Improving Institutional Governance: A Need to Embrace Mindfulness, Selflessness and Compassion in Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The purpose for the creation of institutions world over is to improve the welfare of the people as well as sustainability in the respective communities. In order cultivate truly thriving institutions, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is need to re-look at what is actually ailing leadership these countries. In this paper we will explore what is actually required in a leader in order to understand what matters to the people they are leading in order to achieve the institutional objectives. It is obvious that everybody wants to be happy and to live a meaningful live in order to contribute to the well-being of others for sustainability. It is worth that that institutions like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) was formed to work with individual countries in eradicating poverty while protecting the planet by helping countries develop strong policies, skills partnerships and institutions in order to sustain their progress. Even with the UNDP guidelines most institutions, organizations and initiatives have failed in achieving their set objectives thus becoming unsustainable. The failure to achieve set objectives has mainly been linked to issues to do with governance. In this article, we set to examine the role of Mindfulness, Selflessness and Compassion (MSC) in enhancing institutional governance. The review recommends the adoption of the MSC as a new philosophy in governance. This philosophy may be used to measure the levels of governance in institutions by examining the mindfulness, Selflessness and Compassion in the institutional leadership.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Selflessness, Compassion, Leadership, Governance, Institutional Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Governance

This is the fundamental concept that plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth and effective functioning of institutions across various sectors. It is the process by which decisions are made and implemented within organizations and encompasses a set of principles and practices that guide the behavior and actions of individuals in positions of authority. It is essential to

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understand the basics of governance in order to establish transparency, accountability and participation in institutional settings in order to promote organizational success and ethical conduct [1].

Effective governance in institutional settings is underpinned by the principals of transparency, accountability, participation and consensus-oriented decision making. Whereas transparency ensures that information is accessible in order for decisions to be seen to be made in an open and honest manner, accountability holds individuals responsible for their actions and outcomes of their decisions, participation allows stakeholders to contribute to the decision making process, while consensus-building fosters collaboration among decision-makers[2].

Essentially, governance helps in creating a framework of rules, policies, and procedures that guide the behavior if individuals within organizations. It helps in establishing clear roles and responsibilities, reducing conflicts, and ensuring that decisions are made in the best interest of the organization and its stakeholders. It is through effective governance that ethical conduct, risk management, and compliance with laws and regulations are promoted in order to enhance the reputation and credibility of an institution [3].

It is essential to gain a foundational understanding of governance in order to promote effective decision making, accountability, and transparency in institutional settings. Through the adherence to the principles of good governance and utilization of available online resources leaders are bound to stay informed about best practices, enhance their organizational performance, build trust with stakeholders, and contribute to sustainable development. It is therefore imperative that individuals in positions of authority should uphold the principles of governance and strive to excel in their leadership roles in order to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of institutions.

Mindfulness
This is the intentional focus on the present moment with a sense of awareness and acceptance. It enables individuals to cultivate self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and resilience in the face of challenges. People who practice mindfulness often enhance self-awareness since it allows them to observe their thoughts, emotions and behaviors without judgment. This heightens self-awareness thus enabling leaders to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in addition to their impact on others. In so doing they are able to understand their own motivations and triggers thus able to make more informed decisions in order to effectively manage interpersonal relationships [4].

Further, it fosters the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others (emotional intelligence). Once a leader learns to practice mindfulness they become more equipped to regulate their emotions, communicate effectively, and empathize with the experiences of their team members. In so doing, a positive organizational culture is created which fosters trust and collaboration among team members. It can also lead to the overall wellbeing through the reduction of stress, anxiety, and burnout [5].

Mindful leaders are better able to navigate challenging situations with composure and clarity. This leads to better decision-making even if under pressure. In return, there is a cultivation of

a sense of presence and mindfulness in the organizational leadership approach which in turn leads individuals in the organization to create a more harmonious work environment thus inspiring their teams to perform at their best.

Selflessness

In leadership, selflessness is a transformative concept that centers on the needs of others before one's own through fostering collaborations, empathy, and ethical decision-making within organizations. A selfless leader prioritizes the well-being and growth of their team members, creating a culture of trust, inclusivity, and shared success.

In leadership, selflessness fosters collaboration by promoting a collective mindset where all team members are valued and encouraged to contribute their unique perspectives and skills. A leader who is selfless will recognize the strengths of each individual and empowers them to work together towards common goals. This will be done by creating a supportive and inclusive environment where collaboration thrives through the prioritization of the collective success over personal ambition. In this regard, a selfless leader will inspire trust and cooperation among team members thus leading to innovative solutions and enhanced performance [6, 7].

