

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS (LII312)

7. LEADER SKILLS

7.1. Identifying Features of Leaders

The past 40 years of working with managers in thousands of client companies, research has identified a number of key leadership qualities that effective managers in successful teams and organizations share. These are personal traits that are critical in determining a team leader's effectiveness, but should not be confused with the role or function that a manager must fulfill as part of their job. So, there are many ways of thinking about leadership and the identifying features of leaders. The following list presents some notable features of leaders;

- **Good leaders have emotional maturity**

Emotionally immature leaders feel that they have to have the answer to every situation, and that it isn't okay to *not* have the answer. However, emotionally mature leaders understand that not only is it impossible to know everything about everything, but they don't need to.

- **Good leaders are financially stable**

Although on first blush it may not be apparent how this can impact a leader's ability to lead their team, personal financial issues have a way of becoming extremely stressful and time consuming, and negatively impact decision-making ability.

- **Good leaders have technical knowledge**

As we've said, good leaders have emotional maturity so they can confidently surround themselves with others who will often know more than they do. However, this doesn't mean leaders don't need a good level of technical knowledge. A good team leader has at least a proficient knowledge of each area of their work so they can properly communicate their objectives and ideas with people.

- **Good leaders are passionate about the organization**

Any leader can be devoted to the organization, but the important distinction here is that a good leader shows that devotion with a passion. Internalizing it does not help anyone but themselves; instead, leaders set an example to their people – through words and actions – that the organization (and senior management) requires their respect.

- **Good leaders exercise creativity**

Creativity is often defined as the ability to bring something new or different into existence. Like many things in life, ‘exercising creativity’ is easier to talk about than it is to do. As a foundation, let’s differentiate management and leadership. Effective management is about the smooth operation of a well-defined unit, in essence the efficient maintenance of the status quo so as a result the business functions like clockwork. Leadership on the other hand requires going beyond the status quo, and through a process of innovation and change, developing new ways of creating value for customers.

- **Good leaders exercise good judgment**

Essential to having good judgment as a leader is to have a broad view in relation to the organization. In other words, an effective leader must understand how all parts of the company are interconnected and what the business implications will be when they make a decision or a change. They achieve this by having ‘well-ordered priorities’.

- **Good leaders have empathy**

Empathy is a crucial quality to being an effective leader because it has such a profound impact on how well you can communicate. That's because communication does not begin with being understood, but with understanding the other person.

- **Good leaders are great communicators**

Being a great communicator is a much more holistic approach than the common perception, and requires a lot of work and practice. Beginning with empathy, it also requires being clear about the purpose of your communication.

7.2. Setting Personality Goals

Writing down a goal is the first step to accomplishing an objective. However leaders may need to try a different approach in order to actually accomplish our goal. Typically, we set goals based on our “wants” or our “needs” and sometimes both. Successfully accomplishing goals can be done by basing goals on personality type, more specifically, on natural preferences. Our preferences explain how we (1) motivate or energize (2) gather information (3) make decisions and (4) organize our lives. Understanding our natural preferences helps us to realize, for example, that not clearing off our desk at the end of the day doesn’t mean we are disorganized. Whatever our preferences may be, it is important to also know that we can perform in our non-preference dimension. Remember that if you really want to challenge yourself, set goals based on your non-preferences. This will force you to explore ways to develop in areas you may typically avoid.

7.3. Affective Communication and Messaging Issues

Affective communication is the process through which people express feelings about things, themselves, and others. As Darlington suggests (2012), “Even with a genuine caring attitude, communication still can be unclear, inept, or misunderstood. This is where skill enters. Research shows that certain communication behaviors enable us to send messages more accurately and effectively.” In turn, this may result in more satisfying communication and better problem solving with a joint effort to find solutions that work for both parties. Individuals and families who use good communication skills to resolve conflict and differences build stronger, longer-lasting relationships. One of the skills we need in order to communicate effectively with others is being able to share our thoughts in a clear, honest, assertive way using “I” messages. Introduced in the 1970s, “I” messages are commonly referred to and encouraged in marriage and family relationship education and marital therapy. “I” messages are most simply explained as a way of expressing our thoughts and emotions about a specific experience or interaction using a soft voice and a statement that often begins with, “I feel...” This style of communication tells the listener that what is being said about the situation is based on personal experience and is not necessarily objective fact, leaving room for discussion. When used, “I” messages can be an effective tool in deescalating defensiveness and improving communication within

