Wartime leadership in the context of organizational change theories

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Abstract: After the beginning of the wide-scale terrorist invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, leadership theorists shifted their research focus to wartime leadership. The aggressor demonstrated extreme cruelty in fighting with the peaceful people of the country and in one day millions of peaceful leaders changed into wartime leaders. Despite the plethora of research studies devoted to leadership theories, the research topic of wartime leadership has not been discussed widely. The article aims to explore the effective wartime leadership styles, skills, and attributes that can be applied during the war and investigate practical change theories that can help wartime leaders achieve the organizational goal of survival. The author used a phenomenological design because this study attempts to understand students' perceptions relative to a particular situation. Nine students of West Ukrainian National University were interviewed and shared their perceptions of the practical wartime leadership skills and change theories that can be applied during the war period. The sample size is aligned with a typically used for phenomenological research sample size from 5 to 25 individuals. Literature analysis and research findings show that there is no best leadership style that proves to be the most effective during the war. However, the list of practical wartime leadership skills differs from peacetime leadership skills and embraces such personality attributes as courage, integrity, honesty, reliability, and responsibility. Besides, wartime leadership is about strong communicative skills, fast decision-making, and positive affectivity. Moreover, it is about the constructive implementation of new changes. Therefore, change theories can help wartime leaders to face the challenges. The change theories should be simple, flexible, and easy to be modified.

Keywords: peacetime leadership, wartime leadership, wartime change theory.

1. Introduction

After the beginning of the aggressive russian invasion of Ukraine, the research focus of leadership theorists shifted to exploring wartime leadership. A wartime environment is more challenging and requires specific leadership skills not only to operate in this environment but also to survive economically, politically, and physically. In times of emergency when the world has been fighting against the appalling virus of death (Covid-19) and then the belligerent country of death (russia), the research topic of wartime leadership has become urgent. The purpose of the article is to explore effective wartime leadership styles, skills, and attributes and investigate helpful and practical change theories that can be applied during the war. The nature of any war is threatening and the changes it brings are destructive. Though leadership always matters, however, during the war, leadership is of greater significance.

2. Object and subject of research

Organizations do not operate separately. Besides, the general environment has the potential to influence their performance and cause uncertainty. Any war creates great uncertainty and makes it more difficult for leaders to control resources and protect their domains. The object of research is wartime leadership. The subject of research is a set of effective leadership attributes and skills that can practically employ change theories to achieve the desired outcomes.

3. Target of research

The research study aims to investigate the leadership skills necessary to effectively apply change theories during the war period. To achieve the research purpose, a qualitative approach was used, particularly, a phenomenological design (interviewing) because this study attempts to understand the perceptions of Ukrainians relative to this particular situation. The purpose of interviewing the respondents was to learn their perceptions of effective wartime leadership qualities and identify practical change theories during the war.

4. Literature analysis

There is a plethora of research studies related to various leadership theories. Robertson Work (2021) investigated pandemic leadership and mentioned the two words that came to him in the context of a Covid-19 pandemic. The author reflected on mortality and morality and stated that awareness of their own mortality made people more awake, sensitive, and open to responding to the sufferings of others. At the same time, people continued arguing and fighting about what is true or false, right or wrong, thus, challenging human morality [1]. Pandemic leaders needed to develop cooperative skills, greater employee participation, and share power at the same time with their employees because the COVID-19 pandemic became a global event [2]. For organizations to be prepared to respond to disruptive and discontinuous change, such as the environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, their leaders had to be able to "embrace and accept unlearning, discomfort, continuous inquiry, conflict, and to lead ongoing knowledge creation in complex and uncertain scenarios" [3, p. 24]. In Ukraine, leadership faced the same challenges as all over the world. However, after February 24, 2022, after the beginning of russian invasion of Ukraine, researchers shifted from exploring pandemic leadership to wartime leadership because leadership always matters, especially in times of emergency when the world fights against the virus of death (Covid-19) and the country of death (russia). Thus, obviously, now two more words come into one's mind – death (mortality) and dearth (lack of morality).