Selflessness in leadership cultivates empathy by demonstrating genuine care and understanding for the experiences and emotions of others. An empathetic leader actively listens, provides support, and considers the perspectives of their team members thus fostering a culture of compassion and connection. These behavior helps in building strong relationships based on mutual respect and trust which leads to increased morale, engagement, and a sense of belonging within the organization [8].

Compassion

This is the ability, to recognize and empathize with the suffering and needs of others. It plays a key role in shaping positive organizational cultures that are based on empathy, kindness and understanding. Compassion is therefore a critical element that can lead to more inclusive, ethical and sustainable practices within organizations.

In governance compassion involves approaching leadership and decision-making with a deep sense of empathy, kindness, and understanding towards all stakeholders (including employees, customers, and the broader community). A leader who embodies compassion prioritizes the well-being and needs of others thus creating a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration within the organization. A compassionate leader considers the impact of his/her decision on the welfare of all individuals involved thus promoting inclusivity, diversity, and social responsibility in the team's governance practices [9].

The essential components of compassion that contribute to shaping positivity in organizations are empathy, kindness, and understanding. These are grounded in mutual respect, support, and ethical behavior which help in shaping the culture of an organization. A leader who demonstrates empathy is better equipped to connect with his/her team members on a personal level in order to understand their perspectives, and address their concerns with care and sensitivity. On the other hand, kindness fosters a culture of appreciation, gratitude, and generosity thus promoting a sense of belonging and psychological safety among employees. Understanding will enable a leader to make informed and thoughtful decisions that consider

the diverse needs and circumstances of individual team members thus leading to more ethical and sustainable practices within the organization [10, 11].

REVIEW

Rasmus Hougaard and Jackline Carter [12] argue that the MSC leadership begins inwardly, with your own mind, and then projects outward to your people and your organization. By understanding yourself (your mind) you can lead yourself effectively. By leading yourself, you'll be able to lead others effectively. And by leading others, you can better lead your organization. According to Hougaard and Carter (12) there are three levels of leadership which are; self, people and organizational leadership. They argue that there is need for good leaders to be aware of themselves in order to lead themselves before being aware of the people they lead in order to practice good leadership. This in turn will help them to becomes aware of the organization they are leading in order to achieve its objectives. According to Hougaard and Carter, in order to facilitate meaning, connectedness, and true happiness for the people you lead, three mental qualities stand out as being critical for increasing engagement, happiness, and productivity. These are: Mindfulness (M), Selflessness (S), and Compassion (C). They have therefore classified these as the foundational qualities of great leadership that they call MSC leadership.

All three characteristics are closely linked and are mutually enhancing. Mindfulness makes one more selfless, and selflessness makes one more compassionate. More compassion in turn, makes one more mindful and selfless. Although it is true that some leaders have innately developed these three characteristics, all three can be learned, practiced, and enhanced [12].

Anatomy of Mindfulness
Mindfulness constructively alters human perception of reality. Through repeated practice, mindfulness triggers a shift in cognitive control to frontal brain regions thus enabling human beings to perceive their world, their emotions, and other people without fight-or-flight, knee-jerk reactions thus leading to better emotional resilience [13], [14].

There are two key qualities of mindfulness. These are focus and awareness. Focus enables one concentrate on a task at hand for an extended period of time with ease while awareness enables one to make wise choices about where to focus your attention. Optimal effectiveness is achieved when one simultaneously focused and aware. In this regard, focus will in avoiding distractions while awareness helps in avoiding autopilot tendencies.

When leaders are mindful, they will be able to overcome their minds natural tendency to wander at the same time have greater awareness of what they are experiencing internally and externally. It is therefore important for leaders to practice mindfulness by training in both the focus and awareness [12].

Anatomy of Selflessness
This is the wisdom of getting out of your own way, the way of your people and the way of your organization in order to unleash the natural flow of energy that people bring to work. It combines strong self-confidence with a humble intention to be of service. With selflessness, trust increases since there is no secret agenda thus followership strengthens as a person's

selflessness sets free his/her people to be their best selves. In leadership it manifests itself as humility and service [12].

Humility allows leaders to understand the value of providing service to the organization. That is what creates a healthy culture which in turn creates an organization that can continue from generation to generation. Selflessness therefore make great leaders to tame their ego so that it doesn't hinder the larger interests of the people and the organization they lead [12].

