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Leadership Skills

Leadership is the process of setting the direction and ensuring that the members of the leader's organization or team give of their best to achieve the desired result.

What leadership involves

Leaders have three essential roles. They should:

- *Define the task* – they make it quite clear what the group is expected to do.

- *Achieve the task* – that is why the group exists. Leaders ensure that the group's purpose is fulfilled. If it is not, the result is frustration, disharmony, criticism, and eventually perhaps disintegration of the group.

- *Maintain effective relationships* – between themselves and the members of the group, and between the people within the group. These relationships are effective if they contribute to achieving the task. They can be divided into those concerned with the team and its morale and sense of common purpose, and those concerned with individuals and how they are motivated.

These roles can be described in a number of ways, as discussed below.

The John Adair three circle model

John Adair (1973), the leading British expert on leadership, explained that demands on leaders are best expressed as three areas of need which they must satisfy. These are:

- task needs – to get the job done;
- individual needs – to harmonize the needs of the individual with the needs of the task and the group;
- group maintenance needs – to build and maintain team spirit.
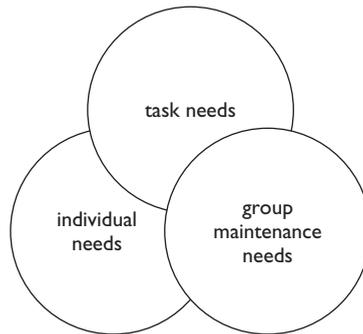
Figure 19.1   Leadership needs

As shown in Figure 19.1, he modelled these demands as three interlocking circles.

This model suggests that the task, individual and group needs are interdependent. Satisfying task needs will also satisfy group and individual needs. Task needs, however, cannot be met unless attention is paid to individual and group needs, and looking after individual needs will also contribute to satisfying group needs and vice versa. There is a danger in becoming so task-oriented that you ignore individual and group or team needs. It is just as dangerous to be too people-oriented, focusing on meeting individual or group needs at the expense of the task. The best leaders are those who keep these three needs satisfied and in balance according to the demands of the situation.

The path–goal model

The path–goal model states that leaders are there to define the path that should be followed by their team in order to achieve its goals. It is the leader's job to guide and help team members to select the best paths towards achieving their own goals and those of the group.

The Welch way

Jack Welch, former chief executive of General Electric, has his own prescription for leadership. He wrote (2007):

> *Being a leader changes everything. Before you are a leader success is all about you –*
> *your performance, contributions and solutions. Once you become a leader, success is all*
> *about growing others. It's about making the people who work for you smarter, bigger*
> *and bolder. Nothing you do as an individual matters, except how you nurture and*

support your team and increase their self-confidence. Your success as a leader will come not from what you do, but from the reflected glory of your team.

This is in line with the belief expressed by Charles Handy (1994) that the post-heroic leader has come to the fore: someone who 'asks how every problem can be solved in a way that develops other people's capacity to handle it'. The Welch way also draws attention to the well-known phenomenon of people who are excellent at their non-managerial job but fail when they are promoted, for example successful sales representatives who become unsuccessful sales managers.

Leaders and followers

Successful leaders depend on followers who want to feel that they are being led in the right direction. They need to know where they stand, where they are going and what is in it for them. They want to feel that it is all worthwhile.

Kelley (1991) suggested that the role of the follower should be studied as carefully as that of the leader. Leaders need effective followers. Grint (2005) pointed out that 'the trick of the leader is to develop followers who privately resolve the problems leaders have caused or cannot resolve, but publicly deny their intervention'.

Ulrich's leadership brand

Ulrich and Smallwood (2007) emphasized that businesses are responsible for establishing a leadership brand as an organizational capability by introducing and maintaining processes that help leaders to grow and develop. The leadership brand is pervasive through all levels of leadership in the organization. It endures by not being tied to one person or a strategic era. Every leader must contribute to the creation of this leadership brand, which defines their identity as leaders, translates customer expectations into employee behaviours, and outlasts them.

A leadership brand statement is necessary. It is developed using the following steps:

1. Start by defining the organization's strategy.

2. Translate the strategy into the firm's brand.

3. Identify desired outcomes for employees, customers and investors.

4. Define the desired leadership code.

5. Combine attributes and results into a leadership brand statement.

6. Create a set of expectations based on the leadership brand statement.

Leadership styles

There are many styles of leadership, and no one style is necessarily better than the other in any situation. Leaders can be classified as:

- *Charismatic/non-charismatic.* Charismatic leaders rely on their personality, their inspirational qualities and their 'aura'. They are visionary leaders who are achievement-oriented, calculated risk takers and good communicators. Non-charismatic leaders rely mainly on their know-how (authority goes to the person who knows), their quiet confidence and their cool, analytical approach to dealing with problems.

- *Autocratic/democratic.* Autocratic leaders impose their decisions, using their position to force people to do as they are told. Democratic leaders encourage people to participate and involve themselves in decision-taking.

- *Enabler/controller.* Enablers inspire people with their vision of the future and empower them to accomplish team goals. Controllers command people to obtain their compliance.

- *Transactional/transformational.* Transactional leaders trade money, jobs and security for compliance. Transformational leaders motivate people to strive for higher-level goals.

There is no such thing as an ideal leadership style. The situation in which leaders and their teams function will influence the approaches that leaders adopt. It all depends. The factors affecting the degree to which a style is appropriate are the type of organization, the nature of the task, the characteristics of the group, and importantly, the personality of the leader.

