

The Prevalent and Persistent Virtues of Autocratic Leadership in the Corporate Sector: An Analysis

Nineteenth-century critics ascertained that there were three major modes of leadership: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. These had their origins in the background of leaders and the structures of power within which they were compelled to operate. Although autocratic leadership was a mode normally associated with the military, many corporate leaders of the early twentieth century (tycoons and company heads alike) were seen to employ this form of governance to varying degrees of effect. Although it has now become unfashionable to dwell on the virtues of this mode, this presentation will demonstrate that within the major corporate sectors of today's business world, several diverse modes of leadership continue to retain a legitimate and strong kernel of autocracy. The presentation will draw on research that reflects the varying roles played by factors such as crisis-management and corporate social responsibility in shaping autocratic leadership practices. Indeed, it can be persuasively argued that since autocratic leadership is the mode that takes over in times of pressure and crisis, it remains the most pervasive leadership practice for highly competitive business arenas.