Courageous Leadership For The Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Today’s the biggest problems such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, terrorism and wars, lack of liberty and justice, unfair globalization, and environmental destruction are threatening the lives of many people throughout the world and putting future generations under a great risk. These problems have reached such a level that their solutions require urgent and radical changes. Most people, many academicians and scholars argue that contemporary leadership practices will not be able to solve these problems. Contemporary leadership practices are either preserving the status quo or not making the necessary changes to solve them.

This paper argues that the courageous leadership practices could make such changes for solving the current problems in the twenty-first century. The courageous leaders are brave, and they have heart, spirit and exceptional intellectual and emotional capacity to make drastic changes. They take risks to face and deal with difficult problems instead of overtaking them to move organizations and nations forward. They are creative so that they can make objective analysis, select the most effective strategies, motivate people at their maximum capacities and act under high uncertainties. Great courageous political leaders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Ataturk, Mao, Lenin, Castro, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and the others made drastic changes. They solved many difficult problems through utilizing again some of those courage-related characteristics. Also, business leaders like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jorma Ollila and others used some of those courage-related characteristics for building new and successful business organizations.

In this study, we analyze the courage characteristics of these leaders including intellectual (knowledge) courage, moral courage, creativity courage, biological courage, and followers’ courage. The analysis is made within the framework of strategic management process. The insights are gathered from their leadership experiences that may provide some perspectives for the leaders of the twenty-first century to solve current problems and satisfy people’s needs.

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1. Introduction

Today’s major problems such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, terrorism, wars, lack of liberty, justice, unfair globalization and environmental destruction are generating crises, distress and anxieties in the societies. Such problems threaten the lives of many people throughout the world and put next generations under a great risk. The contemporary leadership practices failed to solve these problems. Most people, many academicians and scholars argue that current political and economic policies of contemporary leadership practices will not be able to solve the current problems; and they should be changed (Toffler, 1990; Drucker, 1993; Senge, 1993; Gibson, 1997; Sachs, 2008; Marber, 2009; Collis, 1998; Sharp, 2011; Kellerman, 2012; Ross, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012).

Many leaders around the world mostly protect their own interests, and the interests of the political and economic groups that brought them into these positions. The leaders elected by the board of trustees of the stockholders, or the leaders appointed by the owners in many organizations favour the interests of their supporters (Derber, 1998; Estes, 1996; Galbraith, 1998; Thurow, 1989; Reich, 2010). Also, many government leaders support their own interests, the interests of the corporations and political groups that supported them financially and politically for their elections (Batra, 1996; Blair, 1994). Their political and economic policies focused mainly on the short-term objectives for quick results and neglected to address difficult problems that may even be more harmful for the society in the long-term (Sacks, 2008; Marber, 2009; Collis, 1998).

The economic policies of contemporary leadership practices generated unequal groups of 1% and 99% in many countries based on income and wealth figures (Stiglitz, 2012). In addition, the political policies provided disproportionate voice to those at the top. As a result of these policies, the vision of democracy of many people became the democracy of 1%, by 1%, for the 1% of the people at the expense of the remaining 99% (Stiglitz, 2012).

Many people express dissatisfactions with their leaders throughout the world due to unfair and inappropriate contemporary leadership practices. They march and chant on the streets of New York, Madrid, Athens, London, Moscow, and in many other cities of the world. The protesters in Spain were outraged at the high rate of unemployment. The “Occupy Wall Street” movements in the United States were even louder in expressing their anger and dismayed with the economic and political policies of the current leaders. People in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Jordan, Bahrain and some other countries resisted and even risked their lives for opposing the policies of dictatorial leaders. In some other countries, many writers, academicians, soldiers, students, and others were suppressed, terrorized and even jailed for their criticisms of the current leadership practices and demands for the change of those policies.

Some scientists argue that contemporary leadership practices were changed and they came to an end as the leadership shifted from individual leaders to followers (Ross, 2011; Rifkin, 2011; Kellerman, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012). It seems that the process of contemporary leadership practices becomes ineffective and starts a new paradigm shift which requires radical changes of political, economic and social policies of an organization and a nation (Adzies, 1988; Barker, 1992). Although strong demand of followers and the scale of problems were developed enough for radical changes, courageous leadership is necessary to accomplish such transformations.

