Leadership Challenges in Building Urban Youth Climate Change Awareness

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Abstract

The research provides a connection, within the context of climate change, between successful and globally recognized leadership models and the need for leadership of urban young people in Hanoi and its agglomeration in their actions to reduce climate change. To research climate change awareness and attitudes data has been collected and analyzed through an online questionnaire addressed to people within 18-39 years of ago and living in the larger urban area of Hanoi. Findings of the research show that awareness about and attitude to climate change differ significantly. Socio-demographics analysis of the data led to the realization that significant differences in awareness levels exist. Three prominent clusters can be identified. The first cluster of respondents does not acknowledge a clear connection between individual difficulties and changes in their lives with the phenomena of climate change, and are relatively oblivious of the phenomena. A more prominent cluster of the population reflects an existing knowledge about climate change, however they do not think it to be their responsibility to act against it. A third cluster is composed of those people who demonstrate significant awareness of the issue, tie it primarily to human intervention, and would be ready to act upon that personally. However, they have not come to taking any specific action yet. These clusters are finally matched against archetype leadership models to find the best possible leadership traits to guide each cluster. Limitations of the research include the limited depth of responses of online questionnaires, and some of the confusions around the symptoms, elements and consequences of climate change. The research and the leadership framework setting can contribute to creating a local strategy to a global program, and help set the example of successful leadership strategies in the field of building awareness, providing direction and motivation in tackling the challenges of this critically important issue.

Keywords: Climate change, youth, Hanoi, global warming, leadership models

Introduction

Accepting the expanding phenomena of climate change, young people increasingly are faced with its consequences. Their generation is growing up in a period when climate change is significantly taking place and is heading to the point when it might reach irreparable damage to the Planet. It is increasingly likely that the young generation will be the one that carries both the burden and responsibility of facing and tackling the challenge of handling the effects of climate change. It is furthermore increasingly clear that leadership will play an incremental role in the identification, awareness building and mobilization processes related to handling climate change.

Objective

The research contributes to the building of knowledge in the field of understanding the attitudes and the awareness of young people on the topic of climate change. Gaining a clear picture about awareness, attitudes and motivations can lead to the development of strategies in the field of leadership, operations, motivation and communication. It focuses on the research of understanding of the phenomena of climate change, clarification on what the

respondents see as the main contributing factors to its existence, information on how they perceive climate change affecting their individual lives, and understanding of what information and motivation they might be lacking or are open to in order to take a more active role. It is also important to check what they consider as credible sources of information in the field.

Research question

How can adaptation of the appropriate leadership model contribute to climate change awareness generation and mobilization of young people?

Methodology

To understand attitudes, motivations and behavior of Hanoi urban youth, data has been collected and analyzed through an online questionnaire developed in Vietnam. Development of the questionnaire took into account the climate change related questionnaire of the latest European Social Survey (ESS 8). The European Social Survey is the largest regular academically driven cross-national survey in Europe, which aims monitor and interpret changing public attitudes and values within Europe, and to investigate how they interact with Europe's changing institutions. Young people, both male and female, within the age brackets of 18-39, living in the larger urban area of Hanoi were selected to be the respondents of the survey.

Collection of data was organized within the framework of the Hanoi undergraduate course of Contemporary PR Research of RMIT University Vietnam. Students had to execute the data collection based on a standardized questionnaire. The questionnaire included socio-demographic screening questions, to be followed by 8 questions referring to the actual topic of climate change, and followed by 6 further questions of their choice (*these latter do no form part of this paper*).

Each of the student groups of 4 members designed a sampling plan that built on a combination of different methods: snowball, convenience and random sampling were all involved. For spreading the survey further, the social media pages of the individual team members were also used. Respondents were furthermore invited to share the questionnaire further, and thus use the possible snowball effect. With the combination of methods, in total the sample size covered 495 respondents, out of which, following the cleaning of the data, 480 were actually used in the final data set. Screening questions ensured that only respondents meeting the required age and demographic criteria answered the questionnaire.

Of the final 480 questionnaires of the data set, following refinement of the database, 358 questionnaires from Hanoi and 113 from the agglomeration of Hanoi were used, resulting in a database of 471 questionnaires. In order to create the appropriate weightings, the data source of the 2009 Vietnam Population and Housing Census was used.

