

The New Leaders – Transforming the art of leadership into the science of results

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Great leadership works through emotions. When leaders drive emotions positively, they bring out everyone's best. The authors call this resonance. On the other hand, when emotions are driven negatively, it leads to dissonance.

Emotions are important because of the open loop nature of the limbic system. Unlike a closed loop system which is self regulating, an open loop system depends largely on external sources to manage itself. People rely on connections with each other for their emotional stability. Especially, people tend to take emotional cues from their leaders.

Leaders tend to speak more. They are also observed more. In short, leaders set the emotional standard of the organization. A leader's moods and emotions send strong signals across the organization.

Negative emotions must be controlled. Anger, anxiety and a sense of futility can powerfully disrupt work and hijack attention from the task at hand. Negative emotions not only erode our mental abilities but also make people emotionally less intelligent. A person who is upset finds it difficult to be empathic as she has trouble in reading the emotions of others around them.

On the other hand, positive emotions bring out the best in people. They become more optimistic about their ability to reach their goal. Their creativity is enhanced. They become more helpful.

In short, the climate, i.e. how people feel about working at a company, can account for a significant part of the company's business performance. In turn, how employees perceive the organizational climate can be traced to the actions of the leader.

When leadership is resonant, followers become upbeat and enthusiastic and vibrate with the leaders. Resonance amplifies the emotional impact of leadership. When leadership is dissonant, people have a sense of being continually off key. Dissonant leaders lack empathy and also tend to transmit emotional tones that resound most often in a negative register. Dissonant leaders can range from the "abusive tyrant, who bawls out and humiliates people, to the manipulative sociopath." Some dissonant leaders are more subtle. They use a surface charm or social polish, to mislead and manipulate.

Gifted leadership involves a combination of feeling and thought. In many situations, especially during stress or emergency, the emotional centers command the rest of the brain.

Emotional Intelligence has four components:

- a) **Self Awareness:** This means having a deep understanding of one's strengths, limitations, values and motives. People with high self awareness are honest with themselves about themselves. They are realistic, neither overly self critical nor excessively optimistic. Self reflection and thoughtfulness are two common attributes found in these people. Such people reflect things over and do not react impulsively.
- b) **Self Management:** This covers attributes like emotional self control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative and optimism. Self management is needed to control our feelings, facilitate mental clarity and provide controlled energy.
- c) **Social Awareness:** Includes empathy, organizational awareness and ability to serve client/customer needs. By being attuned to how others feel, a leader can say and do what is appropriate, to calm fears, assuage anger or join in good spirits. Empathy includes easy approachability, ability to listen and responding suitably. Empathy is often the key to retaining talent.
- d) **Relationship Management:** This involves influencing, developing others, change management, conflict management, building bonds and teamwork. Handling relationships is about moving people in the right direction.

Effective leaders switch leadership styles depending on the situation. The various leadership styles are:

- a) **Visionary:** This kind of leadership moves people towards shared dreams. Visionary leaders help people to see how their work fits into the big picture. People get the feeling that their work matters and they also understand why. To articulate a truly inspirational vision, the leader must be able to sense how others feel and understand their perspectives. This kind of leadership style is particularly effective when the business is badly in need of a new vision or has to be turned around.
- b) **Coaching:** Coaching focuses on personal development rather than accomplishing tasks. Yet the style leads to an outstandingly positive emotional response and better results, almost irrespective of the other styles, a leader employs. Through personal conversations with employees, coaching leaders establish rapport and trust. Such leaders delegate and give employees challenging assignments that stretch them. These leaders are tolerant towards failures. This style of leadership is most effective with employees who show more initiative and want more professional development. Good coaches effectively communicate a belief in people's potential and an expectation that they can do their best.
- c) **Affiliative:** Affiliative leaders value people and their feelings, put less emphasis on accomplishing tasks and goals and more on the emotional needs of employees. They keep people happy, emphasise harmony and build team resonance.

- d) Democratic: A democratic approach is effective when the leader is uncertain about what direction to take and needs ideas from people around. The democratic style revolves around teamwork, collaboration, conflict management and influence. Such leaders are true collaborators. They work more as team members and less as top down leaders. They are good at quelling conflict and creating a sense of harmony.
- e) Pace-setting: This type of leader sets high standards of performance and is obsessive about doing things better and faster. If applied injudiciously, or excessively, this kind of a leadership style can leave employees feeling pushed too hard by the various demands made by the leader. Pace setters are often so focused on goals that people orientation takes the backseat. Such leaders look for ways to keep improving performance.
- f) Commanding: Such leaders expect immediate compliance with orders, without explaining the reasons behind them. If subordinates fail to follow orders, the leaders resort to threats. Such leaders do not delegate authority. They seek tight control of an situation and monitor it studiously. As praise is uncommon while criticism is free, commanding leaders erode people's spirits and the pride and satisfaction they take in their work. People tend to become alienated from their jobs. Commanding leadership revolves around influence, achievement and initiative. This kind of leadership style may be appropriate while managing a crisis. It can also be useful while dealing with problem employees. This kind of leadership may go off track in the absence of self awareness, emotional self control and empathy.

