**AN ANALYSIS OF *‘’THE LIDL INTERNATIONAL CAREER OPPORTUNITY: FROM DREAM TO NIGHTMARE IN 8 WEEKS’’ BY MATT BLADOWSKI AND ROSEMARY A. MCGOWAN.* BASED ON; LEADERSHIP, PEOPLE AND CULTURE, AND WORKING ETHICALLY.**

1. LEADERSHIP.

Leaders lead. Tannenbaum, Weschler, and Massarik (1961) defined leadership as the “interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals”. It is the ability to influence and direct thoughts and actions of person(s) or group of people, willingly or otherwise (Northouse, 2006; Kellerman, 2014). Matt Sosnowski was quite intelligent, brave, had great passion, determined and resourceful. These are leadership traits as described by Gardner (1989).

However, at Lidl Stiftung Lp., the usually ecstatic Matt felt demoralized, exhausted, and frustrated. The leadership style adopted there was quite different to what he was used to. The interview and enrollment process was rushed, completed in 16 days and only half truths shared with him as the contract details were not completely explained to him, indicating a sinister move. Most importantly, they deliberately did not tell him about the delay in his work visa or the type of visa he was granted to ease his wife’s entry to the country. Matt only got to know this after two months trying fruitlessly as described after his discussion with Mrs. Morchette:

“She explained that, with the work visa that I have, my wife will never be able to come, and that all the work I had done up to this point was useless.”

These are qualities of an autocratic leadership style (Bass, 1990). In autocratic style of leadership, the leader is the sole determinant of what is done; his main contact with his subordinate occurs when he is giving them instructions (Nonyelum, 2018; Ajibade, 1990). Matt reflected on this from his second meeting with the Vice president, who avoided seeing him the previous day when Matt went in to pick his work visa:

“Herr Sosnowski, you have to show more initiative. It is expected of you, just like the rest of the employees here at Lidl. When you are told to do something like for example find a hotel, you should do that immediately.”

Miss Schmidt in conversation with Matt also cemented the leadership style when he asked to see and acquaint himself with his subordinates:

“No, you don’t have time for that. You are in charge, and the things will be done the way you like them to be, regardless of the past.”

Autocratic leadership is a leadership style in which, without accepting participation, the authoritarian leader makes all the decisions themselves and delegate tasks. Leaders adopting an autocratic practice also view subordinates as either contributors or obstacles to efforts to meet their goals (de Luque et al, 2008).

While the autocratic leadership style could enhance productivity, its disastrous effect can create lack of creativity, leave employees demotivated with lack of sense of responsibility and passive aggressiveness. Matt and his wife got into a lot of fights with Matt responding unemphatically in some cases to his wife. Their relationship was strained because of the Lidl’s job even though they both wanted to make it work. Matt could not be there for his parents when they got into an accident.

A much more transformational style approach where the full person of the follower is actually engaged (Burns, 1978) could make a lot of good instead of this transactional model which only focuses on meeting subordinate material and physical needs in return for paid services (Bass, 1985).

1. PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Culture is “learned behavior” (Geertz, 2000). A set of instruction and orientation that normalizes a behavior. For Walter Taylor, culture is a mental phenomenon, consisting of the contents of minds, not of material objects or observable behavior (Taylor, 1948). Culture has also been defined as the communal programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or category from another (Hofstede, 1980). This ‘control mechanism’ account of culture makes the claim that our thinking is, fundamentally, social and public, produced by the words, ideas, symbols, noises and images with which we are confronted in our daily existence (Geertz, 2000).

Corporate culture is said to be devised by management and transmitted, marketed, sold or imposed on the rest of the organization (Smircich, 1983). The rites, rituals, stories and values which are offered to organizational members as part of the seductive process of achieving membership and gaining commitment. Organizational culture has always been considered to have deep impact and importance on the variety of organizational process, employees and its performance and an important element to unify various company cultures in the corporate group structure (Kenny, 2012).

One of the cultural practices exhibited by Lidl is attracting the best young hands using good salary renumerations and offers even with little or no working experience in a bid to control them.