Every element of the research process was supervised by the author of this article, including research design, elaboration of methodology, sampling method, finalization of questionnaires, data collection, analysis and reporting.

Data was collected in the period of 8-17 May 2018.

Literature review

With over 95 percent probability, the global warming process of the last 50 years can be attributed to human activities (IPCC, 2014). The Intergovernmental panel, that groups globally over 1,300 scientific experts under the umbrella of the United Nations, states that

most likely human intervention is the cause of the process. Understandably, it can be claimed that actually changing the trend and reversing the process is most significantly the responsibility and possibility of human action. The same body goes further and recently urges 'global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty' (IPCC, 2018). All this implies that the perception, attitude and actions of future generations is critically important.

It is widely considered that Vietnam is one of the countries hit hardest by climate change related disasters (GFDRR, 2017). For centuries Vietnamese people have been accustomed to various natural catastrophes, including landslides, forest fires, floods, droughts, inland sea-water infiltration, tropical storms and cyclones. Extremities of recent years include unpredictability of monsoon periods and long drought periods changing with extended periods of torrential rain. All these have contributed to a significant disturbance of the standard cycles of the production of rice and other agricultural produces, animal husbandry, forestry and aquaculture. One of the lifelines of agricultural production, the Mekong has seen significant changes to its regular pattern of flow, resulting, among others, in sea water expansion into its delta, and causing the salinization of this critically important agricultural area. Weather pattern changes have their social consequences, as a growing number of people leave their agricultural living behind in exchange for the more predictable urban life and factory work.

The Hanoi population perceives climate change and global warming as a series of unpredictable and harmful events: storms, flood, extended periods of cold weather as well long heat waves (Toan et al. 2014). Deterioration in human health is considered as the prime negative effect of this weather change: 92% of the population identify alarming personal health symptoms. Coughing, fever and influenza are among the illnesses most commonly associated with changes in the climate and in the standard weather patterns.

In a research commissioned and coordinated by the BBC, 74% of respondents in Vietnam agreed with the statement that climate change is actually happening (Copsey et al. 2012). The majority of the respondents, 58/% confirmed that they were aware of the prevalence of client change, while a further 16% believed they have heard about it, but its meaning was unclear to them. They were not sure of the connection between symptoms of the weather pattern changes and climate change in overall terms. Through this survey it has become clear that while a significant majority expressed sensitivity to the issue, they were nevertheless unclear on what exactly to do. Respondents lacked the information on what exactly to do to offset the risks and damages of climate change. The research identified five segments of the population, labelled as those who are 'surviving, struggling, adapting, willing and unaffected'. Urban youth were identified as one of the three priority audiences, together with farmers and with people living in the Central Coast area. Urban youth were highlighted due to their openness to community initiatives, their belief in the role of joint community actions and for having a catalyzing role among peers, friends and family, both in terms of being credible sources of information, but also as for their ability to mobilize for action.

On a more global scale, the public tends to agree that 'the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on the global climate' (Houghton et al. 1996:5). Even more so as the majority of climate models seems to indicate acceleration of the change process. Research on climate awareness reflects skepticism along two dimensions, that of problems and those of solutions. (Corry & Jorgensen, 2015). Exposure of urban environments to effects of the changing climate are evident: in addition to the direct hazards themselves, a range of management issues make cities of developing countries significantly exposed to climate change risks (Tanner et al. 2009). Floods, heat stress, water and air pollution exercise pressure on urban population resilience. The complexity of climate change related risks

create a set of interdependent challenges to manage by the cities and their population (Wilbanks et al. 2001; Parry et al. 2007). In their research on 10 selected Asian cities they came to the conclusion that the ability of these cities to manage climate change challenges is tested continuously. Inapt waste management structures, inadequate drainage systems, increasing noise, air and water pollution problems together with the effects of a complex set of climate change related issues make servicing of the increasing population almost impossible. Nevertheless, exponential urban population growth does not seem to stop, as consequences of climate change make a growing number of agricultural population abandon their traditional places of work and living and move to the cities. A combination of leadership, taking of individual responsibility, the ability to participate in urban planning and public decision-making, responsible city management structures and processes, together with assistance provided to prevent and mitigate risks are all essential elements of sustainable urban structures and processes.

