The Signature of Effective Leadership

Prof. David Minja

Department of Public Policy & Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Email: minjad11@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provoke scholars and practioners in the area of leadership to re-think about the whole concept of 'effective leadership'. A literature gap exists in the explanation of what constitutes effective leadership. This has led to the author studying some selected leaders and through the lessons learnt has attempted to construct a conceptual model on the concept of effective leadership. Existing literature looks at effective leadership in terms of achieving organizational goals and developing followers. And personal leadership. The four elements form what the authors has referred to as the 'Circumplex model of Effective leadership'.

Theory and practice suggest that traits alone will not sustain one at the top. Traits and knowledge will however, do. Traits and individual exposure and/ or experience may take someone to the top, but to remain there will require a great deal of learning and application of knowledge. For an individual to be considered a great leader, the results of his/her leadership must say so. This leads to the concept of effective leadership. Effective leadership must be in place for organizational success. Effective leadership guides an organization to appropriately handle change. It aids in providing the correct skills to manage properly and to cope up with the outcomes of change.

Keywords: Circumplex Model, Effective Leadership, Organizational culture & change, Self-transcendence

1.0 Introduction and background

Unlike the possibility of plague or nuclear holocaust, the leadership crisis will probably not become the basis for a best-seller or a blockbuster movie, but in many ways it is the most urgent and dangerous of the threats we face today; if only because it is insufficiently recognized and little understood. Warren Bennis

Numerous studies have been carried out and books and articles published in the area of leadership. Several theories have been developed in the area of leadership ranging from the Great man, Trait, Situational, Stylistic, Transactional, Charismatic, Transformational, Servant leadership and Virtuous leadership among others. We have been taught how to spot leaders, grow leaders and become good leaders. Other writers and scholars have given us the marks and qualities of good leadership.

 The thrust of this paper is to articulate in a simple way the imprint or signature of leadership that yield results. Results here are three dimensional: the focus on personal growth and attainment of self-transcendence, the focus on followers' growth through an empowerment that arouses their inner self to achieve their fullness and live their purpose; the focus on organizational goals of growth, sustainability and creating a competitive edge.

To survive in a competitive world and sustain growth and profitability over the long haul, an organization must identify leaders that live and pursue holistic lives. These leaders have concern for people and concern for organizational performance. The leaders mandate is to equip the followers, energize, empower and inspire them to do something that will take the organization to the next level. For a leader to achieve all these, he/she must develop self and also move beyond self- empowerment/ actualization to self-transcendence where the focus shifts from self to others.

A leader who is visionary, with great ideas on how to transform work processes or even an organization but does not communicate and inspire followers will most likely become either frustrated or have his or her energies drained, yet with minimal results to show. The art of shared vision, building commitment and mobilizing people to action will most probably be more critical than acquisition of resources.

The challenge of leadership involves urging followers to reach their full potential and not settle for anything less than the best. They may do this in several ways which include: regularly giving words of encouragement, making helpful suggestions, giving a direct challenge or asking challenging questions.

The subject of leadership and leadership development has grown in importance for the last five or so decades. This is because as John Maxwell (2002) puts it, "everything rises and falls on leadership." Peter Drucker as quoted by Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstaidt (2000) wrote, "Leadership must be learned and can be learned." The world is in great need for leaders. The world in yearning for leaders who will accomplish many urgent or worthwhile things, who will lead in the right direction, make good things happen, transform communities and organizations and do the right things. The need for leadership that will courageously help transform the world where humanity will be happy to live in is great.

   It is widely believed in the business world that leadership is the major key ingredient in the recipe for corporate success. Leadership is also required in the world of sports, politics, civil societies, governments, families,

educational institutions etc. Leadership appears to be a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness (Huczynski, 1993, Hakala, 2008).

Leadership is both a science and an art. This emphasizes the subject of leadership as a field of scholarly inquiry as well as examining aspects in the practice of leadership. The art of getting people to follow the leader and to do what the leader requires moves the subject of leadership from theory to practice. It should be noted that scholarship (acquisition of knowledge on theoretical underpinnings of leadership) may not be a prerequisite for leadership effectiveness; but understanding the principles and practices of leadership can help individuals better analyze situations using a variety of perspectives which will significantly contribute to effective leadership. This, in turn, will equip those individuals to become more effective leaders in all the three leadership dimensions given earlier. It is true that some individuals have risen to leadership positions without having leadership training. However, it becomes tough for them to be or remain effective. Theory and practice suggest that traits alone will not sustain one at the top. Traits, knowledge and application of that knowledge will however, do.

