WHICH ABILITIES EFFECTIVE LEADERS NEED TO HAVE? AN EVALUATION FROM THE LEADERSHIP SKILL MODEL

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate deeply Mumford and his colleagues' skill based model of leadership. Relevant to this matter, leadership skill approach which is also known as capability model is examined in order to clarify the model. After that individual attributes of leaders which consist of general cognitive ability, crystallized cognitive ability, motivation and personality are studied critically. These attributes influence competencies of the leader. For this reason, problem solving skills, social judgment skills and the notion of knowledge is investigated in detail. In addition to this, leadership outcomes is explained in terms of problem solving and performance in the third and the last part of skill model. As a result, it is clear from academia and reality that the skills model put forward a suggestion to solve ill-defined and complex organizational problems. In addition to this, it is apparent that not only effective leaders need to have individual attributes but also they need to have other leadership skills to cope with complicated organisational problems.

Keywords: Leadership Skills Model, Individual Attributes of Leaders, Competencies of Leaders, Leadership Outcomes.

1. Introduction

In today's business world, leaders play an important role in the success of companies. Throughout the world, leadership is argued to solve complex organisational problems. From this point of view, many researchers comment leadership and its effects on businesses from different viewpoints. Leadership skill approach is not a new phenomenon. It is one of the leadership approaches in academia. For many years, leadership skills and abilities have discussed in the literature.

First of all, Katz (1955, 35) established a model in the Harvard Business Review and he pointed out three different leadership abilities which are made up technical skills, human skills and conceptual skills (Northouse, 2013, 11). Subsequently; Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs and Fleishman (2000, 14) have advanced this leadership skill model. They focus on capabilities to explain the relationship between a leader's knowledge, skills and performance. Fundamentally, the skill model is composed of individuals attributes, competencies, leadership outcomes, career experiences and environmental influences (Mumford et al., 2000, 15).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Leadership Skills Model

According to Northouse (2013, 19) first studies of the skills model have started in the early 1990s. Within this study, researchers investigate effective performance elements of leaders and their problem solving skills. Therefore in order to effectively evaluate whether the leadership factors create noteworthy job performance; researchers focus on individual characteristics of leaders, their career

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experiences and some environmental effects. Following this study, Mumford et al. (2000, 12) develop leadership skill approach. Even though Mumford and his colleagues study the relationships between leadership factors and job performance, they formulate the skill model.

Leadership skill model is called capability model as leader's capabilities are emphasised in the article. Mumford et al. (2000, 15) point out that these capabilities can be improved by way of experience and education in the process of time. In addition, Mumford et al. (2000, 15) assert that most of the people can become leader when they take a lesson from their experiences. Hence, each individual can be an effective leader due to they have these capabilities which are composed of knowledge and skills.

Leadership skills approach is made up basically five components which are individual attributes, competencies, leadership outcomes, career experiences and environmental influences (Mumford et al., 2000, 16). Before the explanation of these components, individual attributes of leaders are examined firstly.

2.2. Individual Attributes of Leaders

As stated in introduction part of this study, individual attributes are composed of general cognitive ability, crystallized cognitive ability, motivation and personality. Mumford et al. (2000, 16) think that effective leaders must have these attributes so as to be successful in organisations. Thus, each attributes are taken into account especially in problem solving process of the skill model (Northouse, 2013, 22).

General cognitive ability, which is the first individual attribute, refers to person's intelligence. This attribute is related to perceptual and information processing, general reasoning and memory skills, innovative capability and different thinking. Rather than job experiences it involves intelligence of individuals. Therefore, general cognitive ability of leaders is biological and innate feature (Northouse, 2013, 22). At this point, Mumford and colleagues conflict with their assertion. Although they claim many people can become leader with these capabilities, cognitive ability is related to intelligence of person. That's why, all of the people can not be potential leader as some of them are not intelligent or creative.