The aim of this study is to analyze the courageous leadership practices of great leaders that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and focus on major courage characteristics that play an important role for successful leadership practices. Also, it aims to investigate the nature and the sources of the courage characteristics and determine how, where, and when they were used in their leadership
practices. According to the authors’ knowledge, this paper is the first study which examines the impact of courage in leadership practices exclusively and systematically within the strategic management framework (Thompson, Strickland and Gamble, 2010). Within this framework, this study determines how courage characteristics influence the leaders’ successes and it presents some insights from their leadership experiences.

The paper is organized as follows. The concept of courage, courage characteristics and strategic leadership practices are introduced in Section 2. Method of analysis which is made within the framework of strategic leadership process is given in Section 3. Utilization of courage characteristics is presented with the examples from experiences of great courageous leaders in Section 4. Finally, the paper is ended with conclusions and discussions.

2. Literature Review: The Concept of Courage, Courage Characteristics and Strategic Leadership Practices

Courage appears in every aspect of leadership practices through a wide variety of physical and nonphysical courage characteristics (aspects). Courage is the crucial quality of leaders for determining the impressive vision and achieving the exceptional outcomes. Typically, the courage characteristics are rooted in science and the liberal arts domain. There are a variety of courage characteristics that play an important role in effective leadership practices. This study focuses on courage-related characteristics including intellectual, moral, creativity, biological, and followers’ courage characteristics.

2.1. Structure the concept of courage and courage characteristics

In most leadership studies, leadership is defined as a process of influencing relationship among leaders and followers (Rost, 1993). In this study, strategic leadership is defined as a process of developing shared vision, analyzing the internal and external environment, designing and implementing strategies for solving problems and satisfying followers’ needs. Most successful leaders used some or most of the elements of this process (Thompson Jr., Strickland, and Gamble, 2010; Daft, 2005). However, most of the leadership studies indicate that successful leadership outcomes mainly depend on the styles and qualities of leaders, and followers, and the environmental conditions of the organization and the nation (Daft, 2005; Robbins, 1997; Chemers, 1997; Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 1997).

The leadership styles play a crucial role in making drastic changes and solving difficult problems for satisfying followers’ needs and demands. These leadership styles include transformational leadership (Burns, 1972; Tichy and Devenna, 1986), charismatic leadership (Conger and Kanungo, 1988), participative leadership including stewardship (Block, 1993; Fallet, 1918), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002), visionary leadership (Nanus, 1992), and democratic leadership (Halal, 986; Ackoff, 1994; Sen, 2003).

Qualities of a leader include a broad and deep intellectual intelligence, skills and values such as honesty, integrity, drive, equality, liberty, collectivity, justice, courage, fairness and these play the key role for a successful leadership (Stogdill, 1948 and 1974; Locke, 1991). Recent studies pointed out that the emotional intelligence of a leaders’ ability to perceive, identify, understand, and manage emotions such as anger, fear, and love in self and followers are important for leadership success (Goleman, 1995). The other studies argued that the qualities of followers such as intelligence, knowledge, skills as well as values including dedication, perception, participation, awareness, courage, independence, dependability, responsibility and cooperativeness are important for effective leadership (DeVader and Alliger, 1986; Chaleff, 1995; Hegarty, 1985, Kauzes and Posner, 1993). Most recently, some leadership experts argue
that quality followers are not only essential for an effective leadership but also they become the main power to take over the leadership practices for the outcomes of effective leadership (Kellerman, 2012; Ross, 2011).

2.2. Courage and successful (effective) strategic leadership practices

According to Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (1973), courage is defined as mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. Courage is the ability to act in spite of doubt or fear. Courage means accepting responsibility, being able to go against the grain, breaking traditions, reducing boundaries, and initiating change. In addition, it means pushing beyond the comfort zone, asking for what you want and saying what you think, and fighting what you believe (Daft, 2005).

Effective leaders must have courage to see difficult situations and accept responsibility for the outcomes of decisions and actions. It is not hopefulness and not stubbornness. Leaders will work with others, but if they do not have courage to express their own ideas and feelings they would do injustice to themselves and their followers. Courage is not a value like a love or loyalty for others, but it is the foundation of all the values (May, 2012).

