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CHARACTERISTICS OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Laissez-faire leadership style provides little or no direction and gives employees as much freedom as possible such that all authority is given to the employees and they must determine goals, make decisions, and resolve problems on their own. The study attempts to explore and analyze the characteristics of laissez-faire leadership styles in the practices of leadership. The study is exploratory and for the purpose 25 leaders of the state Manipur, India are considered. The sample is drawn from organizations in both the private and government sector. Survey technique is employed and the primary data are collected using interview cum questionnaire method from the top executives of the selected organizations and from two immediate subordinates of the sampled executives. The responses of the followers become essential component as they highlight how subordinates perceive about their leaders' laissez-faire leadership characteristics and thus, their responses crosscheck the practices of the leaders.

KEYWORDS

Leadership, Laissez-faire style, Flexibility, Capability, Decision making

CHARACTERISTICS OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE: A CASE STUDY

The Laissez-Faire leadership style is also known as the "hands-off" style. It is one in which the leader provides little or no direction and gives employees as much freedom as possible. All authority is given to the employees and they must determine goals, make decisions, and resolve problems on their own. According to Robbins et al. (2007) laissez-fair style is abdicating responsibilities and avoiding making decisions. It is difficult to imaging the practicability and advantages of laissez-fair leadership style without having subordinates who are experts and well motivated. Leaders let group members make all decision" (Mondy & Premeaux, 1995). They are encouraged to plan their own activities, set their own targets. However, the subordinates will be accountable for all their decisions and actions. The hall mark of laissez-faire leadership style is independence and capability. The role of the leaders becomes facilitators.

In general, this approach leaves the employees floundering with little direction or motivation. This is an effective style to use when the employees are highly skilled, experienced, educated and trustworthy. In fact, there is no effort on the part of the leader to motivate followers, or to recognize and satisfy their needs (Bass & Avolio, 1997)

The study attempts to explore and analyze the characteristics of laissez-faire leadership styles in the practices of leadership and for the purpose 25 leaders of the state Manipur, India are considered. The sample is drawn from organizations in both the private and government sector. Eighteen departmental heads including six deputy commissioners of six different districts of the state cover the government sector, and in the private sector, seven organizations are selected for the study, and the organizations are based on the number of employees and profitability. Survey technique is employed and the primary data are collected using interview cum questionnaire method from the top executives of the selected organizations and from two immediate subordinates of the sampled executives. The responses of the followers become essential component as they highlight how subordinates perceive about their leaders' laissez-faire leadership characteristics and thus, their responses crosscheck the practices of the leaders. The required data for the study is mainly based on the primary sources supplemented by secondary. The paper assesses style of the sampled leaders with reference to laissez faire style of leadership.

In the light of the above discussion, the study has designed to assess the sampled leaders in terms of Laissez-Faire style. Eight statements were used for the purpose. The statements were based on following factors:

- (i) Decision making
- (ii) Planning and plans
- (iii) Routine feedback
- (iv) Employees freedom
- (v) Capability
- (vi) Flexibility
- (vii) Sharing power
- (viii) Leadership experience

The scores on the leader's table provide information about leaders' laissez-faire leadership characteristics and the scores of the followers highlight how subordinates perceive about their leaders' laissez-faire leadership characteristics. A brief detail for each parameter and analysis thereof are shown with the help of tables. The Table (1) highlights the results of the analysis.

DECISION MAKING

The laissez-faire leader exercise little control over his employees. He feels that his employees are skilled, experienced and educated. He encourages people to take decision; he feels that they are equally capable of taking decision and are not required to consult him for taking decision.

The respondents' opinions regarding decision making is shown in Table (1). The sample leader feels that they occasionally encourage people to take decision. The follower observed that they were given this opportunity frequently. So the followers perceive that the leaders trust their capabilities. They are empowered. As shown in the above table there is a gap between the two medians. According to the sampled followers their leaders have slightly underrated on this parameter -- 'decision making'.

PLANNING AND PLANS

The Laissez-faire leader is quite hands-off, letting the wisdom of his people deliver solutions. He or she assigns task equally among employees so that plans are developed by the employees themselves. This is frequently true for both the sample leader and the follower (Table (1)). The sampled leaders have constantly divided the planning task among the employees, so that plans are developed together.

ROUTINE FEEDBACK

The laissez-faire leader has complete confidence and trust in his employees' skills and performance. Leader of this style does not keep a routine feedback of progresses for activities of their employees as he feels that employees must be accomplishing it. Table (1) shows the responses and analysis thereof for the sampled leaders and their followers regarding the parameter -- 'routine feedback'. The sample leaders provide feedback; do not leave everything to the employees. It is because they do not have complete trust and confidence in the employees' skills and performance.

This result infers that the sampled kept routine feedback of progress for activities of their employees. The sampled followers also assent to their leaders' view point (Table (1)).

EMPLOYEES FREEDOM

Leaders practicing laissez-faire style respect their employees. They feel that employees have pride in their work and drive to do it successfully on their own.