Many of the leaders however fear that selflessness will make them pushovers. However, these has been found to be an illusion since a leader's selflessness has to be combined with self-confidence. If a leader has selflessness without self-confidence, they will actually become pushovers. To avoid this scenario selflessness must be paired with self-confidence [12]. In so doing leaders who practices selflessness will avoid ego-centered behaviors at the same time becoming confident in whatever they do thus discarding diffidence.

Anatomy of Compassion

This is the quality of having positive intentions for others. It comprises of the intention of being of service to other people's happiness and the desire to help in alleviating their problems. It's can be referred to as the ability to understand others' perspectives and use that as a catalyst for supportive action [15].

Although compassion is often mistaken for softness, it is not about giving in to other people. Compassion requires courage and strength to sometimes have difficult conversations or make tough decisions [12]. Organizations with more compassionate cultures and leaders have stronger connections among people, better collaboration, more trust [16], enhanced commitment, and lower turnover [17],[18], [19], [20]. It should also be noted that compassion in organizations makes people feel more valued, feel an increased sense of dignity, and have greater pride in the collective culture. This further leads more positive emotions, less anxiety, and quicker recovery from illness. Lastly, compassionate company cultures make people act more for the common good within the organization which may be extended beyond corporate walls to the organization's other stakeholders [21]. The trick is, of course, to determine how to appropriately harness compassion in a way that best serves you, your people, and your organization. This requires that a leader must be both kind and wise in order to avoid indifferent behaviors and ignorance.

Conclusion

Leading with mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion makes one more human and less leader. It makes a leader more of self and less the title given. In in nutshell the MSC leadership peels off the layers of status that separate the leader from the people they lead. Therefore, Mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion make a leader truly human and enables them to create a more people-centered culture where their people see themselves and one another as humans rather than headcounts.

DISCUSSION

Traditionally, workplace initiatives were designed to increase engagement and productivity which focused on external satisfaction (things like bonuses, increases in salary packages), funky

office environments, free food, flex time, and the like. Although all of these could be great, they're short-term solutions. This is because they work for a little while, but the effects wear off as people begin to take the money, titles, and so forth for granted. It is becoming clear that external initiatives and perks never truly motivate people for the long term. Instead, only internal.

Drivers (such as meaningful engagement, connectedness, and feeling valued) appear to engage employees on the deeper level and indeed for long-term commitment and productivity.it is therefore clear that in the near future, it will be about creating a real sense of purpose and meaning. In the future, successful leaders will be the ones who can facilitate true happiness for their people [12]. It is therefore becoming critical that leaders be trained in the MSC leadership model.

Governing Yourself, Your People and Your Organizations with Mindfulness
The concept of mindfulness has gained traction as a powerful tool productivity, decision making and overall well-being in today's fast-paced and uncertain world. At the core of leading yourself with mindfulness is self-awareness which requires cultivating a deep understanding of one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to make more conscious choices and respond to challenges with clarity and composure. Having self-awareness will enable leaders to navigate complex situations with authenticity and integrity which helps them earn trust and respect of their colleagues and subordinates. Further, mindfulness practices such as meditation and introspection helps individuals in managing stress, enhancing focus and cultivating a sense of inner peace all of which are essential for effective leadership [5].

When governing people with mindfulness, leaders promote a culture of empathy, compassion and inclusivity within the organization. When practicing mindfulness, leaders are better equipped to understand the needs and concerns of their employees thus fostering strong relationships that are built on trust and mutual respect. Mindfulness therefore brings about a supportive and collaborative work environment where team members feel valued and motivated to contribute their best efforts. Apart from improving employee morale and engagement, a mindfulness approach also leads to increased productivity and innovation which leads to the institutional sustainability [22, 23].

Adopting mindfulness in the governance of organizations requires that leaders prioritize ethical decision-making and long-term sustainability over short-term gains. It requires the consideration of the business practices on all stakeholders (employees, customers, communities, and the environment). It implies that the organization must adopt a holistic approach to management which leads to the Building of a reputation for social responsibility and ethical leadership thus attracting top talent and loyal customers. Further, mindfulness leaders encourage a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, embracing change as an opportunity for growth and innovation rather than a threat to stability [24].

Governing Yourself, Your People and Your Organizations with Selflessness
Selfless leadership is governed by altruism and concern for the well-being of others. It fosters a culture of collaboration, empathy, and collective success. Governing yourself with selflessness implies that the needs and interests of others are prioritized above your own. Practicing

selflessness cultivates a sense of empathy, humility and service towards those around us. A selfless individual is willing to make sacrifices for the greater good. It demonstrates kindness, generosity, and respect in the individual's interaction with others. Governing yourself with selflessness requires s shift from a self-centered to an other-centered mindset thus allowing for deeper connections, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose beyond personal gain [25].

