

THE LEADERSHIP - COMMUNICATION BINOMIAL WITHIN ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS. AN ESSAY-BASED APPROACH

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***Abstract:** The great challenges of the third millennium are not limited to globalization (or, according to some people, the forced promotion of globalization worldwide by the world's great powers), the fight against international terrorism or the continuous implementation of state-of-the-art technologies. They culminate in the concept of "Industry 4.0[1], the fourth industrial revolution, represented by the digitization of all aspects of social life. New elements, totally unknown until recently and especially unpredictable such as economic recession, destabilization of the euro zone, political populism, intensification of cyberattacks of Russia or China, the failure of the Trump administration etc. required changes in the current environment. Through the rapid and categorical way of imposition, two of them stand out as cataclysms of the social life, as it was perceived at the beginning of the millennium, completely transforming the reality of civilization on the old continent. Thus, the refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have changed human existence in all its complexity, redefining, among other things, the daily way we make our living through work.*

***Key words:** work, leadership, communication, economic organization, the refugee crisis, COVID-19 pandemic crisis*

From the beginning of its existence, the main activity of the human species - work - is absolutely necessary for their survival and not only, because, with the evolution of human intelligence, work has become much more diversified, more refined and more profit-oriented. In order to meet all these higher requirements, demanded especially in the modern era, extensive analyses have been dedicated to work with the stated purpose of safe and rational knowledge of all the details specific to this field of social life. Of all the concepts, processes and

components that have been identified, through in-depth specialized studies, as the prerogative of work, I will focus on two of them in this paper: leadership and communication.

Initially, the concept of leadership stood out in the military area, being mentioned since the first armed confrontations in early history, through individuals such as Ramesses II in Egypt, Hammurabi and Cyrus the Great in the Middle East, Alexander the Great in the Near East, Chandragupta Maurya in the Indian subcontinent, Qin Shi Huang in the Far East or Hannibal

and Caesar in Europe. Through their actions, narrated in written sources that have been preserved to this day, these great leaders of antiquity were the first people to be involved in the effective management of small groups of people. Nevertheless, with the evolution of man over time, this concept is not only used in the military area, but also it begins to be used in other segments of society, culminating in the modern era (where tolerance, understanding and peaceful coexistence have been raised at the level of state policy and/or international faith - substituting the "old-fashioned" precepts of the past that were based on domination through violence or hatred), where leadership was almost entirely oriented towards the field of work performance.

Another very important concept for working in a human community is communication, which is defined as "a transmission or mutual exchange of knowledge"[2]. Even though it was assigned a secondary role in the past, specialized studies prove otherwise. Understanding communication as just a simple dialogue turned out to be a mistake, because it is much more than that and imposing this limited vision (restricted to a series of data directed from the transmitter to the receiver) does nothing but make it compromise its true potential and limit its value. According to recent analyses, "by creating a communication system, that ensures a real-time transmission of information, can be made substantial savings"[3]. Also, high-performance communication involves real-time self-adjustment, includes multiple complex mental processes (such as thought, memory, emotion, motivation

etc.) and that is why it is the basic activity of investigating organizations, which can be used successfully to increase performance, being "the key to the analysis and understanding of the entity as an open social system"[4].

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, with the globalization of the Industrial Revolution, economic organizations, whose stated goal was to focus on profit, were the first to assume the role of implementing any new discoveries on this line, which represented possibilities to bring extra value. Due to the fact that they realized the true potential of leadership and communication in increasing labour productivity, the top economic organizations of the contemporary period - multinational companies (whose first advantage is that they have great financial resources and, thereby, they have at their disposal a generous budget for research) - have created divisions specialized in investigating these concepts, connections with other social processes, ideal forms that can be adopted to ensure the adaptation of the institution to environmental changes and, mainly, the identification of viable algorithms that can be applied in particular situations.

The concepts of leadership and communication are explained in most specialized studies as two separate notions, with distinct spectra of application and an apparent incorporation of communication in leadership. Nonetheless, analysing the interaction of the two concepts in a performance-oriented environment, such as the business world, it is observed that, in order to reach their maximum potential, they intertwine,

complementing each other in areas of dysfunction and highlighting their strengths, in such a way that the company “poses” as an ideal entity in relation to the object of activity, the commercial interest and / or the market requirements. Thus, in any profitable economic organization, leadership is capitalized through communication at the institutional level and communication - in its organizational form - is based on leadership[5]. In fact, in my opinion, they form a unitary and inseparable binomial, with a mutual influence in all situations and the excellence of the act of leading the team of employees - to which all social theories are applied, only on a smaller scale - and, including its productivity, depends directly on the correct application of the leadership - communication binomial.

The refugee crisis, which reappeared in an impetuous manner at the beginning of the third millennium, put the leaders of highly industrialized states in difficulty for the first time. This was generated by a series of recent political and social events near south-eastern Europe, the most important being the emancipation of the populations of some authoritarian states in the Middle East and North Africa, the war on terrorism led by the United States in the Middle East, poverty and human rights violations in these areas. These facts created the right conditions for the consolidation, in the collective consciousness of those communities, of a strong vector directed towards “the attraction of the West”, which is perceived as “a promised land”, where all personal shortcomings are instantly resolved.

