Review University Without Borders for the Open Society (RUFSO)

The Challenges That Human Resource Managers Face On Developing Strategic Leadership Directions: A Case Study Of Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

The need for human resource development makes the use of communication between employees even more important to achieve the targets of an organisation. The creation and development of strategic leadership directions based on the use of communication by leaders, encourage an organisation to behave more effectively and productive in order to implement managerial decisions.

The aim of this article is to present the important role of a leader to communicate with other employees to implement the strategic decision of human resource managers in an organisation.

This article analyses current situations and presents a new model based on the results found from the higher education sector in Cyprus.

Keywords: Leadership, Strategic directions, Communication, Human Resources, Performance Management, Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The term of 'globalisation' is changing dramatically and very fast. All information was available in theory during the past years, is nowadays a real life actions in a very competitive environment. The everyday use of communication at workplace must be very carefully developed and applied. In business operations, two of the main concepts are managers as effective leaders, and leaders as effective managers. These concepts strategically explore the implicit and explicit links between leadership and management. Both they are also exploring different leadership styles and underlined principles, concepts and models. The task of this article is to present an analysis and an evaluation of the two concepts in relation to 'communication', in a critical way based on an overall organizational efficiency and productivity, as well as cultural differences and styles in working environments.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

Personal qualifications and working experiences of employees should be carefully examined by human resource managers in order to find what is missing or what needs improvement as there is always something new that employees can to learn. "Several researchers have successfully used quantitative methods in order to evaluate the relationship between leadership and communication, in relation to employee performance" (Contartesi, 2010; Embry, 2009; Kennedy, 2009; Rouse, 2009a; Rouse & Schuttler, 2009). This is why leaders are trying to encourage continues training for employees at their organisation, so that they will behave and act based on their organisational culture. This article presents the level of teambuilding effectiveness arise from training courses in the higher education sector based on feedback received from employees' questionnaires.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Savvides (2011:4) argued that "two of the most important terms in business are the words 'efficiency' and 'productivity'. This is why applied leadership at workplace should have the very serious skills related to communication. Managers as effective leaders should find the ways to increase the effectiveness of employees, create teamworking, and create an

organization culture, to reach management's goals. Sarris (2007) argues that "one of the key factors in an organisation is the human capital". A successful leadership seeks to solve poor morale, low productivity, poor quality, interpersonal conflict, intergroup conflict, unclear or inappropriate goals, inappropriate leadership styles, poor team performance, inappropriate organization structure, poorly designed tasks, poor response to environmental demands, and poor customer relations. In simple words, the 'knowledge work is replacing muscle work' (Harrison 2008, p. 152).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The research methodology involves "an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context should use multiple sources of evidence" (Robson 2002, p. 178). The examination of higher education sector in Cyprus offers the opportunity to collect evidence and data on communication for a well-developed country, as well as to observe contemporary real life actions.

Saunders (2009:146) argues that "the case study strategy has considerable ability to generate answers to the questions why? what? and how? Questions". Also, "case studies involve measuring that is there and how it got there" (Morris and Wood, 1991), and "the researcher wish to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted" (Saunders 2009:146).

2.2 Research Design

The research design of a research plan explains what data will are needed to solve a problem that researcher want to study, and at the end it offers the good opportunity to keep the most powerful of the foundings and add on previous knowledge. "There are three layers: the research strategies, the research choices and the time horizons" (Saunders 2009:136). "These three layers can be thought of as focusing on the process of research design, that is, turning the research question into a research project" (Saunders, as quoted in Robson 2002).
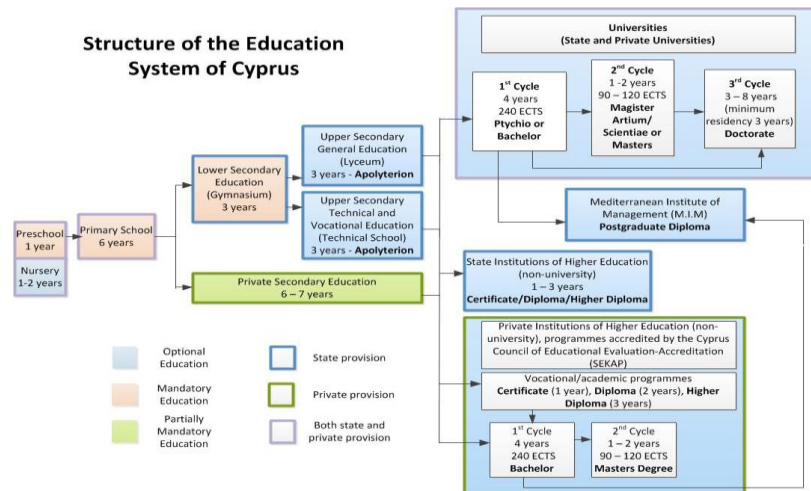
2.3 Research Questions