1.1 Failed leadership

The symptoms of failed leadership rear their ugly faces each day. In many countries in the developing world, millions of people continue to go without food and have no access to clean water and other basic amenities because of poor leadership. Even in developed countries like UK and the USA, cases of poor leadership have been reported in big corporations where some ended up collapsing due to poor leadership and governance issues The examples of Enron and Parmalat are clear cases of poor leadership and management malpractices in the developed world.

Environmental degradation has resulted in untold sufferings to mankind. Corruption in public sector leadership continues unabated in some countries and corporations. The results of good or poor leadership are evident and every leader is judged by the marks he or she leaves behind- be they good or bad. There is an urgent need for transformative leadership – one that will meet the aspirations and expectations of their people. These failures are perhaps not personality based but systemic in terms of how leaders are selected, cultivated, rewarded, and held accountable. Apparently, quick fix solutions, such as wholesale import of leaders from other sectors and countries or big increases in pay do not address leadership problems. Parachuting into charismatic super-leaders is hardly sufficient to deliver a systemic reinvigoration of private or public sector leadership. To achieve sustained change requires action at every level – from leaders themselves, from those to whom they are accountable, from human resource directors to operatives and all those shaping the organization.

1.2 An enigma

The continent of Africa, for example is an enigma. How does one explain the level of poverty amidst plenty? To begin with, Africa has some of the most precious minerals – gold, oil, copper, titanium, and radium among others. Some gold-producing countries like Democratic Republic of Congo still exhibit abject poverty amongst its people. Oil producing countries like Nigeria and Sudan are yet to make major impacts on improving the standard of living for their people. Nigeria exports an average of 3 million barrels of crude oil per day yet millions of her people live in perpetual darkness for lack of power supply. Sudan has had war for 38 years – 1956-73, and 1983-2004. In the latter case, 2.5 million people died.

Many questions now beg for answers. What kind of leadership do we need to see in Africa that will bring development? How do we build leaders for tomorrow? How do we institutionalize integrity in the public sector especially in the developing countries? What lessons can Africa learn from the mistakes made in the past? As we attempt to answer these questions, we need to define the concept of leadership. Our definition will not be confined to the traditional textbooks definitions. The great question that begs an answer is: What characterizes great and effective leadership? The answer to this question is two-fold. The mark of true leadership will be measured by nobility and results. Both the means and the ends to achieving results will matter. This level of leadership can only be provided by the people who subscribes to the three dimensions mentioned earlier. Are we talking about a utopian system of leadership and governance? Not at all. It is possible to provide leadership that meets followers needs, awakens the 'sleeping giants' in them, empowers the follower to emerge as great leaders and thus prepare for succession and meet organizational or national needs altogether. What makes one an influential leader is one's ability to inspire a shared vision, facilitate collective efforts to reach a common objective and identify and nurture the right talent.

1.3 Definition of leadership and Effective Leadership

Before we embark on identifying the leader's signature, it is important to understand what leadership is. According to Kadalie (2006), leadership has been defined differently by many authorities on the subject. He quotes Warren Bennis saying, "Without question, leadership is the most studied and least understood topic of any I can think of." Leadership may be defined as: "*Influence, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals*. It might be interpreted in simple terms as getting others to follow you or getting people to do things willingly" (Mullins, 2007).

The various definitions of leadership differ in many ways and these differences have resulted in various

researchers exploring very different aspects of leadership (Hughes et al., 2006). Although there is such a large number of a leadership definition that may seem conflicting, it is important to understand that there is no single correct definition that has been agreed among scholars. In spite of this, the various definitions given by scholars lead to one observation: leadership is a relationship through which one person influences the behaviour or actions of other people with intent to achieve a goal.

Halcomb, et al, (2000) argue that people's desire to provide leadership comes from a realization of a need to be met - the gap that exists between the existing situation and the desired situation. This implies that the perceived need creates dissonance in an individual, a state of 'healthy discontentment' which moves the individual to want to provide leadership in that situation. Putting it in another way, when leaders see situations that do not reflect what is good, just, true or desirable, the natural inclination for them is not to accept the situations as a fact of life but rather to devise ways to change them and include those affected by those situations. This is leadership in practice.

Following this argument, some may argue that some individuals are already 'curved out' for leadership. All they wait for are opportunities to manifest themselves and then they seize those opportunities.

While this could be partly true, it is a fact of nature that every human being is wired with abilities to influence. The difference comes with context and scope of influence. The difference between those who lead and the led is in the way individuals respond to the dissonance created in them after recognizing the gap.

