



Aalto University
School of Business

Role of communication in leading and managing people at work

18.9.2020

Agenda

- Role of communication in traditional and alternative leadership theories
- Communication in Team leadership
- "Demonstrating leadership" through communication: leadership skills and practice

- Objective
 - To learn to see leadership as a communicative phenomenon

For starters

- Think of some situation where you came across, saw or witnessed or experienced or exercised leadership/leading in some way.
- Write it down: describe just briefly what happened and who were the participants in the action
- Why was it an act of leadership?
- Is it an example of "good" or "bad" leadership?
- **5 minutes**

Managing organizations and leading people: imperatives of the 21st century

Due to economic, organizational, global, generational, and technological development and changes:

Imperative for dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and openness

(e.g. Groysberg, B. & Slind, M. (2012) Leadership Is a Conversation. *Harvard Business Review*.)

Transformational leadership style required

Transformational and transactional leadership

• Transformational

- Focus on employees' intrinsic needs in order to inspire them.
- Sharing power and responsibility to the employees
 - *Characterizing behaviors*
 - Sensitivity, listening to followers, encouraging followers, communicating and inspiring employees to be part of organizational vision; "using" charisma to influence

• Transactional (managerial)

- Transactional approach focuses on organizing, supervising, directing, monitoring, controlling, rewarding, punishing
 - *Characterizing behaviors:*
 - Action-orientation, directiveness, "thinking inside the box" and within and in terms of the existing system

Bass, B. M. (1998). Transformational leadership: Industrial, military and educational impact. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bass, B. M. & Avolio, B. J. (1994). Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership . Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Leadership theories and the role of communication in them

- **Cognitive Traits theory** (most influential leadership theory)
 - Some people *have* special characteristics (“traits”) that make them leaders. (“Leaders are born, not made”), some important traits include ‘intelligence’, ‘self-confidence’, ‘determination’, ‘honesty’, ‘sociableness’, ‘charisma’
 - *E.g. personality testing (suitability for leadership role) is derived from traits theory*
- **Skills theory:**
 - A leader needs abilities in order to be effective
 - These skills can be learned and developed (difference with trait theory)
- **Behavioral theory:** Leaders’ behaviors or styles (that can be learned) will make an effective leadership.
 - Two basic styles of leaders: Task-oriented style (focusing on how employees accomplish their tasks/work; Relationship-oriented style: (focusing on employees’ social needs and environment).

..cont'd

- **Situational theory:** Effective leadership depends on the proper fit between: (1) leaders' style, (2) employee readiness/need
 - Leaders assess the readiness/situation of their employees to determine which of the four leadership styles is suitable: Directing, Coaching, Supporting style, Delegating style
- **Path-Goal theory:** Effective leaders perform two functions:
 - Identifying the path to employees and showing its direction to achieve their goals
 - Removing obstacles on the path and providing support
- **Leader-Member Exchange theory:** focuses on the two-way (dyadic) relationship between leaders and followers.
 - LMX suggests that leaders develop an exchange with each of their subordinates, and that the quality of exchange relationships influences the members' responsibility, decisions, and access to resources and performance

Other approaches (and criticism against dominant theories)

- **Relational leadership:** We should look into interaction, the "doing together" of leadership
- **Emergent leadership:** Leadership is not pre-given to the situation, it is like power, something that can be used by anyone (formal leaders, emergent leaders)
- **Leadership as practice:** To find and understand leadership, we should look into real practices where it is exercised
- **Social construction of leadership:** Leadership as co-constructed in social interaction and in language

All these different approaches challenge **the leader-centric view** and the **cognitive psychology's dominance** of leadership/managerial theories



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Team leadership



Team leadership

- A special area of leadership, focusing on team's and its members' interaction and task-related behaviour
- Crucially important questions for team leadership
 - How to make teams work?
 - How to – individually – contribute to the benefit of the team?
 - How to lead the team whether as a designated or an emergent leader?

**All answers point to
the important role of
communication**

Team leadership, cont'd

- Needed skills:
 - **Technical skills:** communicating about technical matters with team members from potentially diverse backgrounds
 - **Administrative skills:** planning and organizing project activities, selecting members, and handling budgeting and financial responsibilities (knowledge of project communication tools needed)
 - **Interpersonal skills:** understanding team members' needs and values, resolving conflicts, building cohesiveness (skills of dialogue needed)
 - **Cognitive skills:** understanding team's internal and external relationships and how the different functions are relevant to the success of the team/project
 - **Political skills:** developing coalitions and gaining resource and acceptance from top management and other relevant parties (communicative skills of networking and "PR" needed)

(Adapted from Yukl, 2013, Leadership in Organizations.)

