Construction of Leadership among School Teachers: Does Social Identity Matters?

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Abstract

Present study attempts to interrogate the dominant trait based approach of leadership and tried to relook it from group perspective. Investigation was conducted in two phases where teachers were asked about the quality of ideally effective leader they would prefer. The obtained responses were thematically transformed into broader variable which were factor analyzed. Under social identity traditions, leadership is not based on individual characteristics' but it is a group process (Reicher et al., 2005). Based on this metatheoretical assumption, the present study interrogated the psychometric dimensions of leadership constructed among school teachers and questioned whether social identity matters in the perception of leaders? Result obtained seven dimensions (69.078% of total variance) in which four dimensions viz., achievement orientation, conventional personality orientation, nurturant and health orientation (together constituting 31.133% of total variance) showing the importance of individual characteristics' of leaders. However, other three dimensions viz., ingroup prototypicality, entrepreneur of identity, and group productivity together constituting 37.935% of total variance showed traces of social identity as potent reason behind the preferences of ideally effective leader.

Keywords: Leadership; Social Identity; Social construction of leadership

Leadership was always identified with personal qualities and the power of personality *vis-a-vis* the group (Heine, 1971). Hogan & Kaiser (2005) revisited the construct leadership and highlighted its importance together with the role of teams and groups without discounting the role of personality. But leadership was appeared as not a wholesome body of dimensions operating universally with set personal traits but had cultural implications too. Earlier noticed dimensions of leadership such as influence (Yukl, 2002), shared value system (House et al., 1999) and vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) never documented the role of groups in the construction of leadership. However, latter work in the domain of intergroup relation highlighted the role of ingroup identification in the selection of leader (see Hogg, 2001).

Leadership as social construct

Traditionally, leadership theories relied on universal individual traits. In this context, Heine (1971) posited that leadership has been a principle not only about which competing personality theories have made much ado but about which the relevance of

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personality was rarely questioned (see Heine, 1971). The operation of psychological processes always depends upon social context (Israel & Tajfel, 1972). As happened in the mainstream leadership literature, the notions of effective leadership were judged from the behaviour of leaders until the followers' perspective was also taken into account (e.g., Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Shamir, 2007).

A social constructionist theory to describe the relationship between leadership and followership argued that leadership is significantly affected by the way followers' construction and representation of their leaders'. Thus, constructing their understanding of the leaders in terms of their interpretation of personality, behaviours and effectiveness make followers status more relevant (e.g., Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Walumbwa & Weber, 2009). Recent researches in the social construction of leadership pertaining to how followers romanticize their leaders have resulted in modest findings (Bligh, Kohles, Pearce, Justin, & Stovall, 2007; Kulich, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007; Schyns, Felfe, & Blank, 2007; Weber, Camerer, Rottenstreich, & Knez, 2001). But the concept itself has given ample opportunity to explore many aspects of followership, for example, followers' traits and their self concept clarity in leader-follower relationships (e.g., Dvir & Shamir, 2003; Howell & Shamir, 2005). In this regard, divergent social construction of followership (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, Patera, West, & McGregor, 2007; Kelley, 1992) has been extensively explored including the recommendations to see followers' needs, identities and implicit theories affecting leaders' selection (see Shamir, 2007). Shamir (2007) suggested that leadership effectiveness is just as much a product of good followers as it is of good leaders (as cited in Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009).

Leadership as socially driven process

Interaction of the individual with the group and vice-versa is a matter of group definition of the individual meaning system. Characteristics of individuals have importance but are not paramount in any situation (Hencly, 1973). Every aspect of individual's life may get derived by the social forces. The way social and psychological literature dealt with individual's interaction with society seems to be delineating from the core issue of social interaction in the social context of the school.

Earlier noticed dimensions of leadership such as influence (Yukl, 2002), shared value system (House, et al., 1999) and vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) never documented how individual represent his or her social context in the social interaction. In other words, under the metatheory of group in the individual, social identification processes which individual undergoes in the social context is an important factors need to be highlighted. However, later work in the domain of intergroup relation highlighted the role of ingroup identification in the selection of educational leader (Hogg, 2001) in organizations other than educational context. The work by social identity theorists (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) made a major impact on the social and psychological literature.

