THE IMPORTANCE OF FLUENCY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE IN THE FIELD OF LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: The essential behaviours that directly affect the impression a leader makes on other people are considered to be an issue of vital importance. The manner in which fluency, self-confidence, presence, authenticity, courage, passion and attitude are shaped and expressed represents the basis of leadership training and the infrastructure of efficiency when it comes to creating the desired impression as the leader interacts with his/her peers.

Keywords: leader/leadership/charisma/self-analysis/intuition

1. INTRODUCTION. PERSONAL IMPACT

People perceive leadership unconsciously, as they perceive a leader's natural ability to make a powerful impression. Personal impact does not always coincide with the notion of "good". Positive leadership is one and the same with the idea of "good" and the leaders who have managed to consolidate in other people the desire for freedom, the respect for life, the love of their peers and the compassion for people in pain are significant examples in this respect. Among such authentic leaders, we can name Ghandi, Nelson Mandela and Maria Theresa. At the opposite pole of the idea of "good" is negative leadership, which is represented by leaders such as Hitler, Stalin or Mao, who have led people towards destructive outcomes.

Regardless of whether it is positive or negative, leadership seems to involve mysterious innate properties combined with qualities that rely on the ability to create interhuman relations. Celebrities from the world of entertainment, great religious and spiritual leaders, renowned politicians and military geniuses are just a few examples of leadership that have influenced important areas of mankind. This kind of influence can, for the most part, be learned (Fig. 1).
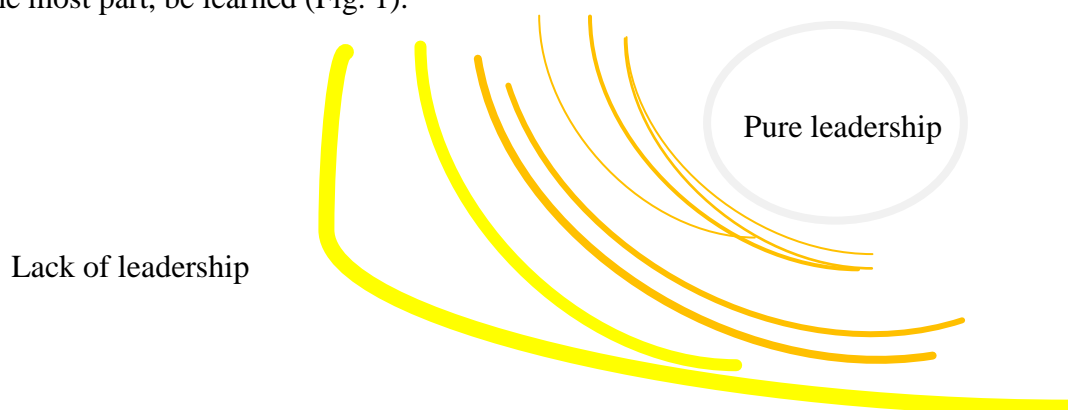

Pure leadership

Lack of leadership

FIG. 1 The charismatic effect of leadership

It is a matter of how one can use the area of one's own leadership (defined by the personal views, integrity, realism and courage) in solving life problems, by attracting attention and using one's own energy to remain fully present, with a view to making oneself understood and mobilising one's peers by gaining their approval, trust, commitment and admiration, thus creating affinities, influencing and creating emotional, intellectual and maybe even spiritual bonds. Therefore, the charismatic effect of leadership represents the ability to use all of one's qualities to generate a powerful and memorable impact on your peers, by influencing them at an emotional, physical and intellectual level, including their thoughts, attitudes and behaviour.

Traditionally, the extreme version of innate charisma is the unusual ability to influence people and to generate devotion. Nevertheless, the charismatic effect could be created from knowing and exercising the ingredients of increasing personal impact, which leads to antisocial, quiet, reserved, even shy leaders, i.e. a paradoxical combination of personal humility and professional wilfulness that reminds us of Socrates rather than Caesar (J. Collins, Good to Greit, Random House, 2001).

