

IDENTIFYING THE HR EXPECTATIONS – PILLAR FOR OPTIMIZING THE LEADERSHIP STYLE

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Abstract

Considering the dynamic business environment, leadership plays a crucial role in developing organizations and increasing the effectiveness of teams. The traditional approach to leadership, based on rigid directives, is increasingly being replaced by personalized strategies centred on employee needs.

With this premise in mind, the objective of this research is to highlight the importance of the new approach, emphasizing that through a better understanding of employee profiles and expectations, leaders can adjust their leadership methods to optimize organizational performance. By embracing an adaptive and personalized approach, leadership becomes a determining factor in increasing organizational performance and motivation.

From this perspective, in order to identify the expectations in terms of preferred leadership styles and their impact on team motivation and productivity, along with documentation from open data sources, a case study conducted in a private organization in Romania was applied as a research method. The centralization and analysis of the answers to the questionnaire used as a working tool, allowed the identification of the leadership styles preferred by employees in various organizational positions and their integration within managerial practices to maximize their performance and efficiency.

This approach has the potential to increase work effectiveness and employee engagement in achieving organizational goals. Thus, the present study provides an essential theoretical and applied framework for optimizing organizational activities and increasing productivity in the modern managerial context.

The research results will help to improve the decision-making process in terms of recruiting and training leaders, ensuring the alignment of leadership styles with employees' expectations, especially in multinational companies, where cultural and situational differences in host countries can be obstacles to the valorisation of human resources and the improvement of the decision-making process.

Keywords: *adaptive leadership, motivation, employee expectations, leadership styles, organizational performance.*

1. Introduction

Today's business environment, characterized by internationalization, rapid change and innovation, makes effective team management a strategic priority for organizations. Under these conditions, an adapted and well-grounded leadership plays a fundamental role in maximizing organizational performance, its success being conditioned by the correct identification of the profile and expectations of employees.

Leadership is one of the most important tools to support innovation and team collaboration, and this relationship becomes more effective when leaders are aware of the diversity of expectations and individual needs of their employees¹.

Based on this hypothesis, we propose in this paper to explore how the identification and detailed analysis of these factors can help to adapt leadership methods to create a more flexible and effective framework, according to the needs and motivations of each employee.

This is because, currently, in Romania, managers of organizations are not sufficiently prepared to adopt a concrete and coherent approach to leadership concepts, Romanian organizations being at the beginning of implementing these tactics. The majority of initiatives in this area come from multinational companies, which

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¹ L. Bilaş, A. Masadeh, *Managementul inovațional: importanța leadership-ului și activitățile de lucru în echipă în cadrul organizațiilor de business*, in ASEM, Revista „ECONOMICA” no. 2 (100) 2017, pp. 51-61.

benefit from information support from the international organizations to which they belong. However, company management is showing a real interest in integrating and developing these approaches within the organizations they manage, with the aim of streamlining activities and maximizing the results obtained through the staff employed. As a result, the overall objective of the study is to reveal that in a dynamic organizational environment, the identification of the profile and expectations of employees is essential to develop leadership methods tailored to the needs of the team.

When leaders understand the profile and expectations of each employee, they can adapt their leadership styles to maximize team motivation and performance. This is because managing teams based on a deep understanding of their expectations improves team dynamics and fosters continuous innovation. In this sense, leaders can use a transformational leadership style, which encourages employees' personal and professional development, aiming at a better alignment between organizational goals and individual expectations.

By identifying these expectations, leaders can create an organizational climate conducive to innovation, where each team member feels valued and motivated to contribute with innovative ideas and solutions. Thus, integrating employee profiling into a personalized leadership strategy can lead to improved organizational performance and foster effective collaboration within teams².

Employee expectations are therefore a fundamental pillar of effective leadership. Although salaries and financial benefits in general are important factors in retaining an employee in an organization, the current reality has shown that extrinsic factors are not enough to ensure long-term commitment, that employees expect leaders to recognize their work, to provide opportunities for professional development and a work environment where they can actively contribute to the success of the organization. Under these conditions, leaders must understand and meet expectations, building a work environment where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute.

As a result, an approach that focuses on developing a genuine relationship between leader and team can make leadership more effective by fostering an organizational culture based on trust and mutual respect - key conditions for increasing employee engagement and satisfaction.

This involves both an understanding of employees' needs and concerns, as well as continuous and open communication in which leaders clearly articulate their vision and goals.

2. Theoretical clarifications

In an ever-changing socio-economic environment, adaptive leadership becomes a key factor for the success of organizations, as a leader's success depends not only on his or her influencing skills, but also on understanding the profile and expectations of employees³. Identifying these aspects becomes decisive for improving the leadership approach and creating an organizational climate that supports continuous development.