Leadership and Social Identity

The work by social identity theorists (e.g., Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) made major impact on the social psychological literature. The four core concept of social identity theory developed out of the minimal group experiments (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) were viz., social categorization, social identity, social comparison and psychological group distinctiveness (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Social categorization is the segmentation of the world so as to impose an order on the environment and provide a locus of identification for the self. Social identity is that part of the individuals self concept which derives from knowledge of his or her membership in a social group, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership, social comparison is the process through which characteristics of the ingroup are compared to those of the outgroup and psychological group distinctiveness is assumed to be the state desired by individuals in which the ingroup has an identity that is perceived by the group members as being both distinct and positive vis-à-vis relevant comparison groups (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 73). From the above conceptual understanding of social identity it could be inferred that process of leadership is group phenomenon (e.g., Chemers, 2001; Haslam, 2001; Hogg, 2001; Reicher et al., 2005). It is not an isolated entity and works within the larger social, political and cultural-historical processes. An issue of leadership has taken various turns from one consensus to other. We have shifted from dominant man perspective and started looking at the characteristics' of leader as manifestation of the broader social milieu. So, eventually characteristics and traits were translated or more appropriately

transcended into complexity of situations and identities. It became mandatory and legitimate in many disciplines and sub-disciplines dealing with education to see whether leaders share common attributes sanctioned by the societies and whether those same societies and organizations screen their leadership cohorts in any way to guarantee conformity to preferred cultural types or models (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996).

Under the social identity paradigm, leadership is a process of mutual influence that revolves around a partnership in a social self-categorical relationship (Haslam, 2001, p. 85). Leadership activity and leadership effectiveness largely revolves around the leader's ability to create identity definitions and to engage people in the process of turning those definitions into practical realities (Reicher et al., 2005). Leaders (and followers) are not mere ciphers, but rather entrepreneurs of identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, 2003). Reicher et al (2005) viewed that leadership is an identity process which has social underpinnings. Moreover, it is represented under the social reality of the context. Realization of social identity – based values and norms among the   group is the major hallmark of leader in his use of skills to initiate structure in any organizational or social context (Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman & Peters, 1962; Reicher et al., 2005). This relates to at one hand, structure of group and at other hand to, structure of wider society, and thereby turning social identity into social reality (Reicher et al., 2005).

The present study explores the notions of leadership constructed among school teachers in Varanasi. The social context under which the schools are situated represents the same institution as preferred by the social system, for example, mostly the schools prioritize and promote the values institutionalized as legitimate in the bureaucratic system (Olson, 2002). Also, as school in India more generalize on the shaping of the traits fitting into the model inherited form the colonial India dominated by the British value system. Keeping the nature of school system intact, present study sees the school largely working on the same bureaucratic model without losing its cultural value system (Kakar & Jahanbegloo, 2009).

The following questions arise from review of literature, and they are the focus of this study:

What elements of current leadership models appear most salient in the perception of secondary school teachers in Varanasi?

In this context, present study explores the following major objective:

To explore the construction of leadership in school system of Varanasi, India.

Method

Location

The study aimed to explore the construction of leadership in the urban school system of Varanasi. Thus, an attempt was made to investigate social-psychological dimensions influenced by social construction of leadership among the teachers. Seven school were visited on the basis of availability (St. Johns School, Dayanand Anglo Vidyakaya, Sunbeam School, Happy Model School, St. Smiths School, Central Hindu Boys School, Central Hindu Girls School),

Participants

This study was completed in two phases. All teachers were graduate, trained and having teaching experience of more than 5 years. For the first phase of study, the number of teachers selected was 100 from different schools on the basis of availability. For the second phase of the study, the total number of teachers selected was 150 where a total of 141 responses were obtained.

Procedure

Phase 1 is description based where teachers were asked two open ended questions viz,

1) Please list down below the behavior you can think of which are characteristics of an ideally effective leader and,

2) During your working life in different schools and also as a student who did you think is most effective as leader and why? What do you think made him/her an effective leader?

Participants were given sufficient time to generate the response. Phase one took around one and half month. Frequencies of responses were noted and the response with frequency less than five were excluded from the second phase. These responses were constructed in the statement form and transformed into Likert type statements (e.g., '1' = highly disagree, '2' = disagree, '3' = undecided, '4' = agree and '5' = highly agree). Total of 40 responses were obtained which were randomly distributed over group of

teachers (N=23). Researcher approached those teachers individually to get the face value of the items. With the help of the general discussion for five to ten minutes it was understood that some items (N=8) were conveying the same meanings. These items were excluded from further analysis. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was found to be sufficiently high i.e. 0.93.

