



A critical evaluation of resonant and dissonant leadership and their implications during the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

There are various leadership styles practised by managers in different organizations in different situations. Leaders can develop multiple mechanisms to mitigate cognitive and behavioural risks and prevent future issues effectively. This research study investigates the resonant and dissonant leadership styles applied by managers in selected Sri Lankan public and private sector organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the consequences of applying each style and the implications. Reviewing the existing relevant literature using a mixed-method approach associated with secondary data and the personal interviews and participants' observation have been incorporated and 30 respondents in each sector were selected based on the purposive sampling method to derive the findings. Results revealed that resonant leadership style has dominance in the public sector organizations conversely, the dissonant leadership style exerts considerable influence on private sector organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka. Researchers believe that since it is a life-threatening problem faced by the people globally, the role of emotional intelligence among the managers also plays a vital role. Finally, it is recommended that the hybrid leadership associated with high resonant and low dissonant is appropriate and much effective for the Sri Lankan organizations during this situation for their successful survival.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, dissonant leadership, emotional intelligence and resonant leadership

Introduction

The survival and thriving of every organization vastly depend on how far its employees are driven to the organizational goals. Therefore, effective leadership is the essence for every organization for coordinating all the efforts towards the organizational success. MacPhee et al., (2012) describe leadership as “the process of engaging and influencing others”. Leaders bring the weather as they can influence the mood of an entire organization. The purpose of such an influence is to achieve organizational goals. However, such influence does not always generate positive results during the interactions can feel either motivated or discouraged. Therefore, this can



lead to a drastic deviation and misinterpretation of the leader's original objectives and intentions.

Leaders who are high in emotional quotient (EQ) are known as “resonant leaders” and who are low in EQ are known as “dissonant leaders” (*ibid.*). Emotions are contagious and that a leader's emotions are a powerful driver of their people's moods and, ultimately, their performance. Therefore, the differences and implications of these leadership styles should be studied in organizational settings. While dealing with uncertainties, influencing people can be a heavy burden. Work from Home (WFH) due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic situation has changed the working environment not only Sri Lanka but also the entire world and this situation could also impact the behaviour of leaders. In this circumstance, to evaluate managers' resonant and dissonant leadership styles and their implications during the COVID-19, the pandemic situation in Sri Lankan organizations is considered an appropriate research problem for this study. Based on the research study, the following objectives have been derived by the researchers.

- to make awareness of resonant and dissonant leadership styles.
- to study the implication of resonant and dissonant leadership in organizational settings.
- to study the implication of resonant and dissonant leadership during the COVID-19, pandemic situation in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

Resonant Leadership

According to Uhl-Bien (2006), relationally focused leadership styles, including resonant leadership, are associated with positive work environments that promote employee engagement to result in greater work satisfaction and productivity. Resonant leaders are literally empathetic, passionate, committed, and can read individuals and teams accurately and empower respectful and civil climates that lead to quality relationships among leaders and staff by enabling their fellowmen to reach the best they can be (Boyatzis, 2008; Squires et al., 2010). Managers who integrate the resonant leadership are concerning in their everyday interactions, seeking feedback from staff even when it is difficult to hear, supporting and role modelling teamwork to achieve goals, actively mentoring staff toward optimum performance, and allowing them the freedom to make important decisions in order to develop effective working conditions that increase staff job satisfaction and lower turnovers (Cummings et al., 2005).



Resonant Leadership Styles

According to Goleman et al (2002), the following styles have been considered as resonant leadership:

- **Visionary Leadership:** inspire and move toward a common goal.
- **Coaching Leadership:** connects people's personal goals with the organization's goals.
- **Affiliative Leadership:** promotes harmony within the team by connecting people.
- **Democratic Leadership:** focuses on collaboration seeking input from their teams.

Dissonant Leadership

Goleman (1998) found that task-oriented leaders are the dissonant leaders, who lack emotional intelligence and tend to be negative, lack in empathy, operate more authoritatively and maintain greater social and emotional distance from employees by only focusing the growth of the organization. Dissonant leadership emphasizes on the accomplishment of assigned tasks, rather than on the development of productive relationships within the workplace (Xirasagar, 2008). Hibberd and Smith (2006) argued that Task-focused leaders tend to focus on the tasks to be completed rather than on the relationships between individuals within the organization. Relationally focused leaders, on the other hand, consider relationships rather than tasks to be the foundation for achieving positive change or outcomes.

Dissonant Leadership Styles

According to Goleman et al (1998), **Pace-setting Leadership** which focuses on performance and meeting goals, and deadlines as the top priority and **Coercive/Commanding Leadership** that uses an autocratic approach to leadership by commands, threat of punishment, and tight control have been considered as the dissonant leadership.

Emotional Intelligence

Goleman (1998) found emotional intelligence (EI) in achieving personal excellence by defining as abilities to motivate oneself in case of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress; to empathize and to hope. Four domains of the EI framework are emotional self-awareness, self-management, socio-political awareness, and effective management of relationships. Leaders can develop EI competencies and learn when and how to use each style depending on the situation at hand (*ibid.*).