Urban local authorities need to take leadership in setting energy supply and management, transport regulations and building standards and requirements of their cities (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2003). Furthermore, they might also be lobbying legislators and government to have the specific climate change related risks of the cities acknowledged, and their handling incorporated in nationwide legislations. Filho et al. (2016) underline the role of communication in the process: communication structures and raising of public awareness are essential to engage the public in the adaptation practices and behavior. To gear communication, the role of leadership needs to be addressed.

Urban youth resilience to climate change has been analyzed in a comparative study of Budapest, Hungary and Hanoi, Vietnam (Sarlos & Ferencz, 2018). The conference paper pointed out the importance of localized communication strategies. While the phenomena of global warming and of climate change is concerns everyone, addressing it can only be done through localized and differentiated strategies.

Western (2005, 2008) introduces 4 different leadership styles that characterize the last 100 years of management and leadership. Setting of the categories are based on a thorough assessment of the complex historical, social, political and economic contexts, and provide an analysis on how actual leadership fares against these criteria. These 'models' represent different attitudes to how to lead organizations. Western claims that these categories are admittedly characteristic of 'westernized organization', however their universal relevance is valid in terms of how motivation works in various settings. Following a chronological order, the last 100 years can be characterized first by the dominance of the controller type, then the therapist, followed by the visionary, and now having the emergence of the eco-leadership model.

The '*Controller model*' is strongly rooted in the modern industrial concept, where most of the labor could be described as factors of production, leading to dehumanization of the work process. Instead, the Controller focuses on targets, numbers, benchmarks and audits, and every element of the work process is measured to ensure greater efficiency and outputs. A leadership discourse emerged at the turn of the 20th century, gaining credentials from the belief in modernism and scientific rationalism. The biggest disadvantage of the method is clearly that it does not take into account at all human needs, aspirations, and the role of individual contributions. It is a model that does not build on the power of individual motivation at all.

The '*Therapist model*' puts the role of the individual as an essential element of the team in the focus. Within this model, it is widely claimed that "happy workers are more productive workers". The model underlines the importance of individual motivation, which is key for full involvement and contribution to the overall team performance. It also believes that a

significant role of the leader is to unleash the potential the individuals within the organization have. The recognition of this model has not passed away and is still widely followed within the non-profit sector. These organizations are often considered as 'people-focused', or 'people-business' organizations. Many organizations in the area of environmental protection and with a large volunteer base operate with this leadership model.

The '*Messiah leadership model*' puts the personal vision or charisma of the symbolic leader in the focus. It is perceived that these leaders were able to create and share a vision which not only designed the direction of the whole organization but created a compelling opportunity for everyone to join in into working towards the vision. The 'Messiah model' created a strong link between the individual and the collective goal setting, by creating the message that everyone can find their future by working towards the shared goals. This model clearly lets those people behind who do not identify with the very strong character of the leader.

The most recent leadership category is that of the '*Eco-leadership model*'. This model builds on the recognition of systems theory where various elements and factors on the planet are strongly interconnected and depend on each other, in fact resulting in one large global system. The rise of this model emerges out of dissatisfaction and of inefficacies of the previous models, as well as of recognition of the changing global worldview. The need to look at business and organizational decisions from a holistic perspective make it necessary that leadership is based on consideration and consultation of a wide range of factors and actors, well beyond the realms of the actual organization itself. Emergence of this model is in fact an acknowledgement of the fact that many people within the organizations became disillusioned due to the fall of previous leadership and management models.

One might argue that among rapidly changing conditions adapting static models of leadership might not bring full benefits. Especially in the case of complex issues such as climate change a combination of approaches together with a level of flexibility in their adaptation can possibly best match the leadership challenges.

Findings

"I work outdoors every day. Sometimes, the temperature could get up to 39–40 degrees; it was never like that before. It's much hotter and makes my work become harder."

67% of the Hanoi agglomeration residents and 48% of the Hanoi residents believe that climate is definitely changing, On the contrary, 27% of the Hanoi and 10% of the suburban population claim that the climate is not changing at all.