Courage is the foundation of physical and nonphysical values which increase capacity of humans for reaching their maximum limits to do things under risky and difficult conditions. Courage is often considered as the foundation of human values which influence all other values positively to increase their effectiveness. Courage is the core of leadership (see Fig. 1).

![Fig. 1. Core courage characteristics.](image)

That is, it is a critical component of the major activities of effective strategic leadership. Courage enables all the values to work up to their maximum capacity like a heart in human body that pumps blood to all other parts and enable the whole body to function effectively (May, 2012). Courage characteristics provide the maximum strength for leaders to use every part of the strategic leadership process effectively. The courage characteristics are like a motor force at the centre of the values as presented in Fig. 2.
They provide strength for leaders to take risks under uncertain and difficult conditions; think wisely, and see future better for difficult and big visions, and decide optimally, analyze objectively, select and create appropriate strategies accurately, and motivate followers fully to achieve extra ordinary results. The amount of the courage characteristics and their depth determine the degree of courage of a leader. Leaders who have more of the courage characteristics are relatively more courageous than the others that have less of these characteristics.

Apart from the impact on the leadership process, courage characteristics affect values such as honesty, integrity, equality, liberty, collectivity, justice, fairness and others. However, leaders like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and others who have negative values such as selfishness, arrogance, dishonesty, prejudice and who are associated in people’s minds with acts of violence harm the followers and their environments (Lutwig, 2002).

In this study, only the impact of courage characteristics are considered on the positive values utilized for successful leadership practices for making positive changes and solving the current difficult problems. Among these leaders Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, Vladimir Lenin of Russia, Mao Zedong of China, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Mahatma Gandhi of India, and Martin Luther King Junior of America. They were the founders, liberators, and builders of a nation. Arnold M. Ludwig (2005) listed them the most successful visionary and innovative leaders among 1941 leaders of 199 countries. Business leaders like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jorma Ollila, Howard Schultz and others also demonstrated great courage characteristics and made drastic changes for building the most successful business (O’Neil, 2004).

3. Method Of Analysis

There is a continuous change and development in leadership practices (Rost, 1993). The main thesis of this study is grounded on what happened in the past which provides guidance for the present and the future. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some successful leadership practices affected political and economic practices of many people. Within this period, there were some drastic changes that played an important role in solving huge problems and achieving great developments for human life. Analyzing the successful leadership practices of the past may provide some useful lessons for the current and future leaders in solving similar problems.
The successful leadership studies were analyzed within the strategic management process as shown in Fig. 3. In this process, the main tasks of courageous leaders include the activities of developing extraordinary visions, missions, and objectives; making the environmental analysis objectively and wisely within their limits; selecting the superior strategies; motivating followers fully and taking high risks to execute strategies for achieving exceptional results (Thompson, Strickland and Gamble, 2010).

Fig. 3. Courage and leadership activities.

This study includes many leadership practices covering the most successful leaders selected from wider geographic areas. The studies including the books, articles, biographies and other related materials about the successful leadership practices are given in the text and listed in the references (see References). Particularly, this study takes the book by Arnold Ludwig (2002) - King of the Mountain - as a basis for the most successful political leaders of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The leaders listed in this book include Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Lenin, Castro, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. The successful courageous leadership practices of these leaders changed peoples’ economic, social, political and business lives drastically. Some of these changes ended up with the establishment of new nations (e.g. The Republic of Turkey and India). In the business area, the most successful business leaders listed according to O’Neil (2004) are Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jorma Ollila and Howard Schultz and the others who also utilized courage characteristics for their successful leadership practices for building the best business corporations of the twenty first-century (see Section 4).

4. Utilization of Courage Leadership Practices For Solving the Current Problems

Courageous leaders use courage characteristics to generate comparative advantages relative to others. This section analyzes the core courage characteristics such as knowledge courage, moral courage, creativity courage, biological courage and followers’ courage (see Fig. 1) at length with examples from the great courageous leaders.

4.1. The intellectual (moral) courage

Intellectual knowledge (IK) provides leaders with the capability of understanding the physical aspects of what to do, how to do it, and why. The capability of understanding what to do provides confidence for leaders to select and develop things like products and services. The capability of understanding how to do it includes all kinds of technologies, capital equipment, process, rules and principles, and activities (Cooper and Sawaf, 1996). Emotional knowledge (EK) provides the understanding why aspect of the reasons and means for doing things (Cooper and Sawaf, 1996; Goleman, 1995). It influences every aspect
of decisions, actions of leaders for selecting, producing and distributing goods and services. EK includes social values, ideas, intuition, imagination and beliefs.

