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Book Review (as part of the requirement for unit 55209) by Gretchen Haman of***The Leadership Challenge***

Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. 1995, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to critique Kouzes and Posner's (1995) book *The Leadership Challenge* in terms of relevant leadership competencies required by organisations in the future. The areas examined include:

- core leadership development behaviours;
- competencies for the future; and
- assessing development needs of leaders.

Within these areas, significant aspects from Kouzes and Posner's (1995) approach will be analysed against current leadership development and competency research. Aspects strongly supporting or contradicting current theories are highlighted. Before a critical analysis can proceed, the concepts of leadership, leadership effectiveness and leadership competencies must be understood.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) define leadership as "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" and emphasise the concepts of choice and internal motivation of followers (p. 30). Nahavandi's (1997, p.4) definition describes leadership as the process of influencing individuals and groups within organisations, assisting in goal establishment, and providing guidance towards goal achievement, thereby allowing them to be effective (Nahavandi 1997, p. 4). This definition introduces the concept of leader effectiveness.

To broadly determine leadership effectiveness and to consider process and outcome issues, a leader could be considered effective when his/her group is successful in maintaining internal stability and external adaptability while achieving its goals (Nahavandi, 1997, p. 6).

The majority of organisations define leadership in terms of competencies and these competencies tend to be similar across organisations creating a common language of competencies (Williams & Cothrel 1997). Lindsay and Stuart (1997) define competencies as an individual's skills, knowledge, characteristics, traits and abilities. Yukl (1998) further defines this concept by including motives, cognitive skills, and interpersonal skills to identify effective leaders (pp. 6-7).

Core Leadership Development Behaviours

Kouzes and Posner (1995) centre their book around five practices which their research indicated as fundamental to effective leadership in the views of current leaders and

followers. These five practices correlate to behaviours identified in Kouzes & Posner's (1995) research as outlined:

Challenging the process

Kouzes and Posner (1995) identify behaviours within this practice as seeking challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve, and experimenting, taking risks, and learning from mistakes. These competencies are mirrored in the research of Morden (1997) and van Maurik (1997) through qualities such as commitment, willingness to learn, learning from mistakes and successes, welcoming change, accepting challenges and taking risks.

Inspiring a shared vision

Within this practice, Kouzes and Posner (1995) focus on behaviours such as envisioning an uplifting and ennobling future, and enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams. Research supports these competencies through the behaviours of motivating and inspiring others (for example, through initiative, enthusiasm, self-confidence, accepting challenges, communication, and commitment), having a vision, and sense of purpose (Morden 1997; van Maurik 1997).

Enabling others to act

Behaviours identified within this practice include fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals, building trust, empowering people, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support (Kouzes & Posner 1995). Research findings of Morden (1997) and van Maurik (1997) identify the need for similar behaviours, such as understanding and facilitating teams, managing processes, motivating, inspiring, and managing core competences.

Modelling the way

Kouzes and Posner (1995) identify behaviours within this practice as setting examples consistent with shared values and achieving small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment. Research indicates support for these competencies through behaviours such as motivating, providing inspiration, and acting as a role model (Morden 1997; Fulmer & Wagner 1999).

Encouraging the heart

Within this practice, Kouzes and Posner (1995) focus on behaviours such as recognising individual contributions and celebrating team accomplishments. These behaviours are supported through the identification of competencies such as identifying and developing potential, understanding teams, rewards and recognition, motivating and inspiring (Morden 1997; van Maurik 1997; Fulmer & Wagner 1999).

Although different terminology is used and different emphasis is placed on competencies, the essence of these competencies remains similar (Kouzes & Posner 1995; Morden 1997; van Maurik 1997). Some competencies identified in other research were not mentioned in Kouzes and Posner's (1995) findings. These competencies included the ability to handle stress, strategic thinking, and performance orientation (Fulmer & Wagner 1999; van Maurik 1997). The exclusion of these competencies may indicate a lack of focus for future requirements of organisations and leaders (Hagberg Consulting Group 1998).

