RESEARCH FILE FOR
SP200 Interpersonal Communication

TOPIC #6: Social Relationships Leadership

Topic #6: Social Realizations- Leadership styles are an important area to understand. The type of leader in any social dynamic can greatly impact how any group interacts, makes decisions and communicates. (1) Discuss the Basics of Leadership styles (2) Why are leadership skills so important in group decision making (3) White and Lippitt’s research on the effectiveness of the commonly identified leadership styles (4) Fred Fiedler’s research on how situation impacts the effectiveness (5) Why can assessing leadership style be beneficial in Work or Community situations.

http://communicationtheory.org/leadership-styles/

KEY SEARCH TERMS:
Task Leadership, Social (Process) Leadership
Authoritarian, Democratic, Laissez-Faire, Autocratic
Fred Fiedler
Ralph K. White and Ronald Lippitt

Works Cited

and styles and how you can prepare for leadership. Then we’ll consider three of the most important leadership skills: coaching, counseling, and leading group meetings.

**Leadership Traits**

Leadership traits are distinguishing qualities or characteristics. Traits that are associated with effective leadership are those related to ability, sociability, motivation, and communication skills (Bass, 1990; Shaw, 1981). In ability, leaders exceed average group members in intelligence, scholarship, insight, and verbal facility; in sociability, leaders exceed average group members in dependability, activeness, cooperativeness, and popularity; in motivation, leaders exceed group members in initiative, persistence, and enthusiasm; and leaders exceed average group members in the various communication skills discussed in this text. Although having these traits doesn’t guarantee selection as leaders, people are unlikely to be selected as leaders if they do not exhibit at least some of these traits to a greater degree than do those they are attempting to lead.

**Leadership Styles**

Leadership style refers to the behavioral patterns that a person enacts when that person is trying to lead. Leadership styles tend to be either task oriented (sometimes called authoritarian) or person oriented (sometimes called democratic), or some combination of the two. Most effective leaders have both task-oriented and person-oriented skills.

Task-oriented leaders exercise more direct control over people and groups. Task leaders will determine what needs to be done and how to go about doing it. Person-oriented leaders may suggest ways of proceeding, yet encourage group members to determine what will actually be done.

Pioneer work by White and Lippitt (1968) suggests the following advantages and disadvantages of each style: (1) More work is done under a task-oriented leader than under a person-oriented leader. (2) The least amount of work is done when no leadership exists. (3) Motivation and originality are greater under a person-oriented leader. (4) Task-oriented leadership may create discontent or result in less individual creativity. (5) More friendliness is shown in person-oriented groups.

So which style is to be preferred? Research by Fred Fiedler (1967) suggests that whether a particular leadership style is successful depends on the situation: (1) how good the leader's interpersonal relations are with the group, (2) how clearly defined the goals and tasks of the group are, and (3) to what degree the group accepts the leader as having legitimate authority to lead.

**Journal Activity**

**Leadership Style**

Identify your leadership style. Are you more of a task-oriented or a person-oriented leader? On what basis did you make this determination? List the strengths and weaknesses of your style. Under what circumstances is your natural style most likely to be effective? Under which leadership style do you work best? Explain each.
According to Gail T. Fairhurst, who has been studying organizational communication throughout her career, leadership is not a trait possessed by only some people, neither is it a simple set of behaviors that can be learned and then used in any situation. Rather, Fairhurst’s research has convinced her that leadership is the process of creating social reality by managing the meanings that are assigned to certain behaviors, activities, programs, and events. Further, she believes that leadership is best understood as a relational process.

One area in which Fairhurst has focused her work is in examining how organizational leaders “frame” issues for their members. Framing is the process of managing meaning by selecting and highlighting some aspects of a subject, while excluding others. When we communicate our frames to others we manage meaning because we are asserting that our interpretation of the subject should be taken as “real” over other possible interpretations. How organizational leaders choose to verbally frame events is one way that they influence workers’ and others’ perceptions.

Framing is especially important when the organization experiences change, such as downsizing. To reduce their uncertainty during times of change, members of the organization seek to understand what the change “means” to them personally and to the way they work in the organization. Leaders are expected to help members understand what is happening and what it means. By framing the change, they select and highlight some features of the change while downplaying others, providing a “lens” through which organizational members can understand what the change means. Most recently Fairhurst has been conducting studies that help us understand the unintentional consequences of the frames that organizations have chosen to use in successive downsizing events.

In The Art of Framing (with Robert A. Sarr), Fairhurst reports that leaders use five language forms or devices to frame information: metaphors, jargon or catch phrases, contrast, spin, and stories. Metaphors show how the change is similar to something that is already familiar. For instance, leaders may frame downsizing with weight and prize-fighting metaphors suggesting that the organization is “flabby and needs to get down to a better fighting weight so it can compete effectively.” Jargon or catch phrases are similar to metaphors because they help us understand the change in language with which we are already familiar. Leaders may use jargon and catch phrase frames with words such as becoming “lean and mean.” Contrast frames help us understand what the change is by first seeing what it is not. Leaders may use contrast frames by suggesting that the downsizing “is not an attempt to undermine the union, it is simply an attempt to remain competitive.” Spin frames cast the change in either a positive or negative light. Leaders may use a positive spin frame by pointing out that the company will not use forced layoffs but will instead use early retirements and natural attrition to reduce the size of the workforce. Story frames make the change seem more “real” by serving as an example, that is, the leader may recount the success that another well-known
company had using the same downsizing strategy.

