Leadership Competencies in Job Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Being in an era where old patterns no longer function, leadership as a future-oriented directing role gained even more significance in the 21st century. Lack of transparency, accountability and credibility of both financial and ethical issues as a consequence of inadequate leadership have led to numerous scandals and eroded the reputation and legitimacy of both numerous leaders as well as institutions, lately. In response to these challenges to leadership, never before has the need for leadership in organizations been so great. These issues, have demanded further look into leadership competencies as the key intangibles that leverage strategic competitive advantage and consequently, recruitment of the right leaders has become a significant challenge for all organizations, recently.

Prior research have mostly focused on leadership styles and compared these styles against each other. The significance of competencies of leaders particularly in executive search and their advertising has been mostly overlooked (Jenn, 2005). Although competency models of leadership and assessments are often largely employed for recruitment along with training and development, in the latter the competencies are designed through an overhaul of conventional contextual framework and used more effectively (Naquin & Holton, 2006). While the core behavioral characteristics for an effective leader are examined extensively by the US studies (e.g., Bernthal, Paul R. & Wellins, Richard, 2006) the common occupational norms among the EU member countries (e.g., Becking, Koen & Hopman, Nikol, 2005) are also being explored based on task versus relationship oriented leadership.

What leadership competencies are used for attracting and selecting the desired leaders for today's leaders in job advertisements is the main research question. Probing into the differences between the competencies chosen for advertisements of different levels of hierarchy and if the key leadership competencies are in line with the global or regional competence norms are other aims of this study. After a literature review of transactional and transformational models (e.g., Bass, B.M. and Avolio, B.J. 1989), a content analysis of advertisements in the two major Turkish newspapers' web-based job placement services has been analyzed for about a year to determine to what extent the leadership terminology stemming from influential leadership theories is used in marketing communication of leadership positions. In this empirical study, it has been found out that conventional task-oriented and/ or transactional competencies are still preferred more than people-oriented and/ or transformational competencies in Turkey. Probing the underlying reasons

Keywords: Leadership Competencies, Content Analysis of Job Advertisements, Transactional versus Transformational Models

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the formation of the first human communities, leadership has been omnipresent in every aspect of life, from politics to economics and from small to complex organizations. In terms of the developing countries, the notion acquired increased importance and became once again the focus of attention since the mid-90s, with increasing globalization through the opportunities presented by a new pioneering medium, the Internet. The need for people with the necessary competencies to lead new business ventures became paramount. Among much uncertainty about what this new business environment entailed, people with the capacity to see ahead with vision have become in absolute need. Over ten years have gone by since, a decade marked by the collapse of the Internet bubble in 2000–2001 coupled with a domestic economic crisis, which lead to an almost forced and unplanned consolidation of the on-line industry including the ones focused on recruitment and placement services. Within this context, the discus-sion about leadership, especially in the field of on-line human resource management activities, acquires a refreshed impetus and at the same time provides a fresh opportunity to reflect on past failures and highlight best practices for the future.

Although the significance of leadership for business success is emphasized in the academic literature, the track record of business practices in selecting leaders gives the impression of a gap between theory and practice. Following Den Hartog, Caley & Dewe, I argue that investigating what are overlapping terminology concerning style, behavior, people, change, process, values (as the soft side) versus structure, cost management, strategy

formulation, implementation (as the hard side) in executive position advertisements and framing them as generic leadership competencies might be helpful in explaining leadership in particular cultural contexts.

The corporate governance crisis with the Enron case, the overall environment for professional services industry has been changing. Both in the US and in Europe, the (executive) search firms has been forced to come out of the closet by media and data privacy legislation or codes of conduct are spreading widely and binding most countries. With globalization, digital technology is acting as a catalyzing medium, opening up increasing opportunities for all with access to multimedia information and communication technologies. In the 1960s McLuhan has coined the term 'global village' and highlighted the ways in which the medium and the message act synergistically. Indeed "the global embrace" predicted by McLuhan has abolished the linear conception of time and space for Internet has transformed our way of communicating along with our way of thinking and learning. The internet can also be an efficient vehicle particularly for finding junior and midlevel candidates for managerial positions (Yüksel, 2007).

While Monster, Yahoo, Hotjobs and other numerous targeted websites continue to prosper at these levels there is also an increasing number of specialist websites that target niche labor markets. Similar developments and trends take place within Turkey. Kariyer.net, Yenibiriıs.com, SecretCV are the major well-known websites that are linked to newspapers. However, the internet has had less impact on senior level leadership appointments, where executive search seems to remain still the preferred way to find "first-rate candidates." Mainly mid-level leaders and sometimes front-line or first- level leadership are sought by websites. However, executives and top-executives are rarely selected through web sites.