Matt reflected on his invitation to the first regional training properly:

“I was still working in a store but was invited to the meeting as I was considered a district sales coordinator in training. Most of the district sales coordinators were around my age, some of them even younger. The meeting was anything but friendly.”

The language style at Lidl was strict, dictatory and authoritarian, “Obey and do not give suggestion, giving no room for feedback”. The region sales coordinator, Mr. Mikorai was not having it with Mr. Muller:

“Mr. Muller, when I tell you to nail a yogurt to the wall, you do it! Understand? It will be done as I say. Any other suggestions?”

Also speed in task completion was important, irrespective of personal or health issue:

“Physically I was doing fine except for the fact that my lower back was killing me from lifting heavy items. I addressed my concerns of heavy lifting to one of my co-workers. “You just need to get needles and you’ll be fine. I get them all the time.” That’s not the answer I wanted to hear. I was under a constant pressure to work faster and faster, and each time Miss Schmidt or Ms. Milock came, they had something negative to say.”

The leadership operated in an old conventional way, resisting new changes and expected their instruction followed to the letter sparked by mistrust:

“This is Germany, a fast-paced technically sophisticated country. And here is Lidl—no computers, nothing. Just recently they installed a scanner at the checkout, and it works only for some articles. All of the bookkeeping is done with old paper (recycled so many times that it looks gray), and a black pen. Other colors are not acceptable. Each store has an old fax machine and phone, both of which break down frequently.”

Lidl culture had it that every employee and customer was treated with the intent that they are prone to theft:

“I was to try and steal a chocolate bar by hiding it in the cart underneath a carton of juices. This was the standard test they conducted on the cashiers…”

Long work hours were demanded and tasks were to be completed perfectly, only then can an employee have a free time:

“I had been a Lidl employee for just over one month. As time went on, my responsibilities increased, and now I was averaging 93 hours a week. In order to save money, the stores were terribly understaffed. In a 16-hour workday, I rarely had more than a one-hour break. I was in fear that Miss Schmidt would come when I was on break”

An organization’s performance depends on many factors, such as the efficiency of business processes, employee productivity, how effectively organizations meet their objectives, the alignment among business functions, as well as those functions alignment with the organization’s strategy, and organizational culture and climate (Smith, 2019). These contribute to how well an organization operates and how well it performs. Lidl was Germany’s second largest retailer so was performing well, had a very strong culture as evident in ranks and hierarchy and how the leaders and employees relate with one another, however involvement was lacking.

While studying the concept of culture, Smircich (1983) argues that Organizational culture can be conceptualized in two ways which are: culture as a variable, and culture as a root metaphor. Culture as a variable is based on the fact that culture is controlled and this is visible in most businesses, and in Lidl's instance in relation to Matt's experience. Significant evidence suggests that an organization that views culture as a root metaphor that emerges within the organization and emphasizes the creativity of members as culture-makers can achieve a better outcome and, as a result, increase productivity (Smircich 1983).

Denison posits that involvement and consistency are internal factors in developing an effective organizational culture while adaptability and mission are the external factors (Denison, 1990). Involvement is critical for organizational culture effectiveness. Involvement includes transparent communication, employee-focused leadership, and strong interpersonal relationships in the organization (Engelen et al., 2014).

1. WORKING ETHICALLY.

In today's globalized economy, international labor standards are an essential component in the international framework for ensuring that the growth of the global economy provides benefits to all. Globalization and labor standards are however inter-related, but labor standard needs to play a great role to ensure the success of globalization.