In general, the interactions between us and other people represent a normal part of our daily lives, regardless of whether they take place during meetings, when you greet your boss in the hallway, when you have a dialogue with a client, during a job interview, when you make a phone call or when you are part of a team. What all of these people think of us is important even if we are fans of technology, recluse, infatuated specialists or preoccupied managers, because this affects the manner in which they react to our demands. The process by means of which leaders enter into contact with other people making themselves heard, saying things that are worth remembering by the interlocutors, being perceived as an authority in their professional field, being asked for their opinion and answering the requests of their peers without disappointing them involves 3 key elements, as shown in Fig. 2.

FIG. 2 The process of personal impact

The aim of managers could be to motivate, to arise consciousness or to trigger actions from their subordinates. An important and difficult part of their personal attraction is represented by the type of relationship that they have with target people. The more explicit the aim of communication (clear, achievable, necessary, desirable), the easier it is to eliminate the obstacles and to obtain more precise results:
- To convince people to trust you;
- To determine people to commit to a certain action;
- To determine people to approve of your ideas;
- To inspire your enthusiasm in other people;
- To make people listen to you with respect;
- To attract new volunteers;
- To reach an agreement on a new meeting for the following month;
- To obtain a warm smile and a handshake at the end.

Trying to achieve all these results involves the risk of failure. Therefore, it is crucial to set priorities based on the classification of multiple aims from 1 to 4:
1. having a high impact on the boss;
2. improving one's position within the team;
3. building a relationship with the client;
4. obtaining the approval of a colleague for a new project.

Increasing self-consciousness is absolutely necessary when the aim is to increase one's personal impact on other people, because only this way strengths are emphasised and weaknesses are minimised. There is not wrong in wishing to improve the impression one makes on other people.

2. THE ROLE OF FLUENCY IN CONSOLIDATING LEADERSHIP

What we communicate, our message must be received by the interlocutor. Communication is clear if the receiver absorbs the speaker's message. If nothing has been heard, it means that nothing has been communicated.

Being fluent means:
- To speak easily;
- To explain complicated ideas in a simple manner;
- To communicate convincingly;
- To give life to your words;
- To speak clearly in order to be heard;
- To use pauses properly and powerfully.

Fluency is a mixture of: 7% verbal communication (only words), 38% voice (tone, pitch, speed and intonation) and the remaining 55% non-verbal communication (body language, gestures, expression and posture).

Having a vast vocabulary is amazing. Still, it is less important than being able to devise a message that people believe is worth listening to. Here are some ways of improving one's fluency:
- eliminating verbal delay tactics, such as repetition and hesitation;
- updating one's vocabulary by:
    - checking one's vocabulary;
    - learning a new word every day using a dictionary of neologisms;
    - doing crossword puzzles;
    - reading;
- exploiting subjects such as art, music, theatre, literature, foreign languages, psychology etc.;
- practicing the active listening of the interlocutors;
- practicing stimulating conversation as a form of training of the mind.

The simplification of the message increases personal impact and involves the elimination of jargon and even professional language, even if they represent useful shortcuts among professionals in the field.

Being convincing is little dependent on the position one holds or the professional role one plays, but it is very much related to the purpose of communication, the non-verbal language, the power/passion behind the actual message and the capacity to give people the most relevant information from the beginning. The verbal content of the message can also increase the speaker's credibility, provided that there are sufficient real aspects supporting the case, that the message is transmitted in a logical and easy-to-follow manner and that it is short enough to be received clearly, without any ambiguities.

Conceptual ideas and complex notions must be presented in an accessible manner, using creative sentences, memorable visual images, metaphors and analogies. Persuasion begins from the transformation of conceptual images into plastic images, using the verbal symbolism to describe something as if it were something else.

