Emerging Organizational Structures: Implications for Leaderless Organizations

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Abstract

Contemporary management and organization theory evidence to the fact that more permeable, flexible, creative, quick responsive and boundaryless structures of organizations are emerging at the diminishing trend of the visibility of traditional, bureaucratic, rational and mechanistic structures. Perceiving the transition of the influential role of leaders in these new forms, we explore the possibility of conceptualizing 'leaderless organizations' in light of newly emerging non-traditional structures. Reviewing comprehensively the existing literature, and concentrating more on the emerging new forms of organizations this study unveils the enforced stipulations for a leaderless organization under four aspects, employees, structure, job/work and culture. It finds that the role of leaders in newly emerging structures is replaced by reliant connoisseurs who emerge timely and contextually to escort the heedful situations.

Keywords: Organizational Structure, Emerging Forms, Leadership, Leaderless Organizations

1. Introduction

Management and organization theory evidence a great deal of writings on leadership in organizations. The extant of literature on leadership accumulated through research over the past decades confirm the diversity of determinants those create, influence, maintain, develop, and turn off the leader's role in organizations. Accordingly, organizational leadership research have stretched over a wide spectrum covering sub divisions alike individual traits of leaders, leader behaviour, interaction patterns, role relationships, influence over followers, influence over organizational culture etc. (Yukl, 1989). These findings have been appeared in trait approach (House & Aditya, 1997), behavioural theories (Blake & McCanse, 1991; Blake & Mouton, 1985; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973), situational theories (Evans, 1970; House, 1971; Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988),

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contingency model (Fiedler, 1967; Vroom & Jago, 1988; Vroom & Yetton, 1973), transformational leadership (Bass, 1990), transactional leadership (Burns, 1978), and charismatic leadership (Weber, 1968; House, 1977), authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005) to name some.

The definition of leadership itself has accommodated diverse views at times complying with the views of researchers (Stogdill, 1974). Leaders, as established in theory, necessarily qualify with followers on whose behaviour the influences are exerted in the process of managing. The major concept commonly highlighted in most of the definitions is the 'influence of leaders over their followers'. 'Influence' in leadership research is explained as 'any actions or examples of behaviour that cause a change in attitude or behaviour of another person or group' (Stoner, Freeman, & Gilbert, 1995). Yukl (1989) defined leadership as 'influencing task objectives and strategies, influencing commitment and compliance in task behaviour to achieve these objectives, influencing group maintenance and identification, and influencing the culture of an organization' (p. 253). Subsequent to these views, a series of related concepts, such as leader power, follower performance, goal achievement, organizational commitment, loyalty etc. have been necessarily lined up in leadership research.

As evidenced in recent organizational practices, contemporary as well as future organizational structures apparently need room for permeability, flexibility, creativity, quick responsiveness, customer care, employee dignity and boundaryless careers in organizations. With these requirements they are becoming more virtual, networked, self-managed (Banai, Nirenberg, & Menachem, 2000), cellular, modular or boundaryless in their nature. In these organizations, the visibility of traditional, bureaucratic, rational and mechanistic structures which are formed to influence human behaviour are ceased to exist. With the transition of the influential role of leaders in organizations due to such structural and behavioural changes, the present study identifies the possibility of conceptualizing 'leaderless organizations' especially with reference to the emerging new forms. Thus, the objective of the present study is to examine the implications for conceptualizing the leaderless organizations.

To identify the background of less researched area of leaderless organizations we start by reviewing theory and research findings that lend insight into the transition of the influential role of leadership. It is followed by a section in which we examine the nature of leadership in emerging new forms of organizations. Elaborating more on the points derived in this section, we move on to comprehensively reviewing the enforced stipulations for leaderless organizations and present a model explicating the findings.

