

Identifying Leadership Styles

Identifying Different Leadership Styles

In many organizations, neither the managers nor the employees think consciously about the prevailing leadership styles. Leaders just do what comes naturally. Staff members react to what they experience. Both groups can benefit by examining the team's leadership model. Managers can assess their own effectiveness and make appropriate changes. Employees can learn to meet the success criteria of their leaders.

Identifying a Team Leader's Style

Identifying a team leader's style need not be a theoretical exercise applying academic definitions. It can simply be making observations on how certain activities are conducted and what is really important to the manager, as evidenced by behavior and reactions to events. In fact, if asked, most leaders would not know how to put a name on their own leadership style. It is possible, though, to examine these elements of their tendencies by asking a few questions.

Questions to Determine Leadership Qualities

How do they define and view the boundaries and scope of their own authority and that of other individuals in the department? How do they establish individual and departmental goals and track progress against them? What do leaders consider to be critical success factors for individuals and for the group? How, and how often, do they interact with staff members, their peers, their own managers, users, and customers? How, and for what purposes, do they conduct meetings? Do they spend their time and energy as detail-oriented micromanagers or as big picture generalists? What events and circumstances produce the strongest positive and negative reactions from the managers? What behavior or consequences do these reactions generate?

Understanding Leadership Elements

By answering these questions, team members can understand the elements, if not the formal name, of the group leader's style. They can then anticipate the demands and expectations of those managers. A key to this analysis is remembering that actions speak louder than words, which in this case means that what leaders actually do on a day-to-day basis or in a crisis may be more indicative than what they say to describe themselves.

The Importance of Understanding and Change

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Managers should have an interest in understanding their own styles as well, and an honest self-examination regarding these topics can be a useful tool to determine whether their actual behavior matches their own image of their leadership tendencies. It is also particularly helpful to think about if and how one's style changes under different conditions. The goal of this assessment is to determine if one's leadership causes team members to understand unambiguously what is expected of them and to be motivated to achieve those objectives. It is one step in determining leadership effectiveness.