First Reaction Paper

Team Leadership

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Reaction to the readings

1

Upon beginning initial reading about the topic of team leadership, my viewpoint of leadership included the understanding that a leader is often “in charge” of a situation, and seeks to support and build the team they are leading. As I moved through the readings and through the activities in class, I found my understanding shifting from this initial basic level of thinking to deeper understanding of the complexities and multiple layers of team leadership.

As a leader, regardless of leadership style, it is integral to develop trust. “Trust is vital during every phase of your team’s development …your ability to build trust-both with and within your team- is fundamental to your transition from traditional leadership to team leadership” (Zenger, 1994 p. 39). In Cosner’s study regarding the impact of capacity building as related to collegial trust provided supporting evidence for previously released studies indicating that trust is essential when establishing team dynamics and setting up environments for collaboration (Cosner, 2009). In the past, I have led groups that by design were only to meet for a few hours as well as with groups that I have been a part of for longer periods of time (up to a year). As I was reading both Zenger and Cosner’s information, I noted that the construct of time appeared to be focused on long –term leadership (although I would say not intentionally). I wondered about trust that needs to be established in a very quick timeframe (minutes for example). I believe that there are probably some key ideas that overlap in both areas such as maintaining constructive relationships and leading by example (1994, p. 43), but wondered if there were key differences, and began to think about some of the readings discussing the characteristics of team leadership and leadership emergence found in the chapter about *Team Leadership in Group Dynamics for Teams* (Levi, 2011 p. 166-168). For example, does the “babble effect” take precedence within a constricted time-frame (2011, p. 167). And/or, how does the “leadership prototype theory” come into play with shortened team timelines (2011, p. 168), This relationship of time, trust, and team leadership is something I would like to further examine.

In addition to targeting trust building as a key part of team leadership , several readings talked about different leadership styles. Although the authors may have used different terminology to explain similar concepts, essentially leadership style took on three configurations; authoritative, collaborative, and facilitative. Levi notes that these styles may be used as the situation requires, or better known as “situational approach” (2011, p. 171-72; Hersey, 1988). Partnered with this discussion of leadership style was the level of group readiness (2011, p. 171-72; Hersey, 1988). Although I have previously learned about a type supervision cycle during a course in educational administration, I did not apply this knowledge to a team dynamic, but rather left it at an individual level. In addition to echoing the three leadership styles, the previously studied supervision cycle provided for capacity-building and growth of the individual. When reading about group readiness, I realized that incorporating the perspective of the group (those being supervised or “led”) was essential to understanding the full dynamics of the relationship between the group as a whole.

2

Taking this understanding to a more detailed level, the chapter “The key to the gold mine: facilitation” in Kayser’s book, *Mining group gold: How to cash in on the collective brain power of a group,* specifically targeted the roles and behaviors of a facilitative manager. Kayser defines a facilitator as, “a person who helps a group free itself from internal obstacles or difficulties so that it may more efficiently pursue the achievement of its desired outcomes for a given meeting” (Kayser, 1990. p. 12-13). Generally, I feel that this leadership style is more fitting to my natural style of working with teams, however, this reading helped my clarify my understanding of the roles and characteristics of a facilitative leader, and provided me with a framework to continue my own growth in this area. Thinking about the definition provided by Kayser, I would however expand the understanding to include not only within a “given meeting,” but within team dynamics as a whole.

Reaction to the class discussion or activity

In class we practiced several activities that supported understanding of several key concepts for leadership. Included in these activities were a trust building reflection discussion and exercise, a flow chart depicting movement from a top down style of leadership to facilitated leadership, and a class discussion/skit activity about situational leadership styles.

Initially working in small groups, we discussed our experiences in both positive and negative leadership in relation to trust. Initially, negative experiences came more quickly to mind. However, as I began to think about positive experiences with leaders, I realized that the foundational trust the leaders I encountered established early on contributed greatly to my support and contributions as a team member.

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During the class mini-lecture, it was discussed that it often facilitative leaders are perceived to be weak or indecisive. It was noted that a study was conducted indicating that when a facilitative leader acknowledged the leadership style initially, the response from the group was more favorable. As someone that frequently acts as a facilitative leader, I found this information to be very telling of previous situations I have worked in, and mentally earmarked it as part of discussions with teams I work with as a facilitative leader in the future.

Within the context of our skits, two things resonated with me, first was the construct of the skit itself, the practice of readiness levels of groups with leadership styles. The second was at a different level, within the construct of the small group itself. During our group discussion about the skit, group leadership dynamics began to emerge even given the small amount of time we worked together. Reflecting on this second level, I noted that our skit group leaders that emerged worked on a collaborative level in the realm of “selling” (1988) to prepare our group for the skits.

Application of team leadership in current work setting

In my current work setting I find my role as a team leader to falling under the functional approach to leadership, acting as a team coach rather than as a leader in the top-down sense. In this capacity, I find that I am a provider of context for teams rather than a provider of directives. I am the leader for leaders of each of the schools, and in this role, I work directly within the three objectives for providing context. As Levi states in the discussion about functional leadership and providing context, the “team leader is to set the direction for the team…create a situation that enables successful performance…links the team to the organization and buffers them from interference from the organization” (2011, p. 177).

Additionally in this role, I find myself attempting to be a more facilitative leader rather than a top-down manager. In the situation of being a leader of leaders, it would be counterproductive to attempt any type of formalized authoritarian approach to the management of these teams. Rather, it is through building of rapport and focusing on the expertise of all members of the team, that I support the members of the teams I lead.

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Future applications of Team Leadership

I truly believe that any future applications of team leadership I will utilize will be related to the understanding that leadership is situational. When possible, I will continue to use facilitative leadership, trust building, and coaching to move teams forward as I believe this allows for the greatest level of capacity building within a team. However, I do see that there are times when authoritative and collaborative leadership styles will be necessary to assist teams and organizations with growth. At these times, I will reflect on the readiness and level of the group (1988) to identify the appropriate leadership needs for the group in order to best meet the needs of the group and the organization as they move toward targeted goals and objectives.

References

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