2. Transition of the Influential Role of Leadership

In the recent past, the leadership research has taken a novel tendency extending its focus on more self-centred behaviours such as self-leadership (eg., Houghton & Yoho, 2005). A further extension is seen in leaderful practice (Raelin, 2005) which connotes concurrent and collective sharing of experiences. Another similar concept has been developed as shared leadership (Solansky, 2008) meaning a motivational, social and cognitive process at large. Further, distributive leadership, collective leadership, solo leadership, community leadership are some of the contributive phenomena. Another interesting development in the leadership recently is the 'followership', which undermines the dominant role of leader and equally cognizes the influential role of follower in leadership development (Fields, 2007; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & van Dijk, 2000).

Teams are the backbone of the flexible organizational designs (Graen, Hui, & Taylor, 2006). Virtual, networked, self-managed, cellular, modular, or assignment-based teams often work alone without rigid supervision from a superior level. There can be seen the depersonalizing of command and control structures through the use of technological protocols and policies implemented by remote control (Oakley, 1998). Citing Stewart and Manz, Oakley (1998) highlights the behaviours of (internal and external) leaders of virtual teams as low level of involvement (such as, showing models of self-regulation, acting as boundary spanners, assisting team members in obtaining resources etc.) and passive influence (which requires continues learning). Literature support for this view can be found in Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) continuum of leadership behaviour (e.g. subordinate-centred behaviour), Blake and Mouton's (1985) Grid model of leadership (e.g. country club and impoverished management) Vroom and Yetton's (1974) contingency model of leadership (e.g. low involvement), Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) model of situational leadership (e.g. relationship behaviour), Bass's (1978) transformational leadership (e.g. creation and communication a higher level mission), Burn's (1990) transactional leadership (e.g. exchange relationships resulting compliance) etc.

The leaders in virtual-type teams are identified to play more the role of coordinators, which involves in informal interactions and team building activities. Thus, the leader has to create an environment, which facilitates successful team work. Further, the leader has to be the focal point of communication network in which s/he handles all information needed for team decision making. Moreover, they have to coordinate informal networks and foster interpersonal trust at the workplace. As Graen, Hui, and Taylor (2006) emphasized, flexible organizations require greater cooperation and coordination.

Self-leadership has been identified as a process through which people influence themselves to achieve the self-direction and self-motivation to perform. The context that facilitates self-leadership has been recognized by Houghton and Yoho (2005) to be more encouraging for employees who are committed to work, independent, creative and psychologically empowered. Self-leadership is facilitated by the prerequisites of members of such firms such as, high level of competency, professional maturity, experiences, time management skills, and ability to take initiatives without external direction. Banai et al (2000) imply that the idea of leadership in self-managing organizations is seen as a contribution and focused on service to the individuals being led.

Druskat Wheeler (2003) implicitly undermined the influential role of leaders of the 21st century by emphasizing the external nature of leadership with day-to-day activities of empowered and distributed workforces. Their focus was centred on four functions, which involved the behaviour for managing from the boundary. Those functions and behaviours are given in Table 1 below.

Further, loyalty to projects or jobs assigned rather than the organization, intrinsic motivation derived through satisfaction achieved rather than external rewards, and kaleidoscope type of careers rather than life time employment bound to one organization have become typical in emerging new structures of organizations. Further, community leadership, which represents a community of common interest, purpose or practice, has been a transition of traditional leadership role towards a more liberal, non-authoritative, and non-legal type of leadership. Community leaders are not necessarily elected to their positions and usually do not have legal powers to perform the functions of the leaders. Thus, it provides insights of the loosening authoritative power of traditional leadership.

Table 1: Functions and Behavior for Managing from the Boundary

Function	Behavior
Relating	Developing social and political awareness and relationships
	Caring team members
	Building team spirit
Scouting	Searching for information inside the organization
	Diagnosing member behavior
	Investigating problems systematically
Persuading	Obtaining external support
	Empowering teams/members
	Generating resources for team success
	Encouraging team to make effective choices
Empowering	Delegating authority for making decisions
	Supporting
	Coaching

Source: Druskat and Wheeler (2003)

A steady transition of the influential role of leadership has been perceptible in the more flexible organizational designs. This knowledge inflicts a look at the milieu of emerging new structures of organizations in order for probing into the nature of leadership in such settings.