In a recent survey by a research firm (Selas), it has been found that human resources and job s search/placement services is the most preferred method by 35 %, printed media (mainly newspapers) by 20 %. The usage of executive search firms (headhunters) is found to be less than 10 % , while the website of the company is used by 15%. The rest is either using networking or word-of-mouth. The largest and oldest search sites, Kariyernet and Yenibiris, they have a data base of 41,000 and 34,000 firms as clients in Turkey along with numerous individual customers as candidates (Hürriyet Newspaper, September 30th,2007; p.12).

Despite this fact, all search firms and even companies themselves now have an ability to develop cost-efficient database as a consequence of which search is becoming a commodity in a way. Thus, firms need to add value, differentiate and develop a comparative advantage beyond their database. The assumptions behind the fact that business performance depends on leadership are:

> Excellence in leadership is vital not only to business processes but to business results,
> Along with leader's competencies.

That is why, I am suggesting that leadership consultancy through assessment, coaching and development based on competencies need to start from the beginning of human resource management, that is, recruitment and its marketing communication through various media help to operationalize the company's performance objectives.

RECENT RESEARCH ON "NEW PARADIGM" MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

Recent "new paradigm" models of leadership have mostly focused on leadership styles and either related them to competencies and performance. However, in doing so, followership process and highlighting others (Shamir & Howell, 2000). In the research like project GLOBE or benchmark studies for competencies (Berthal & Wellins, 2006), most of the leadership competencies seems to be either general suggestions (e.g., being open-minded or culturally sensitive) or specific based on limited number of case studies (Javidan *et. al*, 2006). Kotter (1990 p. 48), for instance, identifies the three main functions of leadership as:

> Establishing direction (this is associated with developing a vision of the future),
> Aligning people (in terms of communicating the direction to those whose cooperation may be needed for the final success) and,
> Motivating and inspiring (i.e.: keeping people moving in the right direction despite major political, bureaucratic and resource barriers
>   to change by appealing to very basic, but often untapped, human needs, values and emotions.)

According to the contingency approach(one of the leading schools of leadership research) successful leader-ship depends on more than just the leader alone. It is affected by the delicate interplay between an individual's personal leadership style, the style and traits of the individuals being led, and the variables of the situation that provide the context in which leadership is occurring (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1999). Research into contingencies have also explored the

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leaders role in clarifying the paths that would lead to follower's goals (Lowe & Gardner, 2000), provides some useful insights for discovering what type of leadership is optimal in a given situation. Another major stream of leadership research known as "New Leadership" or "Transformational Leadership" emerged among organizational scholars in the 1980s. It focused on studying leaders who had proved "transformational" for their organizations. The primary variable of interest in the New Leadership School is the vision of the transforming leader, which is posited as the defining leadership trait.

Despite the criticism that attracted as being disproportionately leader-centric, and therefore ignoring the other factors of successful leadership, the line of argument that wants vision to constitute one of the most important tenets of leadership is still very powerful. According to Nanus (1998) the key reason for this is that vision grabs attention and provides focus. "Vision creates meaning from everyone on the organization. It cuts through confusion and makes the world understandable. It helps explain why things are being done the way they are, why some things are considered good and rewarded while others are not since they see the big picture, people can see how their own jobs relate to it," he illuminates. Vision is a fundamental aspect of charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Sashkin, 1988) and transformational (Bass, 1985) theories of leadership. If there is anything close to a general tenet of leadership theory, it is that leaders must establish a clear and compelling vision (indicatively: Yukl, 2002). Finally, transformational theories of leadership also occupy a considerable space and a prominent position in theory. First mention of this appeared in Downton (1973), whose diatribe looked at the issue through a sociological point of view. In 1995, Bass presented a formal theory of transformational leadership as well as models and measurements of its factors of leadership behavior. According to Burns (1998), leadership is seen when leaders 1) stimulate interest among colleagues and followers to view their work from new perspectives, 2) generate awareness of the mission or vision of the team and organization, 3) develop colleagues and followers to higher levels of ability and potential and 4) motivate colleagues and followers to look beyond their own interests towards those that will benefit the group.

