

Building Deliberate Leadership

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The leadership modern organizations need to achieve their strategic vision is quite different from the simplistic “solo hero”, “great man”, natural leadership model popular in so many management books, and in the hearts of so many American managers. Rather, they need to develop in all employees the capacity for **Deliberate Leadership**, which allows them to adapt their approach as necessary to the situation and the individuals whose followership they want to invoke. Integral to this “leadership development” is further developing the ability to have strategic, technical, and ethical insights worth following, and the ability to trigger these insights in others.

Invoking Followership.

In a very real sense, there is no such thing as a person “having” leadership. People do have a process of followership, of giving their trust to certain people on certain issues. When someone invokes that followership response, we call the interaction leadership. The critical issue is that people differ greatly in what triggers their followership. Some trust confidence, others trust humility. Some trust clear speaking, others trust nuanced sensitivity to complexity. Some prefer a remote authority figure while others prefer to be influenced through close personal relationships. Followership dynamics differ greatly across cultures, genders, even academic backgrounds (invoking the followership of engineers is generally quite different from invoking the followership of sales professionals). Deliberate leadership becomes possible as “leaders in development” learn concepts and behaviors they can experiment with to invoke the followership of others. For many technically expert individuals, this means learning more about human behavior and the impact that their own actions have on others.

Technical Leadership.

In this sense, leadership is not only a superior-subordinate relationship, but the far more important colleague-colleague relationship. Technical experts can only

contribute to success to the extent that they invoke trust and followership in their colleagues -- an obvious example of leadership dynamics. Great competence hidden behind an appearance that does not inspire trust is ignored, and therefore useless to the organization. When working cross-functionally we must trust colleagues whose work we cannot check in detail, therefore whose competence we can not assess technically. (If we can check their calculations, it isn't leadership and trust.) Therefore, people must use social processes to decide who to follow (often unconsciously), so even those who choose the technical ladder of development need to learn more about the impact that their style of communication might be having on others. The confident, aggressive style that might have impressed people in one's own field may convince people from other areas that you are arrogant and untrustworthy. Of course it is also critical that Technical Leaders be supported in constantly upgrading and updating their knowledge, while having a clear idea of areas in which they are less competent.

Changing Followership.

One key task of leaders is to shift the followership patterns of colleagues and subordinates, to help them develop trust more appropriately. Employees must learn to expand their expectations, to see reasons to trust people whose behavior does not fit their original personal and cultural expectations. Those who tend to listen to the clear and loud must learn to appreciate the quiet and nuanced, and vice versa. As leaders shift the perspectives of others and as those people lead by example, better collaboration patterns can spread across the organization.

Becoming more yourself.

Many people attempting to increase their leadership believe that they must stop being themselves and become more like other people they see as “leaders”. A quiet engineer might try to dress and act more flamboyantly to

impress creative marketing types. This “faking it” process is very difficult to maintain for long, and often makes people give up on leadership. In every situation needing leadership, there are a variety of ways to invoke the needed followership, which allows leaders to choose an approach which is more like themselves. Even when it is necessary to move beyond habitual behaviors and styles, leaders need to realize that they already have these competencies, and merely need to call them forth as needed. The person who prefers to live as a mouse has the inner ability to roar like a lion when it is needed.

Insight worth following.

Because it is possible for con men, charlatans, and idiots to trigger the followership response, it is important that people being trained for deliberate leadership actually are contributing insights worth following. In the same way that it is important that those invoking followership in technical areas actually have technical expertise, people preparing to exercise deliberate leadership in organizations and on strategic projects should be prepared to contribute ethical, strategic, and creative perspectives on issues, projects, designs, and operations. Any leadership development program should include or be accompanied by resources to develop ethical thinking, strategic thinking, and creative thinking. It is critical that such programs and resources are responsive to the complexities actually faced by managers and projects. For example, many ethics courses attempt to teach a specific set of values, while managers must work in areas where not only do laws, ethics, and morals conflict, but they are subject to multiple legal jurisdictions, involve multiple professions with conflicting ethics, and are responsive to people from diverse cultures whose moral perspectives conflict. Strategic thinking must prepare people to look far to the future, dealing with many conflicting goals and realities. In addition, most creativity programs, focused on “out of the box” thinking and solo creative heroes, are inadequate preparation for the kinds of deep and complex cross-functional creativity needed for the projects global companies need to succeed.

Self-selection and self-assessment.

Ethical and pragmatic issues lead many experts to ensure that leadership competency assessments are used by individuals to guide their own development, not as a tool for bosses and the human resource department to make

career decisions. Real-world results tend to be the best guide to promotion and transfer, because people can use quite different skills and approaches to succeed in deliberate leadership. The leadership needs of modern global companies are many and diverse, so no one “ideal” of leadership can guide leadership development. The leader who is ideal for a position in one industry, technology, or country might be totally incapable of invoking followership in another area. As the managers and executives grow in their understanding of leadership dynamics and possibilities they will be more and more successful in developing appropriate leadership in their subordinates and colleagues, and gradually spread a more appropriate pattern of followership across the company, permitting a quantum leap in the effectiveness of collaboration and operations.

A Development Curriculum

Each potential leader starts with different developmental needs, but each needs to possess adequate competency and skills in:

- { Perceiving and understanding human behavior
- { Understanding cultural differences
- { Awareness of ones own behavior and its impact on others
- { Presenting facts, values, and arguments in a variety of ways to invoke the followership of people of different styles.
- { A process of Ethical and Value Based Management Decision Making that responds to conflicting requirements of multiple legal venues, multiple involved professions, and stakeholders of conflicting moral values.
- { The ability to plan and lead complex creativity on complicated issues.
- { The ability to think complexly and strategically about technical and business issues.

Even more important than the educational processes are the efforts of the “leaders in development” to share the same ideas, knowledge, and behaviors across an organization. As the followership dynamics and leadership modeling of the organization proceeds, the culture should become a self-sustaining leadership development process.