Comparing Angela Merkel's And George W. Bush's Leadership Styles

World leaders have been an important part of society since the beginning of time. The majority of them embody certain distinctive traits that make them stand out among other individuals. Traits such as being truthful, charismatic, ambitious and many more. Both Angela Merkel and George W. Bush showcased these leadership traits during their time as leaders. For Merkel, being a woman in politics meant there were many challenges she had to face in order to rise to the top as chancellor, challenges that Bush did not have to face when he was becoming President. This was one of the many ways Merkel and Bush differed from each other. Another difference is that Merkel is not very authoritative whilst Bush was. Furthermore, Bush was the type of person that would always confront others, but Merkel did not like confronting anyone. Despite these differences, they also share some similarities - they are both goal-oriented and highly ambitious individuals that refuse to give up. This was put to the test however, when both of them were required to navigate their country through certain crises that arose at the time. At the end, dealing with such difficult issues only made them stronger and better leaders. Even though mistakes were made along the way by Merkel and Bush, it is important that leaders learn from these past mistakes in order to avoid them from occurring again in the future.

Leadership is an important part of human societies and has had an effect on the quality of life for all citizens throughout the course of time (Vugt 2008, p. 182). It has been widely contested on whether leaders should be judged based on how successful they were in reaching their goals or how much good work they have actually done (Gergen 2003). Nevertheless, there are two crucial traits that leaders must adhere to in order to be a good leader in the public eye – the ability to be truthful and charismatic (Friedman 2001). Ahmed and Bach (2014, p. 47) say that although embodying certain leadership traits alone does not guarantee a successful leader, it is evident that there is a difference between effective leaders and other people due to their strong attributes. Leadership attributes such as - a drive, leadership motivation, self-confidence, cognitive ability and an understanding of the business. Two important leaders that have shown these traits are Angela Merkel and George W. Bush (Gergen 2003). These key leadership traits assist leaders to gain the necessary skills to formulate a thorough vision and plan and then enables them to take the required steps to implement the plan (Ahmed & Bach 2014, p. 47).

Thompson and Lennartz (2006, pp. 99 - 108) say that despite being current chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel surprisingly spent most of her youth and adolescence disinterested in politics. Due to her apolitical stance, she did not take part in any school or University politics. Merkel only started to become involved in politics during the democratic revolution in Germany. When Angela Merkel was elected chancellor in 2005, she beat political odds by becoming the first female chancellor of Germany. This had been a long time coming since women in Germany were often underrepresented in major political offices. As a woman, she had to jump through many hurdles to reach her current position. Such hurdles that President George W. Bush did not have to face (Thompson & Lennartz 2006, pp. 99 – 108).

Merkels leadership style is very different from other leaders in the sense that she is not very authoritative (Ulrich 2017). Bush on the other hand brought about a dominant presence whenever he walked in the room (Gergen 2003). Even though Merkel herself is not so dominant

in nature, she still manages to grab the attention of everyone around her (Ulrich 2017). This can be contributed to four factors - her diplomacy, diligence, duty and determination (Lagarde 2019).

The starting point of Merkel's leadership is her ongoing commitment to bringing people together and seeking cooperation instead of confrontation (Lagarde 2019). Gergen (2003) states that George W. Bush was quite the opposite in this sense as he expected those not supporting him to steer clear from his path. Merkel also understands the importance of the multilateral system and how crucial it has been in helping billions of individual's live better lives. However in saying this, she does understand the certain limitations and challenges that come with this which is why Merkel has been putting in so much hard work over the course of many years to ensure there is a better multilateral system in place that benefits all (Lagarde 2019).

Secondly, Merkel shows a great deal of diligence when she is at work. For starters, she is always the most prepared out of everyone else in the room. She works through problems patiently and in an orderly fashion and comes up with solutions step by step. Along with this, she has a very strong sense of duty. She often follows this sense of duty and believes that some things are simply matters of the heart therefore, Europe is a matter of the heart for her (Lagarde 2019).

