Western and Eastern approaches to leadership

Wangmo

Bialystok University of Technology, Faculty of Engineering Management
e-mail: wangmo818@gmail.com

Joanna Samul

Bialystok University of Technology, Faculty of Engineering Management,
Department of Organization and Management

e-mail: j.samul@pb.edu.pl

Abstract

Leadership is important phenomenon in every business organization, professions and in all aspects of our daily lives for the smooth operations. However, leadership has different approaches in different parts of the world which still has a great influences. This articles focuses on the western and eastern philosophical approaches to leadership, including an attempt to explore the Asian perspective of leadership as a whole. Thus, this article aims to draw the conclusion similarities and differences of philosophical approaches of leadership. The article is based on literature review.

Keywords

eastern philosophical approach, western approach, Asian perspective of leadership, differences of leaderships

Introduction

Although the research in the field of leadership has a long history in literature, scientific research in this area was only begun in the 20th century.

By dictionary definition, leadership refers to the individual who are leaders in an organization, regarded collectively. The activity of leading a group of people or an organization or the ability to do this. These activities are: select, train and influence followers who have different abilities and skills. It means that a leader must behave differently in different situations in order to be effective. A leader is a per-

son who focuses on the organization's mission and objectives causing the employees to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy to achieve the organizational aims.

Similarly, a simple definition is that leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. Leadership involves establishing a clear vision, sharing that vision with others so that they will follow willingly, providing the information, knowledge and methods to realize that vision.

Moreover, in case of business leadership is linked to performance and any leadership definition has to take that into account. While it's not solely about profit, those who are viewed as effective leaders are those who increase their company's bottom lines. Leadership plays a crucial role in organizational success [Kumar and Kaptan, 2007; Mastrangelo, Eddy and Lorenzet, 2014], leads to sustaining profitability, productivity, and a competitive advantage [Lussier and Achua, 2007] and influences team effectiveness and organizational performance [Samul, 2016; Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich and Stewart, 2017] by stimulating employees' behaviour [Szczepańska-Woszczyna and Kurowska-Pysz, 2016].

The multiple literature discloses the leadership styles, traits, philosophical approaches and perspective in different parts of the world, but still there are some gaps between western and eastern philosophical approaches to leadership [Allio, 2013; Witt and Redding 2012].

Thus it is important to determine the similarities and differences between Western and Eastern approaches to leadership and the grounds of these approaches. The 'Western' approach is understood as mainly Western Europe, and the 'Eastern' as mostly China and countries strongly influenced by Chinese culture.

1. Western and Eastern philosophy

There is a quite common view that there is an gap between Eastern and Western philosophy and a Western bias still is that the West theories are better than others and that the East can learn from the West.

Before going on to define the characteristics of Western and Eastern leadership, it is worth looking at the differences in the philosophy of both approaches. Philosophy is 'a school of thoughts' that affects and makes differences on Western and Eastern perception of to realities, problems, and situations. In general Western philosophy is derived from Greek school of thoughts. In contrary, the Eastern philosophy is based mainly in the Asian and Chinese philosophy from Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Taoism. Thus, European and Asian philosophy have generated very different assumptions about society, business and government. The

results of differences of both philosophy are displayed in the table form based on different issues (tab.1).

Tab. 1. Comparison western and eastern philosophy

Issues	Eastern philosophy	Western philosphy
Main Principles	Cosmological unity Life is a journey towards eternal realities that are beyond the realities that surround us Circular view of the universe, based on the perception of eternal recurrence Inner-world dependent Self-liberation from the false "Me" and finding the true "Me". The highest state is believed to be a state of 'no-self', where neither self-worth nor self-importance have any real meaning. Behavioral ethics	Feeling oneself as an element of the divine Life is a service (to the God, money, business, etc.) Linear view of the universe and life, based on the Christian philosophy where everything has its beginning and the end. Outer-world dependent Self-dedication to the goal (life vision, success, happiness, etc.)
Relationship with religion	Integration	Opposition
Search for absolute truth	Holistic approach all events in the universe are interconnected Searching inside yourself by becoming a part of the universe through meditation and right living "Though he should live a hundred years, not seeing the Truth Sublime; yet better, indeed, is the single day's life of one who sees the Truth Sublime." (*Buddha*)	More focused on individual events and the role of the person Searching outside yourself - through research and analysis "The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasantest to believe." (H.L.Mencken)
Values and Beliefs	The true key is inside. The inner world of a human being and his or her ability to control and develop it is of the highest value. The way to the top is inside yourself, through self-development. "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell." (Confucius)	The main values are success and achievement. The majority of success and achievement criteria have an external nature (money, faith, popularity, etc.). The way to the top is through active outside intervention. "*Happiness* lies in virtuous activity, and *perfect happiness* lies in the best activity, which is contemplative." (Aristo-

