



Aalto University
School of Business

Role of communication in leading and managing people at work

4.11.2022

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 > focusing on "keeping the ship on course"

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' overall 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

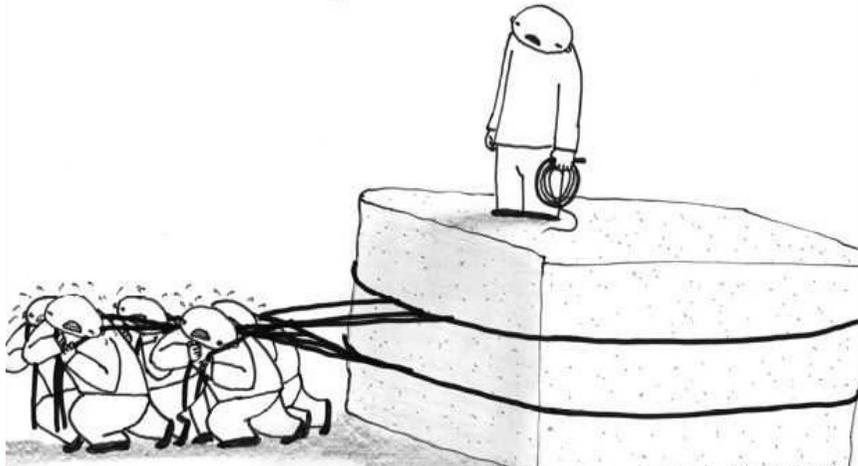
All these different approaches challenge the **leader-centric view** and the **cognitive psychology's dominance** of leadership/managerial theories



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Team leadership

Come on people. We're a team.
Together we can do this!



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

Leadership communication in the sense of demonstrating leadership











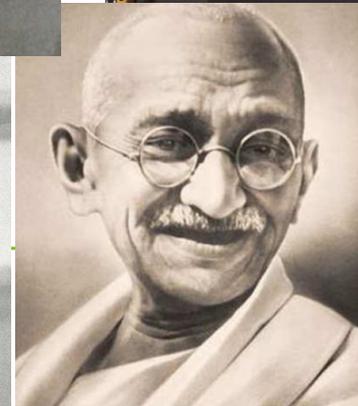
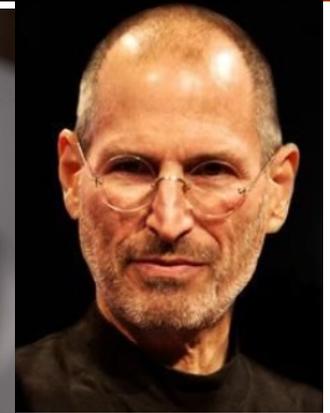
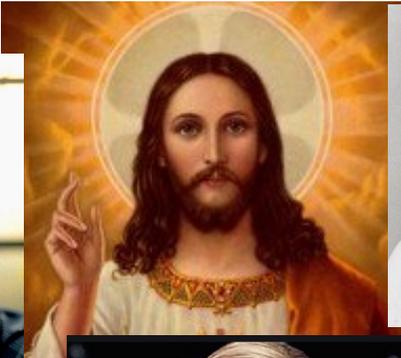
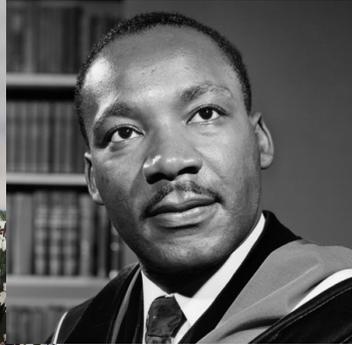
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**But isn't it "natural" and easy for
some people, who are fortunate to
happen to be charismatic**

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

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)**