An achievement-oriented approach may be appropriate when expectations of the results the team has to produce are high and team members can be encouraged to rise to the occasion.

A task-oriented approach (autocratic, controlling, directive) may be required in emergency or crisis situations. It can work, but not always well, when the leader has power, formal backing and a relatively well-structured task. In these circumstances some but not all groups may be more ready to be directed and told what to do, although a more democratic approach can work better. In less well-structured or ambiguous situations, where results depend on the group working well together with a common sense of purpose, leaders who are concerned with maintaining good relationships (democratic, participative or supportive) are more likely to obtain good results.

Good leaders are capable of flexing their style to meet the demands of the situation. Normally democratic or participative leaders may have to shift into more of a directive mode when faced with a crisis, but they make clear what they are doing and why. Poor leaders change their style arbitrarily, so that their team members are confused and do not know what to expect next.

Effective leaders may also flex their style when dealing with individual team members according to their characteristics. Some people need more positive directions than others. Others respond best if they are involved in decision making with their boss. But there is a limit to the degree of flexibility that should be used. It is unwise to differentiate too much between the ways in which individuals are treated or to be inconsistent in your approach.

The kind of leadership you exercise will indeed be related to the nature of the task and the people being led. But it also depends on the context and, of course, on the leaders themselves. If you have a natural leadership style and it works you should be careful about changing it arbitrarily or substantially: modification yes, to a degree; transformation, no. And you can learn how to improve it as discussed towards the end of this chapter so that it fits the demands of the situation.

What makes a good leader

What makes a good leader? There is no universal answer to this question. But Lao-Tzu in the 6th century BC had a pretty good stab at it:

> *A leader is best*
> *When people barely know that he exists.*
> *Not so good when people obey and acclaim him.*
> *Worst when they despise him.*
> *Fail to honour people, they fail to honour you.*
> *But a good leader who talks little,*
> *When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,*
> *They will all say, 'We did this ourselves.'*

More recent thinking about leadership has indicated that good leaders are confident and know where they want to go and what they want to do. They have the ability to take charge, convey their vision to their team, get their team members into action and ensure that they achieve their agreed goals. They are trustworthy, effective at influencing people, and earn the respect of their team. They are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and are skilled at understanding the needs, attitudes and perspectives of team members. They appreciate the advantages of consulting and involving people in decision making. They can switch flexibly from one leadership style to another to meet the demands of different situations and people.

Leadership and emotional intelligence

According to Goleman (2001), emotional intelligence (defined in Chapter 8) is a critical ingredient in leadership. He claimed that effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they

have a high degree of emotional intelligence, which plays an increasingly important part at higher levels in organizations where differences in technical skills are of negligible importance. Although doubts have been expressed about Goleman's theory (see Chapter 8), it is obvious that leaders have to be good at relating to people, and emotional intelligence is a convenient label to attach to the skills involved.

Developing leadership skills

It is often said that leaders are born, not made. This is a rather discouraging statement for those who are not leaders by birthright. It may be true to the extent that some exceptional people seem to be visionaries, have built-in charisma and a natural ability to impose their personality on others. However, even they have probably to develop and hone these qualities when confronted with a situation demanding leadership. Ordinary mortals need not despair. They too can build on their natural capacities and develop their leadership abilities. A 10-point plan for doing this is given below.

1. Understand what is meant by leadership.

2. Appreciate the different leadership styles available.

3. Assess what you believe to be your fundamental leadership style.

4. Get other people, colleagues and indeed your own team members, to tell you what they think your leadership style is and how well it works.

5. In the light of this information, consider what you need to do and can do to modify your style, bearing in mind that you have to go on being the same person. In other words, your style should still be a natural one.

6. Think about the typical situations and problems with which you are confronted as a leader. Will your leadership style, modified as necessary, be appropriate for all of them? If not, can you think of any of those situations where a different style would have been better? If so, think about what you need to do to be able to flex your style as necessary without appearing to be inconsistent to your team.

7. Examine the various explanations of the qualities that make a good leader, and assess your own performance using the checklists set out below. Decide what you need to do – what you can do – about any weaknesses.

8. Think about or observe any managers whom you have worked for or with.

9. Assess each of them using the checklist.

10. Consider what you can learn from them about effective and less-effective leadership behaviours. In the light of this, assess where you could usefully modify your own leadership behaviours.

Leadership checklists

Task

- What needs to be done and why?
- What results have to be achieved and by when?
- What problems have to be overcome?
- To what extent are these problems straightforward?
- Is there a crisis situation?
- What has to be done now to deal with the crisis?
- What are these priorities?
- What pressures are likely to be exerted?

Individuals

- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What are likely to be the best ways of motivating them?
- What tasks are they best at doing?
- Is there scope to increase flexibility by developing new skills?
- How well do they perform in achieving targets and performance standards?
- To what extent can they manage their own performance and development?
- Are there any areas where there is a need to develop skill or competence?
- How can I provide them with the sort of support and guidance which will improve their performance?

Teams

- How well is the team organized?
- Does the team work well together?
- How can the commitment and motivation of the team be achieved?
- What is the team good and not so good at doing?
- What can I do to improve the performance of the team?

- Are team members flexible – capable of carrying out different tasks?

- To what extent can the team manage its own performance?

- Is there scope to empower the team so that it can take on greater responsibility for setting standards, monitoring performance and taking corrective action?

- Can the team be encouraged to work together to produce ideas for improving performance?

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