The research questions were focused on: *What communication strategies do leaders in higher education sector implement at their workplace? What communication skills employees develop about internal communication in regards to the relationship between students and staff? On which level leaders are involved in the decision for teambuilding development? To what extent employees are involved in the designing of a training course for their development?*

2.4 Study population

2.4.1 The Republic of Cyprus

Cyprus is a beautiful island in the Mediterranean Sea at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean with a population of approximately 900,000. Cyprus has been a meeting place of civilizations and cultures, having superb mountain scenery, forests, fascinating coastlines and beaches, and a rich historical and archaeological heritage bearing witness to its long and diverse history. In May 2004, Cyprus joined the European Union and became its easternmost and southernmost outpost. In January 2008, Cyprus joined the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the Euro(€) (source: www.aspectsofcyprus.com). The country's economy has emerged as one of the leading business and financial centres in the region, with a various sectors of the economy like tourism, banking, insurance and telecommunications providing the economy with a cutting edge. The official languages of the Constitution of Cyprus are Greek and Turkish, but English is widely spoken. English is also the language of instruction at private university and colleges for the vast majority of their programmes of study. Public universities are mainly using the Greek language for their study programmes (source: www.cyprustourism.org).

Structure of the Education System of Cyprus

Universities (State and Private Universities)

1st Cycle 4 years 240 ECTS Ptychio or Bachelor

2nd Cycle 1 - 2 years 90 – 120 ECTS Magister Artium/ Scientiae or Masters

3rd Cycle 3 – 8 years (minimum residency 3 years) Doctorate

Upper Secondary General Education (Lyceum) 3 years - Apolyterion

Lower Secondary Education (Gymnasium) 3 years

Upper Secondary Technical and Vocational Education (Technical School) 3 years - Apolyterion

Primary School 6 years

Preschool 1 year

Nursery 1-2 years

Private Secondary Education 6 – 7 years

Mediterranean Institute of Management (M.I.M) Postgraduate Diploma

State Institutions of Higher Education (non-university) 1 – 3 years Certificate/Diploma/Higher Diploma

Private Institutions of Higher Education (non-university), programmes accredited by the Cyprus Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (SEKAP)

Vocational/academic programmes Certificate (1 year), Diploma (2 years), Higher Diploma (3 years)

1st Cycle 4 years 240 ECTS Bachelor

2nd Cycle 1 – 2 years 90 – 120 ECTS Masters Degree

Optional Education

Mandatory Education

Partially Mandatory Education

State provision

Private provision

Both state and private provision

Structure of the Education System of Cyprus

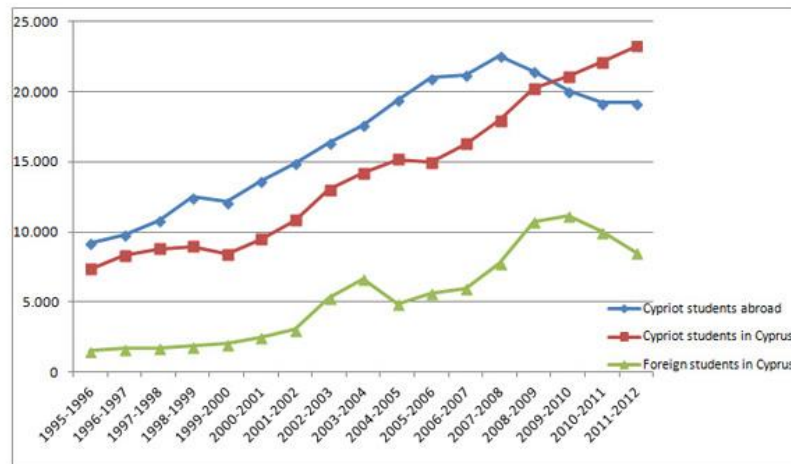Source: www.highereducation.ac.cy (accessed 16th April 2019)

2.4.2 Higher Education in Cyprus

The Department of Higher and Tertiary Education (DHTE) is an authority within the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for Higher Education (HE) regarding all sectors and issues linked to Higher Education. "The Department aims at the creation of the appropriate conditions for the provision of higher education and training in academic and professional programs of studies to the larger possible number of people" (source: www.highereducation.ac.cy).