Analyzing the case study, Matt had this assurance that due to the goodwill and international recognition of Lidl company, working ethically, and labor standards should not be a problem, which made him not to ask questions pertaining to working hours while he was being interviewed. The scenario can be seen in below:

“the entire interview lasted 25 minutes. I asked them specifics about the company and training program. I didn’t ask about the weekly hourly commitment. I didn’t think it was an appropriate question for an initial interview. Besides, Germany has very strict laws that prohibit employment of over 50 hours per week”

Matt did not have the knowlegde on how an organisation‘s culture and leadership approach can affect the ethics and working condition of such organisation. More so he was not aware of the autocratic and toxic environment he was getting into. Working ethically was a concept never welcomed in Lidl. Employees including Matt had learnt to get used to the unhealthy working environment, even when it was detrimental to their health and personal life. However, this approach will not guarantee productive performance from employees, as the perosnal lives of employees affect their productivivty and performance. Following a critical analysis of the case study in respect to the working ethically, it was observed that there was absence of favorable working environment in Lidl. This is due to the negative effect of Lidl’s organizational culture and leadership style. This shows the inefficiency of Lidl’s leadership and management. Also, Lidl lacks the Codes of Conduct and Internal Monitoring Schemes (organizations’ Codes of Conduct) which is supposed to guide the working conditions of the organization. Therefore, Lidl should make sure it employs the services of Internal Monitoring Schemes which will help in evaluating the organizational performance and monitoring the working environment of the organization.

There are numerous advantages to ethical working if an organization attains an ethical working environment. Such as enhanced job performance and workers being more capable of completing their tasks appropriately on time. It enhances firm productivity and teamwork in an organization. Thus, continuing dialogue and attention concerning standards in the office creates community, openness, and honesty, which are essential elements of robust crews in the office. Employees, however, feel a durable placement between their morals and those of the association (Zurba et al., 2017). In the business working environment, where leaders and managers begin to make unethical decisions, it can lead to a worker losing respect. Thus, when this happens, it can be hard for the managers or leaders to attain back the respect and trust that has been lost. It may cause an issue for the organization to make a loss and fail (Guo and Anderson, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The above assignment is related to the case study of Lidle company which is a giant German food discounter. After completing their internship, Matt applied to this company and worked as a manager. After some time, he faced some issues discussed above in this assignment. I have selected three topics: leadership, culture and working ethically. I shed light on these their significance and drawbacks and relate them to the case study of Lidle.

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**APPENDIX**

**SUMMARY ON TOPICS IN PAGO**

* **PEOPLE AND CULTURE**

Culture is seen to be set of basic assumptions defining what people pay attention to, and what things mean. Schein (2010) sees culture as ‘The basic assumptions and beliefs which are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, in a basic taken-for-granted fashion’. Ways of conceptualising culture are through Artefacts, Espoused Values, and Assumptions.

In analysing National Culture, Hofstede did a world survey of 117,000 IBM employees from 50 different countries. He founded differences between cultures that linked to four anthropological differences. Also, Globe researchers examined the interrelationships between societal culture, organizational culture and organizational leadership, using a multi-phase and multi-method project. Findings reinforce the considerable influence of culture on societal leadership expectations. Organisational culture can be conceptualized in two ways; culture as a variable and culture as root metaphor. Corporate culturalism is seen to create shared values, and norms that everybody pulls in the same direction making people think in the right way. However, culture as a form of control reduces dissent and increases conformity leading to suppression of individuality, therefore promoting autonomy and empowerment. Conclusively, culture as fragmented is anti-management in nature, and serve to question the corporate culture through; subverting organisational goals, resistance and refusal to engage, and overt conflict.

* **LEADERSHIP**

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. However, leadership differs from management; Warren Bennis said ‘*The manager administers, the leader innovates; the manager is a copy, the leader is an original; the manager maintains, the leader develops’*. Theories of leadership are traits, skills, styles, and contingency. Trait theory concluded that leaders are born not made i.e. people are born with traits (Intelligence, Insight, and Initiative) and some of these are associated with proficient leadership. The skills theory asserts that leadership can be developed rather than genetically predisposed. The style theory (autocratic and democratic) means combination of traits, skills, and behaviours leaders use as they deal with their followers. Contingency explains that leaders do not possess one set of character, but have different dimensions which can be directive or supportive.

