Leadership Styles

It is essential to be self-aware to effectively reflect on and influence one’s own performance and the performance of others. Studying leadership styles is important method to understand the different roles of leaders in the decision making process. This assignment provides the description of the three basic styles of leadership styles - authoritarian, delegative (or laissez-faire) and participative; the benefits and shortcomings of the participative leadership style, before exploring the Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space Technology as methods of applying a participative leadership in the workplace. The author will then discuss how a targeted community consultation method accommodates for social and cultural diversity in the community before critiquing the authors own performance styles as a leader in relation to receiving and responding to feedback.

Authoritarian Leadership

Authoritarian (or autocratic) leadership involves keeping strict and close control of people, maintaining close regulation with a focus on procedures (Clark 2013). These types of leaders keep distinct professional relationships, close supervision, sets goals individually, engages in one-way (downward) communication and controls discussions. This style is used when leaders tell their employees what they want done and how they want it accomplished. Without getting the advice of their followers, authoritarian leaders use this style of leadership when the group has all the information it needs to solve the problem, when there is a shortage of time and when the employees are well motivated (Clark 2013).

Delegative Leadership

Delegative (or Laissez-faire) leadership is the style of leadership where all the rights and power to make decisions is given to the worker (Clarke 2013). This style of leadership delegates the tasks to the followers, giving them complete freedom to make decisions. While a Delegative leader offers guidance and support when requested, sets priorities and certain tasks, provides the resources necessary to accomplish the goal as well as takes responsible for the decisions that are made, the delegative leader allows the employees to make the decision and does not directly participate in decision making unless the followers requires their assistance. The Delegative leadership style is used when followers are highly skilled, experienced and educated; followers have pride in their work and the drive to do it successfully on their own; when outside experts (such as specialists and consultants) are being used; as well as when followers are trustworthy and experienced. The delegative leader exerts little direct control over the decision-making process, ensuring that staff members and teams make the decision independently with little interference (Clarke 2013; Lockwood 2013)

Participative Leadership

**Participative Leadership** consists of the leader sharing the decision making process with group members by promoting the interests of the group members (Clark 2013). While the participatory leader makes the final decision, provides guidance, facilitates group discussions and provides necessary direction, information and resources; participative leaders see that the group fully participates and makes decisions that affect their lives based on the worker’s input (Zoglio 1994).

Participative leadership encompasses discussion, debate and sharing of ideas as well as the notion that everyone should play a part in the group’s discussion (Clark 2013). This allows mutual benefits, as workers become part of the team and help the leader make better decisions (Clark 2013). The team rather than the leader guides the final decision, encourages active collaboration and allows the members of the group to share information, ideas and perceptions with (Lockwood 2013; Maureen 2011).

The Benefits of Participatory Leadership

There are a number of advantages to participatory leadership including better employee motivation, decision making and the promotion of teamwork. As staff members can see that their input influences decisions and that their ideas and expertise are valued, they are generally more motivated to participate in and have a sense of involvement in the process (Maureen 2011). The discussion also usually elicits both positive and negative aspects of a decision meaning so that better decisions can be made, particularly when authority is in the hands of a leader or a small number of people (Lockwood 2013). Another benefit of participatory leaderships is that it promotes teamwork and strengthens existing teams, as the leader becomes a part of the decision team (Lockwood 2013). The leader also has access to alternatives perspectives, making them better informed when making decisions (Maureen 2011). Zogilio (1994) explains that ‘participation works because the people who know the most about the problem are involved in the process of solving problems.’ Participation eliminates the layers of authority (Zogilio 1994).

The Shortcomings of Participatory Leadership

This collaborative approach to leadership also has some disadvantages such as being a slow and time intensive process, often leading to a lack of satisfaction and the leadership decentralises control (Maureen 2013). In a participatory approach to leadership decisions often cannot be made quickly because of the need to reach consensus or to affect a compromise. Multiple team meetings may be needed to evaluate a decision and determine whether the outcome is acceptable. In order to reach a decision, compromises are often reached that may not be completely satisfactory to the leader or to the staff members. A participatory leader must be comfortable providing guidance and facilitating decisions rather than simply making them. This requires considerable skill in communication on the part of the leader, who may be in a position to see the ‘big picture’ better than other staff members (Lockwood 2013).

Applying Participatory Leadership in the Workplace: Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space Technology

Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space Technology are both methods of applying participatory leadership in the workplace. They instigate ‘positive’ deep learning about issues and perspectives, providing participation of individuals and teams, particularly where there is a real issue of concern, a diversity of players, complexity of elements, presence of conflict and a need for quick decisions (Arthur 2013
).