An effective leader must therefore be aware of the diversity of his/her teams and their needs. Thus, identifying and accepting employees' typologies and their work-related expectations enables leaders to adopt personalized leadership styles that motivate and stimulate employees, promoting their performance and satisfaction. For example, for employees with high career development expectations, a transformational leadership style that emphasizes personal growth and innovation may be more effective than a transactional style focused on achieving immediate operational goals.

At the same time, a leader needs to integrate this information so that he or she can ensure that individual employee goals are aligned with team and organizational goals. Adapting leadership strategies to the specific profile of the geographical area in general and of each employee in particular, and understanding their expectations are therefore essential to increase motivation, improve performance and ensure an engaging work climate.

In today's organizations, effective leadership is not only based on coordination and decision-making skills, the leader's success depends to a large extent on his or her ability to understand group dynamics, to adapt the leadership style to the individual needs and expectations of team members⁴. Moreover, only by understanding

² *Ibidem*.

³ M. Zlate, *Leadership și management*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, pp. 175-200.

⁴ R. Zoltan, *Managementul echipei - un model de cercetare inter- și transdisciplinară*, Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, pp. 50-78.

each team member's profile, skills, values and personal motivation, leaders can adopt personalized leadership strategies. This leads to increased team motivation and performance as employees feel more valued and understood. Likewise, an assessment of their expectations in terms of professional development, recognizing merit and creating opportunities for advancement enables leaders to adopt a transformational leadership style that stimulates innovation and continuous optimization⁵.

In conclusion, the integration of adaptive leadership, based on a clear identification of employee profiles and expectations, not only improves organizational performance, but also contributes to the creation of a work climate in which employees feel encouraged to develop their potential. In this way, leadership becomes a strategic management tool that not only supports the achievement of the organization's objectives, but also supports the individual development and well-being of each employee, thus strengthening the long-term success of the organization.

3. Research methodology and analysis of results

Team management, combined with a deep understanding of the societal profile in general as well as the needs and profile of the employees in particular, are key tools for improving the applied leadership method. This is because employees' expectations are not limited to rewards and working conditions alone, but also include their desire to align with the organization's values and have a meaningful impact on its direction, and leaders who can continuously adapt their leadership methods to meet team expectations and foster a collaborative and innovative work environment are better able to meet organizational challenges and ensure the long-term success of their teams. In order to validate the relevance and usefulness of this assertion, especially in internationalized organizations, we used a case study as a research method and the questionnaire as a tool.

In this sense, the study was conducted in a multinational organization headquartered in Poland and with a branch with 100 employees in Romania. While the parent organization in Poland has developed a well-defined organizational approach, characterized by its own mindset, the process of integrating it into an organization located in a country with a different societal culture involves significant difficulties. As a result, the challenge that this organization is currently facing focuses on the process of aligning the Romanian branch to the specifics of the Polish parent organization.

In Poland, the organizational approach is more formal and oriented on clear hierarchies, with often directive management, with a focus on process and efficiency. Polish employees are accustomed to structured communication, with clearly defined responsibilities, thus compliance with procedures is paramount. This mindset is reflected both in the leadership style and in the way, employees collaborate and relate to authority, responsibility and innovation.

On the other hand, in Romania, the management style is less formal, with employees having a flexible working mentality, less rigid in relation to hierarchical structures. Thus, there is a trend towards collaborative management and a less formal way of working, which leads to significant differences in day-to-day interactions, decision-making and how employees perceive authority and responsibility. As a consequence, the integration of a directive management style, which requires a clearer structure and strict adherence to processes, may generate resistance among Romanian employees who are not used to such practices.

Therefore, in addition to the actual integration of organizational structures and processes, special attention should also be paid to specific aspects of organizational culture, training Romanian employees to understand and adapt to the conditions being essential. This is because, the training process will not be limited to professional training, but will also generate a change of mentalities and values between the two locations of the organization, in order to create a functional and efficient unity. It is crucial that this transition is based on an integration strategy that takes into account the cultural and mentality differences between the two teams, and is managed through clear communication and appropriate support.

Based on this premise, the purpose of the research was to identify the preferred leadership style, based on the organization's team structure, by centralizing the results of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to 57 employees of the organization, which represents approximately 55% of the total number of employees.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

The applied questionnaire included 40 questions structured in 10 sections (general information, leadership styles, communication, professional development, motivation and satisfaction, conflict resolution, decision making, innovation, general satisfaction, suggestions).

The Likert Scale was used to measure agreement for statements such as „Leaders in my team provide constructive feedback” or „Leaders' decisions are transparent and well justified”, and the open-ended questions, which allowed respondents to provide concrete examples of their experiences, were processed using SPSS, one of the most popular and widely used statistical tools for analysing the results of the questionnaires (identifying the preferred leadership style, calculating correlations between leadership styles and employee satisfaction/motivation and generating reports to draw relevant conclusions on leadership strategies).