Team leadership, cont'd

- Team leadership as **situated** activity:
 - Not only the acts of "designated leader" are leadership actions – all (and everyone's) communicative acts/behaviors are or can be acts of leadership
 - E.g. taking initiative in team discussions, making suggestions, evaluating, giving feedback, showing empathy etc.
- Step away from leader-centric thinking: the above-mentioned idea relates to emergent leadership/discursive leadership/relational leadership/leadership-as-practice

Back to where we started, the situation where you witnessed/experienced leadership

- In small groups: share your experiences (about 5 mins.)
- Try to come up, as a group, to an understanding of the role of communication or communicational behavior in those witnessed situations
- Make a list of the communicative skills involved (about 10 mins)

Leadership communication in the sense of demonstrating leadership













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Ingredients of leader's talk that makes a difference

“the ability to deliver an energizing pep talk that spurs employees to better performance is a prerequisite for any business leader” (McGinn, D. (2017) The Science of Pep Talks, *Harvard Business Review*)

- Three part formula
- 1) direction giving
 - leaders should provide precise information about how to do the task at hand by, for example, giving easily understandable instructions, good definitions of tasks, and detail on how performance will be evaluated
- 2) expressions of empathy
 - leaders should show concern for the performer as a human being. Can include praise, encouragement, gratitude, and acknowledgment of a task's difficulty. Phrases like “How are we all doing?” “I know this is a challenge, but I trust you can do it,” and “Your well-being is one of my top priorities” all fit into this category.
- 3) meaning-making
 - leaders should explain why a task is important. This involves linking the organization's purpose or mission to listeners' goals. Often, meaning making language includes the use of stories.
- **These three elements must be carefully balanced (based on the context and the audience)**
 - E.g.: Experienced workers who are doing a familiar task may not require much direction; Followers who are already tightly bonded with a leader may require less empathetic language; Meaning making useful in most situations, but may need less emphasis if the end goals of the work are obvious.

**But isn't it "natural" and easy for
some people, who are fortunate to
happen to be charismatic**

Charisma: some just have it, some don't??



Perhaps not (?)

- Some studies argue that charisma is a learnable skill or set of skills
- Laboratory and field research of managers suggests that anyone trained in "charismatic leadership tactics" can become more influential and leader-like in the eyes of others
- Main point: These tactics are all communicational!

Antonakis, J., Fenley, M. & Liechti, S. (2012) Learning Charisma. Transform yourself into the person others want to follow. *Harvard Business Review*.

So, what are these tactics? (According to Antonakis et al, 2012)

Use of

- Metaphors and analogies
- Stories and anecdotes
- Contrasts
- Rhetorical questions
- Three-part lists
- Expressions of moral conviction
- The setting of high goals, and conveying confidence that they can be achieved
- Nonverbal tactics of animated voice, facial expressions, and gestures

A photograph of a conductor with curly hair, wearing a dark jacket, leading an orchestra. He is holding a baton and gesturing with his hands. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the conductor and the musicians in the foreground. The text "Some practical considerations of skillful (or not..) leadership" is overlaid in white, bold font.

**Some practical
considerations of skillful
(or not..) leadership**

Things to consider in leadership communication...

- **Channel or arena**
 - Email, face-to-face, one-on-one, multiparty meeting
- **How you say things ("tone of voice" – in speech but in writing as well)**
 - Often what you say (content) comes only second to the way you frame the content
 - Important skill: understanding to adjust to people you are communicating to/with
- **Leaders' speech acts**
 - People interpret your propositions on the basis of your position and status
- **Staying cool and professional and not getting provoked (although you may and are supposed to show feelings...)**
- **Learning to say 'no' to ideas, suggestions, questions etc. from others in a way that respects them**

As a leader, you should

- Say the same thing more than once and through different channels
- Try to make sure you made yourself understood
- Be very careful when joking/using humour
- Talk *with* your employees/team mates
- Let your employees to come up with the best ways of doing their tasks (don't intervene unless you really have to)
- Know that your email
 - are not (always) read fully or at all (not to speak about understanding)
 - are seen to reflect your personality and you as a leader...
 - are read under different circumstances and contexts
 - and your exact words may be quoted in some other occasion and context

Turning to the other side of leader's communication: the art of receiving messages and giving feedback

- **Remember, whether you are a designated (formal) leader or an informal leader or just anyone:**
 - Everyone needs to be and wants to be recognized, respected, valued
 - Everyone is human (because not that many robots in workplaces yet) and thus needs to be shown empathy
 - Don't forget to thank your colleagues
 - Apologize and say you're sorry – and admit your mistakes – if need be
 - Communicate high expectations (a profusion of studies show that “leaders' performance expectations for their followers improves follower performance)

Over to you...

