RETHINKING THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY[17]

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Rezumat: *Succesul unei întreprinderi depinde în mare parte de capacitatea liderului de a crea în echipa sa sensul de apartenență la o comunitate. Liderul este persoana care îşi asumă responsabilitatea de a găsi potenţialul atât în oameni cât şi procese şi care are curajul de a valorifica acest potenţial. El va face totul posibil pentru a promova siguranţa psihologică la nivel de echipă, favorizând astfel de comportamente precum: ascultarea activă, menţinerea curiozităţii, încurajarea onestităţii, încrederii şi a respectului reciproc. Totodată, un lider curajos va demonstra flexibilitate în procesul de luare a deciziilor, gândit ca un om de ştiinţă şi dând dovadă de umilinţă încrezătoare.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *leadership, mod de gândire, leadership curajos, siguranţă psihologică, umilinţă încrezătoare, mod de gândire ştiinţific, carismă.*

One might think that having a common goal might be enough for diverse people to come together and work hard to realize it. Yet, there is still the need for someone to lead. So, leadership is all about the person who leads, as the success of an enterprise depends on their ability to create in people the sense of connection and belonging that will inspire them to follow their leader and work hard to achieve the common goal. It is also true that much power is concentrated in the hands of the leader, therefore they should use it responsibly. Holding more power means holding more responsibility. It is not about bossing around and expecting people to obey you without any objections.

In his book *Start With Why*, Simon Sinek emphasizes the importance of a leader to inspire people to act. In the author's words: "Those who are able to inspire will create a following of people – supporters, voters, customers, workers – who act for the good of the whole but not because they have to, but because they want to" (Sinek, 2009: p.6).

It was Kurt Lewin and his team in the 1930s to first identify three main styles: autocratic/authoritarian (when you tell people what to do and expect them to execute that without any questions), democratic/participative (when you involve people in the decision making process, thus sharing your power with them) and delegative/laissaez-faire (when you let people make decisions without interfering).

Although autocratic leadership can still be preferred by some leaders, this approach can eventually backfire because people will never feel as if they belong to the group where an autocratic leader is in charge. They will find it rather difficult to relate to the goal of the organization and will not put enough effort for the company to succeed. They might not even care. However, there can be extreme situations when the leader should demonstrate the ability to take decisions fast and with confidence in order to instill a sense of security in the team. This is particularly true in times of a crisis.

Yet, a leader would still like to have a motivated staff who will contribute with their ideas to the common goal. This is why, a leader should look for ways to involve the people in the decision making process. It helps create in them a sense of belonging and makes them work for the common goal highly motivated. Such an approach is more democratic and creates the idea of shared power.

Delegative leadership implies that the leader lets the workers do the job themselves with little involvement from his/her part in the decision making process. Research has shown that such leadership can result in low productivity. People are basically left to their own devices and they might end up feeling disconnected within their own group.

This is the basic classification. Nowadays, there can be four, five, six, even ten leadership styles. Yet, none would tell what leadership style is the best. What a leader should do at present is to find their own way of inspiring others to act. In doing so, they should look for the qualities of great leaders and develop the characteristic abilities and behaviors that will help them become inspiring leaders.

Simon Sinek (2009) argues that good leadership starts when the team has a clear purpose why they are doing that work, i.e. they are inspired and not manipulated to do it. He developed the Golden Circle model which starts from the inside out, i.e. it starts from the inner circle consisting of WHY, then followed by the middle circle consisting of HOW, and finally the outer circle consisting of WHAT. In his words WHY stands for the core belief shared by an organization, it is this belief that will motivate the people to work in that organization, on the one hand, and will motivate the clients to buy their products, on the other. However, having a well-defined WHY is not enough. The organization should know HOW it is going to realize that belief, i.e. the concrete actions they are going to take. Finally, WHAT stands for the results of those actions, which eventually result in the profit of the company. In Sinek's opinion it is totally wrong to start from the outside of the circle and move inward. Otherwise said, it is wrong to start with WHAT, i.e. think about the success or money the company would get. He states that: "People don't buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it. A failure to communicate WHY creates nothing but stress or doubt" (2009: p. 58).

