



Leadership for the People: Navigating the Contradictions

Disregard the typical image of a leader giving commands. This public discussion portrayed a much more detailed and intricate view of leadership as an interaction between leaders and the people they lead. We examined the core of leadership, its difficulties, and its considerable influence. The observations uncovered an intriguing truth: guiding people often involves navigating contradictions.

The Diverse Nature of Leadership

A prominent theme from the conversation was the significance of diversity in leadership. The discussion emphasised the necessity of a well-rounded mix of age and gender among leaders. However, this ideal comes with its own set of challenges. Professor Eunice Mugo, Dean of the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Aga Khan University, shared her struggle of being assertive in a world that often associates leadership with masculine characteristics. The pressure to conform to a specific style clashed with her desire to lead authentically. Her story reveals the inner struggles that leaders experience when challenging traditional leadership styles.

The Weight of Difficult Choices

Professor Eunice discussed the weight of making tough decisions. Initially, she found it extremely difficult to make choices that might cause harm to someone. However, there is a crucial skill: conveying these decisions with empathy and understanding while acknowledging the impact of her choices and staying true to the bigger goal became her cornerstone of leadership. This balance of firmness and compassion is crucial for anyone aiming to lead effectively.

The Challenge of Immoral Leadership in Kenya

Nerima Wako Ojiwa, executive director of Siasa Space, laments the state of Kenyan leadership, where those in power prioritise personal gain over the well-being of the people. She argues that ethical leaders are deterred from entering politics due to the pervasive influence of money and Mafias. She emphasised the need for Kenyans to support individuals

they believe are the right leaders, urging them to financially back such candidates even for positions like Member of County Assembly (MCA).

Balancing Career and Family

We explored a challenge particularly faced by women: balancing career and family. This recurring theme underscored the need for more support in the workplace, emphasising the importance of having a line manager who understands the intricacies of managing work and family responsibilities. Professor Mugo argued that such understanding could cultivate a more inclusive and supportive work environment. Visualise an ideal scenario where leaders actively support their team members' needs, fostering a culture of mutual respect and flexibility.

Redefining Leadership Through Vulnerability: The Four-Way Test

Patrick Oboth, a management consultant, proposes the "Four-Way Test" as a framework for ethical leadership. This test asks four key questions: Is it the truth? Is it fair? Will it build goodwill? Will it be beneficial? Oboth argues that applying these principles fosters trust and vulnerability, starkly contrasting the traditional Kenyan political style of shouting and making pronouncements. He emphasised the need for a shift towards vulnerable leaders who actively seek out the needs of the people they lead.

Embracing Contradictions

The forum fostered a sense of unity, highlighting a shared commitment to tackling leadership's inherent contradictions. Effective leadership is not about projecting a singular image. Instead, it is a continuous act of balancing strength with empathy, embracing diversity, and creating spaces where leaders and the people they lead can thrive. This human-centric approach, built on open communication and mutual understanding, is the heart of leading for the people.

The Human Element

Emphasising that while contradictions in leadership are inevitable, it can be successful with a human-centric approach. Leaders who communicate openly, empathise deeply, and support their teams' diverse needs create environments where everyone can succeed. This approach is the essence of leading for the people.

This conversation illuminated leadership as a multifaceted and evolving journey. It highlighted the importance of diversity, the balance of strength and empathy, and the need for understanding and support in the workplace. Most importantly, it reinforced that effective leadership is not about adhering to a rigid style but embracing the complexities and contradictions when guiding others. By doing so, leaders can create a more inclusive, supportive, and thriving environment for everyone involved.

Consequently, the insights from this conversation remind us that leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is a dynamic and compassionate process that requires constant growth, understanding, and the willingness to lead with both head and heart.