Once this idea settled, no counter-opinion mattered (the difficulties of a long road on foot, the drama of the children and the elderly, the lack of food sources, proliferation of crimes etc.) and the consequence was the mass migration to wealthy societies in Western Europe.

From the point of view of the studied binomial, the refugee crisis almost immediately failed due to the inability of European leaders to adopt an effective institutional communication (defined as an organized and continuous activity, in order to legitimize the personality of the European Union and obtain the consensus of the citizens of the community [6]), due to the belief that refugees will stop in the countries on the south-eastern border of the European Union and, thus, will not reach a large-scale crisis. The lack of effective actions, from the initial phase, triggered a series of chain reactions of cause and effect (such as the domino effect), which ultimately resulted in an exponential increase in the number of immigrants from year to year, all culminating in 2015 – 2016 [7]. The late and inadequate response of the politicians marked the first question mark on the usefulness of classical models of leadership and communication. Nevertheless, the failures did not stop here. The obsessive promotion of Western principles in refugee crisis management - in particular, the principle of their rapid integration into the community - proved to be another major failure, as most people could not understand, accept and adopt Western lifestyle, principles and European core values,

which has gradually generated in each individual a crisis of consciousness that has been translated, over time, into hatred and multiple antisocial manifestations.

Almost all economic organizations in the West saw the influx of refugees as a great opportunity, represented by a significant introduction of human capital that was hoped to be productive, but especially much easier to stimulate financially. And if we add to these the various financial insertion facilities offered by the state to ease their integration into employment, respectively the concerns caused by major demographic challenges in European countries (represented by low birth rate, aging population etc.), a perfect recipe for economic success was already being outlined. In fact, according to some conspiracy theories, the refugee crisis and the opening of Europe's borders have been deliberately provoked by business elites who are at the forefront of political leadership, as a viable solution to counterbalancing the economic imbalance of the labour force; the same would have been pursued by the strong promotion of the concept of "multiculturalism"[8].

Nonetheless, a new reality has emerged in which a large number of immigrants has encountered multiple adaptation difficulties in local communities, in general, and in economic societies, in particular. Their dependence on radical religious perceptions, transposed in their own way of perceiving life, work and the use of archaic and morally outdated values were insurmountable barriers in their integration in the

evolved, modern and emancipated European world. In this context, the need to rethink the functional model of leadership - communication was clearly highlighted, when the failures of the peaceful integration of immigrants (based on respect for other colleagues) degenerated into multiple deviant behaviours, many of which were serious crimes that shocked public opinion[9]. The accumulation of such violent attitudes led one of the most representative European leaders of the time, Angela Merkel, to state clearly and unequivocally that "refugees must fully integrate, respect German laws and traditions and learn the language"[10]. Thus, a strong message was sent.

Much more dangerous to humanity than the refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the rethinking of the concepts of leadership and communication throughout society and in work in particular, as new elements have almost instantly imposed limits and prohibitions on the human interaction. The imminence of the disease, the large number of victims, its rapid spread globally, the lack of information about the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the inability of many leaders to manage the crisis (e. g. minimizing the danger by Donald Trump or the Italian government's hesitations over complete isolation of the initial outbreaks) have led to the loss of valuable time in the fight against the pandemic and, even, facilitated its spread.

The failure of the classic models of leadership and communication in most economic companies was mainly caused by the lack of foresight - a

basic feature of the first phase of the managerial act [11], so the decline in economic activity was recorded almost immediately after the crisis began. The assessment of the new reality was not properly done by the decision makers of the companies, being influenced by erroneous perceptions and personal feelings, such as the mental need for “optimism”, which turned out to be a fiasco in the end. The subjective assessment of the new economic conditions and the lack of anticipation of the commercial entities led to their economic regression, resulting in the bankruptcy of many, especially those who did not have access to immediate financial resources.

The first consequence of the crisis was the economic recession, due to the new rules strictly necessary to be respected, the redirection of the effort to the production of material goods or services necessary to the medical system and the closure of all companies that were no longer absolutely necessary. This first step meant a record number of bankrupt companies and unemployed people who were no longer able to secure their usual monthly income. Due to financial losses, many people have changed their way of life into a bad one or have experienced in their own skin important shortcomings in daily life. Also, due to the fact that the compensatory payments offered to the companies by the governments were insufficient or were granted too late, only those with liquidity could survive. However, there were also managers who preferred not to give in and to adapt to the new situation, by analysing the real situation, reflecting

on “what needs to be done” and acting accordingly with the help of intelligent technology (e. g. through the new digital marketing, which is a superior economic form evolved from the traditional market, that “occurred for companies to offer a number of benefits to individual and organizational consumers”[12]), even if the change was radical or the effort filed was very intense. From my point of view, I am convinced that these were the new models of leaders, the real winners of the crisis, related to the business environment. Personally, I know a few people who, at the level of micro-economic organization (small number of employees), immediately reshaped their business to segments that were legally allowed (e. g. the production of textile masks or home deliveries), using the large-scale communication both in the motivation of the employees and in the production activity.