		tle)
Individualism/ Collectivism	A human being is an integral part of the universe and the society. People are fundamentally connected. Duty towards all others is a very important matter. Collectivism is stronger.	A human being has an individualistic nature and is an independent part of the universe and the society. Individualism is stronger.
Improvement/ Evolution	Cyclic development, hence improvement is a never ending journey that has no limits.	Linear development, hence improvement has a goal. Development stops when the goal is reached.
Goals and key to success	Piritual "Virtuous life and adherence to performing your duties." (Confucianism)	Materialistic "The secret of *success* in life, and subsequently of *making money*, is to *enjoy your work*. If you do, nothing is hard work – no matter how many hours you put in." (Sir Billy Butlin)
Living Principles	Virtue "Be satisfied with whatever you have, and enjoy the same. When you come to know that you have everything, and you are not short of anything, then the whole world will be yours." (Lao Tzu)	Ethic "Refrain from doing ill; for one all powerful reason, lest our children should copy our misdeeds; we are all to prone to imitate whatever is base and depraved." (Juvenal)
Leadership	Spiritual; walking behind people; silence is golden. "In order to guide people, the *leader* must put himself behind them. Thus when he is ahead they feel no hurt." (Lao Tzu)	Hands-on; walking ahead of people; speech is golden. "*Leadership* is done from in front. Never ask others to do what you, if challenged, would not be willing to do yourself" (Xenophon)

Source: based on (http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/cultures _east-west-phylosophy.html, 2018).

According to above differences between main principles, religion and truth approach, values and beliefs, living principles and so on, it seems that approach to leadership is also different between Western and Eastern organizations. Thus, it is important in determining how these philosophical differences influence the approaches to managing people in organization and leadership.

2. The effect of philosophy on organizational structures of the leadership

There are some differences in the organizational structures of the leadership. First is flat vs. hierarchical structure. 'Western organizations normally have flatter structures, which is less prescriptive mode of leadership. Leaders are generally of the mindset where they tell employees the end goal, and trust them to find the right way to get there' [Simmonds, 2016]. While Asians are more of directive, which provides less opportunities for employees to find their own ways. Of course both styles have benefits as well as failures at the end. On the one hand Western structure supports open door policies to build relationship among employees and leader. However, it is more difficult to implement change due to friendly working environments.

Second difference is challenging vs. deferential. 'Western leaders are accustomed in dealing with challenges in daily basis. In Asian organizations, the leaders has more respect from all employees and has more deference' [Simmonds, 2016].

Third - individual vs. collective. In the collectivist societies, the basic social unit is the group. The ties between group members are very strong and loyalty to the group is one of the basic values. Westerners focus on leaders while Easterners focus on the collective activities of followers [Conte and Novello, 2008]. Individualistic culture emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual's personal characteristics, needs, and motives as the focal point of predicting and understanding the individual's actions [Chiu, Kim and Wan, 2008]. Collectivistic culture places more of an emphasis on the person's identification with a group, such as occupation and the expectations, duties, and roles associated with being a member of a group [Benet-Martínez and Oishi, 2008]. Asian leaders attempts to focus on collective achievement, while Western culture tends to focus on individual achievement and promotes individualists who are highly task oriented. Though Western approach supports to achieve goals and objectives, it does not help in cultivating a culture of collaboration among employees.

Next - open vs. closed. Western leaders tend to build open relationships with their employees, while Asian leaders maintain a distance of 'arm's length'. This distance affects the organization of work, organizational structure, relations between employees. Employees can have inhibitions in approaching their superiors and managers. A low power distance in relationships causes [Rosińska, 2005, p. 150]:

- subordinates and superiors perceive each other as persons inherently equal in hierarchy at work; it means that a way of organizing work, positions and roles can easy to change;
- organizations are decentralized, with flat structures;
- differences in earnings between low and high-level employees are small;
- lower level staff is relatively highly qualified;
- special privileges for management are not welcome;
- supervisors often contact subordinates, care for good relations between them employees;
- employees expect co-participation in the process of making decision.

