emergent state in the system. Once in this state, the components of the system can no longer engage in a similar manner and will be required to adapt to the new environment. CLT is all about making this adaptive process intentional in organizations and social systems, either pro-emptively or reactively [26].

The adaptive process of CLT demonstrates similarity across levels – be it cognitive, interpersonal, intra-organizational or inter-organizational – has two main components: entrepreneurial and operational. While the former is responsible for innovation and novelty, the latter focuses on productivity and results. The key steps in the adaptive process are: 1) Internal or external pressures on a system that drives the agents to change -State of Disequilibrium 2) In response to these pressures, the change agents enable generative emergence through entrepreneurial leadership -Experimentation 3) Once the potential adaptive solutions are identified, the enabling leaders work to scale this into the system - Amplification and 4) The operational leaders recombine them into the operational system to form the new adaptive order -Stabilizing feedback [25]. On similar lines, the complexity

leadership framework is the adaptive process applied to organizations, as shown in Figure 1 below.

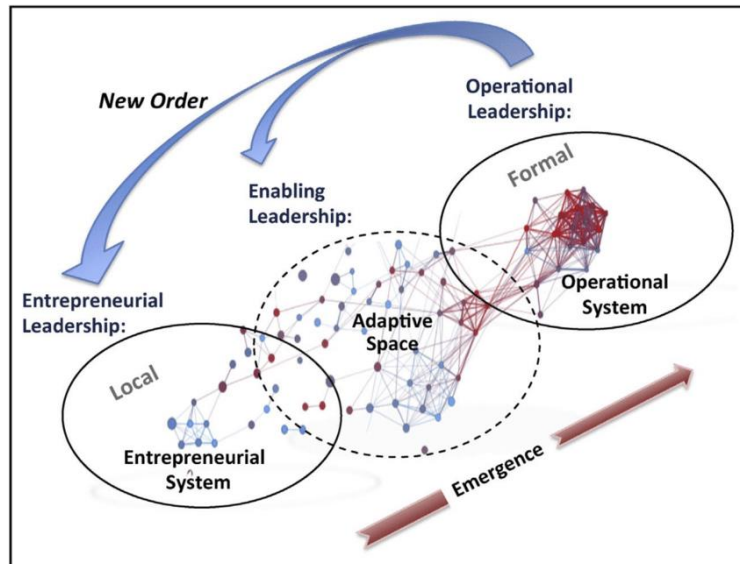


Figure 1: The Complexity Leadership Framework

Source: [27]

The salient features of this framework are as follows:

1. Generative emergence starts on the left side with the entrepreneurial system.
2. Entrepreneurial leadership can occur anywhere in the organization, i.e., top management, frontline, etc.
3. Leaders and followers act as agents who co-create.
4. The adaptive space creates the conditions for enabling leadership, where the enabling leadership must transition to a sponsorship role where the new order gets operationalized.

CLT clearly highlights that leadership is cocreation and is constructed in the combined acts of both leaders and followers. To get a full grasp of leadership as a social phenomenon, the interconnectedness of this equation between leaders and followers in time and space becomes critical. CLT emphasizes leadership as cocreation and followership to enable generative emergence in the face of complexity [27].

IV. SMART LEADERSHIP

The changes over the last few decades in terms of socio-economic shifts, technological advancements, cultural transitions have all necessitated businesses globally to rethink their strategies, and this led to the emergence of new ways of working that centered around flexible working and heightened usage to information technologies, supporting employees to work anywhere at any time [28]. and these approaches are usually referred to as ‘smart working practices’, which has been defined as an agile and dynamic way of working

that leads to better job performance, enhanced productivity, and improved job satisfaction levels that result in overall benefits to customers, employees and the organization at large [29]. According to Reference [30], smart leadership is all about being flexible and agile, which encompasses creating a compelling and rather inspiring vision and enabling people in the organization to deliver on it, making this kind of leadership forward thinking and anticipatory as it uses the wisdom and experience of people and teams in fulfilling goals, whilst remaining unflustered in the eye of a storm even in a world filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Meanwhile adding a different dimension to smart leadership, [31] suggests that smart leadership is all about striking that beautiful balance between soft power – using persuasion, charm, and influence over people and hard power – reward and punish effectively.

Very similar to how leadership as a phenomenon has evolved, organizations too from having a traditional hierarchy, transitioning during the scientific management movement, becoming boundary less and then virtual spaces for high caliber individuals to contribute across the globe have now morphed into smart organizations of today. The three key drivers for the evolution of organizations include 1) The networked world 2) Source of value creation expanding and 3) Value getting customized. A smart organization is a highly agile environment which can be defined as “A combination of complimentary competencies, functioning in a distributed environment, relying on state-of-the-art information and communication technologies to facilitate interaction, in pursuit of a shared project objective” [32]. The salient features of a smart organization are:

1. **Transcending Boundaries:** Smart organizations are highly diverse and operate across traditional boundaries including those imposed by time, space, and culture.
2. **Inter-Organizational:** Organizational members either as individuals or separate entities have unique organizational cultures, values, mission, and strategies.
3. **Internetworked:** Communication mechanisms for smart organizations are internetworked with a wide array of tools including emails, social media channels, video conferencing, interactive whiteboards etc.
4. **Opportunity to Collaborate:** In smart organizations, the opportunity to collaborate on projects, develop competencies, exchange knowledge towards a shared project objective becomes the biggest motivator.
5. **Decision Making Through Consensus:** Gaining consensus differentiates the smart organization and positions it uniquely.