In Hanoi, 56% of the people aged 31-39, and 40% of the 26-30 year olds agree that the climate is definitely changing. The youngest seem to be more skeptical: 33% of the 18-25 year olds state that the climate is definitely not changing. The suburban pattern is similar: the older the respondents are, the higher the chance is they confirm the existence of climate change. 91% of the 31-39 year olds and 30% of the 26-30 year olds confirm a definite change of the climate, while 21% of the youngest generation does not see any change at all. In none of the groups is there a significant difference between the perception of women and of men. Students, together with community and military service people confirm the strongest the definite existence of climate change, with 52% and 63% sharing this view, alternatively.

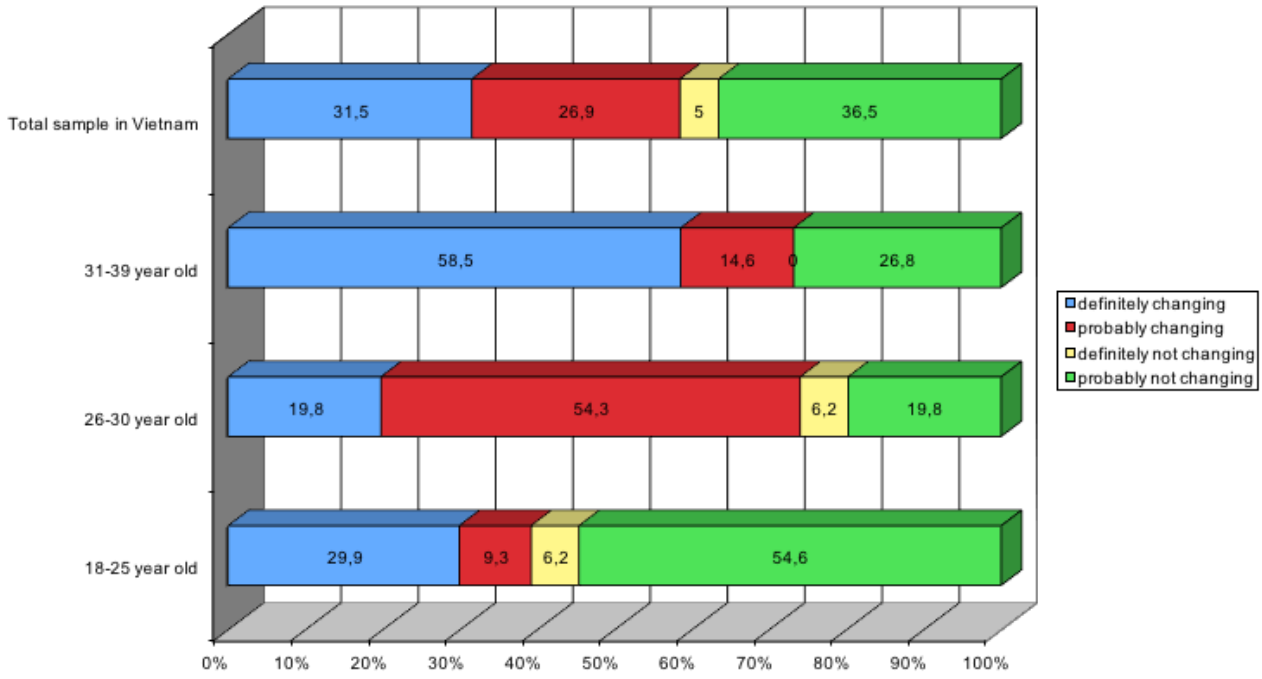

Figure 1. Do you think the climate is changing? (Age) (N=471)

"In my opinion, big corporations and businesses have a big responsibility to play. Most of rubbish comes from fast food restaurants, shops, companies or big supermarkets. You could be easily criticized when disposing of food, drinks or wrappers but maybe large businesses could be not."

Attribution to the human causes is strongly present among respondents. 71% of the Hanoi population and 73% of the suburban population share the view that climate change is mainly or completely due to human activities. A further 25% of respondents claim that it can equally be attributed to natural and human activities. Most dominantly, the 26-30 year olds believe that climate change is caused by human interventions, while the oldest segment of the respondents both in Hanoi and in the agglomeration claim that both natural processes and human activities stand behind the changes. Community and military service people (71% in Hanoi and 100% in the agglomeration) together with students (66% in Hanoi and 81% in the suburbs) are the most outspoken about the role of human actions. In both areas, employed people tend to grant a more equal role of both natural and human causes to climate change.

