Characteristics, Components and Improving Suggestions of College Students' Leadership

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Abstract: This paper analyzes three characteristics of college students' leadership: dynamic, developable and non-power influence. The paper also establishes a model of six core elements of student leadership, including trust, cognitive ability, perseverance, motivation, creativity and execution. Based on this model, the paper suggests that (1) improving leader's own judgment, insight, foresight, learning ability and systematic thinking, (2) improving leader's personal morality, cultivation, and creativity, (3) improving his/her imagination, critical ability, and driving members' innovation, (4) inspiring the confidence and determination of their members to achieve their dreams, (5) building a goal system and reconstructing new relationships between organizational resources, (6) enhancing leaders and members endurance and resilience and achieving self-improvement.

1. Introduction

Information network technology leads to organizational reinvention. Decentralization has become a typical feature of new organizations. The networked working mode challenges the traditional power structure in many organizations. The non-power influence of individuals is more important in this kind of organization. Compared with mature staff, college students have more space for development and growth, so college is a critical stage for students to improve their leadership. It is the university's responsibility to continuously improve students' personal leadership. Universities should make great efforts to cultivate students' leadership so that they can better lead the team to promote organizational change in their future work.

2. Characteristics of College Students' Leadership

Many researchers studied leadership a long time ago and achieved many results. Some scholars believe that leadership is a kind of ability. Some scholars also find that leadership is an interactive relationship or process. Other researchers define leadership as a combination of ability and influence. [1] This paper defines leadership as the interactive influence of creating vision, building trust and inspiring achievements.

There are two main definitions of college students' leadership. One is the characteristics they have or a series of abilities they need to master. The other is the process of college students using their own and surrounding resources to achieve their own or group goals. College students are generally between 18 and 24 years old, and their mental state is between semi-mature and mature. Their logical ability is still developing and their values are taking shape. In college, students' psychological fluctuation is obvious, hovering between independence and dependence, emotion and rationality, communication and isolation. They have strong imitation ability and obvious herd mentality, so the degree of mutual influence is much higher than that of adults in society. The leadership of college students has the following three main characteristics.

2.1 Dynamic

The psychological state of college students at this age is complex and changeable, with a strong herd mentality and a large degree of mutual influence. There is no clear boundary between leaders and followers among them. The roles of leader and follower often shift between group members.

Such role interaction experience enables college students to continuously improve their confidence, knowledge and ability through mutual stimulation. These experiences also make university a golden age for leadership development.

2.2 Developable

College students are more innovative and flexible in vision constructing than adults. They will surprise their partners with their inspiration, which is a more direct and effective way in influencing their partners. On the other hand, the knowledge that the university students studies mostly stays in the theory level. College students are lack of practical experience in real life, especially in dealing with emergencies. Therefore, giving more practical opportunities to college students, they will be able to develop their leadership in different circumstances. In other words, college students' leadership is more developable than that of adults.

2.3 Non-Power Influence

There is no direct interest relationship and power influence among college students. The status of college students is equal and there is no strict hierarchy. The process of leadership mainly depends on the non-power factors, such as personal charm, innovative ideas, character, conduct style and management ability. This is different from formal groups such as businesses, military and religion. Most of the leaders of these social organizations have the power to make financial and personnel decisions. The influence of the organization is one-way from top to bottom. However, college student team organization does not have similar power. College students' leadership is a two-way interaction formed under non-power factors.

3. Core Elements of College Students' Leadership

3.1 Review

There have been a large number of research resulting on the components of leadership, but the conclusions are still not completely unified. Bennis proposed a six-factor model of leadership. Posner compiled a questionnaire on college students' leadership practice (SLPI) and found that college students' leadership includes five dimensions such as leading as an example. The undergraduate leadership program of 31 universities in the United States focuses on six leadership characteristics, which are different from Bennis's six-factor model. [2]

Researchers at 8 American universities, including Harvard University, the University of Chicago and the Wharton School, focused on 11 leadership traits. Based on the leadership behavior description questionnaire of Ohio state university in the U.S., Niu Xingrong compiled Chinese college students' leadership behavior expectation questionnaire, which includes 12 factors. The "science and technology leadership research" project group of the Chinese Academy of Sciences proposed the "five-factor" model of leadership verified by Zou Yiyan. Dai Weidong and Chen Fang constructed a leadership competency model with five dimensions. A large number of research results show that although the components of college students' leadership are expressed differently, their essence is similar. By analyzing the research results of these leadership components, this paper finds that the core elements of college students' leadership can be summarized into six aspects: trust, cognition, creativity, motivation, execution and perseverance. (Table 1)

