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THE MANAGER/LEADER’S CHARACTER

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Abstract:

The qualities of a great man are “vision, integrity, courage, understanding, the power of articulation, and profundity of character”[1]. The character is the highest and most synthetic layout of one’s personality, which emanates from the integration of an entire life experience into some specific psycho-behavioral ways. Unlike temperament, which represents the manifest form of the personality, the character can be seen as the consistent frame for personality, constituting the psycho-social core of human being relations. The character is closely related to social relations, being visible only when the individual interacts with the social environment.

Key words: *character, personality, attitude, trait, manager, leader, ethical.*

1. Concept of character. Characterial attitudes and traits.

The character can be viewed from a various number of perspectives. In 1978, Ştefan Zisulescu [2] synthesized three meanings of it as follows: the sense described as one’s characteristic, the ethical sense, and the psychological sense.

Etimologically speaking, the word “characteristic” comes from the greek “haractir” and was depicted as a “monogram” [3] of an individual, showing the special qualities or traits of a person. For instance, tics, which are known as frequent usually unconscious quirks of behavior or speech, are individual particularities and therefore cannot be considered as characteristic qualities.

Secondly, the ethical sense refers to a moral standard and targets the character invested with moral value. Thus the character involves a moral standard, and can be defined as good or bad, moral or immoral, good shaped or bad shaped. Due to this ethical sense, some British and American psychologists have preferred to replace the term “character” with “personality”, arguing that one’s character could not be a special field of personality.

Thirdly, the psychological sense defines the character as a specific particularity by which a person differs from another, or as a characteristic mark of individuality that causes the reaction to experienced events. When we speak about character we refer to the human behavior canalized by a leading driver, called attitude. The attitude reflects the internal position of an individual against the confronting reality as a whole or as a subgroup of this reality. A system of steady and essential attitudes interacting with each other, which have already removed the circumstantial and variables ones, is called character.

The attitude crystallizes itself during the knowledge and action process, and selectively directs man to a specific behavior. In other words, the attitude can be described

THE MANAGER/LEADER'S CHARACTER

as a latent disposition (or mood) to react or to take actions, in one way or another, as a result of external stimulus.

The entire system of attitudes has to be continuously related to the values. When the attitudes fit the social norms they become values, crystalizing so called attitudes-value system. Having stability, importance and significance, the attitudes transform themselves into characteristic traits. Mihail Golu, a Romanian sociologist, defines the characteristic trait as an “internal psychological structure” [4], which provides individuals a constant behavior in social situations. The characteristic traits are not static, being in a continuous transformation.

“Character is an essential tendency. It can be covered up, it can be messed with, it can be screwed around with, but it can't be ultimately changed. It's the structure of our bones, the blood that runs through our veins.” [5]

The character, seen as a self-regulating system of attitudes and traits, is not innate. It expresses the personal background of a human being, and can be acquired by assimilation of social relations, the dominant ideas and values of that specific era.

It is not my intention, here, to focus on the psychological perspective. Therefore, in the next chapter I will channel the efforts toward the other aspect of character, namely the ethical or moral one.

2. The manager/leader and his/her character.

Is there any difference between managing and leading nowadays? Some people believe there is, some don't. In this regard it is a very big debate.

In the opinion of some people, to survive in the twenty-first century means that we need a new generation of leaders, not managers. They believe the distinction between leader and manager is an important one, affirming that “*a good manager does things right, a leader does the right things*”. Furthermore, they observe that managing is about efficiency and leading is about effectiveness.

Some other people subscribe to the idea that leadership and management must go hand in hand. Nowadays managers must not only maximize efficiency, but also organize workers to develop talent and inspire results. Organizational management is viewed as the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the efforts of organization members.

Getting over on the above mentioned aspects and not pointing out which one is better, an idea pops out: Regardless of what perspective we embrace, to what extent does a manager's or leader's character affect the organization and its goals?

Of course, we consider, *here*, the character from the ethical point of view acknowledging that, at the same time, one's character can be integrated through the values system in society, or it can be disapproved as a result of major deviations.

Developing a new leadership theory, namely the transformational theory, James McGregor Burns, an American historian and political scientist, describes a hierarchy of values, placing public values at the top. Later on in 1985, Bernard Bass suggested that the leader serves as a role model for followers.

A review of their findings indicates the idea that the manager/leader must possess some specific characteristics in order to be followed, and those characteristics cannot be ambiguous. Nowadays, the followers are “knowledge workers”, they look to the manager/leader not only to assign them tasks. They also seek respect and trust. Otherwise they cannot experience the same passion and motivation to achieve the proposed goals.

THE MANAGER/LEADER'S CHARACTER

Nothing is truer than “faced with crisis, the man of character falls back upon himself” [6]. A manager/leader can easily switch instinctively between managing/leadership styles, but he should also have some internal system to rely upon when he makes decisions.

One of top 5 quotes of George Washington tells us what character is all about: “Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder”. This implies that the honest attitude towards the facts makes the difference. A subjective manager/leader obscures the facts for the sake of narrow self-interest, for partisan interest, or prejudice.

Peggy Noonan, an American author and a weekly columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, said: “In a president, character is everything. A president doesn't have to be brilliant... He doesn't have to be clever; you can hire clever... You can hire pragmatic, and you can buy and bring in policy wonks. But you can't buy courage and decency, you can't rent a strong moral sense. A president must bring those things with him... He needs to have, in that much maligned word, but a good one nonetheless, a “vision” of the future he wishes to create. But a vision is worth little if a president doesn't have the character-- the courage and heart-- to see it through.”

A very important aspect is the image that the manager/leader broadcasts amongst the followers. Although you can professionally advertise your image, what really counts are the perceptions of intention and competence. Promises made before elections or at the beginning of tenure, can destroy, *later*, an entire beliefs system if they are not kept. If the ethical expectations and the organization's code of conduct are not respected, they become eventually just meaningless written words. The leaders who fail to live up to their published code cannot win the hearts and minds, and they will find only the opposite of trust.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th American President, said: “Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing. I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration so that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside me.”

3. Conclusion

Our society, like all other surrounding societies, is an organization on its surface, but is also a “living organism” [7] at its core.

Today we have a lot of “white books” and “strategies” in Romania. But if we pay more attention to the facts, could we say that *Romanian-ism is a question of principle, of purpose, of idealism, of character, and not simply a matter of birthplace, or creed, or line of descent?* [8]. First of all, we must analyze to see if *Romanian-ism* really does exist. Are we facing a moral crisis in our state and nation today?

What is the impact of a consistent lack of personal and collective responsibility? An answer could be: the impact is a failure in protecting the spiritual and cultural values, and the dignity and prosperity of our national citizens.

The managers/leaders we have chosen over the last two decades, have spoken many times about progress and prosperity as a foundation for promoting and guaranteeing the national values and interests. We had heard about “*free and fair electoral processes, strong legislatures, civilian control of militaries, honest police forces, independent and fair judiciaries, a free and independent press, a vibrant private sector, and a robust civil society*”. Why do we think that things are going differently than we have been told?

THE MANAGER/LEADER'S CHARACTER

We have been feeling the economic crisis and we have been watching its effect at home and abroad. But, let's face it, our economic status is not a result of this crisis. The actual world's financial crisis has only deepened the economic whole we were facing.

What should we have done these last two decades in order to have a smooth transition to the new society, and to lighten the burden on Romanian citizens?

Looking from a wider perspective, could we accept the premise that our current state of affairs is in fact a matter of managers/leaders character rather than a matter of an ill-fated ideology?

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