Secondly, crystallized cognitive ability is examined in terms of individual attribute. According to Northouse (2013, 23), this attribute refers to intellectual ability. It can be learned over time and acquired from job experiences. Hence, leadership capabilities such as problem solving skills, social judgment skills or conceptual abilities can be improved in time. Regarding this issue, Connelly, Zaccaro, Threlfall, Marks and Mumford (2000, 67) state that effective leaders are able to learn new skills, understand complex information and communicate other people with oral and written forms due to crystallized cognitive ability. To sum up briefly, leaders obtain crystallized cognitive ability by way of intelligence.

The third individual attribute of the skill model is motivation. The notion of motivation is studied by many researchers in terms of different aspects in the literature. There is no doubt that motivation has an impact on the success of leader. At this point, Mumford et al. (2000, 21) emphasise three aspects of motivation. First of all, leaders must be eager about solution of complex problems in organisations. Additionally, they must be dominant character and take responsibility in order to affect followers. Leaders also must be self dedicated the 'social good' which is related to a host of outcomes (Northouse, 2013, 39). According to Mumford et al. (2000, 21), when the people combine three aspects of motivation, they can be leaders in organisations. However, these three aspects fail to satisfy about the explanation of motivation. Because the concept of motivation is a broad term and it consists of many different aspects.

Personality is listed as the fourth and last attribute in leadership skills model. In this attribute of the model, leader's personality traits are investigated. These traits (i.e., foresighted, open minded, patient, tolerant, etc.) play crucial role on the development of leadership skills (Northouse, 2013, 42). Leaders could cope with organisational problems with personality traits in conflict situations. Moreover, personality traits influence leader's performance in the workplace (Mumford et al., 2000, 22). On the other side, some personality characteristics can affect leader's performance negatively. As

some leaders are autocratical, intolerant or rigid they might not solve complex organizational problems and interpersonal conflict. For this reason, the effect of personality changes from leader to leader.

2.3. Competencies

Competencies are the most important point of leadership skill approach. According to Mumford et al. (2000, 23), competencies consist of three elements which are problem solving skills, social judgment skills and knowledge. These competencies have a huge impact on leader's performance. Mumford and his colleagues underline that ill-defined organizational problems cause a commotion in organizations. Effective leaders can solve these new and unique problems with their problem-solving skills. Important problems are defined, problem information is integrated and exemplary plans are generated for solutions within problem-solving process (Northouse, 2013, 43). At this juncture skilled leaders, who have general cognitive ability, crystallized cognitive ability or positive personality traits, are able to find new solutions in order to solve unusual organizational problems.

Skilled and effective leaders also have social judgment skills in complex situations. These leaders can understand easily other people and social systems. In addition, they solve complicated organizational problems as they have social judgment skills (Zaccaro, Mumford, Connelly, Marks & Gilbert, 2000, 39). Concerning this issue, Mumford et al. (2000, 24) examine leader's social judgment skills in four components which are made up perspective taking, social perceptiveness, behavioral flexibility and social performance. All of these skills are related to understanding other people's ideas, needs, motivations in the organization (Northouse, 2013, 44; Zaccaro, Gilbert, Thor, & Mumford, 1991, 324). Effective leaders empathize with their followers and they respect different ideas in the workplace. Thus, social judgment skills of leaders play an essential role on the solution of complex organizational problems.

The notion of knowledge is very important in terms of problem-solving skills' application and implementation in companies. Mumford et al. (2000, 24) point out that knowledge level of leaders has an effect on the analysis of complicated organizational problems. Knowledgeable leaders solve these problems sooner than anticipated as they are experts. Besides their knowledge involves the facts and the complex mental structures (Northouse, 2013, 44). For this reason, knowledgeable leaders can overcome easily different types of organizational problems. Not only Mumford and colleagues highlight the concept of knowledge, but also many researchers who study on the leadership emphasise this notion from different aspects in the literature. Consequently, competencies which are problem-solving skills, social judgment skills and knowledge are interrelated and make a significant contribution leader's performance.

2.4. Leadership Outcomes

In the third and last part of the skill model, outcomes of leadership is examined by Mumford and his colleagues. Competencies of the leader such as problem-solving skills, social judgment skills and knowledge influence these outcomes. As Mumford et al. (2000, 25) point out leadership outcomes are composed of effective problem solving and performance, and the most important point is problem solving ability of the leader in the model. Similarly, Zaccaro et al. (2000, 326) explain that effective leaders create innovative and logical solutions for complex organizational problems.

