

Leadership and Influencers of the Political Governance, Knowledge and Civilization Domains

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Abstract: This paper explains leadership, identifies individuals as leaders and highlights contemporary leadership traits. Further, some influencers of the political governance, knowledge and civilization domains identified as Abraham Lincoln, Isaac Newton and Alexander the Great respectively have been emphasized. Most importantly, the various strategies and leadership styles adopted by these exceptional personalities have been discussed. Finally, the paper concludes that effective leadership requires self-awareness, attention to the environment and self-sacrifice.

Keywords: Abraham Lincoln, Alexander the Great, Civilization, Change, Environment, Governance, Individual, Influence, Isaac Newton, Knowledge, Leader, Leadership, Political, Strategy, Style.

1. Introduction

The word leadership originates from the Old English word 'lædan' meaning 'to go before as a guide' which was first used in English in the 14th century to describe a person in charge, and then various other uses came about later. In an attempt to describe Leadership, John Maxwell posits that leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less. That is, leadership is the potential to influence the behaviour of others or the capacity to influence a group towards the realization of a goal. Warren Bennis also describes leadership as the capacity to translate vision into reality. In the corporate setting, leadership refers to a process by which an executive can direct, guide and influence the behaviour and work of others towards the accomplishment of specific goals in a given situation. In other words, leadership is the ability of a manager to induce subordinates to work with confidence and zeal.

A. Individuals as Leaders

Commonly, most people fail to grasp the fact that everyone has a leader inside. A group has the view that a person who is a leader usually has several personality traits such as domineering, take-charge and natural charisma that make them well-suited to influence others. Some people are natural leaders, while another group hold that an individual, irrespective of his or her personality traits, must work hard to develop a leader's mindset that is, go through the leadership process. This argument remains a never-ending debate. The truth is that

leadership is not just a trait or attribute that resides with the leader, otherwise, introverts may never become leaders. A person can develop good leadership skills through self-study, training, education, and experience. These factors and processes can give an individual the skills to know how to develop a vision and inspire others to work for the realization of the vision.

Again, leadership has often been constrained to the government. There are numerous talks about a country's leadership referring to the government and individuals occupying high offices. Leadership does not automatically happen when an individual assumes a high government office. Similar to the point above, just because an individual occupies a high office does not automatically make an individual a leader.

An individual can be a leader in domains such as Social Conscience, conceptual boundaries of Religion, Social Conduct, Civilization, the pursuit of Knowledge, Political Governance and many other such domains. This paper identifies three people who have influenced the political governance, knowledge and civilization domains and how they did it.

2. Methodology

To accomplish the objectives of this paper, the study relied on secondary data collection method. Secondary data are easily and readily available from sources other than the actual user (Saunders et al., 2012). Hence, there are no specific collection methods. Specifically, this study relied on existing records. This method uses existing reliable documents and similar sources of information as the data source. That is, existing research materials and documentaries related to this topic were reviewed.

3. Abraham Lincoln

In the political governance domain, a great leader and icon whose influence is remarkable is Abraham Lincoln who was an American statesman and lawyer and served as the 16th president of the United States from 1861 to 1865. Lincoln led America through the Civil War and America's greatest moral,

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constitutional and political crisis. He succeeded in abolishing slavery, strengthening the federal government and modernizing the US economy.

Today, Lincoln holds a special place in the collective memory of Americans and the world not only because of his great accomplishments but more importantly, because of certain leadership qualities so famously attributed to him. Again, as great as he was, Lincoln was not born with these leadership qualities/virtues. He practised and developed them daily. Lincoln, as a human, was not a perfect individual. He possessed human flaws and made several mistakes in his life as we all do. However, he learned from his mistakes and learned how to compensate for his shortcomings. Some significant ways through which Lincoln influenced the political governance domain are highlighted below.

1) *Listening to Different Points of View*

Lincoln could listen to different points of view. He created a climate where Cabinet members were free to disagree without fear of retaliation. That notwithstanding, he knew when to stop the discussion and after listening to the various opinions, make a final decision. During his tenure as president, Lincoln appointed the best and brightest to his cabinet including individuals who were his greatest political rivals. He demonstrated his leadership by pulling this group together into a unique team that represented the greatest minds of his time. (Goodwin, 2005).

2) *Emotional Intelligence and Empathy/A Master of His Emotions*

One can tell a leader for their high degree of emotional intelligence and empathy for others. No leader is born a leader. Abraham Lincoln was conscious of the need for establishing bonds with his electorate and citizens. Hence, during his presidency, citizens visit him in his office. Unlike other presidents that were generals or governors, Lincoln had no experience in leading teams and yet no one questioned his leadership. According to Doris Kearns Goodwin, an American biographer, historian and political commentator, Lincoln treated those he worked with well. However, he did get angry and frustrated, so he found a way to channel those emotions. He was known to sit down and write what he referred to as a "hot letter" to the individual he was angry with and then he would set the letter aside and not send it. If he did lose his temper, Lincoln would follow up with a kind gesture or letter to let the individual know he was not holding a grudge.