Blatant attacks on the peaceful population of Ukraine made researchers focus on topics related to war. Grayling (2017) said that the proof of the evil nature of war is obvious to the point of banality. The author focused on the history and causes of war, the ethical concerns, and the task of lessening the evil of war and bringing it to an end. War cannot be an expression of human nature if most people are traumatized by war and if almost every idea of human good is negated by violence and destruction, loss, grief, and death [4]. According to Poberezhets (2022), the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas have already affected over 5 million people. From 2014 to February 24, 2022, in these conflicts 10 000 persons were killed, more than 24 000 were injured, and 1.6 million were forced to flee their homes. These numbers seem to be insignificant compared with the number of people affected during the large-scale military aggression. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report of August 2, 2022, there were about 12 584 civilian casualties, including 5327 killed (4975 adults and 352 children [5, p.315].

The aggressor demonstrated extreme cruelty fighting with civilians instead of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The kremlin used post-soviet narratives of World War II to justify its aggressive policies and underpin claims of a so-called "Russian World". However, in *Zero Point Ukraine : Four Essays on World War II*, Olena Stiazhkina (2021) inscribed the Ukrainian history of World War II

into a wider European and world context [6]. In *Ukraine Vs. Darkness : Undiplomatic Thoughts* (2021), Olexander Scherba clearly and loudly formulated Ukraine's answer to putin: "no, we won't move back. We aren't Mordor. We don't want to be Mordor. We'll never be Mordor. Nothing will change this". The author emphasized that putin wanted to "break Ukraine, push her to the floor, and make an example out of her for others who want freedom" [7, p.160]. This is what this war is about and what makes the investigations in the areas related to wartime leadership crucial.

There are many definitions of the term leadership. Howieson defined leadership as "the capacity to influence people, by means of personal attributes and/or behaviours, to achieve a common goal" [8, p.156). The author stated that effective leaders also have challenges. For example, uncertainty creates pressure for quick responses and solutions. Modern organizations are unforgiving and do not allow any room for mistakes. Organizations have a tendency to rely on old ideas about what effective leadership is and, therefore, prefer simple solutions that do not fit new complicated problems [8, p.153)

On the contrary, Montreuil (2020) emphasized the complexity of the leader's role in times of change and developed a set of actions for leaders that go beyond conventional ways. The author focused on change leadership and transformational leadership and stated that "given that organizational change is foremost a question of managing, leadership appears to be a crucial aspect to consider [9, p.408]. The author also shed light on the consequences of which leaders should be aware of and stated that "change management has become critical in today's organizations as their environment is constantly evolving" [9, p. 406].

Parachin (2022) investigated the leadership skills of Thomas Jefferson and stated the third president of the United States exhibited "one essential characteristic of leadership: optimism". The author emphasized that leaders approach challenging tasks with optimism. "While the majority of people sit back and watch things happen, leaders, like Thomas Jefferson, stand out from the crowd because they make things happen" [10, p.14]. Besides, true leaders have a clear vision, "articulate that vision, enlist the support of others, and establish ways and means of effectively making the vision become a reality". Parachin described important leadership skills, such as a passion for excellence, patience, creativity, effective communication (including listening skills), persistence, positivism, value and protection of reputation [10, p. 14-15].

In the article titled "Zelensky's leadership lessons: the Ukrainian president's skills for dealing with crisis are on full display during war", Teschner (2022) focused on the importance of staying positive, avoiding panic and fear, leading by example, embracing transparency and openness, and communicating regularly. According to Segal (as cited in Teschner, 2022), Zelensky's leadership lessons for all business leaders about communicating and responding to crises would be an understatement. The author emphasized the following leadership skills:

1. Leadership comes from deep within. It is built on character and courage.
2. Grit is built through struggle (there is no easy way).
3. Leaders can come from anywhere.
4. Being seen is a key trait that Zelensky has clearly mastered!
5. Communicate with humility and empathy.
6. Authenticity is critical, being real and not an actor (which is ironic given Zelensky's background).
7. Lead by example [11, p.14].

