Groups: Roles, Organization, and Leadership

Inquire: How Do You Lead?

Overview

Leadership can be scary, and people have different ideas and expectations of leaders. This lesson will teach you what makes an effective leader, how to assign roles in a group, ethical responsibilities of a leader, and some best practices a leader can follow to get the job done. Additionally, this lesson offers an inventory of the kinds of leadership styles to give you an understanding of what kind you can use and what kind you would prefer in a work setting.

Big Question: What kind of leader are you?

Watch: A Leader or a Follower?

If you had to choose to be a leader or a follower, what would you choose? What if the situation were a football game and you had to be captain? Would that change your mind? What if you had to plan an employee picnic for your workplace? Would you volunteer to spearhead that project?

Sometimes you don’t get to choose if you are the leader or a follower. You might be delegated the leadership role and have to roll with it! This lesson will give you the steps to follow when you are placed in that important leadership position.

First, you'll learn about effective leadership. You've probably seen this in action! Effective leadership is the act of leading a group to successfully accomplishing the group's goal. Then, you'll learn how to assign roles and responsibilities within your group. This is done in a few steps. Let’s watch as Eugenia demonstrates effective leadership in her group project.

Eugenia has been elected the chair of the planning committee for an employee picnic. At the first planning meeting, Eugenia breaks down all the tasks that need to be completed: booking a caterer, scheduling a venue, sending invitations, etc. She writes all of these on a big white board in front of the committee, then asks people to volunteer for any tasks they think they can do best. By doing this, she allows the team members to have autonomy over which tasks they would like to do, while also delegating tasks to ensure the team is working.

After everyone chooses a task, Eugenia is sure to encourage team members and to ask if there is anything she can do to help them accomplish their goals. When team members ask for help, Eugenia helps in any way she can. The morning of the employee picnic, Eugenia realizes that no one has set out the chairs for seating. Because she is the first one there, and she knows that she must step in and help whenever necessary, she begins setting all the chairs out before the other members arrive to help.
Eugenia is an example of a great leader. The techniques she uses and the ethical responsibilities she holds help her successfully accomplish her task, with an effective task force on her side.

Read: Leading From the Front

Overview

Sometimes you are in a position where you have to lead the group you are in. Knowing what to do and how to be in charge can be difficult. This lesson is designed to help you get through those situations. You will learn what effective leadership is, how to assign roles to those in your group, what ethical responsibilities you have to members of your groups, and the best practices for team leadership.

What is Effective Leadership?

Leadership comes in many forms. Knowing what leadership style works best for your team can be difficult. But, no matter what leadership style works for you, there are some constants that apply to every leadership style. Effective leadership is the act of leading a group to successfully accomplish the group’s goal. Effective leadership requires several things. First, it requires open lines of communication. Leaders cannot lead without feedback from group members to know what is happening and what needs to change. Second, effective leadership requires transparency. Allowing all members of the group to know what and why things are happening is important. It helps to build trust in a group, and trust is vital to the success of a team. Finally, effective leadership requires proactivity. A good leader does not wait for a problem to occur, but tries to anticipate issues and solve them as quickly as possible. Problems that arise are the responsibility of a leader to address, and you can only do that by being proactive.

How to Assign Roles and Responsibilities

Groups have many different tasks that need to be done. The best way to accomplish them is to assign them to other members of your group based on their skills. This requires an understanding of the strengths of your team members and their skills. In a corporation, you might be assigned team members from several different departments. In that case, those employees’ roles on the team might be defined for you. If this isn’t the case, it falls on you as the leader to inventory the strengths of your team members and assign them tasks that are best suited to those strengths.

One of the best ways to do this is to first decide on the tasks that need to be done and identify the core components of that task. Does the task require strong technical writing? Is it an artistic task? Does it need to be done by someone with a large number of personal connections? Knowing what the task requirements are is the best first step in figuring out how to delegate. From there, you need to ask the members of your team what skills they think they possess or what they can offer to the team. Asking your team members to self-assess their skills can give you insight into the strengths they bring to a team. Match a member’s strengths to the task that will make the most of those skills. If there isn’t a one-to-one match, then you may need to change the task so that it more closely aligns with their strengths.

Ethical Responsibilities of Leadership

When you hold a leadership position, there are certain responsibilities that come along with that role. First, you should never abuse your power. If someone is uncomfortable performing a task, never use your authority to force them to do it. Abusing power is one of the worst things a leader can do. Second, be honest with your group. When they ask questions or want an explanation, offer the truth. For a person in a
position of authority, there is a baseline assumption that you are being honest and truthful when explaining things. You have a responsibility to live up to that assumption. Finally, contribute to the team. Just because you are in charge doesn’t mean that once you delegate all of the tasks, you get to relax and do nothing. You need to be working alongside those in your group helping to accomplish the overall goal of the team.

