

THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP

TAIS LOPES DE QUEIROZ, A PSYCHOLOGIST AND HR PRACTITIONER AT BANCO DO BRASIL, SETS OUT HOW PSYCHOLOGY CAN PINPOINT CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP

In times of change, political scandals and uncertainty, leadership is a key competence for individuals leading organisations.

As psychologists, we are aware that certain behaviour such as: visioning, encouraging, collaboration and trust can have a fundamental, positive impact on the organisation and a confident influence on people.

On the other hand, the same conduct can be seen as aggressive, demanding, avoidant and rigid. This may lead to dark side of oneself; resulting in bad decisions for the organisation.

For this reason, the Association for Business Psychology (ABP) Conference this year will explore the dark side of leadership. Alongside great professionals in the field and using research we will try to understand how we can help HR and organisations to manage this behaviour.

As member of the ABP I was delighted to interview Richie Boucher, CEO of Bank of Ireland. His views as a leader during a delicate time can inspire us to guide and advise our leaders in the banking sector. These are the questions I posed to Richie.

What does the dark side of Leadership look like to you?

RB: Leadership requires certain characteristics, capabilities and skills which can be essential in certain contexts and situations but can also be dangerous in other situations. For example: decisive could be seen as domineering; visionary could be seen as lacking awareness of achievability; determined could be seen as stubborn; charismatic could be seen as over-confident and dealing resourcefully with rapid change and uncertainty could be seen as being unaware of underlying motivations or trends.

In addition, leadership requires an ability to manage multiple stakeholders in an era where communication is transparent and available to all and where ambiguity is perceived as an obstacle. At times of uncertainty, leaders fill an emotional need for people to have someone who can provide the answers and solutions - yet this can become a double-edged sword when people are 'looking for witches to burn'.

So in essence one person's perception of the 'dark side' could be another person's belief in Leaders requiring a 'necessary' side. There is always a need for balance and an ability to understand 'by the Leader and of the Leader' what the inherent traits and necessary competencies are and why they are being utilised, emphasised and mitigated in a given set of circumstances.

In times of post financial crisis, how do you think we can overcome the dark side of Leadership?

RB: I am not sure it is possible to 'overcome' the dark side of Leadership. I think that Leaders have certain inherent personal traits and psychometric profiles which lie under competencies on top of which experiences are overlaid.

I think that the type of traits, competencies and experiences that a company or institution requires of a Leader depend on the external context and the particular today situation of the company. And realistically what is desired for the future; thought having been given

and clarity reached on the principal strategies required which need to be set to achieve that desired state.

Having noted these questions we then must focus on the type of person we need. I'd say in times of crisis, leadership traits which are highly valued include: adaptive and resilient; determined, influential and driven by impact; goal orientated with a focus on practical improvement; rational and decisive; confident; inspirational and charismatic.

How do you think business psychology can help companies / individuals to understand the dark side of Leadership?

RB: I thoroughly believe in using Business Psychology in a structured, professional way to understand oneself and as an essential component of selecting and developing individuals and teams.

A means of developing self-awareness and utilising it is essential for an individual to understand where they stand and what they need to value in themselves. The traits they have to be conscious of managing, how they might respond and react to different situations, how they might impact on others and how they impact on and influence the dynamic of a team.

For the people responsible for selecting and helping develop leaders, Business Psychology is an essential component of the process, analysing the external environment, company values; targets for future and the type of person a company needs to lead.

As we move to an era of exponentially increased capability of and use of artificial intelligence, a greater emphasis is placed on the need for understanding emotional intelligence and how to utilise emotional intelligence, on top of more traditionally valued leadership traits. Business Psychology could be and should be a huge driver of this.

I have noted the use of Business Psychology being more valued within companies over the past few years. Before that, the focus appears to have been primarily using Business Psychology in the people area.

I believe that over time more effort could be devoted to understanding the Team Dynamic and using Business Psychology to help organisations understand their current team. The focus should be on what is the leader's role within that team, what type of a team should they have, what should be the leader's role with and within the team, how do they select and develop the team.

I know that for me, over recent years, a greater understanding and use of Business Psychology has played a critical role in the business and personal decisions in which I have been involved and which I have made. I moved from using intuition and a degree of self-awareness to deliberately developing my own self-awareness and using Business Psychology in a far more structured and consistent way to benefit our business and myself.



Richie Boucher, CEO, Bank of Ireland is speaking as keynote at the Association for Business Psychology Conference on 12-13 October in London. Visit the ABP website for more details on speakers and tickets.

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