From the perspective of leadership process, this paper finds mutual trust and non-power influence are the basis of interactive influence. Self-cultivation, morality, ideology and other personality traits of a leader are the primary conditions for trust. The cognition represented by intelligence, insight, foresight and learning ability is an important basis for the realization of identity. It is the leader's responsibility to lead and gather the wisdom and strength of all members by creating visions and dreams. Leaders inspire the inner drive of members to promote their self-realization and self-transcendence. Leaders must also work under pressure, challenge themselves, and persevere until the vision is realized.

Table 1 a List of Leadership Elements for College Students

Researcher	Elements of college students' leadership					
Bennis (2008)	Personality, Build and maintain trust		Firm belief	Optimism	Construct the social structure of intellectual capital	Actions that lead to success
Posner(1992)		Leading the way	Shared vision	Challenge process,	Inspiring	Make the line
31 U.S. universities	Self-knowledge ability	Creative ability	Policy capacity	Service commitment	Interpersonal skills	Flexible adaptability
other 8 American universities	Confidence, sense of leadership	Creativity, imagination		Career development	Communication, team trust and ethics, influence, authorization	Team work, conflict resolution
Niu Xingrong(2009)	Representativeness, role assumption		Foresight	Tolerance of uncertainty	Persuade, care for subordinates, maintain unity, inspire subordinates, and actively authorization	Coordinate conflict, result oriented, supervision oriented
Chinese Academy of Sciences(2009);Zou Yiyan(2017)	Charisma		Foresight, determination		Influence	Control
Wu Guoqing(2011)	Passion	Creativity	Foresight, learning, determination		Motivation, communication, influence	Execution
Dai Weidong, Chen Fang(2011)	Charisma		Foresight, learning ability, decision-making ability			Execution
Pi Lisha(2018)	Charisma				Ability of communication, teamwork and influence	Problem solving, organizing skills
This paper	Trust	Creativity	Cognition	Perseverance	Motivation	Execution

3.2 Internal Relationship Model of Leadership

As we know, the process of leadership has been so mysterious and complex. Many researchers want to open the "black box" of leadership. In fact, leadership is a process in which leaders and followers achieve goals together through influence interactively. The essence of leadership is a kind of resultant force that influences others through the interaction of trust, cognition, creativity, motivation, execution and perseverance. It means that leadership is not a single process, but it is the result of these six elements working together (Figure 1). As part of leadership, these six elements are interdependent. At the same time, each one is for the others' cause and effect. The relationship of these six elements respectively and leadership is that cognition is the premise of leadership, trust is the foundation, creativity is the core, motivation is the key, execution is the carrier, and perseveranc is the guarantee.
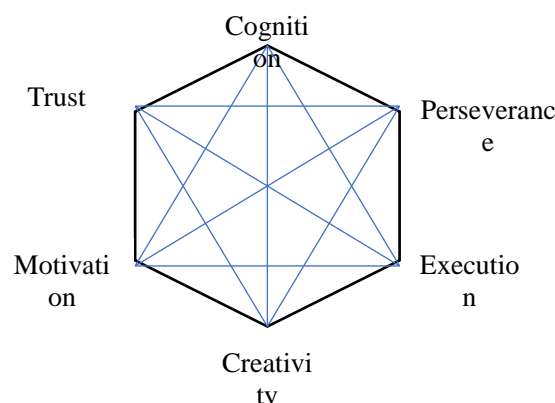