relationships. In contrast, statements that begin with “you” tend to evoke defensiveness and an escalation of emotions rather than a desire to compromise and problem solve. An important part of “I” messages is being able to express our own thoughts and emotional experiences with the issue at hand. In the heat of the moment, it may not be easy to logically identify what we think and feel, and we may need to take some time away from our partner and the situation to calm down and think rationally about our emotional responses. Taking the time to reflect and accurately identify our thoughts and feelings helps us more accurately express them to others, and in turn, we can better discuss issues and manage conflicts in our relationships. Although we only have control over our own words and actions, using “I” messages can help decrease misunderstandings, defensiveness, and the potential to belittle or demean others while discussing conflicting points of view.

7.4. Attitude Changes

How can we change attitudes? Consider that depending on an individual’s communication skills, it is possible to express thoughts and emotions using a soft voice and talk about conflicting opinions in a time and place away from the escalated emotions. In doing so, we can use our calm demeanor and tone of voice to help melt away our partner’s possible negative emotions and exchange solutions that will best meet everyone’s needs. For many individuals, talking about heated issues in person can be very challenging since body language and tone of voice sometimes get in the way of the words, confusing the message we intend to share. In these situations, it may be better to communicate some of your thoughts and feelings through words only, perhaps by writing a letter or by talking on the phone. In this way, we may be more effective using “I” messages to convey our thoughts and emotions with specific reasons why we are feeling this way.

7.4.1. Personal Attitudes Towards Change

We’ve moved into a time where change is happening all around us. In fact, it seems to be constant nowadays. Part of learning to be resilient at work is learning how to handle change as it occurs. Learning to recognize the phases of change and ways to deal with them can help us work more effectively with change as it occurs. Innovation is equated with change. Change is happening all the time whether we are aware of it or not. What one can observe and do in the context of a novel occurrence or insight might very well lead to innovation. If organizations can boost their "return on innovation" by investing more in good implementations

rather than merely focusing on the innovation results, then that's where their efforts and focus should go. Changes are needed in terms of process, organizational structure, management and so on. When speaking about leadership or innovation, the concern is about accomplishing some sustainable change whether large or small, continuous or breakthrough. Innovation takes place at different levels from modest improvements on an existing product or process to dramatic and even historically significant breakthroughs in how we relate to the world. In all cases, the capacity to innovate will be a function of commitments, what is to be accomplished and circumstances people perceive to be in. When people react positively, they are in a position to innovate and will do so with enthusiasm that could be commemorated with leaders who understand the need for such changes.

7.4.2. Creative Learning

Creative leadership is the concept that leaders who exhibit imaginative and inventive qualities are better able to impact individuals who work underneath them or who look to them for guidance. The concept also maintains that more creative leaders are better equipped to find unique solutions to complicated problems. In addition, this style of leadership is often driven by the notion that people can become more effective leaders if they are able to think and perform in original and innovative ways. In recent years, creative leadership development has been extended to managers and other leaders within companies. Some companies have embraced the idea of creative leadership, believing that it will ultimately improve employee productivity and drive bottom lines. Many of these companies have invested in courses or activities that will help produce more leaders who are able to think outside the box. For example, some companies promote corporate leadership by sending managers and supervisors to leadership training courses and leadership coaching programs. Other companies use team building exercises to promote creative leadership and better communication skills. Defining whether a person has creative leadership skills can be difficult, as it can vary depending on the situation. As a general rule, however, creative leaders are skilled at generating a great deal of ideas. Some of these ideas may be original while others may simply be different ways to reinvent the wheel. These leaders usually seek out ways to test their ideas, and they are open to suggestions for improvement.