3) *Ability to Communicate Goals and Vision*

To be a great leader, it is essential to establish oneself as a good communicator and know how to convey messages. Lincoln's success story and great leadership were a result of his ability to communicate and connect with others. The iconic US president was a renowned storyteller, who could get his audience involved in his stories and vision of his projects. According to Kearns Goodwin, Lincoln had a "remarkable ability to communicate his goals to his countrymen." He made concepts simple and communicated with an understanding of the concerns of the citizens. Lincoln was thus a master communicator.

4) *Motivation and Passion*

The attention to common goals gives leadership an ethical overtone because it stresses the need for leaders to work with followers to achieve selected goals. Motivation and passion are seen as vital attributes of leadership. Sharing and spreading the passion for a goal is vital to get support from a team and working together to achieve objectives and goals. Lincoln had his principles always clear and struggled throughout his presidency to put them into practice.

4. Isaac Newton

In the sphere of knowledge, we can mention Sir Isaac Newton who was an English physicist, mathematician, astronomer, alchemist, inventor, theologian, and philosopher. Newton is regarded as the most influential scientist in history and is probably most famous for discovering the Laws of Gravity. Newton is believed to be "the man who birthed the industrial revolution" and gave us scientific findings on motion and energy that are still as relevant today as they were 300 years ago. Again, he discovered the laws of optics - figuring out that white light is composed of several colours. Newton possessed a mind of unparalleled genius. In the knowledge domain, Isaac Newton's influence had a great impact in the following ways.

1) *Insatiable Curiosity*

Gaining leadership in the knowledge domain begins with curiosity. When we are curious, we begin to ask questions, which help us to see the world in a different light. Newton's most powerful trait was his insatiable curiosity. He asked questions about everything he observed. This helped him enhance his creative intellect to even greater levels. His curiosity comes to us in the story of the apple that supposedly fell on his head, ultimately leading him to outline the laws of gravity. He was curious about why it fell straight down rather than at an angle. This curiosity led him to develop his work on motion and gravity.

Moreover, asking great questions was not enough, he also pursued the answers. Being curious is great. Great leaders question everything and challenge the status quo. Most importantly, curiosity translates to innovation and makes the world a better place only when the questions are answered. Newton, by answering his unanswerable questions is what resulted in the impact he made on the knowledge domain.

2) *Patience and Perseverance (Bearing)*

His ability to work at length on the most complex questions was due to his inexhaustible perseverance. Newton published his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1687, after 18 months of intensive work. This is still considered among the most transformative and influential scientific books of all time. He once said, "If I have done the public any service, it is due to my patient thought", He added, "It is not that I am so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."

3) *Passion for Learning*

Newton's unyielding passion for learning is unparalleled as he poured all his energies into building on the knowledge of others that went before him. It is documented that he was known for always having a notebook and pen beside him as he jotted down excerpts of the books he read. Newton believed that he

had to learn from others. His creativity stemmed from combining ideas learnt from reading other works, especially the works of the French philosopher Rene Descartes as well as the astronomers who developed theories about the Earth's place in the cosmos in relation to the Sun and other planets.

The characteristic of asking the right questions, being able to patiently think them through and persevering to the end is a mark of a transformational leader. Sir Isaac Newton truly demonstrated this and was a transformational leader.

5. Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great is known to be one of history's most famous warriors and a legend of almost divine status in his lifetime. We can classify him under the elite category of people who changed the history of civilization and shaped the present world as we know it. Alexander the Great served as king of Macedonia from 336 to 323 B.C. During his reign as king of Macedonia, he united Greece, reestablished the Corinthian League and conquered the Persian Empire. Alexander's reign and leadership was remarkable. Below is a highlight of how Alexander achieved great leadership in the civilization domain.

1) *Compelling Vision*

Alexander, through dramatic gestures and great rhetorical skills, spoke to the collective imagination of his people and won the commitment of his followers. His actions depicted that vision can be accomplished when a person is focused. One of the main influences of Alexander on Western civilization was his policies on commerce. He established roads that facilitated commerce with the Western world after conquering Persia (Noble, 2008, p.96). His clarity of vision coupled with a 'magnificent obsession' was a hallmark of his leadership. Alexander did not only have a compelling vision; he also knew how to make that vision become reality. Alexander had an excellent information system, was able to interpret his opponent's motives, and was a master at coordinating all parts of his military machine.

2) *Encouragement and Support of Followers*

Alexander knew how to encourage his people for their excellence in battle in ways that brought out greater excellence. This won him the commitment of his followers. He routinely singled people out for special attention and remembered acts of bravery performed by former and fallen heroes, thereby making it clear that individual contributions would be recognized. He also had the ability to contain and bear the emotions of his

people through empathetic listening. Alexander spent resources on the training and development of his followers. He did not only consider his followers at that time, but he also looked to the future by developing the next generation.

3) *Walking the Talk*

Alexander's success and influence could be attributed to his leadership style. He led by doing the things he believed in and proclaimed. When his troops went hungry or thirsty, he went hungry and thirsty too; when their horses died beneath them and they had to walk, he did the same.

6. Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, it can be established that no individual is born with complete leadership abilities. Thus, effective leadership does not occur overnight; it is a life-long effort and process. It is worth noting that one does not need a title to lead. Effective leadership in the modern world implies being able to adapt to change and adopt various styles and strategies that suit the changing environment. Consequently, leadership requires self-awareness, adapting to the environment and self-sacrifice.

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