MANY IDEAS ABOUT LEADERSHIP ARE WRONG OR NOT ENTIRELY TRUE

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ABSTRACT: There are many common ideas about leadership that are wrong or at least not entirely true. In this article, those ideas are questioned, with the support of thoughts of good authors.

Keywords: leadership, business, management

The main common ideas about leadership are identified below, followed by a critique of their validity.

Leadership is a person's quality.

For a long time it was believed, and still many believe, that leadership is the quality of a person. Even well-known authors publish articles in which they describe the main characteristics or qualities that a leader must possess, as if this were all that is necessary.

The truth is that leadership is not really just characteristics or qualities of a leader. It is a process, which occurs when people, in a certain context, decide to follow a leader (Kellerman, 2014).

The leader must possess certain qualities, but those qualities are not universal and, in each case, they must be those that his or her potential followers judge appropriate in a given context.

Leaders are born, not made.

For a long time it had been believed that leaders are born, not made. The Great Man Theory of Leadership, proposed by Carlyle (1841), is one of the most well- known examples of that belief. Carlyle, studying the lives of great people, concluded that heroes or leaders were exceptional people, great men chosen by destiny, who had to command, and others had to obey them for societies to be successful. Even some current authors still think that way.

But McCall Jr. (2010) wrote: "Even if some leaders are "born", there clearly aren't enough such gifted people to go around, and they need all the help they can get".

It is now generally accepted that leaders are mostly made. However, their development as leaders is facilitated if they possess some innate intelligence and personality traits. Avolio (2010) wrote: "Over a series of studies, we have found, for both men and women, that approximately 30 percent of leadership emergence was heritable, whereas 70 percent was due to environmental events".

Leaders possess personality traits that are different from other people's.

Since the writings of Carlyle (1841), it was thought that leaders possess personality traits that differentiate them from non-leaders, but this idea was discarded shortly after World War II.

Stogdill's (1948) review, in particular, was based on more than 100 articles written on the trait approach or theory and concluded in a damning sentence: "A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits."

However, certain innate intelligence and personality traits, which leaders share with other people, can favor their development.

Leaders must modify their style according to the circumstances.

Many authors talk about situational leadership, assuming that the leader must modify his or her style according to the situation or circumstances. Situational theory was developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982).

The truth is that it is very difficult for a leader to change style. What you can do is manage the situation in a unique way, but not change your style.

Kotter, interviewed by Gibson (1997), said: "The key is not in style. The key is in the substance. Is something that has to do with the basic way of working, not with appearances or tactics, but with that essence that changes little over time, no matter the difference in cultures, or industries."

In general, it is easier to select a leader whose style or behavior is appropriate to the circumstances than expect the leader to change his or her style in a new situation. Lorsch (2010) wrote: "Fiedler -an important leadership author in the 1950s and 1960s- argued that his ideas could be used to select leaders whose style fit the situation at hand".

Leaders must be virtuous.

Many people think that leaders should be virtuous. Since ancient times, it has been thought that leaders must possess values that make other people admire them. Confucius (475 BC/ 1979) described the principles that a prince or political leader must follow and stated that he must be virtuous, so that his subjects imitate his example and society prospers.

However, the reality is that many leaders are not virtuous and that does not mean that they cease to be leaders.

Pfeffer (2015) wrote: "Leaders are expected to be virtuous and accountable, so that members of the organization can rely on them to protect them and look out for their interests, but few leaders meet those requirements."

This is not to say that we should accept that leaders are not virtuous, but that we should understand that it is unrealistic to idealize them too much.

Leaders must influence their followers.

It is necessary for leaders to influence their followers, to get them to follow them and also to transform themselves or help transform realities.

But Nye (2010) wrote: "Even when they do not take initiatives, followers have the power to set constraints on leaders". And he mentioned a good example: "After his New Deal slowed down in the mid-1930s, Franklin Roosevelt reinitiated his legislative programs in response to pressures from new political and social movements in the country".

Kellerman (2012) stated that the balance of power has been changing, reducing the power of the leader compared to the power of the followers. The leader, to sustain itself, must be able to influence his or her followers, but at the same time must allow itself to be influenced by them. If followers perceive that the leader does not respond to their interests, they will withdraw their support and the leader will cease to be their leader.

Women are not good leaders.

Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011) warned that in most cultures the leader prototype has masculine characteristics (decisive, assertive and independent) and women, because of their way of acting (friendly, altruistic, concerned about taking care of others) are considered not suitable for leadership roles.

However, many women have shown that they can be just as good leaders as men and even better. Some recent examples include Queen Elizabeth II of England, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi, CEOs Karen Lynch (CVS Health) and Mary Barra (General Motors), etc.

Leaders develop with leadership courses.

Many people and universities believe that leaders can be trained in leadership courses.

Leadership courses can be helpful, but no leader develops just by taking leadership courses. As Hackman and Wageman (2007) note, the right question about leadership development is not what should be taught in leadership courses, but how leaders can be helped to learn.

To develop, leaders must learn by:

- Collaborating with good leaders
- Acting like a leader, as suggested by Ibarra (2015). It means producinginnovative ideas, making contributions outside their area of expertise, and connecting people and resources toward a worthwhile goal
- Taking advantage of opportunities offered by their organizations or companies so they can learn to lead and influence others.

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