While the most conventional distinction is based on either soft versus hard issues or task versus relation oriented behavior (e.g., Bass, 1990), style differences and core dimensions or competencies of diverse models have revolved around transactional versus transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 2002). Although transactional leadership may be regarded either as a subset of transformational leadership or as a diametric opposite, there is an increasing number of findings on affirmative impact of transformational leadership. Besides, many transformational qualities or competencies of leaders were found to be universally endorsed (eg., in GLOBE program).

Transactional leadership model combines various styles such as contingent rewarding with active or passive management-by- exception. Transnational leaders often prefer mainly a task-based controlling style based on standards, compliance based on past performance. The transformational leadership is more of role modelling and focuses on trust building, motivating, developing and stimulating the subordinates (e.g., Bass, 1997). While walking the talk and ethical aspects or charismatic appeals of leadership are emphasized more in practitioner-oriented popular business discourse, recent media scandals have also led academicians to incorporate integrity and ethics as a foundation for building healthy relations through open communication and trust between leaders and followers with particular emphasis on team-building processes (Podsakoff *et al*, 1996).

Transformational leaders has held out the promise of being a change agent who transcends daily transactional tasks and transforms both the employees and the context by portraying different styles based on inspiration, charisma, idealized influence, individualized considerarion or intellectual stimulation. Consequently, motivated employees working as teams toward shared goals in a learning environment was enhanced through a shared team processes between the leader and the followers (Den Hartog *et al*, 1999).

In competence-based models or competency frameworks a further distinction based on styles versus behaviors may be probed. While "leadership attributes" include habits, traits, styles, motives, values, character along with competencies, such a large array of terms with overlapping meanings is confusing. These attributes may be categorized as:
      1. Who leaders are (values, motives, personal traits and character),
      2. What leaders know (skills, abilities, knowledge, attitudes),
      3. What leaders do (behaviors, habits, and styles).

Thus, "Competency" refers to the behavioral characteristics of an individual that is related to effective performance of the job incumbent, whereas "competence" is the ability to perform activities within an occupation to a prescribed norm. The first focuses on the inputs to achieve a successful performance in a job , while the latter emphasizes the demonstrated outcomes of competence. The demarcation line is rather difficult since both aims at identifying the behavior patterns of effective performance based on all three levels of attributes. However, the second approach is preferred in the European model since it is a narrower construct that can be employed as a

generic standard and common ground in different contexts/ countries (Yüksel, 2007). The research on the common competence and conduct frame for public leadership for Europe revealed seven clusters of core competences for an excellent role model :

> Open-mindedness (1) (i.e., flexibility, learning ability, diversity & change management skills),
> Integrity (i.e., honesty, authenticity, transparency, accountability, confidence and commitment),
> Innovativeness (creative problem solving skills, taking initiation and being proactive, risk-taking ability),

Knowledge at different levels of analysis (e.g., national, EU and strategic planning technical expertise etc.),
Result-orientation (e.g., information processing, decisiveness, analysis, performance), Organization Skills (e.g., planning, evaluation, staff development, delegation, team building, organization skills).

> *Social Skills* (Linguistic skills, cross-cultural communication, presentation and reporting skills, ability to listen, interpersonal understanding, networking, influencing and lobbying skills, persuasiveness, negotiating and conflict management skills, strategic thinking and consensus building skills are all in this last cluster). (Becking & Hopman, 2005).

The power distance between management and other employees, controlling micro-management, and traditional "know-it-all" or "zero-sum game" understanding disable leadership competencies and confine leaders to transactional mode. However, when transformational leading roles are   practiced rather than tactical micro-management, a trustful organizational climate, participatory and collaborative understanding may easily flourish. The question to be posed then is do we want to look good in form and tangibles or to be good in structure and intangibles? (Yüksel, 2001).

On the whole, theoreticians mainly drawing on Hofstede's (1980) work on cultural differences identify the other cultures (of developing countries) as being characterized by high collectivism, high power distance and femininity, low uncertainty avoidance, and associative/contextual thinking. By and large, Turkey is found to be mostly: a country with a high power distance, a high uncertainty avoidance and with a low long-term orientation, a high social identity based collectivism. Consequently, in recent studies on Turkish business leaders, it had been found that neither team building nor leadership is possible unless there is trust between the leaders and their followers attained through open and honest communication and feedback (Akiş, 2004: 394-401). Moreover, Aycan (2001) has highlighted the fact that where 'paternalism' and patron-client relations dominate as in Turkey (also in China, India and Pakistan of the sample), reactivity rather than proactivity characterize the organizational culture. Although treating the employees in a holistic way so that they are empowered is not encouraged in paternalism where dyadic relations are based on hierarchy, charismatic leadership traits are favored. Aycan also implies coaching and mentoring roles of leadership may also be appropriate in such a cultural background (2001; 11-31).