Leadership during Uncertainties

Argyris (1991) argued that the environment of uncertainty (U-A-C-complexity: ambiguity and contradiction) could be an uncomfortable place for any authority. Successful leaders should bring to bear in such circumstances and assess the propositions' face validity with experienced practitioners. Their thinking shapes the broad issues, weighs the many variables and resolves the many contradictions, and their decisions have far-reaching impacts over large time frames (Harrison, 1996, Stroh & Miller, 1994). Management education has a responsibility to design learning experiences that provide the opportunity to practice dealing with uncertainty, ambiguity and contradiction in a non-threatening and less risky setting (McKenzie, 2009).

Research studies found the leadership styles of managers in uncertain situations. Line managers approach remote performance, communication issues, lack of collaboration and socialization, and sustained effort (Chen and Wu, 2015). Supportive leadership and co-worker relationships have been reported to impact employee resilience positively (Cooke et al., 2019). CEO Walmart Slack Stewart Butterfield focused on personal care in reassuring employees stressed overwork. “We got this,” he said. “Take care of yourselves, take care of your families, be a good partner.” (Walmart). During the COVID-19, Best Buy has defined a dual goal to protect employees while serving customers who rely on the company for increasingly vital technology. The company has made clear that employees should only work when healthy, and that those who feel sick should stay at home, with pay (Mendy & Stewart, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak is a complex crisis made up of multiple trigger points—health, policy, the economy—and leaders should tailor their communications to the stage of the crisis their employees are experiencing, and to what they need most in the moment (Mendy & Stewart, 2020).

Further studies highlighted the practices of WFH which is now the norm and suddenly the newbie (with or without their choice) have been transformed into an inevitable force for organizational change. They are currently the leading force on organizational response to WFH, reiterating the argument that it is now the right time to introduce more strategic remote work policies (Choudhury, Larson & Foroughi, 2019).

Methodology

Knowledge production within the field of business research is accelerating at a tremendous speed while at the same time remaining fragmented and interdisciplinary. This makes it hard to keep up with state-of-the-art research



and be at the forefront and assess the collective evidence in a particular research area (Snyder, 2019). The research methodology chosen for this study is that of reviewing the existing relevant literature by using the mixed method of collecting the secondary data from the published media files in the websites in Sri Lanka, organizations' web sites, personal interviews with and participants 'observation to increase the validity and reliability of the research findings. Researchers considered selected public and private sector organizations as two categories based on the purposive sampling method to get the findings. Three public sector organizations-Postal Department, Divisional Secretariat and Public Sector Banks and in the private sector, Private Sector Banks and selected Super Markets were considered in this since all of them are under essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka. Thirty respondents in each sector via personal and telephone interviewing from different districts and transcribed the interpretive method's information to derive the findings.

Results and Discussions

In Sri Lanka, there are public and private sector organizations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic period. The leadership in every organization and the government regulations imposed are the influencing factors for organizations' functioning.

The implications for Sri Lankan organizations during COVID-19 pandemic situation

Most of the Sri Lanka organizations in both the public and private sectors followed the regulatory imposed by the Health Ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Initially, the government passed the rule for locking down the schools in the education sector. After that, all higher education and institutions were informed, closing down their functions. During this time, the leadership of managerial in level has not impacted. Later, the government declared public holidays and WFH practices for all organizations. However, based on the organizational need and the management leadership, different experiences were gained by both the public and private sector organizations. Exceptionally, certain organizations like hospitals rendered their service in a full-fledged manner with all the health precautions.

Similarly, the postal department and divisional secretariats function with the minimal staff to carry out the essential functions. However, both the public and private sector banks carried out their functions with the rotation of staff. In the case of Supermarkets, they fulfilled people's essential needs via their



outlets and online home delivery in restricted areas with the staff residing in those areas. Later, during lockdown phases, the management is strictly concerned with the attendance of their employees.

Further, after the lockdown period, the government instructed the organizations to work at the organizations with one-third of the staff. However, specific organizations not followed these rules accordingly. In these organizations, the influence of either resonant or dissonant leadership was visible. In the above situation, the leadership in the private sector organizations was remarkable in a dissonant way since most of the employees were requested to report to work daily. Conversely, in the public sector, the heads of the organizations have been given the authority to decide the staff's attendance for each day. At this juncture, employees who are far away and who have the difficulties in travelling were given concessions by the departments' heads. It was observed in the public sector; most of the heads expressed the resonant leadership styles. However, there were exceptional departments in the public sector too. Similarly, in the private sector also, there are practices for resonant leadership.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study revealed the two different types of leadership- resonant and dissonant, highly involved with the EI of managers in various organizations in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Relevant literature has been reviewed and the organizational practices have been found through the published media files, interviews with required personnel and the participants' observation. The research findings disclose that most of the managers/superiors in public and private sector organizations have practised the resonant leadership style. WFH practices confirm the findings of (Choudhury, Larson & Foroughi, 2019) and the styles described by Goleman et al., (2002). Further, certain organizations' leadership practices during the COVID-19 pandemic were dissonant since some of the employees exploited the privileges continuously. This concurs with the findings of (Mendy & Stewart, 2020). Therefore, researchers strongly recommend that pure resonant or dissonant style is not adequate for organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka and a hybrid leadership with more resonant with less dissonant would be successful for the practical survival of organizations. According to Ross Ashby's law of requisite, which explains resonance and dissonance need to be in an acceptable state of balance (Ashby, 1958). Further studies could be extended with quantitative techniques and multiple sampling methods in the future.



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