- **Return to your experiences about good/bad examples of leadership acts**
- **In groups, compare your experiences**
- **Try to come up with**
 - A short list of leadership skills (based on what you think and have experienced yourself). Present them either in the form of DO's or DON'T's.
 - Prepare to present your ideas to others in mini-presentation (1-2 mins.)

Fin.


OB and leadership in contemporary business life

- Traditionally: huge amount of evidence on how other people affect us – and how the fact that we are human beings has effects on our work
- But: both research and practice has been preoccupied with technical-rational worldview that emphasizes processes, structures – and e.g. brains over bodies and cognition over emotion...
- Recent developments in business: people leadership, positive psychology, dialogue and stakeholder involvement

Team leadership ...cont'd

- Either the formal leader's or any member's contribution to the processes that make the team work efficiently
- In brief, dialogical behaviors of interaction such as
 - Listening
 - Avoiding 'stage-hogging',
 - Asking opinions (soliciting input)
 - Giving room
 - Showing interest
 - Drawing conclusions, making suggestions, making sure everyone's on board, taking administrative responsibilities of schedule & order of things
 - Talking about us (not me) etc.

The big WHY of studying organizational behaviour and leadership

The background of the slide features a blue-to-white gradient. In the center, there is a 3D-rendered staircase with several silhouettes of business professionals in suits. One person is at the top, another is on a higher step, and others are on lower steps, suggesting a hierarchy or a path of growth.

Leadership is connected to and has effects on organizational behaviour; that is:

Productivity, Efficiency, Motivation, Creativity, Well-being, Resilience, Learning, Attitudes...

Methods of studying OB and leadership



Main methods

- **Quantitative:**
 - Typically about finding correlations (using e.g. survey questionnaires)
 - *Example: investigating the correlation between a specific (reported) leadership style and (reported) job satisfaction*
- **Case study approach**
 - Understanding a particular case
- **Organizational ethnography**
 - Participant (or non-participant) observation, being part and inside of the organization and events
- **Qualitative methods**
 - About understanding, emphasis on 'how' type of questions
 - *Example: investigating how people themselves experience and understand, or practice, a specific leadership style*

In a broader picture of human organizational behavior: Micro-level observations of people at work

- A) may work as qualitative data for research
- B) work (unavoidably) as benchmarks for own behavior as an employee or manager

- Ability to observe, analyze, and understand what people (including **ourselves**) say and how they behave in team situations, or in any workplace activity, is a vitally important leadership skill
(see e.g. Gosling & Mintzberg 2003: The Five Minds of a Manager. *Harvard Bus. Review*.)

- Observations of *behavior* – observations of *ways of saying* (what is said, how it is said, in what situational context and through what "channel")



Successful team?

“Individual reasoning and talent contribute far less to team success than one might expect. The **best way to build a great team is ... to learn how they communicate and to shape and guide the team so that it follows successful communication patterns**”

[Successful comm. patterns: e.g. equal amount of talking and listening, energy and facing one another, willingness to connect directly with one another, desire to meet informally too, readiness to explore outside the team for the benefit of the team]

Pentland, A. (2012) The New Science of Building Great Teams. *Harvard Business Review*.



Scientific approaches to leadership (historically)

Funny (?) facts from history: personality types show in the facial (and skull) structure – and thus leaders can be recognized (phrenology in the late 19th century)

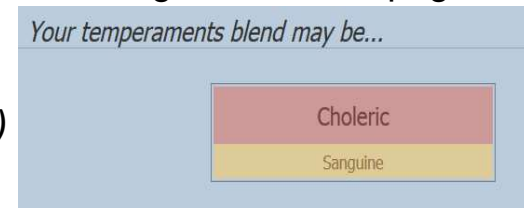


choleric sanguine melancholic phlegmatic

Classic personality types & leadership

- *Strong leaders choleric (extrovert, decisive, ambitious, goal-oriented)*
- *Consultative leaders sanguine (talkative, social, energetic)*
- *Participative leaders melancholic (analytical, detail-oriented)*
- *Laissez-faire leaders (weak leaders) phlegmatic (relaxed, easy-going)*

For fun: take a Four Temperaments test at <http://temperaments.fighunter.com/?page=test>



Natural-born leaders tend to be some combination of choleric/sanguine personalities?

(E.g. Ricketts & Ricketts 2011: Leadership. Personal Development and Career Success, 3rd edition.)

Example instruction of how to lead people (1940's...)

"Above all, the supervisor has to have a **firm and robust body structure**. As a supervisor, **he*** has **superior skills** over any aspect of his subordinates' work. He maintains his **fatherly authority** by **keeping strict discipline** and by **speaking sparsely** and by **silencing opposing views** right from the start."



(Free translation from Mikko Ivalo (1947) "A guidebook for supervisors at work")

*Finnish language does not mark gender in the third person ("hän" is used for "he" or "she"). Contextually (most obviously,) the translation here is gender-specific "he".