3. Leadership in Emerging Structures

The practical implications of leadership exercised in newly emerging, non-traditional organizational structures are examined below.

3.1 Virtual Organizations

Virtual organizations are the entities which do not have a physical existence but still operated successfully through communication technology by connecting all the relevant and required parts for the continuous functioning. Thus, the appearance of a head office, long-term employed staff, permanent bonds of employees with the organization will not be the characteristics of this nature of structures.

The main features of virtual organization are the interaction of its members with each other through telecommunications, and their lack of meeting with each other in the actual work settings. The meetings, communication, sharing of views are all done at distance. Thus, the work is most often performed as assignments or small projects assigned to people, which need no strong supervision and face-to-face coordination. The type of work that could be maintained and coordinated from distance is organized in this manner.

Here, the accumulation of power, distribution of power, and different sources of power within the structure cannot be seen throughout, but instead, smooth flow of work getting done from people has been the core of business functions. Thus, face-to-face interactions of leaders and followers, fear of commands, or leadership and followership even ceased to be visible in this kind of structures.

3.2 Network Structures

A collection of autonomous firms or divisions as single entity interacting with each other through integration and exchanges among themselves for the smooth functioning is identified as network structures. Such networks are not necessarily legally prescribed units, but instead connected to each other and fallen into stable patterns of relationships which become solidified over time. Thus, these are alike 'natural clusters' of organizations in which individual organizations surviving as nodes in a wider network.

In such a structure, there can be seen a leading player that coordinates the entire system, however, the actions and interactions of the whole are arranged through the behaviour of single organizations connected to the network. Thus, the leading nodes will be created at times and at contexts it permits them to behave as such.

3.3 Self-Managed Work Teams (SMWT)

This particular structure evidence the empowerment of staff for managing the work engaged by themselves. Thus, the manager's job is performed by the members of the group. The dominance of certain individuals within the organizational hierarchy disappears here and commanding and controlling directly channelled from higher positions will no longer exist. The group can make arrangements to appoint a leader for the particular assignment; however, it will be done solely for the achievement of group goals given by the management. This can be a rotating, non-fixed appointment especially made for the sake of group work.

In self-managed organizations, the role of leader was identified to be consultative in decision making, acceding freedom to work design, team building and motivation, and coaching team members while being a role model (Banai et al., 2000). Thus, the leader does not possess formal-legal authority, the power to reward and punish or the power to allocate resources. The only power they can use is referent or expert bases of power (Banai et al., 2000).

3.4 Cellular Structure

Cellular organization is a form of organization consisting of a collection of self-managing firms or cells held together by mutual interest. The main principles on which it is built are noted to be self-organization, member ownership, and entrepreneurship (The Pocket Dictionary of Business, 2012). It is a form that each cell within the organization shares common features and purposes with other cells. However, at the same time it is also able to function independently. These characteristics deny the need of a leading figure for commanding actions.

3.5 Modular Structure

Modular-type structures of organizations have been arisen to cater to the need of horizontal designs which activate as functionally distinct modules. The modules not competing with each other, and not being commanded hierarchically from the top positions so rigidly, have left their functioning as separate components which can be distinctive from each other. A single leading role activated over the separate components of the modular system is not existed here, and subsequently, individual units have been empowered to perform their best on the given assignment or project or function. Thus, the leading function is limited to spontaneously emerged or temporarily appointed group leaders.

3.6 Boundaryless Organizations

Introducing more flexibility to organizational structures and allowing a smooth flow of information from external environment, the organizations have adapted permeable boundaries breaking down the rigid boundaries at internal as well as external levels. Thus, being bounadaryless in their structures have overcome certain limitations in the traditional organizational structures. The behaviour of these structures is seen more as organisms, which integrate fruitfully at internal level and link fast and appropriately with external environment.

The organismic metaphor explaining the nature of organizational structure has implied the living nature of organizations, which promptly activate in responding to their environments. Fluid boundaries imply the flexibility in-built to the systems removing all the rigidities in human and material components. Thus, rigid, permanent, continuous leadership would not be seen; it would not be a necessity in this structure.