Figure 1 Internal relationship model of leadership

3.3 Core Elements of College Students' Leadership

In detail, trust includes the degree of personal confidence, the degree and intensity of trust in realizing the vision and goals, and the degree of followers' recognition of the leader's personal integrity. Cognition includes the ability to know oneself, members and organization, the ability to perceive the world, the ability to learn new knowledge, or to solve problems rapidly. Perseverance represents the stability of thought, emotion, action, responsibility and so on. Creativity represents the ability to create and design the future direction and vision, to innovate, and to connect various factors to organizational reality. Motivation is effective communication between leaders and members, emotional resonance, leading the growth and transformation of members. [3] Execution involves the individual actions of the leader, the creation of structures, leading as an example , leading the team in action, etc. Among the six elements, trust is the foundation, creativity and motivation are the key, cognition and perseverance are the guarantee, and execution is the carrier. The static leadership composed of trust, cognition and perseverance, and the dynamic leadership composed of creativity, motivation and execution, which are mutually integrated, transformed and complementary, have become the core driving force for the continuous evolution and iteration of college student leadership. (Table 2)

Table 2 Core Elements of College Students' Leadership

The core elements	Details
Trust	Confidence, optimism, integrity, integrity, courage, responsibility, etc.
Cognition	Judgment, insight, vision, learning, expert, system thinking, etc.
Creativity	Imagination, innovation, curiosity, sensitivity, creative vision, openness
Motivation	Giving meaning, growth, authorization, resonance, inspiration, care, etc.
Execution	Building systems, adjusting structures, leading as an example, being energetic, taking actions, being cooperative with others, etc.
Perseverance	Faith, stability, firmness, persistence, challenge, responsibility, etc

4. Suggestions on Improving the Leadership of College Students

4.1 Improvement of Cognition

The improvement of cognition requires leaders to improve their own judgment, insight, foresight, learning ability and systematic thinking. Leaders need to learn how to analyze the external situations trends and to find opportunities of the organization environment. At the same time, leaders need to identify the internal advantages of the organization accurately. At the basis of understanding expectations of members, leaders are required to provide knowledge and ideological guarantee for the development of organizations with accurate judgment, profound insight, future vision, continuous learning and systematic analytical thinking. [4]

4.2 Improvement of Trust

The improvement of trust requires not only to improve leader's personal morality and cultivation, but also to improve leader's creativity in promoting the development of the organization. Leaders need to build good images in various ways at the organization. Authenticity is one of the most important characteristics to gain trust from others. And a leader can be trusted to be an expert in his/her field. Improving communication quality between leaders and members is also an important way to improve trust.

4.3 Improvement of Creativity

The creativity of leaders is mainly reflected in the following aspects: creating the vision of the organization, defining the development direction, creating the execution structure, establishing the trust relationship and finding the shortcomings of the organization. Leaders need to develop and enhance their ability to identify environmental opportunities and understand the shared dreams of their members. At the same time, leaders need to have decision-making ability to determine the appropriate development goals and paths. Student leaders should learn management skills and have

the ability to make plans and goals. [5] They are able to guide members through goals. They need to explain the attraction of goals and visions clearly to their members. College leaders not only need to improve their imagination, visual creation ability and critical ability, but also need to improve the trust between members and to assist group members to have better common desire cognition and understanding. They need to guide team members' cognitive actions to drive innovation.

4.4 Improvement of Motivation

Giving meaning is the key to leadership. Giving meaning to group members means the ability to effectively connect an organization's vision to the dreams of its members. Leaders need to be able to articulate and define previously unstated ideas and to learn to use pictures, metaphors, models, etc., to provide a new focus for members' attention. Leaders inspire the confidence and determination of their members to achieve their dreams. Authorization creates more room for organization members to use their talents. Leaders need to empower themselves and their members to accumulate experience, increase knowledge and achieve growth more rapidly. In communication with members, leaders need to be able to sense and understand their emotions.

4.5 Improvement of Execution

Executive leadership is the executive system in which the leader leads members to realize the vision of the organization. Firstly, leaders should create a goal system, which recognizes goals from the bottom up on the basis of members' understanding of the organizational vision to ensure the realization of the organizational vision. Then, leaders need to accurately analyze internal and external situations and reconstruct new relationships between organizational resources. New achievements can be achieved by establishing new organizational structure and reorganizing new business processes.

4.6 Improvement of Persistence

Persistent leadership is the leadership that leads members to overcome adversity, difficulties, pressure and challenges. Leaders first need to improve their own stress tolerance. With perseverance, endurance and resilience, leaders can cope with more complex and changeable environmental situations. At the same time, members need to improve their own level of confronting challenges and achieve self-improvement. Both leaders and members need to develop a sense of responsibility of the organization.

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