After the epidemic wave was somewhat stabilized, another element emerged that tests the leadership - communication binomial within economic organizations: social distancing in the work environment, which limits direct human interaction and involves its replacement by the massive use of various virtual platforms. Nothing is more uplifting for the paradigm shift than working from home, which has recently promoted in a fulminant manner from a niche option - as seen until the end of 2019, when, with few exceptions, it was not at all desired and never really supported (being used by employers almost exclusively in the cases of employees on parental leave or in

other similar “special” situations) – to an almost indispensable condition of work in functional economic organizations at present.

The refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have caused negative feelings in every human being that no one thought they could experience in the new millennium, characterized by intellectual progress, respect for others, humanistic values and social equality. Panic, ignorance, and the impossibility of working in the community - as has been the case for thousands of years in the human history - have led to major tensions unprecedented in the entire world trade area of modern times. Work simply ceased to be as it was perceived at the beginning of the third millennium, entering a broad process of transformation, along with all its systems and components. The leadership - communication binomial is no exception and is a subject to a continuous series of experiments in order to adapt. The new circumstances force an intimate connectivity of the concepts of leadership and communication, an osmosis in the essence of each and the effect obtained is not a destruction or a mutual degradation, but the opposite: they become indispensable for each other, the boundary between them no longer exists and we cannot know exactly what leadership, nor communication really is. Thus, in order to ensure the performance of the new companies (which are perfectly adapted to the current crises), a new projection of the top management (qualitative) is outlined: the leadership - communication tandem.

The two major disasters in the recent history of mankind cause profound changes in current economic realities, so the orientation of the new generation of organizational leaders must change from the “simplistic” model to the optimal and productive par excellence in the new conditions. Adaptation must be made quickly, but based on analyses, which have objective observations, and on the lessons learned from the experience gained so far. Errors of judgment or negligence (many due to prejudice) are not allowed, because it is no longer about optimizing performance, but the very existence of the company and the wellbeing of all its employees.

In my opinion, in order to successfully step into the future, the leadership - communication binomial of any company must pursue some clear goals. First of all, it must focus on cultivating closeness between employees’ conceptions of the world, on peaceful reconciliation between the two opposing views (secular and religious), on finding common values, on tolerance in both directions and on promoting a cultural reunion between the two types of employees: the local ones and the immigrants; thus, a modern solution for the most effective exposure of organizational goals to staff is the use of motivational speakers - a newly emerged profession, specializing in high-performance communication. The implementation of information technology not only in telework, but also in other parts of the companies must be another priority direction; in fact, the current emphasis on artificial intelligence (resulting from its massive use to replace social

interaction, which is restricted in the real world) will materialize in the short and medium term in a real revolution in performance - dictated precisely by the increasing demand of quality optimization of the entire IT environment, both in the hard part (more capable peripherals, physical shrinking of components, use of more reliable materials etc.) and in the software part (better processing of collected data, optimization services offered, exploring new options etc.). It must also direct its efforts to bring the manager behind the screen in front of employees, to make him "alive", to make him go from a quasi-passive to a proactive-dynamic involvement; the great trap of the new working conditions (based on "links" at distance) is the apparent lack of humanity, the loss of direct empathy, which must be combated by promoting positive communication, based on trust and openness. Another important objective must be the professionalism of the managerial act, which is based on the seriousness and operability of all adjacent products and obligations to the company (immediate observation of environmental changes, collection of truthful data, detailed analysis, objective predictions of the evolution of reality, promptness in reactions, expeditious and objective actions, real-time feedback etc.); as we have learned from those two crises, underestimating reality, insufficient firmness or diminishing the importance of negative effects only lead to organizational failures. Last but not least, effective management means ensuring the funds for hard days, transposed into the establishment of viable financial resources in order to be used for

periods of economic downturn that, at least from a statistical point of view, will certainly follow.

Beyond the conclusions offered or possible solutions promoted, I cannot overlook the personal observation that there is an almost perfect similarity between the initial management of the two recent social disasters, with the only difference being the different level of application. Thus, if in the case of the refugee crisis the managerial failure was found at the level of the political elites of the moment - macro-human entities, in the case of the epidemic crisis the failure became much more particular, being the prerogative of economic organizations - human micro-entities. Beyond this difference, the similarities are so obvious that it even outlines a model of the failure of the great challenges of the third millennium - applicable from the first impact - based on the lack of prediction, the poor investigation of the facts and the lack of ability to adapt to the new social conditions. The recurrence of these characteristics raises questions, in relation to the institutional competence (human beings) to assimilate the previous experience and to integrate the lessons learned. The question arises whether this model does not tend to become archetypal. Perhaps, under the impact of future threats, this impossibility of the leadership - communication tandem to adapt (throughout the social hierarchy) will be the main cause of the implosion of reality as we know it today. In fact, according to some conspiracy theories, the illicit and esoteric public battle for a new world order may have already begun.

ENDNOTES

[1] <https://www.orange.ro/help/articole/cele-4-revolutii-industriale-o-scurta-istorie>, accessed November 12, 2020.

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