3. Western approach to leadership

Most modern approaches to leadership have their origins in the West. Western approach to leadership differs to some degree across European cultures according to some literature reviews. According to [Kotter, 1988] the leaders in the West have visible role, meaning leading from the front, that indicates the intention of performing everything for the employees benefit. The Western leaders' job is stimulating the organizations' desirable attitudes, values and belief and building trust, openness, acceptance as well as take care about productivity, efficiency and quality as the requirement of supervision and control. A leader should display ethical behavior [Caldwell, Canuto-Carranco, 2010] and integrity [Odrakiewicz, 2010]. Integrity, honesty and sincerity are important features of leadership that provide the authenticity of leader [Moczydłowska, 2015, p. 20].

A task of a leader is to set the psychological tone of the organization by promoting desirable attitudes, skills and values which are needed to build organizational culture and shape employee behaviour by outlining a vision. Leaders should respect their subordinates [Caldwell and Canuto-Carranco, 2010] and interact courteously [Kadar and Mills, 2011].

Moreover, setting visions for employees and directions for the organization are common choices of western leaders to efficiently inspire and adequately energize their staffs to set goals [Kotter, 1988] and promote career development [Cheng et al., 2004]. In addition, Western leadership are highly appreciated collaboration, authorization, performance management, rationality, designation, listening and learning [Blun and Jones, 1997] and involve employees through communication [Franken et al., 2009].

Based on literature the western leadership are characterised by:
- flexible leadership styles,

- high levels of trust and openness,
- a willingness to confront personal conflict.
- acceptance the difference of opinion,
- high tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty
- relative equality of power and status between leaders and followers,
- strong beliefs in teamworking,
- playing central role in building organizational culture implies the necessity to cultivate employee commitment, involvement and morale.

4. Asian perspective of leadership

Eastern philosophy of leadership theory is quite new for a research topic which emerged at around thirty years ago [Wu, 2009; Yang, 2009]. Current research, however, suggests that Eastern business practices continue to follow traditional Asian approaches that are firmly entrenched in traditional Chinese leadership. Within this philosophical framework, leadership has focused on being humanistic and improving followers through personal development [Chen and Lee, 2008; Wang, 2006]. Although Chinese leaders are adopting more 'scientific' approaches to how they manage focusing on efficiency, elimination of waste, standardisation and automation of processes [King and Zang, 2010], their role still characterised by inspiration for subordinates by using persuasion rather than coercion, leading by example in terms of promoting equality, simple living and harmony with nature and others [Chen and Lee, 2008]. Leaders in Chinese culture are expected to regard ethical considerations above the achievement of profit [Ahmed, Kung and Eichenseher, 2003]. Collectivist culture and power distance orientation are the two of the most prominent contextual factors of leadership in Asia [Park and Koo, 2018, p. 697].

Leaders in Asia does two things: to establish direction to the company and then the most important is to manage people and organization as a whole. One should also know that to be a leader is to learn and improve one's own abilities to overcome the challenges. Thus, Asian cultures leaders encourage personal and professional collaboration, with people learning to work and support each other both at work and outside to accomplish targeted goal as a whole.

Conclusion

Modern approaches to leadership in the West and East have evolved to adopt principles from each other. However, it does not mean that leadership in these two

cultures is now the same. The literature analysis carried out indicates many differences between Western and Eastern approaches to leadership that are the result of differences in Western and Eastern philosophy and life perspective. There is no one answer which approach is better for organizational success, professional life and societal life. It depends on culture, traditions, habits, values of both subordinates and leaders – it depends on environmental conditions. In one case Western style can be useful, and in the other – Asian style. The Chinese leadership seems to be an art and emphasizes on interdependent, humanistic and situational aspects, while Westerner leadership focus on organizational objective results and impersonal processes supported by logic and analysis. Thus, the most significance issue is that one can learn from another. Leaders from the West should look for opportunities to follow their Eastern counterparts in increasing employees' discipline, responsibility and ownership and not only focus on "getting things done" and leaders from East should try to be more open in relationships and notice the individuality of employees.

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Zachodnie i wschodnie podejścia do przywództwa

Streszczenie

Przywództwo jest niezwykle ważne w każdej organizacji w celu zapewnienia sprawnego działania. Wiele jest jednak podejść do przywództwa, szczególnie w różnych częściach świata. Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na wschodnim i zachodnim podejściu do przywództwa, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem perspektywy azjatyckiej. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja podobieństw i różnic w podejściach do przywództwa. Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczny.

Słowa kluczowe

filozofia wschodu, podejście zachodnie, azjatycka perspektywa przywództwa, różnice w podejściu do przywództwa