Both IK and EK determine the whole body of knowledge which constitutes the knowledge of courageous leaders. Knowledge courage is at the centre of every decision and action of a leader. The visions, missions, and objectives of leaders are rooted from this knowledge (see Fig. 2). The actions of leaders start and end with this knowledge. Courage knowledge is the source of the highest quality of power, and it influences all other parts of strategic leadership. Knowledge courage generates the most important competitive advantage for leaders (Quin, 1992; Stewart, 1997). Ataturk said “knowledge is the best guide for life” and used it in every aspect of his leadership activities (Sen, 2009).

4.2. Moral Courage

Moral values such as honesty, integrity, care, humility, beliefs, liberty, equality, quality and others are the main sources of human decisions, behaviours and actions in an organization or a government. The quantity of moral values and its effective use for the welfare of people depend mainly on the moral courage of leaders. Leaders who have these values and use them for the welfare of the people in organizations and nations are called moral leaders (Gini, 1997). Moral leaders distinguish right from wrong, do right things, have honesty and integrity, seek justice, take responsibility, fulfil commitments, possess humility, show respect and serve, show courage to stand up for what is right, encourage and develop others (Zauderer, 1992).

Gandhi and Martin Luther King Junior demonstrated moral courage for gaining independence, liberty and equality for their followers. All courageous leaders including Ataturk, Lenin, Mao, Castro demonstrated moral courage for solving difficult problems and satisfying the needs of followers (Ludwig, 2002). Business leaders such as Henry Ford (Ford Co.), Arthur Blank and Bernie Marcus (Home Depot Co.) made their corporations very successful through utilizing moral courage for putting the customer first (O’Neil, 2004; TIME, 2012).

On the other hand, immoral leaders are arrogant, dishonest and self-serving, practice deception, deal unfairly, blame others, diminish others’ dignity, ignore the interests of the society, focus on their self-interest excessively, and exploit others in order to enhance themselves (Zauderer, 1992; Kouzes and Posner, 1993). Some leaders who harm others, such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini are examples for immoral leaders (Kunich and Lester, 1997). Most people believe that many contemporary business leaders are involved in immoral leadership practices, and less than only one-third of leaders are honest (Wallington, 2003).

4.3. Creativity courage

Creative (inventive) courage is a process of finding new ways, ideas, symbols, models, methods, techniques, discoveries to make radical changes and solve difficult problems. Some creations are destructive in nature. They generate radical changes and destruction of the status quo and lead to demise of old products, technologies, political, economic and social conditions (Schumpeter, 1961). When a creative process results in radical and destructive change of an entire organization or nation, it is called a paradigm shift or revolution (Adzies, 1988; Barker, 1992; Howie, 2011). It means the birth of a new ideology, the birth of a new political, economic, and social system. It also means the evolution of a new type of education, law, medicine, organization and nation.
Creative leaders know the past, see the present and predict the future. They establish a vision for changing and creating a new ideology, new political, economic and social systems, and new educational, legal and medical structures. Also, they solve difficult problems and satisfy people’s needs in an organization and a nation. They strongly believe that they can do it and take risks to achieve it. Leaders utilize their creative courage to create a shared vision, identify direction, inspire and motivate people in a common effort and align the values of followers to make radical changes.

 Atatürk’s creative courage played the crucial role for creating a new vision for Turkey’s liberty and independence formulating the new strategies for winning the Independence War and transforming Turkey’s political, economic and social systems (Sen, 2009). Other creative leaders like Lenin, Mao, Castro, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Junior utilized creative courage without fear for their successful leadership practices. Business leaders like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jack Welch, and Josef W. Wilson were also used creative courage for building their successful businesses (O’Neil, 2004).

4.4. Biological courage (talent)

All the personal courage characteristics can be obtained through learning, doing and training. But, some of them are given through with birth as an inherited trait. These biological characteristics provide exceptional advantages for leadership practices (Colvin, 2010). The biological courage characteristics provide the main personality of leaders and make them different from other leaders. Biological courage such as being smart and visionary enables leaders to select the right vision and the right strategies, and implement them successfully for effective leadership. Biological courage provides leaders superior competitive advantages for understanding, thinking and analyzing.