Data obtained from Phase two were factor analyzed using orthogonal rotation method (VARIMAX) with Kaiser's normalization (retaining all factors with Eigen values greater than 1). There were 4 iterations done to get the independent picture of items being loaded on the individual factors.

Results

Table 1 shows seven factors obtained from school system viz., ingroup prototypicality, group productivity, achievement orientation, conventional personality orientation, Nurturant, charismatic and health orientation by suppressing factor loadings less than 0.45 and communalities less than 0.5. With the help of Principle Component method, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is found to be 0.86 at sixth VARIMAX rotation with Kaiser Normalization. Inter-factor correlation is obtained with the help of principle component method applying PROMAX rotation with Kaiser Normalization.

First factor is composed of five items: helpful, cooperative, good behavior, responsibility, impartial. Inter-item correlation among items shows significant relationship at (P<.01, 2-tailed). This factor is labeled as Ingroup Prototypicality (alpha=0.82) (Burton, 1993; Haslam, Turner & Oakes, 1999; Lord & Maher, 1991; Turner & Haslam, 2000).

Second factor is composed of six items: vigilant, confident, commitment, decision taking ability, solution oriented and hardworking. Inter-item correlation among items shows significant relationship at (P<.01, 2-tailed). This factor is labeled as Group Productivity (alpha=0.81) (Cartwright & Zander, 1960; Haslam, McGarty et al, 1998; Worchel, 1994).

Third factor is composed of two items: highly educated and effective in many domains. Inter-item correlation between the items shows significant relationship at

(P<.01, 2-tailed). This factor is labeled as Achievement Orientation (alpha=0.65) (Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Yukl, 1998; French & Raven, 1959; Katz & Kahn, 1966).

Fourth factor is composed of two items: punctual and disciplined. Inter-item correlation between the items shows significant relationship at (P<.01, 2-tailed). This factor is labeled as Conventional Personality Orientation (alpha=0.63) (see Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).

Fifth factor is composed of two items: empathy and humane touch. Inter-item correlation between the items shows significant relationship at (P<.01, 2-tailed). This factor is labeled as Nurturant (alpha=0.58) (Sinha, 1980).

Sixth factor is composed of two items: Role model and good orator. Inter-item correlation between the items shows significant relationship at (P<.01, 2-tailed). This factor is labeled as Entrepreneur of Identity (alpha=0.36) (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996).

Seventh factor is composed of single surrogate variable 'healthy' with factor loading 0.76. This factor is labeled as Health Orientation (alpha=0.76) (Bass, 1990; Marmot, 2004; Campbell, Simpson, Stewart, & Manning, 2003).

Table 1. *Factor structure obtained from school system, its Eigen value, % variance and commonalities.*

Variables	M	SD	FT1	FT2	FT3	FT4	FT5	FT6	FT7	h^2
Helpful	3.92	.95	**.78**							.77
Cooperative	4.13	.80	**.76**							.68
Good Behavior	3.98	1.02	**.70**							.63
Responsible	4.38	.89	**.66**							.70
Impartial	3.97	1.05	**.58**							.55
Vigilant	4.14	.94		**.73**						.66
Confident	4.38	.81		**.73**						.68
Committed	4.3	.9		**.73**						.70
Decision taking ability	4.4	.82		**.59**						.65
Solution oriented	4.06	.89		**.55**						.60
Hardworking	4.21	.96		**.52**						.70
Highly educated	3.79	1.04			**.77**					.68
Effective in many domains	3.56	1.04			**.76**					.68
Punctual	4.31	.69				**.87**				.80
Disciplined	4.51	.79				**.8**				.75
Empathy	3.9	1.01					**.77**			.74
Human touch	4.00	.89					**.56**			.67
Role model	4.31	.96						**.75**		.72
Orator	3.92	1.01						**.62**		.74
Healthy	3.78	1.09							**.76**	.71
EIGEN VALUE			3.262	2.991	2.023	1.553	1.407	1.336	1.243	
%VARIANCE			16.311	14.955	10.117	7.765	7.037	6.680	6.214	
CUMMULATIVE%			16.311	31.265	41.382	49.147	56.185	62.864	69.078	

FT1-Ingroup Prototypicality ; **FT2**-Group Productivity; **FT3**-Achievement Orientation; **FT4**-Conventional Personality Orientation; **FT5**-Nurturant; **FT6**-Entrepreneur of Identity; **FT7**-HEALTH ORIENTATION

Inter - dimensional correlation of school (Table 2) shows significant correlation between factor 1 and factor 2, factor 1 and factor 3, factor 2 and factor 3, factor 1 and factor 6, factor 2 and factor 6, factor 3 and factor 6. PROMAX rotation identifies the correlation among the factors which shows the possibility of some variables working latently.