In addition, leader's performance is measured so as to assess his/her job. While effective and successful leaders' performance is evaluated as positive, others performance can be measured negative. Results are changed according to the performance of leader. Mumford et al. (2000, 25) use effective problem solving and performance in order to evaluate leadership effectiveness. But these outcomes are insufficient to assess the leader in organizations. The evaluation of leadership effectiveness must be explained in more detail.

2.5. Strengths and Weaknesses of Leadership Skills Model

In this model, leadership skills and leadership effectiveness are scrutinised by Mumford and his colleagues. They emphasize the importance of leadership skills in different parts of the approach

and create new structure which is related to the leader's skills (Northouse, 2013, 49). Furthermore, Mumford et al. (2000, 26) underscore that all of the people can be leader because of leadership skills are learned and developed. Many people could improve these competencies with practice and become good leader over time in their jobs.

In addition to this, leadership skill model combines many variables which are made up of individual attributes, problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, knowledge, environmental influences and career experiences so as to examine the notion of leadership (Northouse, 2013, 50). The model investigates leadership deeply and it is more detailed in comparison with other studies. Besides, this leadership approach is exemplary for leadership education programs. Components of approach are closely related to these education programs (Northouse, 2013, 50).

Even though the skill model examines leadership from different perspective, it has some weaknesses about this context. The model includes only two types of intelligence such as general cognitive ability and crystallized cognitive ability. These abilities of leader are investigated widely by many researchers so they are not new in academic literature. Although Mumford et al. (2000, 92) claim many people can become leader with these capabilities, general cognitive ability and crystallized cognitive ability are related to intelligence of person. Therefore, all people can not be potential leader as some of them are not intelligent or creative.

Three aspects of motivation are studied in the skills model (Mumford et al., 2000, 161). Albeit, these three aspects fail to satisfy about the explanation of motivation. Because the concept of motivation is too broad term and consists of many different aspects. Leaders could overcome organisational problems with personality traits in complex situations. However, some personality characteristics can influence leader's performance negatively. As some leaders are autocratical, intolerant or rigid they might not solve complex organizational problems and interpersonal conflict. Moreover, leadership skills approach is too general about the evaluation of leadership performance although the model comprise of many variables (Northouse, 2013, 73).

3. Conclusion

Fundamentally, leadership skills model represents five components of leader which include individual attributes, competencies, leadership outcomes, career experiences and environmental influences (Mumford et al., 2000, 27; Northouse, 2013, 36). In this study; individual attributes, competencies and leadership outcomes are worked through due to each of them are interrelated. The leader's attributes such as general cognitive ability, crystallized cognitive ability, motivation and personality have an impact on competencies which at the heart of the skills model (Northouse, 2013, 36). These competencies are very important as they make a significant contribution leader's performance.

According to Mumford et al. (2000, 33), all of the people can be an effective leader if they have leadership capabilities. These capabilities or individual attributes play a crucial role on the solution of complex and ill-defined organizational problems. Mumford et al. (2000, 33) believe that effective leaders must have individual attributes so as to be good problem solvers in organisations. However, some attributes (i.e., general cognitive ability and crystallized cognitive ability) are related to intelligence of person. For this reason, all people can not be potential leader as some of them are not intelligent. Mumford and his colleagues also emphasize three aspects of motivation in their study. These components are not enough to explain the notion of motivation as it comprises of many different aspects. Mumford et al. (2000, 33) highlight personality traits about the solution of complex organizational problems. While these traits affect positively the performance of leader, some personality characteristics can influence leader's performance negatively. Therefore, all leaders could not solve complex organizational problems and interpersonal conflict. In addition to this, the skills model is too general in terms of leader performance's evaluation.

As a result, it is clear from academia and reality that the skills model put forward a suggestion to solve ill-defined and complex organizational problems. In this context, leadership skills are studied in detail by Mumford and colleagues. However, it is apparent that not only effective leaders need to

have individual attributes but also they need to have other leadership skills to cope with complicated organisational problems.

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