Cyprus' accession to the European Union (EU), in 2004, has brought forward new challenges for the Department of Higher and Tertiary Education which has taken significant steps towards the establishment of Cyprus as a regional educational and research center and has also implemented a series of measures regarding the alignment of the Cypriot educational policy and vision with that of the European Union. "The Lisbon Strategy, which has been adopted by the European Union, aspires to turn the EU into the most competitive knowledge-based economy with more work positions and social cohesion. Main goals and challenges of Higher Education (HE) in Cyprus is to enhance quality assurance in HE through keeping up with the Bologna Process, active involvement in Bologna Process and its implementation in Cyprus Education, develop Cyprus into a regional centre for education and research, increase the number of people attending HE in

Cyprus; increase the number of students attending programs related to science, technology and communication" (Source: Lisbon Recognition Convention, 1999).

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus: "Higher and Tertiary Education is also directly linked to the European membership of Cyprus since matters such as the recognition of academic qualifications and student and academic staff mobility are dominant among the issues handled by the DHTE" (www.moec.gov.cy accessed on 13th April 2019).

Cypriot and foreign students in Cyprus / Cypriot students studying abroad
Source: www.highereducation.ac.cy (accessed 16th April 2019)

2.5 Data collection

The collection of data was easy because Cyprus is a small island with short distances and low cost transportations.

2.5.1 Sampling techniques and procedure

The specific population for the research was employees from the higher education sector in Cyprus with an age minimum of 25. Questionnaires were sent by emails and interviews took place at their working environment for better observations because a face-to-face contact could support research in collecting quantitative amount of data, some reactions and feelings about communication skills. Interviews explain experiences, as well as share opinions about the working environment.

2.5.2 Methods of data collection

The most widely data instrument in communication areas, is the use of a questionnaire. "This is because it helps the researcher to examine communication practices a system at both macro and micro levels of the organization" (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). A questionnaire also supports a research because it gives important information in a very short time (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Downs & Adrian, 2004; Hamilton, 1987). "Barker (1986, p. 153) argues that a questionnaire is well-designed to measure the concerns of employees and the organisation as well as a valid and reliable tool which makes its use appropriate when examining communication in organisations".

Interviews "include both positive and negative comments" (Komini, 1991), and impressions show "the issues of trust and confidentiality, between an interviewee and an interviewer". Furthermore, "having recorded the interviews is also one of the advantages because nothing is missed" (Saunders 2009, p.329).

3. PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

This article presents a qualitative data analysis and the interpretation of results from the interviewers' participation. It also presents the information collected from the interviews at private and public universities in Cyprus. Finally, it presents the results in relation to perceptual and multigenerational differences at workplace, as well as the results is relation to generational differences and employee performance.

### 3.2 Presentation of results

3.2.1 Opportunities and threats

"Leadership arises from the interaction of people with different ideas, attitudes and beliefs" (Wielkiewicz et al 2005). Scientists around the world have researched and understood the importance of leaders, and have recognized the 'power of motivation' as their main tool of success. According to Huczynski et al (2007), "the motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. It

is the determining dynamic for an employee's behavior, which can be rooted in a basic need to minimize physical pain, but also maximize pleasure. "The impact and effectiveness of a leadership towards 'the team' is being considered in practice during a work project that facilitates the assessment of social responsibility through innovation and respect for the opposite view" (Astin et al 2000 , Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

3.2.2 The fan model

"The dynamic of a person's behaviour in order to achieve a goal, is nothing more than the cognitive decision-making process through which the behavioural goal moves, activates, and maintains" (Huczynski, 2007). Communication strategies follow three theoretical subject areas: a) leadership, b) motivation and c) organizational change, which, according to the fan model, are its three propellers.
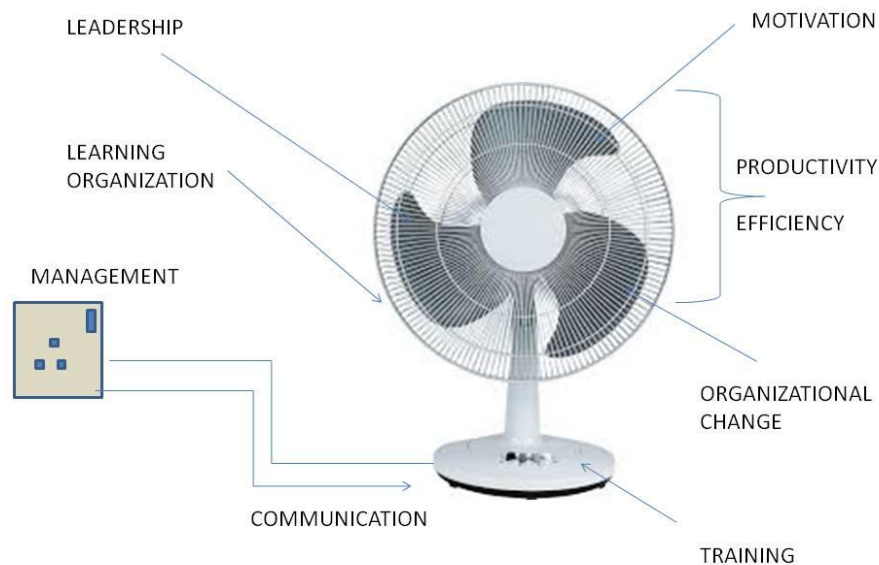
The fan model