In his books, he offers a series of examples when starting with "WHAT" lead to disaster. For example, he mentions the story of the Wright brothers, the American aviation pioneers who are credited with inventing, building, and flying the world's first successful motor-operated airplane. At the time there was another notable figure wanting to create a motor-operated airplane as well. This was Samuel Pierpont Langley. Unlike the Wright brothers who were driven by their passion to invent and make a change in the world, Langley was primarily driven by his desire to be first, rich, and famous. So he was driven by "WHAT" he was doing and "WHAT" he would get as a result. Although he was funded by the government and managed to get some of the brightest minds of the time to work for him, he didn't succeed. The Wright brothers, on the other hand, were passionate about their belief, they wanted to make a change, and that was what helped them inspire other people to work for them. At the end they were the ones to succeed.

Thus, a good leader should have a clear sense of WHY in order to inspire the team to act. Although it is true that the ability to communicate the core belief to the team is essential in the process of leading, this may not be enough. It definitely helps build the culture of the organization, where absolutely every employee will share the same set of values and beliefs. However, good leadership also implies helping the employees realize their potential.

Brené Brown (2018) defines a leader as "anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential" (p. 4). Such a leader will be able to inspire their team by creating a sense of belonging at work. They will earn the trust of the team. The purpose of a leader is not to impress their team, but to let the team know that the leader is there to serve the team. Respectively, the team will do their work because they want to, not because they have to.

Brené Brown calls for another type of leadership, in which leaders have the courage to rumble with vulnerability. She wants leaders to be "committed to courageous, wholehearted leadership" and to be "self-aware enough to lead from their hearts" and not "from hurt and fear" (2018: p. 4). In her opinion, vulnerability is not weakness, but strength, and "leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior" (2018: p. 67).

In her book *Dare to Lead* (2018), she enumerates ten major causes leaders identified as hindering the success of their organizations. They are:
1. avoidance of tough conversations, including honest and productive feedback;
2. avoidance of acknowledging and addressing fears and feelings in difficult times;
3. avoidance of taking risks;

4. diminishing trust;
5. people's tendency to define themselves in terms of their setbacks, failures and disappointments;
6. people's feelings of shame and blame;
7. fear of looking wrong, saying something wrong, or being wrong;
8. avoidance of problem identification and rush into ineffective solutions;
9. people's WHY is not translated into HOW they should realize that goal;
10. perfectionism.

All these causes actually armor the people and create a sense of disconnection. Therefore, leaders should have the courage to lean into vulnerability by setting healthy boundaries. That will contribute to the psychological safety of the company, which includes such behaviors as: listening, staying curious, being honest, keeping confidence, trusting and respecting one another.

In Brené Brown's opinion, leaders should apply an approach she calls "daring leadership", which consists of:
1. modeling and encouraging healthy striving, empathy, and self-compassion (which excludes the culture of perfectionism);
2. practicing gratitude and celebrating milestones and victories (which contributes to employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention);
3. setting boundaries and finding real comfort (instead of numbing an uncomfortable feeling, employees should be encouraged to acknowledge it and getting to its actual cause; in this way resentment will be excluded);
4. practicing integration-strong back, soft front, wild heart (the act of bringing together all the parts of ourselves, i.e. all our strengths and weak points);
5. being a learner and getting it right (cultivate having continuous learners, rather than knowers; it's far more productive to have people asking the right questions than have quick answers);
6. modeling clarity, kindness, and hope (that will eliminate cynicism);
7. making contributions and taking risks (encourage people to have honest discussions, in which everyone feels free to offer suggestions and contribute);
8. using power with, power to, and power within (by empowering your employees, trust and confidence will be built);
9. knowing our value (help people understand where they're strong and where they deliver value for the organization);
10. cultivating commitment and shared purpose (avoid compliance leadership as people should share the commitment to purpose and mission, not be afraid not to);
11. acknowledging, naming, and normalizing collective fear and uncertainty (in the midst of uncertainty and fear, leaders have an ethical responsibility to hold their people in discomfort – to acknowledge the tumult but not fan it, to share information and not inflate or fake it);
12. modeling and supporting rest, play, and recovery (it will only help the brain to cool down);
13. cultivating a culture of belonging, inclusivity, and diverse perspectives (avoid favoritism and encourage diversity);
14. giving gold stars (instead of seeking to be rewarded as a leader, reward your team, remember you are there to serve them, not the other way round);
15. straight talking and taking action (encourage the people in your team to speak up the truth and avoid zigzagging);
16. leading from the heart (avoid being seen as "important" at work by taking credit for ideas that aren't yours, don't stay in comparison mode, and don't pretend to know, instead stay curious and learn).