Shared leadership occurs throughout levels of an organisation i.e. power is shared between team members, Emergent leadership starts without a formal leader, and a leader emerges as the group progresses. Followers are passive, helpless, conforming individuals, with little or no drive until they are influenced by a leader. However, Gender has an effect on Leadership as gender tells how the art of leadership would be. Toxic leadership involves leaders having destructive behaviours, and dysfunctional personal qualities which can affect the performance of followers.

* **STRATEGIC HRM & IHRM**

Human Resources Management is aimed at recruiting capable, flexible and committed people, managing and rewarding their performance and developing key competences. Some activities of HRM are recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, pay and benefits, and employee relations. There are two approaches to managing human resources, they are; Soft HRM which involves enhancing of employees’ commitment and quality; and Hard HRM which emphasises on strategy where human resources are deployed to achieve business goals. However, HRM differs from SHRM in such a way that SHRM Focuses on strategic rather than operational issues compared to HRM. Nevertheless, HR can be Linked to strategy through vertical and horizontal integration. Approaches to SHRM are: Best practice’ HRM, and ‘Best fit’ HRM.

IHRM can be explained using the Bartlett‘s and Ghoshal‘s Model of International Strategies.The model indicates the strategic options for businessess wanitng to manage their international operations based on two pressures: Local responsiveness which examines how customers in each country expect the product or the services to be adapted to meet local requirements; and Global integration which examines how important is standardisation of products and services for organisations to operate efficiently in international markets. The multinational corporation develops strategies to hlep promote businesses at local and international level.

* **INTERNATIONAL RESOURCING**

Recruitment is the process which aims to attract suitably qualified candidates for a job from which it is possible to select a competent person. Selection is the application of techniques with the aim of selecting and appointing a competent person. There are approaches to recruitment and selection which are: Psychometric paradigm which explains that during the R&S process, applicant is matched to a job; and Person-organisation fit paradigm (PO fit) which explains that during the R&S process, job is matched to an applicant. Recruitment process involves Job analysis (definition of the post), Job description (Key information on the post, including specific responsibilities, relationships, and performance standard), and Person specification (Enables identification of the “ideal” candidate). However, the selection techniques are Application form, References, and Interview.

International staffing is increasingly seen as one of the core HR practices used by global enterprises to control and coordinate their spatially dispersed global operations. Approaches to international management and resourcing are: Ethnocentric, Polycentric, and Geocentric. International assignees help in transfer of both explicit knowledge and the tacit knowledge of the MNC’s practice and management style to overseas affiliates. Furthermore, selecting international assignees is dependent on supply-side and demand issues. Conclusively, failures of international assignments are due to early return and overall poor performance.

* **POWER AND POLITICS**

Power is based on influence and can also be seen as the ability to resist others. Politics. Politics is power in action, using a range of techniques and tactics. Power and organisational politics are absolutely central to a great deal of what normally goes on in organisations” (Clegg, 2005: 162). Organisational politics arise when people have different thoughts and acts while making decision. Conflict however refers to disagreement between two opposing groups or individuals. Conflict may be personal, interpersonal, or between rival groups or coalitions. Conflict may be built into organisational structures, roles, attitudes, and stereotypes or arise over a scarcity of resources. Power can be seen as Coercive, Reward, Expert, Legitimate, and Referent. Relationship between power and knowledge is seen as intertwined, in the sense that knowledge creates power. Power and Politics in organizations can be seen from the perspectives of unitarism, pluralism, and radicalism. Unitarist see the organization as one big family where all interests are the same, Employees are often loyal to the organisation. The pluralist believes in delegation of power, and diversity of individual/group interests are welcome, thereby encouraging competition, while the radicalist believes that power accorded according to levels, i.e. should not be equal so as to ensure productivity.

* **MANAGING CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONS**

Organizational Change is a process where corporate restructuring and the replacement of key personnel through to mergers and acquisitions takes place in order to promote productivity level. However, there are states through which organizations go through while changing, they are; present state, transition state, and future state. Changes like new technology, new materials, political shifts, new product and service design innovations, and Innovations in the manufacturing process, influences organisation. People resist organizational change due to substantive change in job, reduction in economic security or job displacement, psychological threats, and so on. To avoid resistance, there are approaches in managing resistance, they are; democratic approach, political consultative approach, and political directive approach. Furthermore, changes can be seen inform of loss, some of which are; Loss of security, Loss of competence, Loss of relationships, Loss of a sense of direction, and Loss of territory.