Source: Colocassides, E.M. (2016)

3.2.2.1 Creativity as a powerful tool for leadership

'The fan model' (Colocassides, 2016) was created based on the results of a research about leadership. Organizational change is not possible to be developed without new innovated

ideas. "Ideas are useless unless used" (Levitt 1993:79). Individual innovation refers to the "development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage with others within an institutional context" (Van de Ven 1986:591). The relationship between innovation, employees and creativity can get to an organisation effective results and survival (Shalley et al, 2004). Amabile (2004) argued that "the connection between empowering leadership and creativity is affected by important variables". Amabile (2004) talks about "empowering leadership and creativity", "psychological empowerment", "creative process engagement", "intrinsic motivation". The fan model shows those variables graphically based on the fan's functions.

3.2.3 *What communication skills employees develop about internal communication in regards to the relationship between students and staff?*

There is no numerous studies about implementation of communication skills because it is not easy to measure it, but researchers can measure creativity by examining empirical analyses (Yuan and Woodman, 2010). Yuan and Woodman (2010) also mentioned that "an idea implementation is largely a social-political process because people are motivated to engage in new creative ideas, and communicate effectively" (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). "The frequently touted organizational benefits of individual creativity include higher-quality products, more effective decision making, better group performance, and more innovative solutions to organizational problems" (Kelley, 2001).

In 2013, Cyprus was in a very serious economic situation. Bankruptcy was very close to our society, while people and organization were close to lose everything. The decision of Eurogroup for bank bail in -a decision that has decided for a first time globally!- was a choice that saved the economy of the island, but on the same time has created a new situation if Cypriots daily life, as deposits of customers in banks where used to save the bank system (bail-in). One big bank closed that year, and another bank a few years later. As a result, Higher Education, had to face new the situations, and serious affections on continues training and development as they were 'no money' to participate or develop courses for staff. "The survival, growth and profitability of educational institutions reduced their speed of adjustment" (Harrison 2008:117). The need to bring back life to normal was a must and a lot of hard work should be done.

3.2.4 *What communication strategies do leaders in higher education sector implement at their workplace?*

According to West & Turner (2010): "*Communication* is a process in which individuals use symbols and signs to create and determine meaning in their environment". Communication in a higher education environment (university or college) can affect both the relationship between students and staff, as well as the relation between student's performance and in class climate. Based on *Laws of Communication* book written by Schuttler (2008), "the use of a stoplight as a simple metaphor can indicate leadership behaviours. Red, yellow and green indicate levels in the quality and quantity of supervision communication". Furthermore, Cox and Holloway (2011) mentioned that "communication and trust are interrelated" as both can brings engagement, trust, and a perception of openness within an organization. Thomas et al. (2009) also found that "the trust building between a leader and an employee is effective when transferred information is communicated in a timely, accurate manner".

The terms '*engender empowerment', 'trust' and 'ethical stance'* in Cyprus were not well known before the entrance of the country into the European Union in 2004. It was then when the small island of Cyprus started feeling the effects from the coming of 'globalisation'. The big changes in the business environment of the country, and the way of life on the island appeared in 2008 when Cyprus started exchanging in Euro. Euro has replaces Cypriot lira and gave in to the current market the option to 'open wings' in bigger markets. This is the most important challenge that the Republic of Cyprus had to face, after the Turkish invasion of 37% of the island in 1974 which has divided the island in two parts (Note: North Cyprus is a not recognised state). Organisations operating in Cyprus have started thinking and designing new complex strategic plans, in order to create a multicultural team spirit for their organisation, to perform well and to bring new ideas to an international market. Cyprus, as a tourism and very welcome country has decided to increase the number of international students by developing marketing plans for Asian and African countries.