7.4.3. Proactivity and Flexibility

What does it mean to be proactive? Proactive behavior is defined as self-directed and future-focused action in an organization, in which the individual aims to bring about change, including change to the situation and/or change within oneself. This definition aligns with lay definitions, which highlight both a future focus (anticipation) and a change focus (taking control). Being proactive is also thought of as “creating or controlling a situation by taking the initiative and anticipating events or problems, rather than just reacting to them after they have occurred, thus innovative, tending to make things happen. As Bindl states (in press), “Moreover, careers are increasingly boundary less, and not confined to one organization, requiring individuals to take charge of their own careers. Thus, for both theoretical and practical reasons, a review on proactivity is timely.” Proactive behavior is in part a function of individual attributes, but is also influenced, shaped and constrained by the work context (e.g., the degree of job autonomy provided). Traditionally, work psychology has focused on work characteristics to which employees adjust in order to perform and employees are committed to goals that are provided by the organization, and on social structures and cultures at work to which new employees need to adapt. Today it may be better to focus on the research of ‘active’ behavior which focuses on how employees change the characteristics of their job and situation.

7.4.4. Learning and Resistances

The job of leadership is never ending. Consider the research of Nodeson (et. al.) who suggests (2012), “Charismatic leaders are not born, but developed through a never ending process of self-study, education, training and experience. All situations are unique and varied by different reasons.” Employee resistance is one of the situations which leaders have been faced in industry nowadays. Leaders have to use their judgment to decide the best course of action and leadership style to confront employees who are so called resistant. Resistance happens when leaders introduce new things for the organization and abandon the traditional way of doing things. Basically people might see the benefits gained from the innovation or new technology and ignored the negative impact to employees. There are suggestions to manage new learning/resistance at the workplace;

1. Do change management right the first time

Much of the resistance faced by projects can be avoided if effective change management is applied on the project from the very beginning. While resistance is the normal human reaction in times of change, good change management can mitigate much of this resistance.

2. Expect it

Do not be surprised by resistance! Even if the solution a project presents is a wonderful improvement to a problem that has been plaguing employees, there will still be resistance to change.

3. Address it formally

Managing resistance should not be solely a reactive tactic for change management practitioners. There are many proactive steps that can be used to address and mitigate resistance that should be part of the change management approach on a project.

- **In Phase 1 - Preparing for change:** During the creation of the change management strategy, anticipated points of resistance and special tactics are generated based on the readiness assessments that are part of this phase.
- **In Phase 2 - Managing change:** The resistance management plan is one of the five possible change management plans created - along with the communication plan, sponsorship roadmap, coaching plan and training plan.
- **In Phase 3 - Reinforcing change:** In the final phase of the process, feedback is collected to understand employee adoption and compliance with the new workflows and processes prescribed by the change. Evaluating this feedback allows the team to identify gaps and react to resistance that may still be occurring.

4. Identify the root causes

Managing resistance is ineffective when it simply focuses on the symptoms. To be effective at managing resistance, you must look deeper into what is ultimately causing the resistance. Effective resistance management requires identification of the root causes of resistance and understanding why someone is resistant, not simply how that resistance is manifesting itself.

5. Engage the "right" resistance managers

The "right" resistance managers in an organization are the senior leaders, middle managers and front-line supervisors. The change management team, as a unit, are not effective resistance managers. Ultimately, it takes action by leadership in an

organization to manage resistance. At a high level, senior leaders can help to mitigate resistance by making a compelling case for the need for change and by demonstrating their commitment to a change. Employees look to and listen to senior leaders when they are deciding if a change is important and they will judge what they hear and what they see from this group. If senior leaders are not committed to a change or waver in their support, employees will judge the change as unimportant and resist the change.

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