When a different perspective is needed or when an individual or group wishes to begin a new process from a fresh, Appreciative Inquiry is a method of participation that can be used with individuals, partners, small groups or large organisation. **Appreciative Inquiry** is a participative strategy to open a meeting or create a conversation to identify what already works (i.e. what one value’s most about an individual, work and organisation). It is a process that aims to *define* the purpose (or focus) of inquiry, *discover* the organisational process that work well (i.e. ‘what is’ the current context), *dream* of the processes what would work well in the future (creating a vision of ‘what could be’), *design* (or plan, create policy or prioritise one’s agenda) and then *deliver* (or implement) what the discussion, meeting or consultation proposed (Arthur 2013).

**Open Space Technology** is also used in meeting. It is used to create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of concern. It occurs by a group meeting in a circle, with a a facilitator providing an overview of the process, explaining how open space technology works, inviting people with issues of concerns (conveners) to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper and announces it to the group. Each ‘convener’ places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items. Participants then break up and head to the agenda wall taking note of the time and place for sessions they want to be involved in. Dialogue session then convenes for the rest of the meeting, with recorders (scribes) capturing the important points and posts the reports on the news wall. Following a closing or a break, the group then converges taking the issues that have been discussed and attaches action plans to them. The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share their comments, insights and commitments arising from the process. Open Space Technology can be used in groups of participants from 10 to 1000 (and probably larger) and is useful for strategic direction setting, creating plans for the future, resolving conflict, building morale, when consultation with stakeholders and during community planning (Arthur 2013).

Accommodating For Social and Cultural Diversity Through Targeted Community Consultation

To accommodate for social and culture diversity in the community, it is important to adapt more inclusive **consultation methods** that contact, inform and engage people from diverse social and cultural populations in the community(Brackerts and Meredyth 2008). Interviews, surveys and focus groups are proactive methods of participation that must strategically target diverse social and cultural participants (Brackertz and Meredyth 2008). Existing networks (such as local groups, service providers, community leaders and peak bodies) help to make contact with target populations being consulted to represent the views of all populations in society (Gopalkrishnan 2013). A targeted participation strategy could be based on country of origin, language spoken, ethnicity, gender or age; acknowledging the diversity and complexity that exists in society. Given the variation of needs of each individual’s ethnic, political and migration context, different consultation strategies may be required to accommodate social and cultural diversity when searching for a diverse array of views (Gopalkrishnan 2013).

Receiving and Responding to Feedback

Participatory leaders need to continually critique their own performance styles by giving, receiving and responding to feedback. Giving, receiving and responding to feedback help to maintain a healthy relationship in the workplace, creating greater trust, respect and confidence from both leaders and their subordinates. As feedback creates a new awareness within the receiver, it is up to the receiver to decide what he or she learns from the feedback and what he or she chooses to do with that knowledge (NASA 2011).

When receiving and responding to feedback, it is therefore important to accept, manage and reflect upon one’s emotions. Most people react to constructive feedback with surprise or shock, followed quickly by anger and then rejection or denial. After denial, our emotions usually shift into acceptance and even contentment. It is therefore important to observe your emotions and give yourself time to let the emotions ‘move’ through you. A strategic response to your emotions ensures that an individual does not respond to the feedback until the ‘flight or flight response has settled down. Taking time to analyse the feedback is important to determine what you think it means for you (NASA 2011).

Talking with the person who gave you feedback shows that you are committed to make changes and you care about their needs and perceptions. In discussing the feedback, it is important to maintain open lines of communication by sharing your feedback, the way you interpreted the information and what it means to you. In discussing the feedback, it is important to listen carefully to the person, paraphrasing and summarising their ideas in your own words, asking open-ended questions and using silence in responding to the information. It is important to admit where you were in error, confusion or ignorance and consider that changes that you are willing to commit to (NASA 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the participative leadership is the most productive style of leadership when the group needs to be involved. The Hawkesbury Skills Youth Advisory Committee (HSYAC) requires a participatory leadership role so that the youth are involved in the participatory process, while being guided and directed by the manager, mentors and other adult representatives using a number of participatory methods such as Appreciative Inquiry and Open Technology Space Technology. As the manager attempts to receive and respond to feedback within the group, HSYAC will attempt to accommodate social and cultural diversity through a period of consultation that aims to allow all the community and youth leaders to participate in the decisions that influence their lives.

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