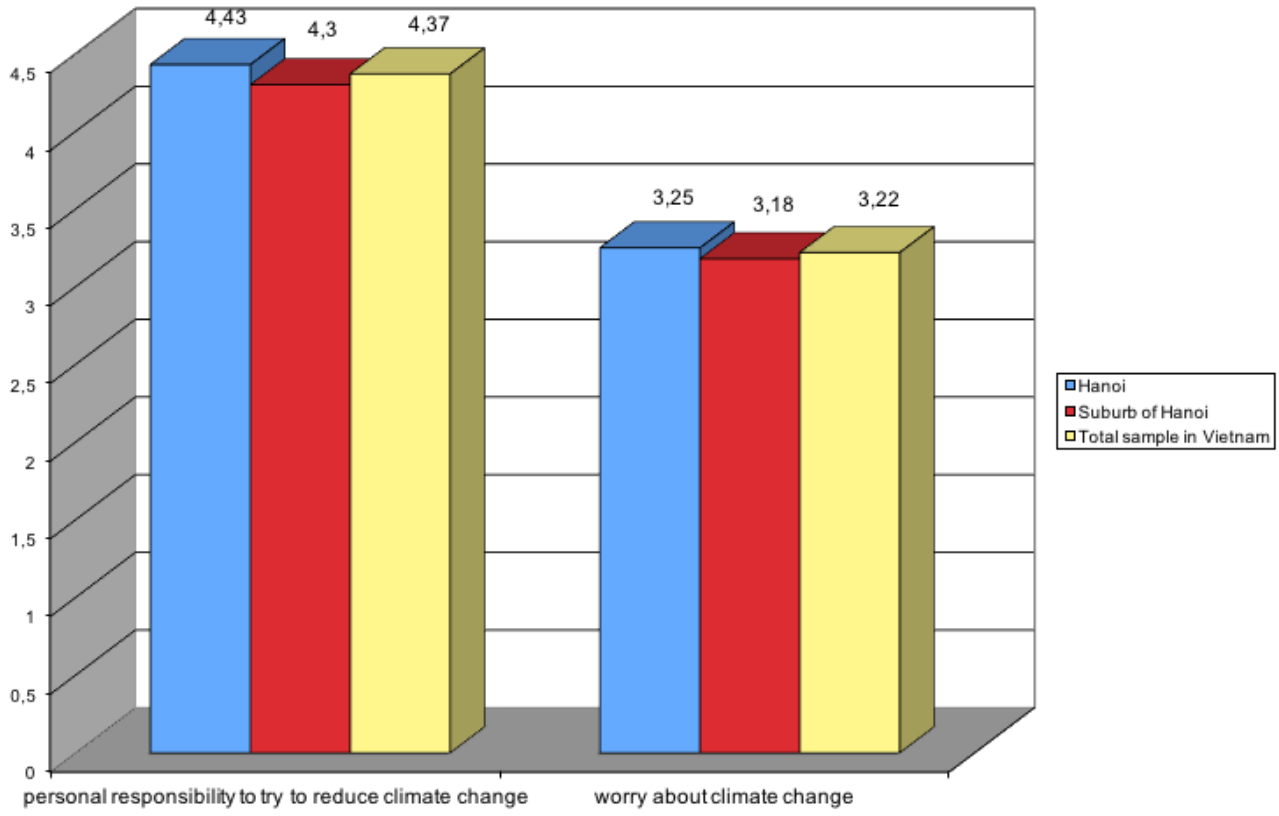

Figure 2. To what extent do you feel personal responsibility to try to reduce climate change? / How worried are you about climate change? (Location) (N=471)

'*The number of children coming to health facilities has been rising significantly. Along with the hot and humid conditions, the environmental issues in Hanoi are facilitating the development of insects, bacteria and several diseases like mosquitoes, rats and flies*.'

The older people appear to be most concerned about climate change. Of the age bracket of 31-39, 41% of Hanoians and 65% of the suburbans are extremely worried about climate change. Females show higher levels of concern, with the difference being significant in the agglomeration where 53% of women and only 21% of men claim being extremely worried. On this topic, employees demonstrate the biggest level of concern: in Hanoi 39% are very worried, a further 35% are extremely worried – and the trend is similar in the agglomeration. Students demonstrate less concern in both Hanoi and its agglomeration.