One important feature that won't allow a leader to armor up is to be open-minded and flexible. That would imply that an inspiring leader has developed the ability to rethink.

It is true, that people acquire a certain background that allows them to make judgements. Once the belief has been formed, there is the tendency to constantly look for ways of reinforcing that belief. Consequently, it is rather difficult to shatter that belief. However, the purpose of learning is not to affirm a belief, but to evolve that belief. Some people aren't even aware that they lack flexibility in their thinking, that they are unable to rethink their formed beliefs. It happens due to the tendency of

the brain to save energy, whereas thinking, and particularly rethinking, requires a substantial amount of energy from our brain. In addition, challenging the old beliefs makes the world more unpredictable.

So, people prefer to stick to their deep-seated beliefs. This is known as cognitive laziness, which can result in mental stagnation. Moreover, people will be driven by their confirmation bias in order to reaffirm those beliefs. Another bias that can interfere with the rethinking process is the desirability bias. Simply put, this is seeing what you want to see, and not what it actually is. This is what makes Adam Grant conclude that: "Being good at thinking can make you worse at rethinking" (Grant, 2021: p. 25). This means that expecting the information to confirm your beliefs will hinder your ability to rethink the issue and see it from another perspective. It can explain why some devout and ardent supporters of an idea resist and totally oppose changing their mind, like for example the issue of sexual education in our country.

In order to prove how lack of rethinking can lead to the downfall of an entire company, Adam Grant (2021) describes Mike Lazardis's story, and namely his reluctance to rethink the WHY of his company. Mike Lazardis created BlackBerry, and it became an immediate success as people were able to manage their email on their telephones. His smartphone revolutionized the market and people really enjoyed having easy access to their emails. However, Mike Lazardis rejected the idea of rethinking their core belief and did not listen to one of his top engineers in 1997 to add an internet browser. Mike Lazardis still wanted the whole focus to be on the email. Now, people don't even remember Blackberry.

In Adam Grant's opinion what contributed to Mike Lazardis's failure is his inability to rethink. Being a highly intelligent man, he was governed by his deep-seated beliefs. Grant's claims that: "No matter how much brainpower you have, if you lack the motivation to change your mind, you'll miss many occasions to think again" (Grant, 2021: p. 24). Thus leaving room for doubt can be more advantageous than being fully convinced in the correctness of one's beliefs. This doubt no matter how small it is can help people rethink and come with solutions that can help the company to prosper.

But what to do if the leader has blind spots, if they are unaware of the biases they have? This can be addressed in two ways. First, the primary purpose of a leader should be to create psychological safety at work, and second to be aware of the different mindsets they can operate, and develop the ability to shift to the necessary mindsets while leading the company.

What exactly does psychological safety mean? Adam Grant defines it as "fostering a culture of respect, trust, openness in which people can raise concerns and suggestions without fear of reprisal" (Grant, 2021: p. 209). This will lead to the foundation of a culture of learning, where people stay always curious, are flexible, and can think again. (Organizations where performance culture is highly valued are doomed to fail as compared to those where learning culture is sought after.)

Psychological safety opens the possibility to lean into vulnerability. When an organization has built psychological safety, their employees:
- see mistakes as opportunities to learn;
- are willing to take risks and are not afraid to fail;
- speak their mind at meetings;
- openly share their struggles;
- trust the teammates and leaders;
- take risks by saying or doing something that other people might not like.

In order to create psychological safety at work leaders should:
1. model the values you as a leader want to promote;
2. identify and praise others who exemplify them;
3. build a coalition of colleagues who are committed to making the change;
4. model openness and inclusiveness;
5. lean into vulnerability;
6. create process accountability by evaluating how carefully different options are considered as people make decisions, and avoid outcome accountability;
7. demonstrate confident humility and curiosity as a leader.