The aspects related to the musicality of the speaker's own voice are also very important in attracting the public's attention:

-   diction (for a clear pronunciation of the words it is recommended to speak slowly and to look closely at the interlocutor);

-   the pitch of the voice tone (it is recommended to avoid monotone speaking, by using the breathing and relaxation technique, "stressing the important words and sentences", investing emotion in the speech and emphasising the end of the assertions/questions);

-   volume (speaking too loudly or too softly can undermine the effort to catch attention; determining the volume required to attract attention starts with deep breath and regular speech that does not use up all the air in one sentence);

-   tone (a pleasant tone involves using the diaphragm, the vocal cords and the sound that resonates in the throat, mouth and head and that has the effect of what the voice is transmitting: joy, friendliness, anger, patience, poise);

-   rhythm (speaking more rarely, using techniques such as adding pauses to give the interlocutor time to think, varying the rhythm of the speech by increasing or decreasing the speed of the speech, minimizing the use of energy for an efficient speech so that the words can be uttered slowly and less intermittently, all of which shall increase the level of attention).

3. THE ROLE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE IN BUILDING LEADERSHIP

Self-confidence is, along with correct self-assessment and emotional self-knowledge, one of the competencies of self-knowledge, one of the dimensions of emotional intelligence.

There is a difference between the internal and external confidence that leaders transmit to other people and a powerful link between internal confidence and the external results interpreted by others as self-confidence.

Basically, self-confidence is built through practice and it leads to the shaping of certain skills that shall support, in their turn, more self-confidence (figure no. 3).

Here are some of the things that show the external self-confidence:

-   Being relaxed rather than stiff;

-   Being flexible in voice tonality, attempting to cover a wide range of tones and gestures;

-   Controlling one's movements in order not to tremble and seem clumsy;

-   Using open-ended questions in order to involve other people and to avoid "Yes/No" answers;

-   Using the informal 2nd person singular when addressing the interlocutor directly, which shows a direct and friendly approach;

-   Being proactive and taking the initiative in the conversational process;

-   Looking the interlocutor in the eye and maintaining visual contact for enough time in order to send a clear message, for example: "Trust me, you interest me."
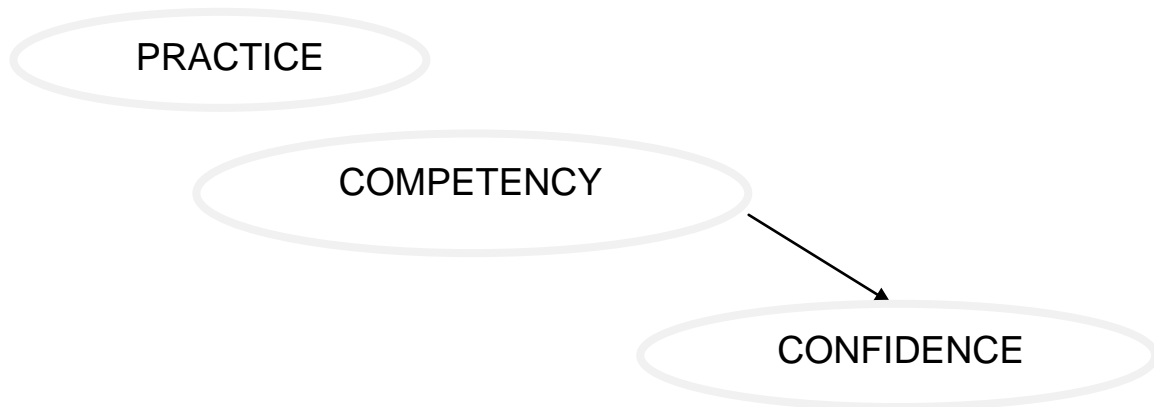
-   Making one's intent clear.

PRACTICE

COMPETENCY

CONFIDENCE

FIG. 3 Steps in achieving inner self-confidence

The simple fact of having inner self-confidence shall significantly reduce the fears that might become overwhelming when:
- entering into a room full of strangers;
- giving a speech;
- supporting one's own point of view in a team meeting.

Exterior self-confidence involves rejecting one's doubts, by adopting a normal demeanour, which shall increase the chances of one's own progress through behaviours that target the desired premises as an already incontestable reality, i.e.:
- behaving as if the others are happy to see you;
- behaving as if other people are eager to listen to what you have to say;
- acting as if your peers like, respect and admire you.