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

This research is based mainly on web-based advertisements and partially on newspaper advertisements for leadership positions in Istanbul, Turkey. I have initially started to gather data from the two largest websites that are linked with major newspapers since I wanted to control and follow the senior level positions on the Human Resources section of the selected newspapers that are published on Sundays. However, one of the websites (i.e., *Yenibiriş.com*) and its services split-up from the newspaper *Hürriyet* in the process. I have continued to gather data from *Kariyer.net* site and *Sabah* newspaper along with *Hürriyet* newspaper on Sundays. For the latter newspaper, I have solely reviewed the senior positions.

A total of 17,975 advertisements were skimmed through over the 11 months of the study. Based on the job title, 7,345 (41 %) of these advertisements were vacancies for all leadership positions. The remaining 344 (6 percent) of the advertisements out of 7,345; therefore, represented vacancies for leadership positions at chief executive, general manager and assistant general manager, general coordinator levels. The information recorded from each unique advertisement included job title and recruiting . In a few cases of top executive position ads neither the specifics of the industry nor the company name was disclosed (i.e., executive recruitment consultancies were involved). Both the titles and leadership relevant or leadership related words/phrases in each middle level leadership advertisement was not systematic as a consequence of which was difficult to categorize with numerous confusing adjectives for attributes. However, in senior level ads, the frequent phrases were like: Goal oriented, results driven, intelligent, with a proven track record and experience, charismatic, dynamic, communication skills and foreign language, crisis management , problem-solving and administrative skills. In an attempt to classify according to the transactional versus transformational leadership model, not all words reflected dimensions of the two models. While some examples of transactional words include goal oriented, results driven, meet targets, attention to detail, analytical, pragmatic, efficient and profit-focused. By and large although there is more transformational words at senior leadership than middle leadership ads, still they are used less frequently.

Examples of transformational terms used in the advertisements include charisma, motivating the team, drive, ability to convince**.**

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has focused on the recruitment of leaders in an era of high leadership failures and crises. While recruitment process varies across companies and recruitment consultancies, the advertising process bears more similarities. Since the beginning of recruitment is to advertise the position, this initial step requires that organizations need to identify the core competencies or attributes that are being sought in candidates more cautiously. Our analysis of advertisements for leadership positions revealed a wide range in the number of leadership related words often used almost ramdomly – particularly for middle level leadership positions. Some advertisements did not even use any leadership-oriented terminology and only gave information about the firm or context was provided, while others only focused on the definition of the job or position requirements, responsibilities and qualifications of candidates to a limited degree, disregarding competencies entirely.

In the senior level posts, managerial competencies or transactional leadership competencies are emphasized more than transformational leadership competencies. This might be based on either the need to create consistency and order in a context of instability rather than going with the flow and status quo, or it may be related with the organizational context, e.g., organizational culture, climate or values.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE STUDIES

Although words relating to people and transformational oriented qualities appeared in recruitment advertisements, they occurred less frequently than the task and transaction oriented ones. Despite the fact that several firms sought a 'charismatic' leader, inference cannot be based solely on this since many scholars see charisma as an attribution by followers *(e.g.,* Kanungo, 2001). Charisma not only has a connotation of change in practice but other conventional meanings with negative loadings.

Whether or not charisma is relevant to paternalism is another issue to be addressed. Future research might shed light on this and study culture in relationship to leadership. Leadership and the organizational culture transformation are the two sides of the same issue, since creating the appropriate work climate and culture seems to be the most significant responsibility (Bass & Avolio, 1989).

Other research might focus solely on executive search consultancy, since they might highlight the leadership competencies such as cross-cultural sensitivity, team building or communication skills more. Besides, executive search consultancy might employ more transformational dimensions in recruitment either for multinational teams or in using other media (e.g., Numic & Rubesch, 2007). Based on the critics of transformational leadership, one might also argue that in a developing country such as Turkey where "social desirability" is rather high, making use of impression management might have side effects. For instance, there is an implicit concern that such leaders might manipulate the followers along an idealized path on which they loose more than gain, particularly in a low trust culture. Accordingly, transactional leadership competencies seem to be more adequate than pseudo-transformational leadership, where looking good or looking as if rather than being good is highlighted.

NOTES:
1.These competency clusters may be regarded as prerequisites for transformational leadership, while the remaining may be regarded as basic dimensions of transactional leadership.

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