For an individual to be considered as a great leader, the results of his/her leadership must say so. This leads to the concept of effective leadership. Effective leadership must be in place for organizational success. Effective leadership guides an organization to appropriately handle change. It aids in providing the correct skills to manage properly and to cope up with the outcomes of change. Leadership as Hughes et al, (2006) argue provides a strategic intent. This means that it provides an organization with a crucial sense of where it wants to go as well as the results to be achieved. Ultimately leadership must help the organization to achieve its growth goals and also create sustained competitive advantage. This forms the first dimension of effective leadership discussed in this paper.

The leadership paradigm that is effective holds that before one can lead others, one must first be able to follow. Leaders who are best known for their skillful leadership abilities are those whose leadership flows from their skillful followership abilities (Halcomb, Hamilton, Malmstadt, 2000).

The effective leader should be regarded as credible and legitimate source of power. The leader must develop relations with the followers that motivate and enable them to act to attain collective goals. The leader must also mobilize and direct the effort of the group to make the most effective use of the combined resources of the group in task accomplishment (Knipperberg, Hogg, M; 2003). Leadership effectiveness is therefore, a combination of personal competency in leadership, an organizational culture that supports people (empowerment) and the leader's ability to inspire people. The intervening factor to this combination is the leader-follower environment which includes the task structure, availability of resources and intra-group communication and conflict resolution.

Effective leadership whether judged by the leader or the followers is seen from four dimensions - organizational culture (which is partly influenced by the leader), personal leadership, follower development and organizational goals attainment that lead to superior performance. Leadership is all about results. The leader's success or failure is judged by the extent to which organizational goals are achieved, followers are empowered and live fulfilled lives and the leader grows in leadership practice. A balanced way of evaluating leadership effectiveness is where the leader is rated by superiors, the peers and the followers. In this way, the biases that a particular category of raters may have are neutralized when the overall score is calculated. The answer to the leadership question of what effective leadership is will be found in the application of what this paper refers to as the *Circumplex Model of Effective Leadership.* The model shown in figure 1 provides a framework which effective leadership may yield results. Personal leadership is one key ingredient introduced in effective leadership.

This model postulates that leadership that yields results must take into account the personal competences and character of the leader. The leader's values must shift from self- promotion to care and development of others/ followers. The ability to identify gaps, inspire people, build commitment and move them to action is the very foundation of effective leadership. Personal competences must be grounded on moral integrity. Competences may place a leader at the top; but it will take integrity to remain at the top. Self-leadership then, becomes the foundation of all leadership. A leader who is unable to lead self will find it difficult to provide holistic leadership to others.

Self-leadership is an enabling process whereby a person learns to know himself or herself better and through self-understanding is able to steer his or her life better. The rapidly changing business environment requires flexibility, quick responses, creativity and great learning skills (Sydanmaanlakka, 2002). According to this author, there is a model of self-leadership known as the Self Ltd. Model. This model postulates that we all are Managing Directors of our own companies or organizations called Self Ltd. This organization is divided into five

departments which are Physical, Mental, Social, Spiritual and Work (Professional) departments. We should be able to manage the interactions of these departments and their interactions with one another. The leader and the follower in this organization is the same person. The leader is the consciousness that leads the body, mind, feelings and values.

The physical dimension focuses on having a balanced diet, exercising, sleep and resting adequately. The mental dimension means that one is curious, creative, promotes creative thinking, memory, perception and learning. Social dimension requires developing one's relations and the Spiritual dimension considers promoting a life with a purpose, values, vision and actions of one's life which are in balance. The implication is that a clear vision and spiritual stimuli steer the leader's life.

Good self-leadership releases energy and gives new internal resources. It is a tool against fatigue, over-specialization and boredom. Self-leadership calls for personal change and renewal. For self-leadership to be effective, great self-discipline is at the core. At the core of self-leadership is the purpose of living or finding the sense of meaning(Covey,S.R.1989). All humans have a meaning why they exist. We must find what our contribution is and be of service to others and the universe. We however, need to know ourselves for us to be able to define our purpose in life: Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? The answer to these questions will generate a mission, vision and priorities in life (Zohar,D and Marshall, I. 2000).

Renewal, learning and change are key to self-leadership. An effective leader has to be flexible and renew continuously(Zohar,D and Marshall, I. 2004) Change must be seen as a natural state of life and one must be willing to change continuously and not see change as a threat.