## 4. Stipulations for Leaderless Organizations

Following the insights drawn from above, the stipulations for leaderless organizations can be derived as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Stipulations for Leaderless Organizations

Element	Characteristic
Employees	Multi-skilled labor
	Professional maturity
	High level of competency
	Strong involvement
	Empowerment
	Independent, creative
	Self-directed, self-motivated
	Kaleidoscope type career
Structure	Organic nature
	Flat structure and no vertical boundaries
	Independent business units
	Flexible and adaptive systems
Job/Work	Assignment-based jobs
	Shared responsibility over tasks
	Work around processes
	Team orientation
	Managers as facilitators and mentors
Work culture	Shared vision
	Collaboration
	Cooperation
	Interpersonal trust
	Informal interactions
	Informal networks

Based on the insight derived from the above discussion we can portray the main points highlighted as the stipulations for a leaderless organization (see Figure: 1).

Figure 1: Stipulations for Leaderless Organization
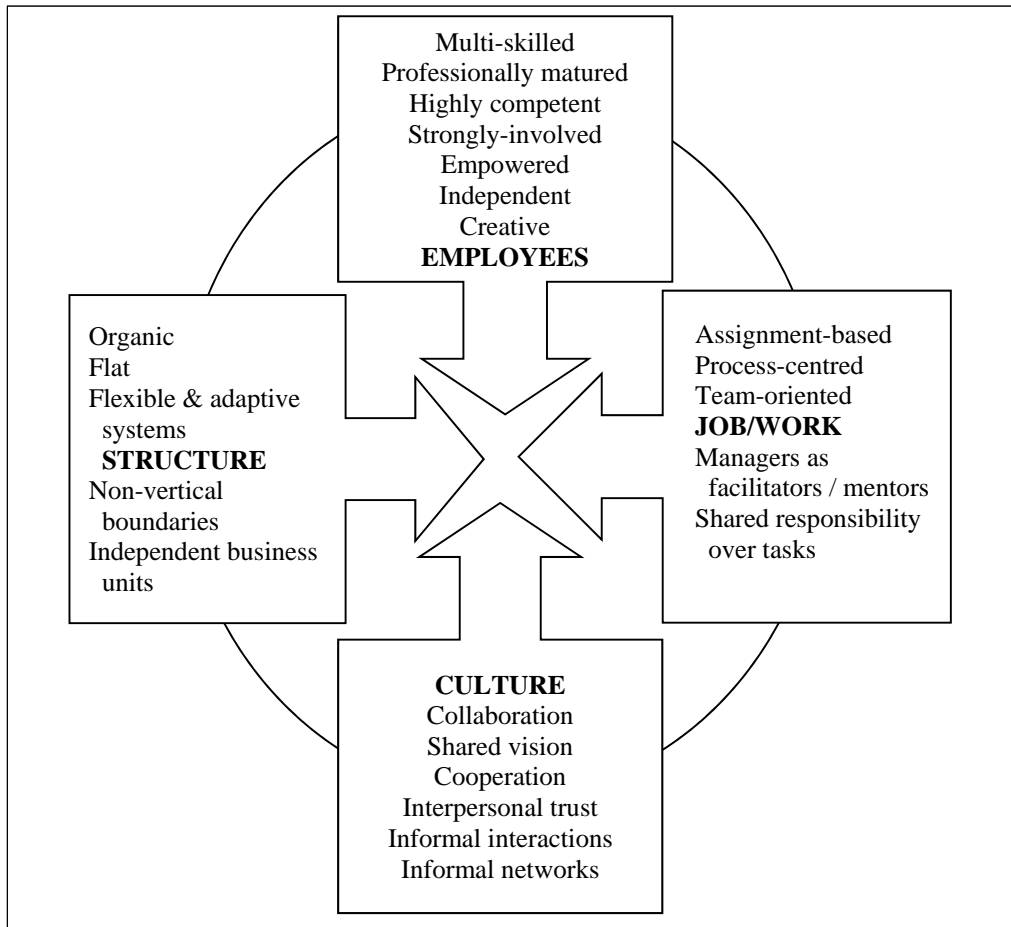
There we cluster the facts under four main aspects; employees, structure, job/work and culture as drawn from the literature survey. We propose the possibility of experiencing a leaderless organization in such a setting where the employees are experts and multi-skilled, professionally matured, highly competent, strongly involved in the given assignment and empowered accordingly; the structure is organic, flexible, adaptive and independent to the required extent; the job or work are assignment-based and process-centred, facilitated by mentors and responsibility is shared; and having a collaborative culture, cooperation, interpersonal trust, informal interactions in the groups, informal networks and a shared vision.