Among the Hanoi population, with a score of 4,08 on a scale of 5, community service people agree significantly to taking personal responsibility in making steps to stop climate change. People working in households demonstrate the relative lowest level of personal responsibility (3,25). In the suburbs of Hanoi, self-employed people express most significantly (4,3) the role they perceive for themselves in reducing effects of climate change. In both locations, the 31-39 year olds express the highest level of responsibility to take personal action.

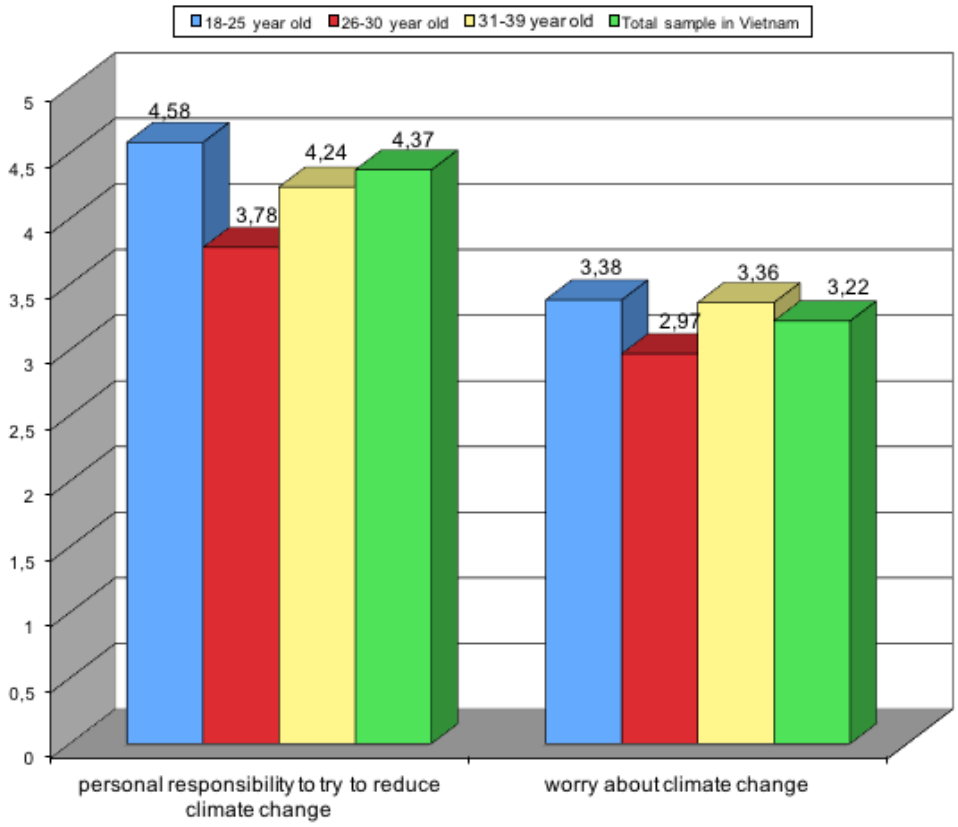

Figure 3. To what extent do you feel personal responsibility to try to reduce climate change? / How worried are you about climate change? (Age) (N=471)

"The authority can teach households to plant trees, for example, or develop green areas for each neighborhood. A green city is a good solution for climate change."

Women in general seem to be more optimistic than men. In contrast to men (2,75) female respondents firmly believe (4,08) that enough countries will make decisive steps to reduce climate change. In the suburban area, the 26-30 year olds were significantly more sceptic (2,92) regarding the actions of governments around the world.

Discussion

Self-employed and household people tend to claim that the climate is not changing. They do not show significant concern and it is not a prime thought to them in their everyday lives. Employed people however believe the climate is probably changing, are very concerned, and attribute the changes to both natural and human causes.

The 18-25 year olds do not think the climate is changing and are only somewhat worried. They attribute it however primarily to human interventions. The 26-30 year olds are least concerned about the climate change, they have not spent much time on the topic, and do not feel their personal responsibility in handling it. Students are somewhat worried about climate change which they believe is primarily the consequence of human intervention. Readiness to act is best demonstrated by community and military service people, who demonstrate a high level of personal responsibility to act.

People living in the agglomeration agree significantly that the climate is definitely changing (49.4%). 25% of the citizens of Hanoi agreed the climate was definitely not

changing. Accepting personal responsibility was prevailing among the Hanoians (3.85).