The centralized analysis drew a number of key conclusions about the leadership in the analysed company, its impact on employees and directions for improvement, such as:

- Organizational leadership – styles and perceptions:
 - Leadership is perceived as participative and collaborative, with the majority of employees believing that leaders encourage team involvement and provide support;
 - The adaptability of leaders is valued, but there are discrepancies in the application of these styles, depending on the department or leader;
 - Leaders' accessibility and collaboration are strengths, but employees want more involvement in decision-making.
- Communication between leaders and employees:
 - Clarity of messages is rated positively (40% consider communication excellent, 35% good);
 - The frequency of feedback is moderate, only 5% of respondents consider it insufficient;
 - 75% of employees say they can give feedback to leaders, which indicates a relatively open environment, but 25% think this could be improved.
- Professional development and leadership support:
 - Learning opportunities are overwhelmingly considered satisfactory, with 76% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied;
 - Mentoring and coaching are appreciated by 66% of employees, but there is room for improvement;
 - Recognition of individual efforts is an area for improvement.
- Employee motivation and satisfaction:
 - Performance recognition and material benefits are the most important motivators (about 37% of respondents);
 - Leadership support and open communication positively influence team motivation (about 45.6% of respondents);
 - 78% of employees consider merit recognition a key motivational factor.
- Conflict management:
 - 70% of employees believe that leaders manage conflict effectively;
 - Over 65% say leaders create a harmonious environment.
- Decision making and team involvement:
 - 68% of employees feel involved in decisions, but there is room for improvement;
 - Leaders are appreciated for making decisions under pressure by over 70% of respondents.
- Innovation culture: the majority of respondents (over 70%) feel they can contribute new ideas and believe that leaders support the implementation of innovative solutions.
 - Overall satisfaction: over 60% of respondents are satisfied with current leadership.

The analysis of the results shows that participative leadership is appreciated, but not consistently implemented. In some teams, employees feel more involved, while in others they perceive a more authoritarian leadership style. There is a need to standardize leadership approaches. Communication is a strength but can be optimized. While most employees feel that messages are clear, feedback is not always consistent and uniform across departments. A clear, standardized communication system would improve transparency.

Performance recognition and motivation are directly linked. A significant percentage of employees believe that recognition of merit has a major impact on motivation, but the current reward system is perceived as insufficiently structured. Employee involvement in decision-making is appreciated but not sufficiently constant.

Some employees feel regularly consulted while others do not. A clear pattern of participation would improve the sense of ownership.

Innovation is supported but not always actively encouraged. Although leaders are open to new ideas, there is no structured system for collecting, evaluating and implementing employee proposals.

Conflict management is perceived as effective, but there is room for improvement. Leaders are valued for their ability to mediate conflicts, but teams are not sufficiently trained to manage tensions autonomously.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the leadership and organizational climate in the analyzed company shows a predominantly positive perception of the leadership style, focused on collaboration, open communication and support for professional development. However, there are discrepancies in the consistent application of leadership practices, which can lead to differences in employee engagement and team dynamics.

To ensure uniform and effective leadership, it is recommended that leadership practices be standardized so that the participative style is consistently applied at all levels of the organization. In this regard, organizing trainings for leaders would contribute to the development of a collaborative leadership style and improve their ability to motivate and involve teams. Moreover, creating a structured framework for consulting employees through regular meetings would facilitate their active involvement in the decision-making process, strengthening their sense of belonging and trust in leadership.

While communication within the organization is well appreciated, there is a need to improve the clarity of messages and increase transparency of decision-making. The use of digital platforms (*e.g.* intranet, internal newsletter) would facilitate the rapid distribution of relevant information to employees, thus helping to reduce uncertainty and increase organizational coherence. In addition, increasing the frequency of two-way feedback through anonymous surveys would allow employees to express their opinions openly and leaders to adjust their strategies and approaches according to the needs of their teams.

To support employees in achieving their career goals and increase their satisfaction, it is important to facilitate access to educational resources such as online courses, mentoring programs and participation in professional events. Another key direction is to create a structured performance recognition system so that employees are rewarded not only financially, but also through opportunities for advancement and development. This would increase motivation and therefore have the effect of reducing staff turnover.

A dynamic working environment also requires active involvement of employees in decision-making. More frequent consultations and brainstorming sessions would stimulate employees to express their ideas and contribute to the improvement of internal processes. In addition, strengthening the leader-employee relationship through more frequent and open direct interactions would improve the organizational climate, contributing to a culture of trust and collaboration.

Taking into account that constant adjustment of leadership strategies and real-time corrective actions based on teams' feedback contribute to maintaining a motivating and high-performing work environment in the long term, we can conclude that in order to ensure an effective, efficient and sustainable organizational culture, the implementation of an employee satisfaction monitoring system becomes an indispensable tool in the human resources strategy.

Therefore, the study has achieved its purpose by highlighting the importance of adaptive leadership, however, it faced some limitations. Thus, the analysis was limited to a single company and a restricted number of responses, but it is intended to continue the scientific approach by extending the analysis at national level.

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