According to the authors, the more of the six styles a leader can deploy, the better. Leaders who have mastered four or more styles tend to be the most effective. Effective leaders scan people individually and in groups and adjust their style suitably. They are good at the four resonance building styles – Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative and Democratic. They also use the pace setting and commanding styles at times but with a dose of self discipline that ensures that they control the impulse to be impatient, get angry, or attack character.

Leaders have more trouble than anybody else when it comes to receiving feedback. People tend to withhold important information, especially when it is unpleasant, from senior leaders. Sometimes leaders do not encourage feedback not because they are egoistic but because they genuinely believe they cannot change.

The crux of leadership is self directed learning. People must develop a strong image of the ideal self and an accurate picture of the real self. Self directed learning involves five major discoveries:

- Uncover the ideal self
- Discover who you actually are now
- Plan of action to build on strengths and move towards the idea

- Experimenting with and practicing new behaviours, thoughts and feelings
- Developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible

Values play an important role in uncovering the ideal self. A person's philosophy influences the way she determines values. A pragmatic philosophy revolves around the worth of an idea, effort, person or organization. The central theme of an intellectual philosophy is the desire to understand people, things and the world by constructing an image of how they work. A humanistic philosophy emphasizes personal relationships and evaluates the worth of an activity in terms of how it affects close relations.

Leadership development plans built around learning rather than outcomes have been found to be the most effective. The best learning agenda is one which enables a leader to focus on what the person wants to become rather than on someone else's idea of what he should be. Goals should build on one's strengths, not on one's weaknesses. They should be a person's own, not goals that someone else has imposed. The agenda should be flexible, feasible and suit the person's learning style. The more personal the commitment to learning goals, the more likely we are to achieve them.

There can be different kinds of planning styles. Directional or visionary planners are good at crafting a picture of a meaningful, distant future stake, grounded in values, beliefs and a sense of what is important in life. Goal oriented planners get what they go after. Action oriented plans focus a lot on a high level of accomplishment in the short run.

There can be different approaches to learning:

- Concrete experience: Having an experience that allows people to see and feel what it is like.
- Reflection: Thinking about experiences
- Model Building: Coming up with a theory that makes sense of what they observe
- Trial-and-error learning: Trying something out by actively experimenting with a new approach

Each time people repeat something, the neural connections for that habit become stronger. This is called implicit learning. For the most part, the brain masters the competencies of leadership through implicit learning. It is important to channelise this implicit learning to make it more effective. That involves bringing bad habits into awareness, consciously practicing a better way and realizing that behavior at every opportunity until it becomes automatic. The key to learning new habits lies in constant practice until one becomes a master.

It is important to leverage naturally occurring situations to generate new learning opportunities. This is called stealth learning. Mental rehearsal is also a useful way to

generate opportunities for practicing leadership abilities. Leadership success is more likely if we can picture ourselves achieving the ideal state and maintaining that focus. The brain can motivate us by carrying an image of where we are going and how we will feel when we get there.

A group's emotional intelligence requires the same capabilities that an emotionally intelligent individual expresses. Groups have moods and needs and they act collectively in the group. Leaders must understand how they are feeling and be alert for important signals.

Employee surveys rarely tap "the feelings and complex norms that lie below the surface". On the other hand "dynamic inquiry" which involves focused conversations and open ended questions, is a better technique, for getting at people's feelings. From these initial conversations, themes emerge that can be explored further to understand the emotional reality of the organization. Unlike surveys, dynamic inquiry starts a conversation that has momentum of its own.

Discovering the emotional reality of the organization involves the following:

- Respect the group's values and the organization's integrity
- Slow down in order to speed up. The shotgun approach to change does not work.
- Top leadership commitment is important. At the same time, a bottom up strategy is needed to ensure that everyone is attuned to the change. Conversations must be held throughout the organization to understand what is working and what is not.
- To formulate a resonant vision, leaders must pay attention to their own feelings as well as the feelings of those around.
- A compelling vision that touches people's hearts.
- The focus should first be on people and emotional bonds and then only on strategy.
- Vision must be turned into action. Leaders should demonstrate by their own actions that they are serious about the vision. In addition, appropriate organizational structure, changing relationship norms, systems, etc must be put in place.
- Managing the myths, legends and the symbols of the office.

To be effective, leadership development initiatives must take into account that change must penetrate three levels of the organization – the individuals, the teams and the organization's culture. The development processes must create a safe space for learning, making it challenging but not too risky. These processes must focus both on emotional and intellectual learning. They must build on active, participatory work,

action learning and coaching where people use what they are learning to diagnose and solve real problems in their organizations. They must leverage experiential learning.

Conclusion

Emotions matter tremendously for leadership. Emotional intelligence offers the essential competencies for resonant leadership. These abilities must be cultivated and strengthened both at the individual and organizational level. Leaders must be able to manage their own emotions in the face of drastic change. Leaders must get on top of anxiety which impedes the brain's ability to understand and respond and fear which can cripple decision making. Emotionally intelligent leaders are good at managing their disruptive emotions. They keep their focus, thinking clearly under pressure. They are prepared to change before a crisis. Even during tumultuous times, they can visualize a brighter future, communicate that vision with resonance and lead the way. Emotionally intelligent leaders create a climate of enthusiasm and flexibility where people feel most innovative and give their best.