Smart leadership unlike the traditional leadership models focuses primarily on what is in the long-term interests of the organization and how the society would be benefited overall. According to [32], smart leaders tend to have four unique attributes – 1) Curiosity 2) Focus 3) Determination and 4) Perseverance and these attributes enables a smart leader to be both a task leader and a process leader, ensuring a right balance between task efficiencies and aligning resources towards organizational goals. In a interconnected and dynamic world, the core skill sets of a smart leader encompass the

abilities to anticipate and diffuse conflict, create and communicate common shared goals, build and manage trust and encourage mutual interactions among systems.

In understanding how smart leaders can be successful, several key aspects have emerged based on the work carried out by Reference [33]. Leaders in a smart working context need to have mastery of both vision and execution, that is communicating the vision to people, whilst enabling and guiding them towards fulfilling the goals, creating a catalyst level of agility, where there are very high levels of participation, employee empowerment and teamwork, where the leader acts as a catalyst in changing the behaviors of employees such that it benefits them and the organization at large [34]. This by itself also represents yet another leadership method called purposeful leadership, where the leader consciously creates a fit between individual and organizational values, enabling better productivity and performance from employees, thus impacting stakeholder value maximization, where the employees and the leader are ethically aligned [35]. Also, since smart working implicitly encompasses working from anywhere and at any time, leaders need to provide a cohesive ambience where autonomy and trust play crucial roles. With this, leaders may be required to display more coaching-oriented behaviors, supporting the employees in task completion and fulfillment of departmental or organizational goals [36]. When all these different leadership approaches are examined and brought together to make smart working more robust, the primary aim of smart leaders must be to enhance intrinsic motivation of employees, foster self-determined behaviors, promote psychological empowerment, all leading to enhanced work performance and improved organizational productivity [37].

V. SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Servant leadership as a form of leadership is attributed to [38] and continues to receive attention from several research scholars even in most recent times, as servant leaders lead by serving followers, by fulfilling their needs which in turn will make them follow you effectively. Reference [39] have defined servant leadership as ‘an other-oriented approach to leadership; manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests; and an outward reorientation of their concern for self towards concern for others both within the organization and the larger community’. Servant leaders tend to be different from others as their focus is on the growth and development of their followers. In general, it has been argued and suggested by existing literature that in comparison to other styles of leadership, servant leadership provides a better prediction of individual and organizational outcomes [40] and [41]. Several studies have indicated that for enterprise development, service innovation continues to play a critical role [42]. Service innovative behavior is defined as the new ideas and methods in the service process generated and used by employees to improve the quality of existing service [43]. Scholars in the past have argued and shared their perspective that innovative behaviours of employees largely depend on the leader’s style [44]. In today’s ever-changing landscape of smart organizations, satisfaction of employees being prioritized is critical and servant leadership puts the employees first [40], and servant leaders influence the subordinates by serving them and in turn helping them develop a sense of service towards the organization and fellow peers [45]. Also, as per Reference [39]’s meta-analysis of existing literature indicate that servant leadership effectively stimulates positive behaviours in employees’ including innovative behaviour,

organizational citizenship behaviour and voice behaviour. Similarly, Reference [46] have pointed out servant leadership could positively effect employees' intrinsic motivation levels.

In today's time and age, work engagement plays a critical role and [47] defined work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption" Meanwhile, Reference [48] suggest that individuals who are highly engaged are mentally and emotionally connected to their work and display higher continuation will. Several studies done previously have found that servant leadership exerts a positive impact on work engagement [49] [50] [41] and [51]. Research has also indicated a positive relationship between servant leadership and employee organizational commitment [50] [41] and [52]. Based on these previous studies and the emphasis of leadership as a phenomenon in today's organizations, servant leadership seems to enhance both engagement and organizational commitment. Organizations must consider recruiting leaders who display skills including empathy, selflessness, integrity, optimism, and empowerment. Moreover, such servant leaders must instil these service qualities in their followers, as many of them might become leaders of tomorrow for organizations and institutions [53]

VI. CONCLUSION

Leadership as a phenomenon for organizations in the 21st century continues to be a critical aspect, and organizations must be careful in identifying leaders who can strengthen the unique propositions and propel the organization towards greater stability, sustained growth, and increased profitability. At the heart of organizational success stories lies people and how they are motivated towards accomplishing organizational goals whilst developing novel skills and competencies. In this chapter, complexity leadership, smart leadership, and servant leadership as leadership constructs have been presented. While leaders continue to be challenged by a VUCA world, they will have to develop themselves as smart leaders and servant leaders as identifying and fulfilling the needs of followers is of immense importance. Afterall, leadership only seems to be a co-created construct, where followers and several macro elements in the system that are interconnected need to be carefully evaluated and examined. While social, economic, and technological changes will only deepen with time, organizations must continuously innovate, and perhaps at the very crux of this transformation must lie the adaptive capabilities of leaders and followers, who will jointly create organizations of the future capable to manoeuvre an ever-changing landscape and sustain the pressures of time and change that only seem inevitable.

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