An Analysis of Youth Employment in Azerbaijan Success of Leadership

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The aim of our project statement includes youth unemployment, underemployment as well as the attitude of young people to the labor market. Youth unemployment is a global problem. In Azerbaijan, it is becoming more challenging not only because of the lack of jobs, but also the lack of technical skills such as CV and cover letter writing, job interviewing and so on. This paper offers a first comprehensive study of the relationship between labor market policies and youth employment in Azerbaijan. The second aim of this paper to learn the performance of young leaders, and eadership in Azerbaijan. Article has emerged as a result of project and primary, secondary data.

***Keywords**: Employment, Unemployment, Youth Employment, Leadership, Young Leaders, Success of Leadership, Youth Employment in Azerbaijan*

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1. Introduction

Azerbaijan as other Post Soviet countries in the Soviet period had the same management system that provided equal education, job and other opportunities for citizens of USSR. Clark Brown (1955) tried to compare theory and practice in the Soviet Labor Market. Soviet Union had the labor market policy which included central planning, planned training and recruitment, direction of labor and direction of turnover, social pressure, advertisements, and self-direction under the influence of wage and other incentives, and local and all-union recruiting machinery. This article gave us an opportunity to see and analyze that the creation of public policy and planning in the labor market are very crucial for each new established country concerned with decreasing the unemployment rate and to avoid underemployment which is more dangerous especially in developing countries. Even more critical is the fact that many forms of leadership are required (context, team, personal, ...) to provide new vision for youth employment in Azerbaijan, and by working with multiple stakeholders as well as engaging the constituents' energy, real changes are possible and improvements in youth unemployment are possible.

If we overview the labor market of the Soviet Union, we may see that almost everyone had an opportunity to get a job after high school or graduate school. In general, the system was not so competitive in

the labor market and the employee recruitment system differs from the current one. Currently, it is more demanding and more competitive.

Twenty years ago, when the Soviet Union collapsed the small countries became independent, including Azerbaijan. This independence brought new leadership for the common good that emphasized some leadership capabilities including leadership in context, team leadership, organizational leadership and personal leadership (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.XIX - introduction) that we discuss below in context of youth unemployment and youth attitude to the labor market. Azerbaijan compared with other Post Soviet countries is rich with natural resources. Now, exporting oil and gas helps the country increase GDP and invest in education, new infrastructure projects, and business development and so on. This is a good chance for the younger generation and young people should understand it and benefit from this opportunity.

After twenty years of independence, now we have twenty-year-old citizens, born in the lands of independent country of Azerbaijan in 1991. In spite of this, in our families, we still have a big influence of eldest people particularly parents living with Soviet attitudes. Nowadays, the young generation faces obstacles in choice of education and job because of the influence of their parents. The root of the problem that we have mentioned in our project statement is coming from the families. Analysis of our project statement shows that today the labor market is more demanding and more competitive. In order not to be a victim of unemployment you have to work hard, get new skills and knowledge as well as have a good network of people that will help you access the information in the labor market. It is a big leadership challenge for citizens of a new independent country to accept new approaches that they never practiced.

2. Literature Review and Research Premises

2.1. Leadership Challenge

After getting independence, the new government of Azerbaijan decided to keep a similar strategy of the Soviet Union in the fields of education as well as employment. Becoming an independent country and keeping free public education and equal employment opportunity was a big a challenge for the new government. The government lost credibility, because the quality of education has been decreased, most of the factories were closed, job opportunities became limited, and some other social problems were created. "Credibility is a very long term process that leaders want to earn the trust and confidence of their constituents" (Kouzes and Posner, 1993, p.XII introduction) and it takes long time to recover it.

2.2. Overview of Leadership Frameworks

Changing the attitudes of the young generation towards the labor market will be analyzed through four leadership frameworks: leadership in context, personal, team and organizational leadership. Theories from leading researchers in each area, such as Crosby and Bryson (2005), Drath (2001), Kouzes and Posner (1993), Bryson (2003), Parks (2005), Moxley (2000), Bolman and Deal (2008) will be applied to this issue. This analysis will help to determine where leadership has been exhibited in the past and where there are areas for improvement.

2.3. Leadership in Context

The first framework is leadership in context. Crosby and Bryson explain that leadership in context gives an understanding of the social, political, economic, and the technological environment. In a globalized world, the young people in Azerbaijan should understand and accept the requirement of globalization and think more strategically in terms of education and career development. Analyzing of project statement, we found that elements of leadership in context are more applicable in our project statement. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a big change of political environment. This change affected the economy as well as education and employment. It was the end of Soviet leadership and beginning of new leadership. Leadership happens, when people come together and use dialogue and collaborative learning that was similar context when Azerbaijan became independent (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.36). It is also important for a leader to believe that change is possible (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.38). Working in youth organization and implementing youth employment projects, frequently we organized round tables with young people to see their vision on youth employment from their own leadership perspectives. Asking our first two questions, we always want to know the potential of young people as a future leader and see how they accept changes from the future perspectives. Unfortunately, influence of parents to young generation in choice of education and employment still exist which affected their leadership potential. We always give an example to young generation comparing state with a human. If the country doesn't have a freedom of choice, unfair elections that means there is no development and there is no future perspectives. The same example might be used in the position of human.