People living in Hanoi expressed a positive expectation about possible actions, in terms of large numbers of people limiting their use of energy (3.45), possible positive government actions (3.52) and limiting their own use of energy (3.37).

A part of the population is not at all or only partially aware of climate change, they do not link changes in their individual life situations to the phenomena of climate change, and if they acknowledge the existence of climate change at all, they attribute this primarily to natural causes. Members of this cluster can be noted as '*lacking awareness*'.

A significant part of the population is aware of the issue, but lacks the motivation to act on their own. Members of this cluster claim that it is not up to them to change the situation, rather, it should be the government or the companies that would need to fix the problem. Members of this cluster can be characterized as '*lacking motivation*'.

The third cluster consists of people who are not only aware of the problem, they are furthermore motivated as well to take personal responsibility, but they are unclear what exactly to do themselves to act. However, they are not sure what exactly they should be doing. Members of this cluster are best characterized as '*lacking direction*'.

Conclusions and implications

Adaptive leadership styles are needed

The research clearly spells out: one of the critically important conditions of mobilizing the public is the existence of appropriate leadership. Leaders are important to give vision, provide direction, encourage and guide action. Leaders are also essential to create a link between merely identifying issues or actually taking personal responsibility.

Today, probably all leadership types prevail, reflecting differences in - both national and corporate - cultures, actual organizational management needs, individual leadership traits and actual needs.

Overall awareness about the phenomena of climate change is significant. The majority of the respondents acknowledge its existence, and, similarly significantly, the majority acknowledges the role of human factors in its prevalence. A more detailed look reinforces that based on awareness and readiness to act, three major clusters can be drawn based on the major factor they are lacking: awareness, motivation or guidance. It would require different leadership strategies to engage people from the three clusters.

Identifying the most appropriate leadership style to create awareness, mobilize and provide direction in relation to climate change needs to match the specifics of the three clusters. It is advised that population clusters are matched with leadership models. The importance of matching cluster characteristics with leadership traits is that it will give indication on how traits of each the clusters can be best addressed and their members best engaged. However, this attempt cannot tell in a prescriptive manner who exactly is needed for leading the process. With high probability a combination of leadership approaches would serve the purpose best.

It also needs to be noted that while climate change is a global phenomenon, currently the structures to fight them on a global level are limited. While governmental and inter-governmental actions might be made on an international and global level, awareness raising, mobilization and direction giving can best be done on a local and a national level.

For those people lacking awareness, having the '*Therapist model*' adapted could work best. These people are aware of individual elements of climate change effecting their own lives, however, they do not see the link to neither the global phenomena of climate change,

nor the role of human actions in contributing to climate change. A therapist approach could help address personal anxieties, issues related to their personal wellbeing and making them realize how this is all part of a wider picture, as well as underline the validity of human interactions.

For those who might be aware of the problem, but lack the motivation to act, implementation of the '*Messiah leadership*' approach could give the necessary impetus. Such a leader could provide the necessary motivation by making a clear and compelling link between the challenge and what each and every individual would gain by joining in fighting this challenge. This leadership style could also help people realize the bridge between their individual actions and the shared future. They could be instrumental in actually mobilizing people to act.

For those people who would be ready to act but are currently lacking direction, the '*Eco-leadership model*' could provide the best possible guidance. While this is the youngest of the models, this approach reflects "a growing interest in systems thinking, complexity theory, narrative approaches, and also the environment as metaphors for leadership and organizing company structures" (Western 2008:184). These people would be eager to act, and by understanding what they need to do could be the best direct motivating factor. It could furthermore bring personal inspiration and pride when realizing how their work contributes to global well-being. Nevertheless, the most important expectation here would be to set clear guidelines, tasks, and opportunities to get involved. These are all essential as, after all, taking action against climate change is to a large extent a matter of individual choice. Besides adapting to possible changes in government regulations, it is primarily up to each individual to decide if and how they take part in these activities.

Limitations of the research

Limitations of the research include lack of in-depth responses and ability to understand attitudes in a cohesive manner, the need to change the scales during the research process itself, and the misconceptions in relation to the basic term of climate change.

Recommendations

The current study can contribute to the formulation of significant further research and development of strategies in the field of communication, mobilization, operations and leadership.

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