Changing Leadership Behaviors is Habit Forming

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Changing behavior as a leader requires targeted effort. The important leadership behaviors need to be habits, so change is creating new habits. The first step is to observe how the leadership behaviors of inclusion, respecting, rewarding, improvement, and modeling are used at the start of the change process. The second step is to create goals to achieve change. Only after creating realistic goals should actions be taken to change behavior into new habits because only then will leaders know if they have actually changed those behaviors.

Creating so-called SMART goals is a management technique that requires the goal writer to identify the five parts of a goal. These are that the desired result be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and have a time-frame for completion. There are other techniques for goal creation, but this one fits the planning needed for implementing the behaviors (Bovend'Eerdt, Botell, and Wade, 2009). The following are examples of SMART goals for each behavior to effect change.

Inclusion. I will ensure that 100 per cent of the time a decision about a team member's work is needed that I discuss that decision with the team

member prior to finalizing. I will log these conversations, so I can review how I am doing and note if I missed a chance to discuss the decision along with how that came to be. I will make the time and effort to do this as it is possible to do and very relevant to bettering our working relationships. I will track for the next 30 days to see if I make 100 per cent.

Respecting. I will implement what I learned at the recent management seminar on listening skills. When I have a substantive conversation with a team member, I will score myself 1-10 on how much I listened vs. talking. I can track this on my phone quite easily in the notes app. At the end of 30 days I will review my scores for self-feedback. This is important as I am not a natural listener, but I believe doing more listening will be good for my relationships with the team members. This will probably solve some problems faster. I will then repeat this process over the year, seeing how I improve.

Rewarding. I will help HR understand how we might want to change our recognition programs. I will meet with each team member and ask them what they value now and what they would change. I will write these thoughts up in a report for HR and meet with the director. By doing this maybe I will surface some issues that can be addressed which will help the team. I will have this done by September 30.

Improving. During the upcoming annual appraisals, I will ask each team member what they think I could provide that would promote some type of improvement. This fits in with the planning portion of the appraisal, so it will be a relevant discussion. I will evaluate the ideas after the discussion are complete in September. I will then create goals regarding the individualized improvement I can support.

Modeling. Each day I will dress as I would want team members to dress. I will make sure it is clear what I expect. In this way, those team members who are "sloppy" today should change how they dress. After 30 days I will see if we have 100% compliance. I will also identify improvement needs in job specific skills that I can show team members how I would do those. I will make a list of the needed improvements and check them off as I help out. I will do this over the next 60 days to see how much improvement has been made.

Implementation

The key to this leadership development model is that the elements are in the control of the leader. There are many forces that can be applied for change, but many require other people to be involved in the change process. This change method of affecting LMX to achieve goals relies only on the leader themselves. The SMART goals are designed to focus on the behavior of the leader in a way that requires attention to the behavior and whether it is being used. Current behavior used in the context of leadership can be

considered habitual behavior, how the leader normally acts in response to cues (Gardner, Lally, and Wardle, 2012). Implementation is changing the habit.

Changing a habit is not easy. A habit is an automatic way of acting when in the presence of a set environmental cues. It is not because the person doesn't want to change, it's that without conscious effort to identify the cues and monitor self-behavior then the behavior will continue to manifest. Psychologists have found that it is necessary for the individual to be constantly reminded to 'Do this, not that'. (Wood and Runger, 2016).

Therefore, the SMART goals are created for implementation. Measurement of specific change to attain the goal is the reminder to act differently. For example, if current leader behavior is announcing changes in job functions only in group settings then a goal stating they will first discuss the change with individuals would support inclusion behavior. The goal acknowledges the desire to change and the measurement will prove whether change is occurring. In this way, the group announcement which is not conducive to improvement of exchange relationships is replaced with individual meetings with discussions that do lead to improved LMX.

Measurement

Measurement is required for two reasons: (a) to see if the goal is met; and (b) as the constant reminder to use the new behavior fully. The

measurement may have several components, as behavior is complex and is affected by variables such as the environment, cues, current moods, the leader's actions, and the other party (Amici, Call, Watzek, Brosnan, and Aureli, 2018). These variables affecting behavior can be accounted for to some extent through the goal definition. For example, if the leader's new behavior is to have individual meetings to discuss change, then the goal may specify both the actions and the venue. In other words, not only that there will be individual meetings, but also where these meetings will take place to avoid the environmental cues tied to location. Measurement would account for this by requiring a scoring that includes the environmental change. In this case, if the meeting took place, but not in the location specified in the goal (e.g. the member's office, the conference room) then a low score would be recorded and the reason for the low score should be noted.

Scoring must be recorded in a way that allows the leader wanting change to see past and present not only for progress reports, but also to note how scoring may have changed. The scoring can be dynamic over time as the leader learns more about what change looks like. They may get tougher on themselves or they may relax certain aspects of judgement (Claiborn & Pedrick, 2001). A simple journal is generally sufficient.

References

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