Communication is very necessary in ensuring change; Communication is one of the most important factors influencing the outcome of change. It is however important to know that there are various approaches to change. They are: programmatic and participatory approaches, planned (direct) and process (emergent) approaches, systemic approach, and Jabri’s participative dialogical approach.

* **DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT**

Equality is when an individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of his/her life and talent, and believing that no one should have poorer life chances, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Diversity means the quality of been diverse or making differences that will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met. In analyzing the concept of equality, Liberal approach explains it better which focuses on ensuring formal, fair, transparent and meritocratic procedures. There is also the equal opportunities approach where recruitment is not gender biased, there is pay equality, and work-life balance measures for men and women.

However, there are criticism to the equal opportunities approach which are: inadequate in changing underlying attitudes, and emphasis on legal compliance/procedural justice. Many organisations are now seen moving from traditional language of equal opportunities to new language of diversity because harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met. Conclusively, diversity has brought about discrimination where an individual is rejected, or unfairly treated due to certain features that are irrelevant to the job.

* **EXPERTRAITE TRAINING**

Training is a systematic acquisition and development of knowledge and skill, and attitude required by employees to adequately perform a task or job, or to improve performance in the job environment. The various forms of training are; Pre-departure (which includes Cultural orientation, Pre-departure, Area study, Language instruction e.t.c.), Post arrival training (which includes Behavioural simulations, Case studies), Post arrival training, and Re-entry training and orientation. To individuals, the outcomes of training are Cognitive competency, awareness of needs and expectations of different parties in the international operation, and Performance competency.

International Assignees as training and development tool means sending employees on an international assignment so as to ensure succession planning, career development or expertise development. Preparation for international assignments includes counselling, practical assistance, preliminary visits, and training. Also, Cross Cultural Training (CCT) helps international assignees become aware that behaviours differ across cultures and to provide practice observing these behaviours. However, Mendenhall’s and Oddou’s model of expatriate training shows that the longer the length of an assignment, the amount of training will be rigorous and greater. For shorter assignments, training can be brief. Conclusively, the literature being summarized indicates that if done well, CCT has great benefits for creating bi-lingual and bi-cultural international assignees.

* **GLOBAL ORGANISATION, ETHICS, AND LABOUR STANDARDS**

Ethics means principles of conduct governing an individual or a group. It can also be referred to as the standards used to decide what a particular conduct should be. Ethics is very important in international business context as it considers different perceptions about ethical standards between cultures. In today's globalized economy, international labour standards are an essential component in the international framework for ensuring that the growth of the global economy provides benefits to all. Globalisation and labour standards are however inter-related, but labor standard needs to play a graet role to enure the success of globalizaion.

Looking into labour standards and international trade, we have the Internatnional Trade Organisation, World Trade Organisation, Regional Economic Integration, North American Free Trade Agreement, and The European Union. Bilateral trade agreements means Political, economic and cultural relations between two sovereign states. However,the limitations of the international trade system are: limited scope and coverage, a non-standardised approach, weak monitoring and regulation system, and weak and inefficient sanctions. Furthermore, internal monitoring (organisations’ Codes of Conduct) means voluntary standards embodied in codes of conduct specifying norms and rules by which to evaluate factory performance. While the external codes and monitoring schemes are programmes establishing standardised codes of conduct and systems of monitoring that are conducted by accredited third-party auditors.

NOTES: scenarios and examples used in the case study analysis are extracted from AN ANALYSIS OF ‘’THE LIDL INTERNATIONAL CAREER OPPORTUNITY: FROM DREAM TO NIGHTMARE IN 8 WEEKS’’ BY MATT BLADOWSKI AND ROSEMARY A. MCGOWAN.