The phrase *confident humility* deserves special attention. Humility does not sound like some-thing one should foster. It has acquired a rather negative meaning. However, confidence and humility

can go hand in hand, when "you can be confident in your ability to achieve a goal while maintaining the humility to question whether you have the right tools in the present" (Grant, 2021: p. 46). Confident humility implies acknowledging that you might not have the right solution at present. Yet, it enables you to rethink beliefs that are deep-seated and come with new insights to the existing problem.

Adam Grant says that: "It takes confident humility to admit that we're a work in progress. It shows that we care more about improving ourselves than proving ourselves" (Grant, 2021: p. 215). However, he warns us against showing confident humility before having established our competence first.

According to Adam Grant (2021), people tend to slip into the mindset of three different professions: a preacher, a prosecutor, or a politician. Our habitual way of thinking leaves little room for us to rethink something, thus pulling us down. This means that having one or all of these modes might not help us get to the core of the problem, understand its complexity.

So, if somebody gets into the mindset of a preacher, the tendency is to see the job as a sacred cause, and like all sacred things, one is expected to believe without doubting the validity of that cause. People in preaching mode will deliver sermons to protect and promote ideals which are perceived by them as being in jeopardy. It is true, however, that preaching can be effective in debates with people who are receptive to the person's viewpoint or aren't invested in the issue.

The prosecutor mindset is taken on when people think they recognize flaws in other people's thinking. The natural tendency is to provide arguments that will prove the latter wrong so that the former wins the case. This can be used when the aim is to get through to audiences who aren't determined to be in control.

Finally, the politician mindset aims to earn people's approval, usually resorting to populistic elements in their speech. This can help when the purpose is to persuade the speaker's "own political tribe." It results in an easy win over an audience who will easily approve what the leader is lobbying for.

Adam Grant warns against slipping into these mindsets as none of them shows confident humility. He says: "The risk is that we become so wrapped up in preaching that we're right, prosecuting others who are wrong, and politicking for support that we don't bother to rethink our own views" (Grant, 2021: p. 19). This is extremely dangerous in leadership. Once the beliefs are unshakeable, no creativity can be fostered, and no psychological safety can be built in that organization.

Adam Grand describes a fourth mindset that can help the process of rethinking and foster confident humility. It is called the scientist mindset. Leaders are encouraged to always take on a scientist's goggles and scrutinize various viewpoints before adopting a certain course of action. Moreover, once the course is taken, people in a scientist mindset engage in a process of constantly questioning beliefs and assumptions; they test the alternative hypotheses. This can lead to the needed change within an organization. Jeff Bezos is quoted to have said: "People who are right a lot listen a lot, and they change their minds a lot. If you don't change your mind frequently, you're going to be wrong a lot" (Grant, 2021: p. 72).

Another benefit of the scientist mindset is that it helps avoid the pitfalls of binary bias, "a basic human tendency to seek clarity and closure by simplifying a complex continuum into two categories" (Grant, 2021: p. 165). Unfortunately, people's tendency to look for simple explanations does not mean they thought the issue through. What the scientist mindset enables them to do is to complexify, this will spur rethinking cycles.

Scientist mindset also contributes to making change happen. A leader in the scientist mindset could use the following practice to encourage employees to think about ways of executing change effectively. The practice is called motivational interviewing and it consists of four techniques:
1. ask open-ended questions;
2. engage in reflective listening;
3. affirm the person's desire and ability to change;
4. summarize.

The purpose of such an interview is not to tell people what to think, but rather to help them question their deep-seated beliefs and make change happen. Adam Grant makes an interesting remark: "When we try to convince people to think again, our first instinct is usually to start talking. Yet the most effective way to help others open their minds is often to listen" (Grant, 2021; p. 151).

As seen, a scientist mindset can make the leader appear more charismatic. Yet, charisma is more than that. According to Olivia Fox Cabane (2012), "charisma is the result of specific non-verbal behaviors" (p. 4). People tend to believe that some are just happy to be born charismatic. However, research proved them wrong. Charisma is a skill that can be developed and perfected. It boils down to three crucial aspects dealing with the ability of showing power, presence, and warmth in everything a person does. The main trait of charismatic people is that they make others feel good in their company. As mentioned, leaders should know the employees that they are there to serve the employees, and not the other way round. This is exactly what a daring leader with a scientist mindset does.

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