Selfless leadership involves prioritizing the well-being and development of your team members above your own agenda. Leaders who govern with selfless ness foster a supportive and inclusive environment where individuals feel valued, empowered, and motivated to achieve common goals. A selfless leader leads by example, demonstrates empathy, and actively listens to the needs and concerns of their team members. When embodying selflessness, in leadership, one builds trust, loyalty, and collaboration within the team thus leading to improved morale, productivity, and overall performance (26).

In regard with organizational governance, selflessness plays a crucial role in shaping the values, culture, and ethical standards of an organization. Leaders who prioritize selflessness in their decision-making processes promote a culture of integrity, compassion, and social responsibility. Selfless governance involves considering the impact of decisions on all stakeholders (employees, customers, and the community). Leaders who govern organizations with selflessness may create a sense of purpose, inspire collective action, and drive sustainable growth that benefits the bottom line and the greater good of the organization [27].

Governing Yourself, Your People and Your Organizations with Compassion
Compassionate leadership is governed by empathy and understanding. It fosters a culture of trust, collaborations, and growth. It is therefore am essential quality that can greatly influence the way we govern ourselves, lead others and manage organizations.

When governing ourselves with compassion we treat ourselves with kindness, forgiveness, and understanding. Self-compassion enables us to learn from our mistakes, practices, resilience, and nurture our well=being. Being compassionate towards our own struggles and shortcomings enables us cultivate a positive self-image thus developing a growth mindset that fuels personal growth and fulfillment. Practicing self-compassion is a strength that empowers us to be more authentic, resilient, and empathic leaders and not a sign of weakness [28].

Compassionate leadership extends beyond self-governance to guiding and inspiring others with empathy and understanding. It requires leaders to approach their teams with compassion which creates a safe and inclusive environment where they feel valued, supported, and empowered. Compassionate leaders actively listen to their team members, validate their experiences and provide guidance with empathy and respect. When leaders foster a culture of compassion and collaboration, they enhance employee morale, motivation , and overall team performance [29].

In the context of organizational governance, compassion helps in shaping the culture, values and decision-making processes. Leaders who prioritize compassion in their leadership style promote ethical behavior, transparency, and trust within their teams and indeed across the

organization. Organizations cultivate a positive work environment, improve employee engagement and retention, and ultimately achieve sustainable growth and success by practicing compassionate governance. Compassionate leadership therefore aligns the interests of the organization with the well-being of its employees, customers and communities thus fostering a sense of purpose and shared values [30].

CONCLUSION

In this section we will indicate the conclusion in regard with the review in two ways; findings of the study and way forward in embracing the MSC governance philosophy.

Findings

In this review we have seen that mindfulness offers profound benefits in leadership and decision-making through the enhancement of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and the overall well-being. By incorporating mindfulness practices in their daily routines, leaders are better equipped to navigate complex situations, communicate effectively, and inspire others. When mindfulness is prioritized in leadership approach, individuals are likely to be able to cultivate a more positive organizational culture which will foster innovation thus driving sustainable success. Further, embracing mindfulness as a core aspect of leadership leads to personal growth, resilience, and lasting impact in both professional and personal realms.

Compassion in governance on the other hand has been found to be a pivotal factor in driving more inclusive, ethical and sustainable practices within organizations. Compassion incorporates empathy, kindness and understanding into leadership approaches which helps individuals to create a positive organizational culture that prioritizes the needs and well-being of all stakeholders. In this regard compassion prays a transformative role in shaping governance practices that in turn fosters unity, integrity, and long-term sustainability in the pursuit of organizational success.

Lastly, selflessness implies that leaders prioritize the needs of others by creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Embracing selflessness in leadership fosters collaboration, empathy and ethical decision-making within organizations thus inspiring trust, innovation, and shared success among team members. In this regard, selflessness in leadership has the potential to drive positive change which creates a lasting impact in the professional realm and beyond. Embracing Mindfulness, Selflessness and Compassion (MSC) in leadership will lead to institutional sustainability.

Way Forward

The finding indicates that governance is a function of Mindfulness, Selflessness and Compassion. This being the case, it is recommended that an empirical study be undertaken across both performing and under-performing institutions to establish the correlations coefficients for the three variables. The function can then be used to determine the areas that respective leaders need to improve in order to make an organization sustainable.

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