If there is no freedom of choice in education and career, it means there is no chance to be a leader and change the world. The freedom of choice and independence are very critical elements of future development of a person as a leader.

Parks (2005) uses the metaphor of moving from the dance floor to the balcony: "There is something about the dance you will only know by actually dancing. But if you move to the balcony for a while, you can see things that you can never discover on the dance floor – the larger pattern of interactions of which you are a part. You gain perspective and can make new choices." This example gives to our project statement, new vision and perspectives to move forward. As an activist in the youth field and observing political and economic environment within leadership in context, we decided to become a leader in the field of youth employment and took this initiative first in local then in national level. Later most of the youth organizations and big companies joined to our initiative on a national level. However, the success of the coalition, created after youth employment forum helped us to engage government in face of the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Labor. Representation of government in our coalition subsequently engaged international community. In 2008 the European Commission provided a long term grant for our organization to create the Youth Employment Resource Center in our city that was the beginning of new initiative in local as well as national level. Establishment of such center in our city made representatives of State Employment Center upset and it was difficult for them to accept this idea since they do the same job for population. But understanding and practicing leadership as partnership changed their attitude to this project. Moxley (2000) idea of partnership, "suggest the basic of two or more people sharing power and joining forces to move toward accomplishment of a shared goal. It understands that leadership is an activity that happens in and comes from a collective – sometimes two people, sometimes more". As a result of project we became strategic partners. Later, the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan joined our initiative and provided some financial and technical support for sustainability of this Center. Afterward, the International Labor Organization offered new proposal to our coalition to start implementation of new initiative with support of government and international community titled "Young Woman Entrepreneurship Development" program.

2.4. Personal Leadership

Our personal leadership initiative in 2006 helped us and our organization to bring all stakeholders together and start this campaign as a coalition. Bryson (2003) described in his research project different definitions of stakeholder which include the following version:

- "Any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on the organization's attention, resources or output, or is affected by that output" (Bryson, 1995, p.27)
- "People or small groups with the power to respond to, negotiate with, and change the strategic future of the organization" (Eden and Ackermann, 1998, p.117)

In our particular case the second definition is more relevant to our initiative. We brought all stakeholders together to change attitudes of young people as well as employers towards the labor market. Why employers? In Soviet period people in our country as well as in other Post Soviet countries didn't have an opportunity to create a business company or any type of organization. Meanwhile all employees were hired by the government. Establishment of company or organization as individual or group and hire people is quite new idea for all those countries. Most of individuals or groups created company or organization want to hire people whom they know well, mostly among friends or relatives. Besides parent's influence, this factor also negatively affected in the young people applying for a job. The survey conducted by our organization "Bridge to the Future" Youth Public Union among 230 young people in our region within International Labor Organization project included different aspects of youth unemployment, however we proposed to include the question "whom do you rely in the labor market, if you are unemployed?" and almost the same question was for people who were employed "Who helped you to find this job?" revealed interesting information. From responses it was shown that 57.8 % or 133 (65 men and 68 women) young people rely or got a job on the help of parents and friends. Only 27.8 % or 64 (38 men and 26 women) young people have relying or found work based upon their education and skills. And the rest 14.4 % or 33 persons didn't answer this question (Jafarov, 2010).

"Leaders need a supportive personal network (including family, friends, counselors, mentors, and coaches) to cheer them on, give honest feedback, and hold them accountable. Serve as role models, and furnish emotional sustenance and other resources (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.59). Nowadays, networking has become a very actual topic all over the world. It is very important to use networking in personal leadership. In our project statement we used our networking to achieve our goal and objectives. It was easy to get access to the youth organizations because we are working in the same field and we already had some partnership projects in the field of youth development. Bringing business companies to this forum and engaging them to create a coalition was quite a big challenge. Most of owners of big companies are very busy and not interested to come

to the public event and show up as a public activist. However, we needed these people because of future expectations of our project. If you want to achieve your expected results, you have to bring key stakeholders together. Our networking strategy was very helpful thousand our organization, to bring main stakeholders together and create a center of attention towards the society as well as government and international community.

Drath (2001) connected personal leadership with relational leadership that allows us "to understand leadership in general in a new way, one designed to help people create and discover new ways of making leadership happen." This is what happened in our project statement. The success of our personal leadership was belief in what we do for our community and credibility that we got from our community. Our relational leadership helped us to get support and dedicate ourselves to the problem solution. "In its simplest terms, relations as the creative ground for leadership, while personal leadership pays attention to the character and skill of the leader" (Drath, 2001, p. XV).