Table 2. *Inter-factor correlation of total school*

	FT1	FT2	FT3	FT4	FT5	FT6	FT7
FT1	1						
FT2	.55**	1					
FT3	.4**	.45**	1				
FT4	.16	.18	-.07	1			
FT5	.11	.08	.17	-.04	1		
FT6	.3*	.33*	.41**	-.01	.16	1	
FT7	.05	.01	.07	-.14	-.05	-.04	1

**P<.01(2-tailed) *P<.05(2-tailed)

Discussion

The present work started with an assumption whose metatheory goes beyond the dominant trends in the leadership studies (also see Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004). The principle goal of present study was to observe whether leadership phenomenon is a group based process or it depends upon individual traits only. There are ranges of social and contextual factors that impact upon a leader's capacity to influence others. These includes 1) the culture of group being led, as well as that of broader society within which the group is located , 2) the nature of institution within which the leadership takes place (e.g. democracies, aristocracies, monarchies etc), and 3) the gender of leadership themselves (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011). However, to explore how the notion of leadership was constructed among school teachers and in what way responses symbolizes the individual or group level factors was the basic agenda for the present study. As social identity is a formally defined and theoretically integrated set of processes and assumptions explaining the relationship between sociocultural forces and the form and content of individual social behaviour. It is used in a coherent theory formulated within

a specific critique and specific model of the social world and is represented and socially constructed in a relatively clearly circumscribed literature (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, 2005; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, the social identity concept directly addresses the psychological processes involved in translating social categories into human group in creating a psychological reality from a social reality (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Factor analysis of the data obtained from secondary school teachers resulted in 69.078% of total variance constituting seven factors. Four factors, viz., achievement orientation, conventional personality orientation, nurturant and health orientation (together constituting 31.133% of total variance) showed the importance of individual characteristics' of leaders. Other three factors viz., ingroup prototypicality, entrepreneur of identity, and group productivity together constituting 37.935% of total variance showing traces of social identity as potent reason behind the preferences of ideally effective educational leader. Thematically, 'Ingroup Prototypicality', 'Entrepreneur of Identity' and Group Productivity can be indexed under broader domain of "Prototypical Leadership" (Lord & Maher, 1991; Haslam, Turner & Oaks, 1999; Turner & Haslam, 2000).

Examining schools closely it is found that teacher's perception of ideal leader does not lie in the domain of traditional administrative skills but in bringing change and reforms in school system through mobilizing people for collective struggle by instigating their social identity. Thus, the result obtained showed more variance pertaining to the factors associated with the group orientations of the followers. This showed that the preferences of followers in placing their leader in *'one of us'* category (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011) made much ado in recognition of their leader. Thus, social identity and its processes matters in the leadership phenomenon where the followers show more comfort with their leader and define their subjective meaning by identifying with him or her.

In other research, leaders were theoretically perceived from two perspectives viz, employee orientation and work orientation where much wider context was seen as out of the psychological analysis in Indian settings. Factors like ingroup prototypicality, group productivity, achievement orientation; conventional personality orientation, nurturant, entrepreneur of identity and health orientation accounted both for personal characteristics and social identity where social identity characteristics show greater variance and thus it matters in leadership process. Future researches have reason to see

the value preferences of people in the given social context based on their varied social identity. The present study raises the question for the future study as to how leadership is socially represented between and within the social identities and in what way dominant social identity hijacks the notion of leadership in the public discourses? Therefore, it is the requirement of the time to go beyond the perception of one's social identity as match or mismatch to the set model of leadership. That is, going beyond the symbolic role to more process oriented formulation of leadership and to explore the social context and other macro level forces which shapes the psychology of leadership with social identity acting as a conduit (see Simon, 2004).

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