Following not so far in order of priority is creating an organizational or group culture that fosters individual empowerment and values that promote self-transcendence not just for the leader but for everyone in the organization. Values are "constructs representing generalized behaviour or states of affairs that are considered by the individual to be important" (Gordon, 1975). Because values play a central role in a person's psychological make-up, they have a profound effect on leadership (Hughes et al., 2006). Values play a key role in the choices made by leaders (Curphy, 2003). Bhargava (2008) argue that organizations can create and sustain high performance by applying a value-based leadership model. Values such as trust and integrity are key to the growth of followers. Value-based leadership gives a sense of power and hope, provides guidance, direction, inspiration and empowers people to realize their potential. Leaders should be at the front in shaping an organizational culture that upholds values that will enable attainment of results at individual, organizational and/ or societal level. Creation of cultural capital will be a major task of a leader.

Burns (1978) observed that moral leadership emerges from and always returns to the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations and values of the followers. It is a kind of leadership that can produce social change and satisfies followers' authentic needs. Value-based leaders discern the true interests of the followers from their stated desires and learn to address the underlying needs that the followers are unable to articulate. O'Toole (1996) observed that value-based and effective leaders illuminate their followers' better side, revealing what is good in them and thus ultimately giving them hope. In the end, the leader's vision becomes their vision because it is built on the foundation of their needs and aspirations.

The other dimension of effective leadership is the follower -empowerment. The leader must ensure that followers are equipped by way of competences and resources to do what they have to do for themselves and the organization. It is also the responsibility of leadership to help individuals align their goals with those of the organization. Removing all forms of barriers, be they structural, systems or people is the foundation of the empowerment process. Task variety, intra-group communication and mechanisms of resolving conflicts should act as lubricants in leading for results. Task variety refers to the extent to which followers are required to perform different tasks that demand for different skills. For example, customer service clerks may be required to perform stocking inventory duties also. This promotes creativity and idea generation. There is nothing more encouraging to a follower than knowledge that his or her ideas count in the organization.

Communication within the group or the organization will determine the extent to which the vision will be shared and the extent to which followers will be committed to realizing that vision. The leader should apply right communication media for his or her group. Media appropriateness is key to communicating effectively for vision buy-in. The choice of communication medium will determine whether people understand and buy-in the vision or not.

Lastly, sufficient resources and capabilities are critical to achieve superior performance. The leader should be at the center in the process of acquiring, developing and retaining talents. In addition, the leader should ensure that the organization has sufficient financial resources to enable it achieve its goals. This will also involve focusing on organizational capacity. Systems, processes and procedures should be major components in creating superior performance. Both financial and non financial resources should be acquired and harnessed to create sustained results.

At the heart of effective leadership is self-leadership. In times of great need or leadership crisis, the only person

with ability to meet any challenge and keep the faith and the respect of those he or she leads is the one who has led self-first before leading others. Great leaders have a real need and desire to lead self-first before they can lead anybody else. Hybels B (2002), observes that unless a leader is upright internally, he or she has nothing much to offer to his or her team. He quotes Dee Hock saying that it is management of self that should take at least 50% of the leader's time, energy and the best of their ability. The remaining 50% should be left to leading up, leading down and leading laterally. Inability or neglect to lead self explains why a small percentage of leaders develop to their fullest potential while most leaders hit a plateau far beneath what one might expect from them.

According to Daniel Coleman (author of "Emotional Intelligence") as observed by Hybels(2002), 'emotional self-control' –self leadership- is a form of "self-control' exhibited by leaders when they persevere leadership despite overwhelming opposition, or discouragement; when they refuse to give up in times of crisis; when they manage to hold egos at bay; and when they stay focused on their mission rather than being distracted by other people's agendas".

2.0 Elements for evaluating self-leadership

Self-leadership makes a leader stay healthy, energized and focused. No one can make this happen to a leader except a leader him or herself. Every leader has to do the work of leading self and it isn't easy. Dee Hock claims that because it's such tough work, most leaders would rather avoid it - self leadership. Every leader should consider the following elements to evaluate the extent which they succeeded in leading self:

Clear vision

For one to lead effectively, the vision of the future must be clear. Both the leader's personal vision and organizational vision must be clear in the leader's mind.

Leader's Passion

The leader's passion must be kept fired up. That is a self-leadership fundamental according to Bill Hybels(2002). It is the leader's responsibility to do things that make their passion fired up.