People shall have the same assumptions about leaders as they do about themselves. Leadership is based on the leader's attitudes that echo back from the others. People tend to reflect the emotional state of their leaders, i.e. their interest for their peers shall be transmitted and converted in the interest that people have for the leader. The expectations related to the manner in which peers behave shall affect their behaviour significantly. This has nothing to do with telepathy, but rather with the tacit messages sent by the leader's poise, facial expression, gestures and body language.

For example, the challenges of delivering a public speech at an event involve the fears related to speaking in public and to the interaction with strangers, which leaders, as people with self-confidence, shall cope with by using the technique of imagining the 3 series of sequences (scenarios) and by preparing strategic solutions to get out of such situations, as described below:

1. the scenario in which the leaders shall behave as the host of their own party (the solution imagined for the challenge of speaking in public at a conference: leaders shall behave with all the people they meet at the event as if they were their guests, paying close attention to each and every one of them before moving on to the next stage);

2. the scenario in which the leaders shall manifest their curiosity (the solution imagined for the challenge of speaking in public at a conference: leaders shall focus on a target of their curiosity that shall become the aim of their focus, such as curiosity to identify the reason why people have chosen to attent the conference);

3. the scenario in which the leaders assumes the role of an emissary, or the bearer of a message (the solution imagined for the challenge of speaking in public at a conference: leaders shall approach the people atending the conference by talking to them as if they benefited from a unique opportunity to find out what they have to say and they were eager to listen to their messages).

3.1 The role of emotional intelligence in developing self-confidence

Emotional intelligence means being aware of what is happening to other people at an emotional level. Decreased emotional intelligence is the equivalent of not feeling/understanding/anticipating or not caring about the fact that one makes the people around feel belittled, inadequate, intimidated, angry, frustrated or guilty. Machiavellian people have decreased emotional intelligence. Leaders have above-average emotional intelligence, which translates into:

- their ability to detect social dynamics, i.e. what happens during an interaction between people;

- their capacity to get involved more from a social point of view;

- their capacity to correctly interpret behaviours, intentions, emotional states and their willingness to relate to their peers.

The increase of emotional intelligence is based on the development of situational consciousness by knowing and using the appropriate tools to properly identify/perceive a situation (Andrew Leigh, 2010):

- Space (identifying who is staying where and why; for example if the most experienced person is sitting at the head of the table; identifying whether the set-up of the environment highlights the power of the person occupying it, whether it encourages intimacy, whether it promotes communication or it blocks it);

- behaviours (body posture, movements, gestures, face expression, voice tone, who is touching who, who enters the room first or last);

- Advanced sensorial activity (superficial or deep breathing of the people, face pallor, flushing might indicate anger, opposition or shyness or simply the fact that that person is in trouble; the signals of shifting energy levels can be decrypted from multiple sources, such as one's body posture, visual contact, hand or foot movements etc.)

- Words and symbols (the meaning of words and symbols can vary from one person to another depending on their social status, which is identifiable from: language, slang, figures of speech, the use or avoidance of insulting expressions, the use of specialised vocabulary, such as jargon);

4. CONCLUSION: THE INTERACTIONAL LEADERSHIP TYPE

Fluency and self-confidence are indisputable traits of leadership, together with a wide range of characteristics, behaviour and personality features that make some people more efficient in achieving their goals. Undoubtedly, leadership is also a process based on power sources that are directed towards influencing the members of a group into the direction of a common objective. In reality, the definition of leadership is somewhere between a sum of traits and a process used to influence a group. As it cannot occur in isolation, any leadership action shall take place within a context.

Therefore, a leader's fluency and self-confidence and all their personal qualities must be confirmed/supported by the particularities of the situation/context in which the leader performs.

Some leadership situations are simply not suitable for certain people or certain situations and the interface between a leader, his/her people and a situation makes

leadership hard to define and apply and it also makes leaders valuable and necessary individuals for the society.