Competencies for the Future

The rapid rate of change experienced by organisations and new challenges facing leaders suggest that effective leadership for the future will require higher skill levels and new competencies (Yukl 1998, p. 466). Technological, social, and economic forces compel leaders to address these issues in order to stay ahead of the competition (Hagberg Consulting Group 1998; Kouzes & Posner 1995). Some of these challenges include:

- globalisation of business requiring cross cultural competencies;
- geographic shifts in economic power;
- information overload and democratisation of access to information;
- technological innovation;
- demographic and workforce changes;
- changing expectations of a more educated workforce;
- flattening organisations.

(Hagberg Consulting Group 1998; Kouzes & Posner 1995)

The competencies championed in *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner 1995) are noticeably dominant in 'soft' skills. This approach is supportive of research indicating the balance of leadership skills has shifted from traditionally 'masculine' attributes (eg, strong decision making, driving strategy) to 'feminine' qualities (eg, listening, relationship building, nurturing) and these trends will continue (Williams & Cothrel 1997). This change in focus aims to unlock the potential of the organisation's human assets (Williams & Cothrel 1997). Research indicates that effective leadership in the future will rely heavily on the attainment of 'soft' competencies (van Maurik 1997; Zenger, Ulrich & Smallwood 2000).

Evidence from recent research indicates that the evolving work environment is producing executives who suffer high levels of stress, work extremely long hours and balance work and home life poorly (van Maurik 1997). It may be prudent to suggest that leadership development competencies should concentrate more on teaching coping mechanisms, stress management, and the art of delegation (van Maurik 1997; Hagberg Consulting Group, 1998). Once these basic competencies are addressed the task of looking ahead at the ever-evolving business environment, creating a sense of direction, giving meaning to complex situations and stimulating creative responses from employees can be the focus for the effective leader (van Maurik 1997). Once the leadership competencies outlined by Kouzes and Posner (1995) have been developed, the dilemma for emergent leaders may well be how to strike a balance between the competencies to be effective (van Maurik 1997).

Assessing Development Needs of Leaders

Many approaches can be implemented to assess leadership development needs. These approaches have been divided into the competency areas outlined by Kouzes and Posner (1995).

Kouzes and Posner's (1995) practice of 'challenging the process' can be developed and assessed through self development techniques including 360-degree feedback, coaching,

group feedback, personality questionnaires, and follow-up to ensure transference of skills (Cacioppe 1998).

The four other practices of Kouzes and Posner's (1995) theory include 'inspiring a shared vision', 'enabling others to act', 'modelling the way', and 'encouraging the heart'. These practices can be developed and assessed through techniques to build leadership, team and interpersonal skills. Techniques may include project work, team problem-solving, exposure to leadership models, role-plays, and interpersonal skills exercises (e.g., conflict resolution, listening, facilitation, negotiation) (Cacioppe 1998).

Other methods of assessing leadership competencies focus on organisations compiling a common list of competencies so that current human resources can be analysed against human resource needs (Woodruffe 1991, p. 32). To determine the 'gap' between current competencies and future organisational requirements, competencies may act as dimensions to assess promotional potential or readiness, to appraise, and as dimensions upon which people may be developed (Woodruffe 1991, p.32). This list of competencies could be utilised in the writing of position descriptions and subsequently as guides in training needs analyses or development programs for staff (Woodruffe 1991; Sofo 1999).

Research indicates that leaders respond best when they learn about themselves, learn skills that help improve their team leadership and learn how to substantially contribute to the organisation's success (Cacioppe, 1998). Rapidly changing business competition, new technology and new concepts have resulted in new approaches to leadership development. Use of strategies such as 360-degree feedback (including a global focus), computer simulations, outdoor learning, personality questionnaires, and real world projects are increasing in current leadership development programs (Cacioppe 1998). These strategies assist managers to see relevance in using these skills in the workplace (Zenger, Ulrich & Smallwood 2000; Cacioppe 1998).

Conclusion

This paper has identified the competencies discussed in Kouzes and Posner (1995) and has analysed current literature in the leadership competency field which supports these practices. The identification of leadership competencies for the future highlighted inadequacies in the Kouzes and Posner (1995) literature. These inadequacies do not affect the viability of the practices outlined: however, they highlight the nature of the rapidly changing modern business world. Assessment methods to determine and develop leadership competencies easily related to the Kouzes and Posner (1995) practices. Overall, the Kouzes Posner leadership competency framework is a useful tool to further our understanding of leadership and the development of leadership competencies.

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