Talents and gifts

A leader must be articulate about his or her talents and gifts. A leader who operates outside the area of his or her talents and gifts finds work and life boring and this eats away the passion. All leaders are responsible for developing each of their gifts to the zenith of their potential. It is the leader's job to stretch his or her talent and gifts to the best of his/ her ability.

Moral Authority

Leadership requires moral authority. Followers will only trust leader who exhibit the highest levels of integrity, According to Bill Hybels (2002), people will not follow a leader with moral incongruities for long. Every time you compromise character you compromise leadership.

Overcoming Fear

Fear immobilizes and neutralizes leaders. Leaders should never allow fear to mess with their decision-making. Fear should never be allowed to sabotage one's leadership. It is a leader's job to deal with fear.

Dealing with Internal issues

Everyone has experienced heartaches, wounds, frustrations and even failure. Leaders who ignore their interior reality often make unwise decisions that have grave consequences for the people they lead. Some leaders do not realize that their own struggles with grandiosity cause them to enslave their followers. Other leaders are incurable people pleasers. Leaders are responsible for processing and resolving their interior issues so that their followers will not be negatively impacted by the leader's internal issues. Self-leadership demands that leaders deal with their internal issues and learn from their past failures and successes.

3.0 Conclusion

The four aspects discussed in this paper that result in development of the Circumplex model of Effective leadership is what the paper refers to as the signature of leadership that yield results. As the leader continues to influence others, grow as a leader and help an organization live out its mission successfully, certain marks must distinguish him or her from the rest of the people. The practice of these aspects in the model is as a result of a leader's commitment and dedication to grow and impact other people's lives. Effective leaders bear certain marks that distinguish them from followers. This paper has argued that the practice of the four dimensions provided by the circumplex model will result in effective leadership and these dimensions are what the author has called the 'signature of effective leadership'.

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About the author

Prof. David Minja is an Associate Professor of Management Studies In the Department of Public Policy & Administration at Kenyatta University. He is a full member of Institute of Human Resource Management (Kenya) and International Public Management network. Prof. Mija Holds a doctorate in Organization development and transformation from Cebu Doctors' University- Philippines, MA Leadership from PACU in collaboration with Trinity Western University- Canada, and BA Economics& Business from Kenyatta University. His major field of study is organizational leadership and change, and ethics.
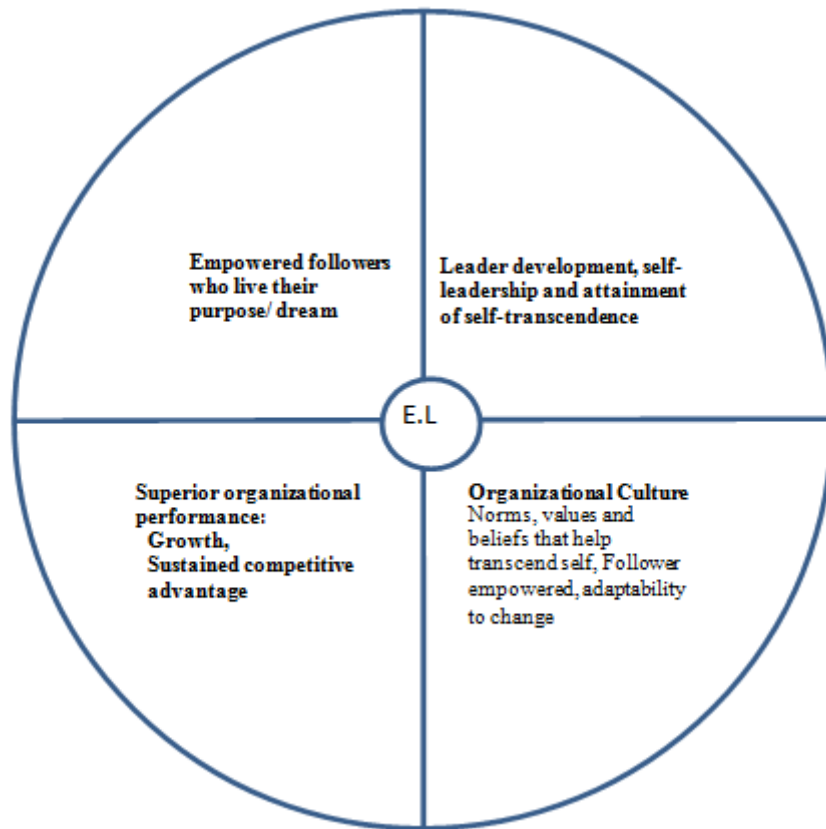
Appendix 1

Figure 1: Circumplex Model of Effective leadership - Minja, 2013

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