Ataturk demonstrated his biological courage when as a child he insisted on attending a school of his choice in spite of his mother’s objections. According to her, he should have gone to a religious school and became a Hodja. Another case for his biological courage was in Canakkale and Independence Wars. He stood up and fought against improper policies of Sultans, and against much stronger enemies with poor resources. Biological courage of Fidel Castro’s drastic economic, political and social changes under the threats of a much more powerful nation such as the United States, and Che Guevara’s courage to die for these changes were the other good examples of biological courage. According to the business area, biological courage played crucial role for Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and many others to build up great businesses with poor resources (O’Neil, 2004).

4.5. Followers courage

Leadership cannot exist without followers (Bennis, 1999; Goffee and Jones, 2001). However, followers should have the necessary courage for effective leadership practices. Robert E. Kelly (1992) argued that followers should be independent critical thinkers and active to participate fully in an organization. They should be willing to engage in behaviours beyond the limits of their jobs, demonstrate a sense of ownership, and initiate problem solving and decision making. Followers should be critical thinkers to be aware of the significance of their own actions and actions of others. On the other hand, followers are neither critical and independent thinkers nor active participants in administration without courage. Followers without courage leave thinking to their leaders and do what they are told to do. Effective followers should not try to avoid risk or conflict. They should have the courage to put themselves at risk or to fall into conflict with others and even with their leaders. Courageous followers should have the will to accept responsibility, take risk to challenge authority and participate in change (Chaleff, 1995).
Courageous followers supported Ataturk and even died for him in Canakkale and Independence Wars to defend their country. The courageous followers supported him for transforming the old and inappropriate political, economic, and social policies of the Ottoman Empire. Courageous followers were also the key for Lenin, Mao, Castro, M.L.K. Jr., Gandhi, and others in transforming their nations’ political, social, and economic policies (Ludwig, 2002).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Everyone whether he or she lives in a rich or poor country or whether he or she belongs to the 1% or the 99% will be affected negatively from the current mega problems. The inequality and unemployment problems divide people and nations into different camps. Some of them are mostly unfriendly, and in some cases are enemies of each other. They do not trust each other and cannot cooperate effectively to solve common problems. Environmental problems are destroying the planet, harming many people and putting future generations at a great risk. Terrorism and wars are hurting many homes and coming closer to all the others. Variety of corruptions in many organizations and governments of many nations are becoming unstoppable and generating unfair opportunities and competition for many people, organizations and nations. Unfair opportunities for working, education, health care, business and political practices and globalization are causing severe inequalities. These inequalities cause injustice, economic and political crisis for many people. Lack of justice, liberty, equality, and quality life are still the privileges of some special groups and the main reason for many people to lose their hope of a fair life.

It is neither morally right nor politically feasible to ignore these problems. In fact, not only is it politically infeasible but also economically, socially, technologically and environmentally so. They hurt many people currently and will harm everyone in the long-term. It is clear that, economic and political policies deriving from contemporary leadership practices which are the main source of these problems will not be able to solve them. The continuation of contemporary leadership practices may even make an already bad situation even worse. Therefore, contemporary leadership practices should be changed urgently and drastically.

However, the courageous followers are essential for effective leadership practices. They should also have the knowledge and moral courage to understand the need for change as well as the strong will to demand it. The followers with knowledge and courage should be able to understand and question the wrong doings and have responsibility and commitment to make change and the will to solve big problems.

The great leaders like Ataturk, Lenin, Mao, Castro, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Junior had a variety of courage-related characteristics including knowledge, moral, creative and biological. They used them for every part of the strategic leadership process by developing the most impressive and difficult visions, analyzing environment objectively, designing strategies creatively, and motivating their followers fully for their exceptional successes. The great leaders also had an exceptional biological courage (talents) quality that played the crucial role for their successes.

The experiences of great courageous leaders demonstrate that leaders can utilize courage-related characteristics to make radical changes and solve difficult problems. Contemporary leaders and followers in every organization and government should learn, utilize courage-related characteristics and commit themselves to solving the current difficult problems for a better human life and a better future.
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