The Laissez-faire leadership style is also called the free-range style as it supports complete freedom for the employees. As a matter of fact, the researcher has designed to assess the leadership style of the sampled leaders with reference to the parameter -- 'employees' freedom'.

The opinions of the sampled leaders and their followers concerning the parameter 'employees freedom' is shown in Table (1). The sample leader occasionally gives freedom to the employees to decide by themselves what needs to be done and how to do it. The sample followers observe that frequently they are given the opportunities. So the followers feel that they receive more than what was given by the leader. It is difference in perception. What might be challenging to the follower might be less challenging to the leader. It is because of the difference in the outlook.

CAPABILITY

The laissez-faire leadership style is usually appropriate when leading a team of highly motivated, skilled and mature people, who have produced excellent work in the past. In other words, leaders of this style consider that their employees are as capable of leading as they are. The opinions of the sampled leaders on the parameter "capability" are shown in Table (1).

It has been found out from the table that the median score of the sampled leaders corresponds to the third highest scale of response category- Occasionally True (3). This result highlights that the sampled leaders occasionally thought that their employees are as capable of leading as they are. In the case of the followers also, the rating is the same -- 'Occasionally True'. So there is agreement about the leadership practices on the aspects of capability.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is one quality of Laissez-faire leaders which make them able to adapt to changes. They provide flexibility and freedom in taking decision. Laissez-faire leaders believe that innovation and creativity come when employees are given more freedom and flexible.

The responses of the sampled leaders and the followers regarding 'flexibility' are shown in Table (1). It is observed from the table that the median score for both the sampled leaders and their followers correspond to third highest scale of response category -- Occasionally True (3). This result shows that the sampled leaders are of the employees have concern for flexibility and freedom in taking decision. The sampled followers have supported the opinion of their leaders at the same scale.

SHARE POWER

Power is the capacity that a leader has to influence the behavior of his followers. In case of laissez-faire leadership style, the leader has given all the authority to the employees. In order to assess style of the sampled leaders, the researcher has served a statement regarding "share power" to the respondents. The respondents' opinions on this parameter are shown in Table (1). It has been observed from the table that the median score for the sampled leaders falls at the second highest scale of response category- Frequently True (4). This result highlights that the sampled leaders frequently share their power with subordinates.

The sampled followers have rated about their leaders in this category. The median score for the sampled followers corresponds to fourth highest rating of response category -- Seldom true (2). There is a gap between the two median scores. According to the score of the sampled followers, their leaders have overrated their response on this parameter- 'share power'. Followers observed that the leaders did not share power with them that often.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

It is true that everyone has leadership experience in life -- may be at home, in group or outside, organizations, politics or in any walks of life.

Table (1) shows the opinions of the sampled leaders regarding the statement "Everyone has leadership experience in life". The median score for the sampled leaders corresponds to the highest rating of responds category-Almost Always True (5). This result has inferred that the sampled leaders have highly endured the statement "Everyone has leadership experience in life". The sampled followers were excluded from this parameter.

OVER-VIEW

The table above shows the overall score of the sample leaders with reference to laissez-faire style in their leadership practices. It is found from the Table (2) that the median score for the sampled leaders' falls at the third highest rating of the response category -- Occasionally True (3). This result highlights that the sampled leaders have sporadically exercised laissez-faire style in their leadership practices.

One of the factors contributing to this style is that some of the sampled leaders are from health care and higher educational sectors. These sampled leaders were highly professional and expertise in their areas. They delegated authorities and responsibilities to their employees who were either doctors or professors. They have confidence on the capability of their peers and subordinates.

TABLE (1): LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE

Sl. No	Parameters	Median score	
		Leaders (Scale)	Followers (Scale)
1.	Decision making	Occasionally True (3)	Frequently True (4)
2.	Planning and plans	Frequently True (4)	Frequently True(4)
3.	Routine feedback	Seldom True(2)	Seldom True(2)
4.	Employees' freedom	Occasionally True(3)	Frequently True (4)
5.	Capability	Occasionally True(3)	Occasionally True (3)
6.	Flexibility	Occasionally True (3)	Occasionally True(3)
7.	Share power	Frequently True(4)	Seldom True(2)
8.	Leadership experience	Almost Never True(1)	Not Applicable

TABLE (2): OVERALL SCORE OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE

Leader				Follower			
Response category	No. of respondents	Cumulative frequency	Median score	Response category	No. of respondents	Cumulative frequency	Median score
Almost always true	48	48		Almost always true	21	21	
Frequently true	45	93		Frequently true	56	77	
Occasionally true	46	139	Occasionally true	Occasionally true	63	140	Occasionally true
Seldom true	36	175		Seldom true	67	207	
Almost never true	25	200		Almost never true	33	240	
Total	200	200		Total	240	240	

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Thanking you profoundly

Academically yours

Sd/-

Co-ordinator

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