3.2.5 *On which level leaders are involved in the decision for teambuilding development?*

According to Likert's and McGregor's theories developed in the 1960s, "teamwork is an important element of success, and that's why most businesses, regardless of their size, have

used teambuilding for some of their work". Personal energy, self- belief and responsibility is connected as a team with other staff members. Individual evaluation is showing the impact of a leadership style, which can have relative success for teambuilding (French and Bell, 1999). "Team building and performance is the result of creating a team spirit". Team spirit refers to a wide range of activities that are designed to improve team performance which lead to the collaboration of colleagues during the elaboration of a particular project" (French and Bell, 1999). According to Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:570): "Team building is a developmental intervention of the organisation to help team members understand their roles more clearly and improve their interaction and collaboration at the workplace".

Situational leadership focuses on leadership in situations. An effective leader requires that a person adapt his or her style to the demands of different situations. Situational leadership stresses that will direct and support dimensions in particular situations. Leaders must evaluate their employees and assess how competent and committed they are to perform a given task. Situational leadership, based on the assumption that employees' skills and motivation vary over time, suggests how leaders should change the degree to which they are directive or supportive to meet the employees' changing needs (Northouse, 2013). The situational approach has been developed by Blanchard (1985) with the Situational Leadership II model (SLII). This model is an extension and refinement of the original SL model developed by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969. This new model can help to be better understand the dynamics of situational leadership by separate *leadership style* from *development level of subordinates*.

There are only a few published research studies on situational leadership on justifying the assumptions and propositions set forth by the approach, even several doctoral dissertations have been written. The authors of situational leadership do not make clear and explain how commitment is combined with competence to form levels of development (Graeff, 1997), as well as the theoretical basis of a change in the composition of each level (Yukl, 1989). Blanchard et al. (1985) stated the subordinates' commitment with confidence and motivation, but is not clear how both they combine to define commitment.

Situational leadership fails to account how certain demographic characteristics (Education, experience, age, gender) can influence the leader's instructions. Situational leadership does not fully address the issue of one to one versus group leadership in an organisational setting (Northouse, 2013). Questionnaires on situational leadership typically ask respondents to describe leadership style in terms of specific parameters (i.e directing, coaching, supporting), rather than in terms of other leadership behaviours (Graeff 1983; Yukl, 1989).

3.2.6 *To what extent employees are involved in the designing of a training course for their development?*

The need of a competitive advantage for an organisation with high standards and principles leads to continuous improvement of working staff. The investment on new knowledge and lifelong learning can build trust and relationship, as well as accept diversity at workplace. The selection of a training course is tailored on the needs and the size of each organisation, which can be taken as an important investment to create a healthy working environment, and advanced corporate image and reputation. The personal differences of each working environment are very much related to personal development "in order to control misunderstanding within organizations and minimize breakdowns through effective management strategies" (Gibson, 2009). "Leaders must understand these differences to maintain an effective work environment and a competitive organizational culture" (Burmeister, 2008).

Training and development actions in the field of higher education were also examined for this research. Visits to public and private universities of Cyprus in order to collect all necessary information observe that internal cultural and organisational policies has been developed and mixed with training courses to build the right organizational culture. Leaders as effective managers are always under pressure because they must make important decisions and actions in very complex working environments. Leaders are always facing new managerial challenges and complex situations. The need of designing and developing new skills and capabilities for employees are always important in order to create productivity. Efficiency and effectiveness are also very important for a higher education organisation as its

operations in a complex business environment will create a competitive advantage and a strong image to local and international markets.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

The collaboration between employees and their managers is very important, as good results can not be produced without an excellent communication between the two parties in order to achieve targets. The implementation of oral and written communication at workplace needs the attention of managers in order to understand needs and complete gaps.

Over the last few years organizations around the world have started feeling the importance of Leadership as an important powerful communication tool for their success. This project critically explains leadership from different point of views of an organization. It has also evaluated and analyzed its role is an everyday situation, as well its relationship with culture and communication as an overall strategic direction to create organizational change.

This project has presented some terms regarding the importance of leadership at workplace for the implementation of a human resource plan. Organizations' productivity and effectiveness are very much related to human beings actions, so creativity, motivation; communication and continues training. It also presented and examined how 'the fan model' can improve the everyday way of life by developing the use of communication between the employees. New ideas and strategies must be updated with creative strategic directions and plans based on the real life situations. In higher education, the need for internal communication is also very important because colleges and universities must well operate internally effective, before they transfer the good environment into their customers, who are their students. Higher education organisations, should behave very closely with the local society as higher education institutes are part of a local community, and their results will have a feedback to the local society.

Interviews and questionnaires might look 'scary' to some researchers but at the end their benefits can improve the quality of life. All employees in higher education sector should invest on the improvement of their performance, as by communicating successfully should have both a horizontal and vertically development in their organisation.

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