Best Practices of Team Leadership

There are a few tricks to help you be the best leader possible for your group. First, don’t be afraid to say you don’t know something. If someone has a question and you don’t have information, just admit that. It creates an opportunity for the team to give input about how they think the task should be done, strengthening the trust the team has in you.

Second, be prepared to be the first person to arrive at work and the last person to leave. Being in charge brings responsibilities that will require more of you than other team members. You need to be comfortable with that and accept it at the start so you can make the most of the situation.

Finally, be prepared to help your team members. It sounds obvious, but some leaders project an aura that they aren’t approachable or aren’t willing to help those under them. Helping the members of your team when they need it opens the door for collaboration. Often, the end result will be better than what a person tries to tackle on their own.

Reflect Poll: Your Leadership Style

What kind of leadership style are you?
- Transformational/Charismatic
- Transactional/Autocratic
- Servant
- Laissez-faire
- Democratic/Bureaucratic

Expand: Leadership Styles

Overview

There are many kinds of leadership styles, but being able to identify the kind you bring to a group, or the kind you would rather work under, is important to know. This section will explain these kinds of leadership.

Leadership Styles

The first kind of leadership is a transformational leader. **Transformational leadership** focuses on encouraging personal growth of team members and inspiring members to be and do their best. This style of leadership is designed to inspire but sometimes requires a secondary leader to help come up with the finer details of how tasks will be accomplished.

**Transactional leadership** focuses on a clear chain of command and uses rewards or punishments to get people to accomplish tasks. Those that perform well are rewarded within the group, and those that perform poorly are punished. This style of leadership is task oriented, focused on finishing the task at hand rather than promoting relational aspects of group work.
With **servant leadership**, the leader works alongside their team members and shares the workload of the group. This leadership style focuses on the needs of the group and works to make decisions together rather than dictating decisions to individual members.

**Autocratic leadership** has a tight grip on power, ordering people to do tasks and taking little input from members of a team. The opposite of servant leadership, an autocratic style focuses on the power of the leader in making decisions.

**Laissez-faire leadership** is a hands-off style of leadership that leaves team members to do their own thing at their own pace. Expectations need to be clearly outlined in this leadership style to avoid members working aimlessly and not accomplishing progress toward the overall goal.

**Democratic leadership** is a style that encourages input from team members. In this style, the majority of the group decides what needs to be done, how to do things effectively, and the roles of members. In this model, the leader presents the options to the group and then enforces the decision of the majority.

**Bureaucratic leadership** is a style that uses rules and structures of power to accomplish tasks. This leadership style is typically found in large organizations, not small groups of workers. It concentrates on how groups interact with other groups to help create a process for large tasks. Its focus on rules can make it slower, but the size of organizations governed by this leadership style overcomes the slower speed because of the large amount of tasks it can do at once.

**Charismatic leadership** focuses on the attitude of team members toward the leader. The focus of the group is often more on the leader than the task. This can be problematic if the group is unable to accomplish tasks because the leader changes, is gone, or suddenly falls out of favor with the group.

**Situational leadership** is a flexible leadership style that allows the leader to change their style based on the situation, task, and group members. The leader gauges what kind of leadership traits are needed in that moment and adopts them. This leadership style allows the leader to adopt traits from many leadership styles at once.

**Lesson Toolbox**

**Additional Resources and Readings**

An article providing ways to spot a bad leader

A video explaining the difference between a manager and a leader
- Link to resource: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TddIkly1cC0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TddIkly1cC0)

An article explaining some traits you can develop to become an effective leader
- Link to resource: [https://managementhelp.org/leadership/traits/leader.htm](https://managementhelp.org/leadership/traits/leader.htm)

**Lesson Glossary**

**effective leadership**: the act of leading a group to successfully accomplish the group’s goal
**transformational leadership**: a leadership style that focuses on encouraging personal growth of team members and inspiring members to be and do their best

**transactional leadership**: a leadership style that focuses on having a clear chain of command and using rewards or punishments to get people to accomplish tasks

**servant leadership**: a leadership style that has the leader working alongside their team members to share the workload of the group

**autocratic leadership**: a leadership style that has a tight grip on power in a group, ordering people to do tasks and taking little input from members of a team

**laissez-faire leadership**: a hands-off style of leadership that leaves team members to do their own thing at their own pace

**democratic leadership**: a style that encourages input from team members

**bureaucratic leadership**: a style that uses rules and structures of power to accomplish tasks

**charismatic leadership**: a leadership style that focuses on the attitude of team members toward the leader

**situational leadership**: a flexible leadership style that allows the leader to change their style based on the situation, task, and group members

### Check Your Knowledge

1. A democratic leadership style makes decisions without input from group members.
   - a. True
   - b. False

2. A bureaucratic leadership style uses rules and structures of power to accomplish tasks.
   - a. True
   - b. False

3. A transactional leadership style focuses on inspiring and growing team members.
   - a. True
   - b. False

**Answer Key:**

### Citations

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