Fairhurst has also studied how the meaning of a change is continually re-framed as members of the organization work out the specifics of how to implement the change. She analyzed the transcripts of tape-recorded conversations between managers and their employees during times when the company was undergoing a significant change in the way that it worked. Her analysis has revealed that employees' reactions to change are often framed as "predicaments" or "problems," showing that they are confused or unclear about the change, or they feel that what they are being asked to do is in conflict with the goals of the change. In response, the leader might counter the employee predicament by using one of several reframes, for example, "personalization." Using personalization, a leader might point out the specific behaviors that the member needs to adopt in order to be in line with change. Fairhurst suggests that such re-framing techniques help members understand what to do next to bring about the change.

Fairhurst's experience in analyzing the real conversations of managers and employees indicates that many of those in organizational leadership roles are not very good at framing. As a result, leaders may need to be trained to develop mental models that they can draw on to be more effective during their day-to-day interactions with workers. For complete citations of many of Fairhurst's publications, see the references for this chapter at the end of the book.

In addition to teaching courses in organizational communication at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, Fairhurst works with the Center for Environmental Communication Studies, a research and consulting organization, which she helped found. Through her work with the Center, Fairhurst continues to enhance our understanding of the role communication plays in organizational leadership. In addition, she is also able to lend her expertise to managers who work in environmentally sensitive industries so that they are in a better position to communicate effectively with their workforce and with the public to whom they are ultimately accountable.

Sandy's task force on reducing crime on campus is to present its recommendations at a meeting of the President's Cabinet. If Sandy is an accomplished public speaker who has done premier presentations, she is technically competent to coach team members on their presentations. When they rehearse the presentation, Sandy may carefully observe their trial run and take notes on what she sees.

2. An effective coach both analyzes and supplies specific suggestions for improvement. Some people are good observers, but they don't really know what the employee needs to do to improve. For instance, a new sales associate may be weak on closing deals because he or she misses the cues that people give to show that they're receptive to what the sales associate is saying. An effective coach not only spots the negative, the failure to close, but also uses his or her expertise to help the new sales associate identify the cues that indicate the right time for moving into the close. Key skills for effective coaching are listening, observing, and describing behavior.

3. An effective coach creates a supportive problem-solving environment. Some people are excellent observers and know exactly what needs to be done, but end up antago-
nizing the other person by being "preachy." An effective coach helps people improve their performance by creating a positive problem-solving environment. To do this, a coach will often begin by acknowledging an area of strength that suggests the other person has undeveloped potential. For instance, in our previous example the coach may praise the new sales associate's product knowledge by saying, "Lydell, I've watched you work, and you have developed a lot of product knowledge. I think you're really going to be good at this job. Would you like to know what you might be able to do to increase your percentage of sales?" This approach helps Lydell to see that they have shared goals. When a person makes a mistake, rather than jumping all over the person, the effective coach might say something like, "Lydell, I think you lost a sale you might have gotten. Can you think of what you might have done differently that will help you close sales like this in the future?" Finally, when the person does succeed, effective coaches praise them but also ask them to reflect on why they were successful. "Lydell, wow—a $300 sale! What did you do this time to close such a big sale?"

Counseling Others at Work

Whereas coaching deals primarily with improving work performance, counseling involves helping others deal with their personal problems. Specifically, counseling is the discussion of an emotional problem with another in order to resolve the problem or help the other cope better (Robbins & Hunsaker, 1996, p. 153). Under the pressures of work, and in some cases living in general, people experience such problems as coping with the death of a loved one, lingering illness, divorce and its aftermath, financial problems, the effects of chemical dependence, depression, and overwhelming anxiety that affect their lives in general and their performance at work in particular. Effective counselors maintain confidentiality, listen empathically to others' feelings and circumstances, and help others determine what to do, including seeking professional help.

1. Effective counselors assure confidentiality. Personal problems are just that—personal. Colleagues at work often avoid discussing such issues with their managers, but talk freely to co-workers. Under most circumstances effective counselors do not tell anyone else another's personal problems. Just because a co-worker prefaces a remark with "Don't tell anyone," however, we are not relieved from the ethical responsibility to let the person know the limits to which we will go to maintain his or her confidentiality. There are some circumstances under which maintaining confidentiality would be wrong—for example, keeping confidential information that could jeopardize the health or well-being of others. Under these circumstances ethical counselors first advise the person to disclose the information to an appropriate authority and then, inform the other that the leader is ethically bound to disclose it.

2. Effective counselors are good listeners. Good counseling begins with empathic listening that results in appropriate responses. A good counselor will ask questions for clarification, paraphrase to make sure he or she understands, and most of all provide comforting replies. Supportiveness and, at times, interpreting responses are
Good counseling begins with empathic listening that results in appropriate responses.

key to effective counseling. When people are emotionally distraught, they need to talk out their feelings. Only after they have vented these powerful emotions can they begin the logical problem-solving process.

3. Effective counselors help colleagues find help. At times perhaps the best thing a good lay counselor can do next is to suggest that the person could benefit from professional help. When peer counselors see that problems are long term or severe, they are ethically bound to try to use their leadership to help others seek appropriate professional guidance. To be prepared to do this, it is useful to be familiar with the kinds of services available within your business or organization. Some large companies have employee assistance programs. Various services are also available in the community. And some religious organizations also have professional counselors on staff.

Leaders cannot be expected to and should not act as professional counselors. But because some problems are of short duration and not overly intense, leaders can use their influence to help others sort through and triumph over personal problems.

Leading Group Discussion and Decision Making

In today's work organizations, many decisions are being made by groups of people. Because the cost involved in doing so is high, leaders who are adept at managing group problem solving effectively are valued. A few of the important skills necessary for leading work groups are agenda setting, gatekeeping, questioning, and summarizing discussion and crystallizing consensus.