Unfortunately, there is less research devoted to wartime leadership that unravels the differences between wartime and peacetime leadership, or wartime and military leadership. Agner Fog (2017) distinguished warlike (cruel) societies and peaceful (tolerant) societies. Warlike societies are called regal, and peaceful societies are called kungic. Most members of regal society desire a strong leader, develop a strong feeling of group identity, and follow a world view of friends versus enemies. Also, regal societies "tend to be quite xenophobic and intolerant of all kinds of deviants" [12, p.21]. The author stated that the leader may have to take a frontline role in battles, can be expected to make higher sacrifices, or take higher risks. Thus, there are obvious differences. However, in real

life, it is more complicated because it can happen the way it happened in Ukraine when in one night most of the leaders of different levels (top, middle, and low-level managers) changed from peaceful leaders into wartime leaders (the word *most* is used because the shameful war started in 2014, however, due to the courageous defense of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the east, most of the country lived the peaceful life till February 24, 2022). The organizational environments have changed immediately and impacted negatively most of them. No doubt, that change theories can be applied in this situation.

Bose (2020) investigated organizational change and stated that it is highly influenced by its leaders. The author mentioned transformational (charismatic) and transactional leaders and emphasized the following effective strategies: pay attention to individuals, identify the individual needs of the employees, inspire and encourage the employees, and implant faith in the new vision. Furthermore, the author concluded that a combination of the two leadership styles is most appropriate because transformational leadership provides a base and enhances the effects of transactional leadership (p.27). Additionally, the author suggested the three effective and most frequently used change theories: Kurt Lewin's three-stage model, ADKAR model of change, and Kotter's eight-step model [13, p. 29].

Similarly, Arghode et al. (2021) mentioned that to cope with change, organizations need to be aware of the critical points that may endanger their survival. Organizational leaders must be aware of these criticalities, act quickly to deal with threats, and consider all available opportunities [14]. Additionally, Alcott et al (2020) emphasized the importance for theories of change to take account of the context in identifying appropriate actions. The central argument of theories of change is that they contain the basic foundations upon which policies operate that should lead to the desired changes in outcomes. The authors concluded that "there is a pressing need for greater recognition that theories of change need to be seen as flexible and iterative tools, allowing for ongoing reflection of contextual realities and sharing of experience in other relevant contexts" [15, p. 14].

5. Research methods

To answer the research questions, researchers prefer not to skim across the surface but dig deep to receive a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Halling (2021) identified "significant contributions made by researchers from various phenomenological traditions as a reminder of the vitality of human science research, the contributions it is making to our lives, and the development of powerful ways to carry out phenomenological research" [16, p. 344]. Therefore, qualitative research is found in many academic disciplines. All the respondents were delivered the course *Theory of Organization* at West Ukrainian National University (Ternopil, Ukraine). For this article, the author used a phenomenological design because this study attempts to understand students' perceptions relative to a particular situation.

The researcher depended exclusively on the lengthy interviews with a small sample of participants: nine students of West Ukrainian National University (the sample is presented in Table 1). The sample size is aligned with a typically used for phenomenological research sample size from 5 to 25 individuals.

Table 1. Sample information

		University	Degree	Year of study	Nationality	Age	Region	Gender
1	A	WUNU	Bachelor	3-d year	Ukrainian	19	Ternopil	Male
2	B	WUNU	Bachelor	3-d year	Ukrainian	19	Ternopil	Female
3	C	WUNU	Bachelor	3-d year	Ukrainian	20	Ternopil region	Male
4	D	WUNU	Bachelor	3-d year	Ukrainian	20	Chmelnytsky region	Female

Continuation of table 1

		University	Degree	Year of study	Nationality	Age	Region	Gender
5	E	WUNU	Bachelor	3-d year	Ukrainian	19	Ivano-Frankivsk region	Male
6	F	WUNU	Bachelor	3-d year	Ukrainian	20	Ternopil region	Male
7	G	WUNU	Bachelor	4-th year	Ukrainian	21	Ternopil	Male
8	H	WUNU	Bachelor	4-th year	Ukrainian	21	Ternopil	Female
9	I	WUNU	Bachelor	4-th year	Ukrainian	22	Ternopil region	Male