Based on this knowledge, we define leaderless organization below, and propose the temperament of the replacement of the leader in newly emerging organizations.

5. Defining Leaderless Organization

The term 'leaderless' in the present study is identified as 'desertion of any influential figure in the notion of a leader who devastatingly exercises power over others in getting things done'. Thus, it is the absence of a commander who dominates, directs, demands, decrees, orders, rules out or controls the behaviour of followers in an organization.

Subsequently, the leaderless organizations are defined as the entities those do not exert influence over human behaviour in the process of getting things done towards a common purpose. It implies the fact that leaderless organizations are entities which possess enough talented and multi-skilled participants to initiate and implement any possible and appropriate solutions at times, irrespective of the events, especially with the use of the collective mind (Weick & Roberts, 1993). It is not analogous to the term 'situational leadership' (House, 1971), and 'self-leadership' (Houghton & Yoho, 2005), or 'leaderful practice' (Raelin, 2005), but rather means the redundancy of a so-called leader.

Thus, this paper sets forth the view that the positions occupied in the traditional organizations by the traditional leaders will be occupied in the new structures by 'reliant connoisseurs' who contextually and timely emerge to escort the heedful situations in organizations.

5.1 Reliant Connoisseurs as Emergent Activators

Connoisseur means a person with good judgment on matters in which appreciation of fineness is needed. We use this term in this context to denote the nature of engagement of an employee in a setting where there is no a formally appointed leader. In that, any employee will be the expert at a particular instance to make any decision. Thus, we posit that reliant connoisseurs, instead of leaders, are the emergent activators of newly formed non-traditional organizational structures.

6. Conclusion

Given the emergence of non-traditional structures, such as virtual, networked, self-managed, cellular, modular, and boundaryless, the present study examined the possibility of leaderless organizations. The leaderless organizations were defined as the entities those do not exert influence over human behaviour in the process of getting things done. The findings were depicted in a coherent portrait explicating the four aspects, employees, structure, job or work, and the culture of the leaderless organizations as evidenced in the study.

The possibility of leaderless organizations brings out certain implications of theoretical and practical importance. One intriguing issue it implies is the wane of the exercise of power within organizations and the consequent diminishing value of power as a means of need satisfaction at the individual level. Subsequently, the contentment it endows with would be diverted to different directions such as, competing behaviour for acquiring knowledge for gaining better opportunities, for gaining multi-skills, high competency, and a negotiable position at the labour market. Thus, the significance of the phenomenon 'power and politics' in organization studies at the micro level would be transferred to its macro level i.e. the labour market behaviour, thus demanding more theoretical and practical concerns than earlier.

When seen from practitioners' perspective, leaderless organizations would demand more collaborative work environments where directives, commands, demands and advises cease to exist but instead more facilitation, mentoring, and advocacy are in need. The individuals who foster cooperation, integration, coordination and facilitation at work will fulfil this need. Accordingly, the skill of the individuals in such an environment will not be the leadership skill at the outset, but the skills for collaboration, cooperation, sharing, support, teamwork, and experiencing the collective mind.

Further, individuals attached to leaderless organizations will be benefited with a rigorous training for leaderless situations; especially at heedful events those occur spontaneously, needs to be responded promptly by the individuals themselves. Such requirements will be facilitated with a

general training for coping up situations rather than developing people for undertaking specific assignments.

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