A more realistic incorporation of fluency and self-confidence in the leadership equation is provided in figure no. 4 (Manfred Kets de Vries, CODEX Publishing House, 2001, page 246).

The leadership style is determined by the fact that, in real life, the following elements meet and match in a fortunate manner:

- The leader's fluency, self-confidence, conceptual thinking, type of character, values, position, experience;
- The group's type of character, values, cohesion;
- The organisation's type of activity and life stage, the organisational variables, the culture, the social, political and economic environment;

Unfortunately, most of the times, these elements meet, but they do not match, as shown by the following situations:

- the group has a much higher level of emotional intelligence than the leader;
- the leader has the required self-confidence, fluency, position and experience, but he/she lacks the conceptual thinking and character, which has disastrous consequences for the group that follows the leader trustingly;
- the leader has self-confidence, fluency, conceptual thinking and character, but he/she lacks the position and experience required to make the group to follow him/her;
- the nature of the activity, the social, political and economic environment or the culture of the organisation might not put the leader's quality in the best light.
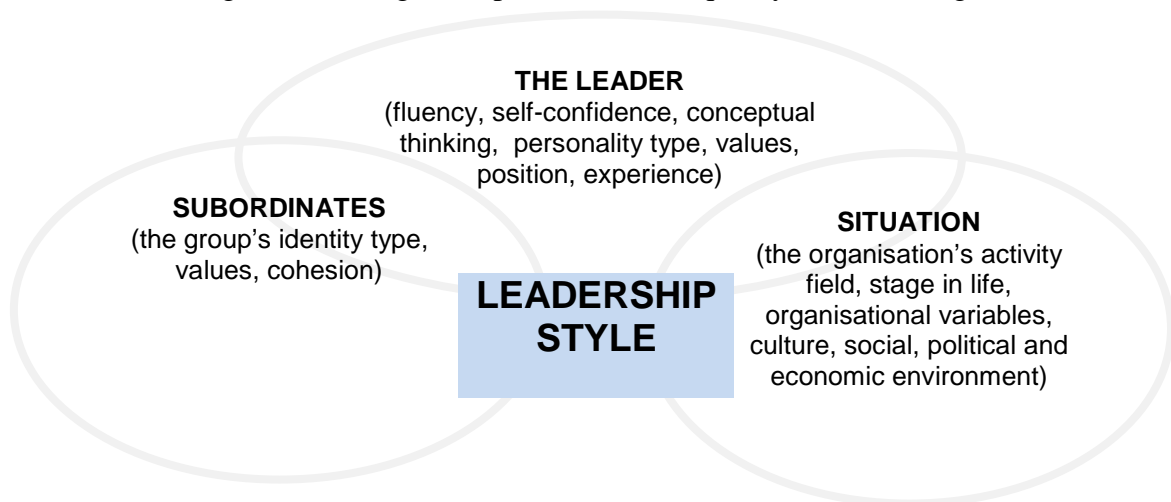
THE LEADER
(fluency, self-confidence, conceptual thinking, personality type, values, position, experience)

SUBORDINATES
(the group's identity type, values, cohesion)

LEADERSHIP STYLE

SITUATION
(the organisation's activity field, stage in life, organisational variables, culture, social, political and economic environment)

FIG. 4 Leadership field

The company follows its leaders, who are people that are ahead of their times and who assume the role of implementing a collective sense of importance by:

- building a clear personal vision for the future and creating the feeling that the group is headed towards an AIM;
- planting the feeling of SELF-DETERMINATION by inspiring his/her peers to feel that they are in control of their own lives;
- building the feeling of IMPACT among his/her peers, letting people convince themselves that their actions matter to the people around them;
- planting the feeling of COMPETENCY among people, by finding the means of expression of the creativity required for their need to explore;

- knowing and successfully applying the values of the organisation, i.e. focusing on teamwork, honesty, employee empowerment, respect for the individual, customer orientation, entrepreneurial attitude, pleasant atmosphere, assuming common responsibility, lifelong learning, trust, openness to change.

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