2.5. Team Leadership

"A team begins as an informal working group and progresses to a more formal arrangement, examples being a task force, steering committee, planning team, or standing committee. They may come together for a relatively brief period of time to complete a specific task, or they may last for years" (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.64). In the project statement the coalition that we created lasted for years and it became more powerful increasing the number of stakeholders as well as changing the status of coalition from local to national level. The most important team leadership skill that our coalition used was a communication that coordinates members and build mutual understanding and trust, and toward all power of coalition to the problem solution (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.67). Communication is easier when we had representatives of few groups, in our case it was nonprofit and profit. To be successful from the beginning we were created three working groups within coalition: a) research group, b) community development group and c) project development group. Consequently, when representatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Labor joined our coalition, we as a team were faced with some dispute within our coalition. The root of the conflict between two Ministries was ambiguous and unclear action plan of their Ministries in youth employment that created confusion in team work. In order to avoid dispute in the team work and manage the situation, the coalition members representing profit and nonprofit institutions had a great commitment to keep the situation more comfortable. Focusing coalition members' attention on the mission, aim and objectives, team leadership helped to concentrate and fully engage government representatives into group discussions and finding solutions to the challenges as a team. These tactics worked very well and we succeeded in result of our joint team work.

Why do we need government? Can we affect the solution of problem without government? In the beginning we, representatives of profit and nonprofit institutions were thinking that solution of this problem is in our hands. Our observation working in groups that we created within the coalition has shown that the role of government is crucial in our coalition. Later, government became our main stakeholder that we engaged to the working groups. This helped us create credibility in society and succeed with initial results (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.66). Our initial result that we consider a success of our joint work as a coalition was in June of 2011, the President of Azerbaijan Republic signed a new decree called "Azerbaijan Youth 2011-2015" State Youth Program (2011) which includes establishment of youth employment resource centers as well as business incubation centers in different regions of Azerbaijan. Through these centers young people will get new skills and knowledge including trainings for job preparation and self-employment.

In terms of credibility which is important for team leadership as well as other types of leadership. "Credibility is foundation of leadership" (Kouzes and Posner, 1993, p.XIV). WEtotally agree with Kouzes and Posner point of view in terms of credibility. Credibility should be the first job of any type of leadership, to earn the trust and confidence of society.

2.6. Organizational Leadership

Crosby and Bryson (2005) explained very clearly the main task of organizational leadership which is talking about "paying attention to purpose and design, becoming adept at dealing with internal and external change, and building inclusive community inside and outside of the organization". Understanding the rules of organizational leadership, before start up initiative of youth employment, we proposed to the board of directors of "Bridge to the Future" Youth Public Union bring this issue to the General Assembly. There was a big discussion among members of organization, such as how internally and externally this issue will be influenced to the mission of organization, since the establishment, organization didn't have any projects or initiatives in the field of youth employment, there was also discussion that organization never had a partnership with stakeholders in this field such as employer organizations, trade unions, government institutions and so on. As

an executive director, we offered to the General Assembly of our organization to host a forum of profit and nonprofit sector that may help us to carry out initial stakeholder analysis, subsequently conduct a survey among young people to see the importance of this issue in ordinary life of youth. As Crosby and Bryson (2005) says "people listen to diverse stakeholders, they build a much richer understanding of the organization's performance, ideas for improvement, and understanding of the relationships among stakeholders." During the forum we had a chance to listen to diverse stakeholders, build the organization's performance and shared ideas to understand the relationship of this issue among all stakeholders. However, to reframe organizational leadership, we tried "to understand and use multiple perspectives, to think about the same thing in more than one way" (Bolman and Deal, 2008, p.5). Our organizational leadership succeeded hosting this forum and opening the new doors for our organization and young people for the common good. Reviewing eight stages of John Kotter (1996) a useful process of organizational change, we found similarities in our project statement such as "establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing new vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering employees, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new approaches in the culture (Crosby and Bryson, 2005, p.102). All these stages we have practiced in our organizational leadership.

3. Conclusion

The main idea that we got from analysis of our project statement is that all type of leadership including leadership in context, personal, team and organizational leadership contribute toward changing the situation inside or outside of an organization or community. To make these changes happen, leaders need constituents' energetic involvement as much as the constituents need leaders' boldness of vision and courage of conviction" (Kouzes and Posner, 1993, p. xxiii - xxiv - Introduction). Mutual understanding and mutual support is very important for the leadership in practice. Leadership in practice might change very often particularly if it depends on political and economic situation. Analyzing our project statement and reading different articles and books from leadership class, we understood that the first thing that we have to know about leadership is to learn to analyze the real situation and support leadership initiative if this leadership is for our common good.

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