The purpose of interviewing the respondents was to learn their perceptions of the effective wartime leadership qualities and change theories that can be effectively applied during the war period. The interconnectedness between people, things, and the surrounding world is what phenomenologists call intentionality. According to Valentine et al. (2018), "in phenomenology, intentionality is where meaning resides—it is at the heart of any phenomenological investigation" [17, p. 462]. Interviews were conducted because the researcher was interested in studying what the participants had perceived and experienced themselves, which provided data surrounding particular phenomena. Qualitative interviewing is not just one specific method, but "a set of different practices that all employ conversations for knowledge-producing purposes" [18, p. 139].

All the participants of the interviewing were explained the purpose of the interview and the terms of confidentiality. Before responding to the questions, the participants revised their knowledge of different leadership styles (democratic, autocratic, transformational, transactional, charismatic, situational, ethical, and intuitional), including the advantages and disadvantages of different leadership styles. The questions embraced their perceptions of leadership (except military or political leadership) characteristics (including leadership styles) that are most important and effective during the war. However, most (seven) of the participants shifted their responses to the characteristics of personality saying that leadership style is less important, but individual features such as courage, stamina, self-confidence, and honesty become the priority features of effective wartime leadership and decision-making.

Respondent A mentioned effective communication at the beginning of his response, emphasizing the role of communication skills in general in leadership, but during the challenging period, it becomes of greater significance because the employees expect clearer instructions and explanations of future goals. The respondent also mentioned courage in decision-making ("not to be afraid of showing his/her embarrassment and making the wrong decision, changing decisions when the situation changes every day). The respondent mentioned that he perceived the autocratic leadership style to be more effective because of the lack of time for democratic discussions. Additionally, the respondent emphasized the ability of understanding reality correctly. All nine respondents mentioned communicative skills in their interviews.

Respondent B focused on such features as courage, honesty, and the ability to become a model for the subordinates. The respondent told a real-life story from the experience of her parents who work for a private company. The director of the company showed practical leadership skills and was respected by the employees. However, after February 24, the leader almost disappeared for two weeks and employees did not have any information about the leader and their way of action in that situation. It appeared the leader became too stressed and frustrated and could not decide what to do. The employees helped their leader to overcome stress and come back to the workplace, and later the leader regained his composure and became a good leader in his place again. They developed together a new strategy, continued their work, and participated actively in volunteering activities. The responder summarized that collaboration, communication, trust, and the ability to understand each other helped the company to overcome the challenging situation. Seven respondents also mentioned courage in

their interviews. Two of them spoke about courage and speed, meaning speed in the decision-making process because war does not give a lot of time for analysis of the situation.

Respondent F focused on the ability to be aware of the challenges, understanding properly the reality (vision), and taking responsibility for the company and its employees. The student identified the decision-making process to be critical, courage, rationality, and responsibility to be most important. According to Responder F, wartime leadership is more about "individual personality attributes and virtues". It is hard to define the effective leadership style choosing among democratic, autocratic, transformational, or charismatic styles because all of them have advantages and disadvantages. Wartime leadership requires specific personality characteristics, such as courage, trust, honesty, and positivism plus the advantages of different leadership styles, for example, quick decision-making (autocratic), employees' dedication (democratic), commitment to the vision (charismatic), ability to communicate new ideas and collaboration (transformational). Similar ideas were articulated by five respondents who mentioned that it was difficult to identify the best leadership style applied in the war period. Respondent H suggested the following definition of a wartime leader (it is difficult to cut down the quotation): "A sober-minded democrat with certain traits of an autocrat is the ideal formula for a wartime leader. Complete democracy in such conditions equates to liberalism in its ineffectiveness. Listening, but drawing conclusions, avoiding clear control, but guiding competently, not demanding obedience, but earning respect. Reasonably ambitious, decisive, but not a maximalist, confident but not a narcissist. In the changing ocean of waves and disagreements, he is a rock on which he (the one who needs him) will find shelter, the other will crash on his rapid and unshakable foundations".