The last thing that ties Merkel's leadership together is her determination. Her main objective is to make sure she reaches that crucial compromise which at first will make most people uncomfortable but will help them in the long run. For example, during the early stages of the global financial crisis in 2017-2018, Merkel told American President George W. Bush that there was a necessity for an international response to this international crisis. Ultimately her continuous determination helped the world by finding a response and preventing the occurrence of another Great Depression (Lagarde 2019). In this instance, Bush needed some encouragement from Merkel. However, just like Merkel, he was also a very determined individual. Once he had his eyes on an objective, he would use all means to reach that goal and was not afraid to take risks even if it compromised his position as President (Gergen 2003).

Throughout Merkel's political career, there were many obstacles she had to face. At the beginning, there were three disadvantages she had to overcome. Firstly, she had no political background and no experience in that area. Secondly, since she grew up in East Germany, she felt like a foreigner when she had to suddenly help govern West Germany. Lastly, she joined the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) which was the most masculine party at the time. The only way Merkel could compensate for these three disadvantages was by constantly learning at a fast pace. She knew that she was not in a position to make any enemies since she had very few friends to begin with. Her most effective strategy was to understand and be reasonable (Ulrich 2017).

She has been the longest serving leader in the EU and is only one of two European leaders that has survived the Euro crisis. Since the initial outbreak of the crisis, she has led two coalition governments (Esch 2017, p. 227). Like other leaders, Merkel did not understand the severity of the crisis at the beginning (Helms et al. 2019, p. 354). Even after guiding her country through the EU crisis and the migration crisis, her position as chancellor was never challenged (Esch 2017, p. 227).

George W. Bush was put in the same boat as her when he also had to navigate his country through a crisis. The September 11 terrorist attacks that occurred have been regarded as one of

the biggest crises America has dealt with. In the aftermath of such a crisis, it is common ground for citizens to often experience an array of emotions and they are more than likely to turn to their leaders for hope. Before 9/11, people did not see George W. Bush as a charismatic and strong leader to turn to in times of crisis. During the first nine months of his presidency, there were a range of questions regarding his leadership and many did not think he would be able to handle the aftermath of 9/11. However, this drastically changed overnight. Prior to the terrorist attacks, only 51% were satisfied with Bush's performance however after the attack, the rating went up to 86%. This can be contributed to a change in the Presidents rhetoric in communicating with the public. The rhetoric he used in the following weeks after the attack used language that was linked to charismatic leadership. Additionally, the media also included more charismatic language when talking about the president. Taking all this into consideration, it shows that the crisis of 9/11 has changed the way citizens would see the president. Ultimately, facing such hardships throughout their terms have made both leaders stronger and better leaders for their nations (Bligh et al. 2004, pp. 211-227).

When comparing the public's perception of the two leaders, it is evident that they are very different. Most people view Angela Merkel in a very positive light with only some individuals having a slight negative attitude towards her. However, this was not the case of George W. Bush. People were either supportive of him or repulsed by him (Gergen 2003).

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for leaders to make mistakes during their time of leadership however, there are certain lessons that can be learnt from these mistakes in order to avoid them in the future. Lessons learnt from mistakes often leave a strong and permanent impact rather than lessons learnt from doing things right. Not only do these lessons give valuable insight for those in leadership positions, they can also be of use for those wishing to improve their character (Friedman 2001). Although Merkel's decision to have an open-door policy during the migrant crisis hailed her as a hero, it put a significant strain on the country. The large influx of immigrants caused an increase in violent crime and gave terror groups an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. Along with this, the rate of unemployment was high among newcomers. Since then, Merkel has closed the borders, but the damage had already been done (Cleppe 2018). Like Merkel, Bush also made an irreversible mistake that put a huge toll on his country. His war on terror strategy to stop terrorism did not go according to plan. His miscalculation cost America a lot of money and resources and eventually resulted in mass casualties (Pressman 2009, p. 159).

World leaders around the world have made their mark throughout history. There are specific characteristics that these people have which sets them apart from other individuals. Leaders such as Angela Merkel and George W. Bush both embody these traits to a certain extent. Despite both being very different from one another and sharing many differences, they are also similar in some aspects. Additionally, when their country was in crisis, they needed to lead their country through it and ended up making mistakes along the way which is not uncommon for any leader to make during such difficult times. The important thing is if these leaders have learnt from these mistakes in order to avoid making them again in the years to come.

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