In responding to the questions related to change theories, most respondents agreed that different change theories can be effectively used during the war; however, all nine respondents mentioned the Kurt Lewin change model. The rationality for their choice was its simplicity. The model consists of only three stages; unfreeze, change, and refreeze. According to Respondent H, this model is applicable during the war; however, it can be used in a different manner and at a different pace. For example, the first stage becomes very short because the need for change is not determined by the company itself but by the war which does not give a lot of time to manage doubts and analyze concerns. The second stage (change) is longer and more important: it is crucial to make effective decisions and plan constructive changes. The third stage (refreeze) becomes very short as well because it immediately changes into the first stage. Seven respondents mentioned that they never observed so many changes in short time periods. Additionally, five respondents mentioned Kotter's change management theory and four respondents mentioned ADKAR theory.

6. Research results

Since the wide-scale aggressive war of the terrorist country against Ukraine, wartime leadership became a research focus of many authors who aimed to explore the differences between peacetime and wartime leadership skills and share their findings to help leadership face wartime challenges. The destructive nature of war brings many changes and leaders are expected to implement constructive changes to help their organizations survive economically, politically, and physically.

There is no one effective leadership style that proves to be the most effective during the war period. It is important to focus on the advantages of every leadership style and develop a new model of a wartime leader that will embrace the strengths of the styles and individual leaders' attributes. A wartime leader's character must have courage, integrity, honesty, reliability, and responsibility. Besides, wartime leadership is about strong communicative skills, effective decision-making, positive affectivity, and authenticity. Moreover, it is about the fast implementation of new changes. Therefore, change theories can help wartime leaders to face the challenges.

The theories of change help leaders implement important changes to achieve organizational goals. There are no specific wartime change theories; however, the role of change theories during the war is obvious. It is critical to be aware of the fact that the wartime organizational goal is survival.

Therefore, more simple change theories can be applied more effectively. For example, the three-stage Kurt Lewin change model can be modified and receive a different representation of application during the war: **Cycle 1** (Stage 1 (unfreeze) → Stage 2 (change) → Stage 3 (refreeze)) → → **Cycle 2** (Stage 1 (unfreeze) → Stage 2 (change) → Stage 3 (refreeze)) → → **Cycle 3** (Stage 1 (unfreeze) → Stage 2 (change) → Stage 3 (refreeze)) → → Cycle 3 (Stage 1 (unfreeze) → Stage 2 (change) → Stage 3 (refreeze))... The number of cycles is unlimited because the end of war is unknown. The duration of each cycle is different because the level of uncertainty changes frequently. The model highlights that during war one cycle won't be enough and it is important to be ready for its repetitive nature.

ADKAR (awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, reinforcement) theory is good to apply because it emphasizes the importance of being aware of the ongoing changes and the role of reinforcement. When survival is a goal the desire to survive becomes high and stimulates the effective use of knowledge and abilities. Kotter's eight-step theory of change can be modified because there is no need to spend a lot of time on the first step (building urgency); however, it highlights the importance of communicating the vision and removing obstacles.

7. Prospects for further research development

Ukrainians avoided the destiny of the Chechens in 2000 or the Georgians in 2008; however, today Ukraine fights against the country of terrorism and shows its heroism and persistence. Ukrainian wartime leadership lessons will be widely discussed. The prospects for further research embrace various aspects of wartime leadership, wartime political and military leadership, and peculiarities of wartime motivation and communication.

8. Conclusions

In the article, the author emphasized the importance of investigating wartime leadership and developing wartime change theories that can quickly and constructively implement changes. The author used a phenomenological design to learn students' perceptions relative to the situation. Literature analysis and research findings showed that there is no one effective leadership style that proves to be the most effective during the war; however, the list of wartime leadership skills embraces important personality attributes, such as courage, integrity, honesty, reliability, and responsibility. Besides, wartime leadership is about strong communicative skills and fast decision-making. Moreover, it is about the constructive implementation of new changes. Wartime change theories should be simple, flexible, and easy to be modified.

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