

Leadership Practices Inventory Final Project

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LEAD605 Foundations of Effective Leadership

08-Apr-2002

Introduction

One of the key success factors in becoming an effective leader is continually investing time and energy in personal growth. Maxwell (1998) notes the following about “the relationship between growth and leadership: ‘It is the capacity to develop and improve their skills that distinguishes leaders from their followers.’ Successful leaders are learners. And the learning process is ongoing, a result of self-discipline and perseverance. The goal each day must be to get a little better, to build on the previous day’s progress (pp. 23-24).” The purpose of this paper is to report on personal application of the Kouzes’ and Posner’s (1995) model of leadership known as the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership in terms of the results from conducting a Kouzes’ and Posner’s (2001) Leadership Practices Inventory. This report consists of three parts: 1) the results from conducting a “Learning by Doing” exercise in one of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, 2) an action plan for personal improvement in selected areas of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, and 3) results of conducting feedback sessions with work associates on opportunities for personal leadership development.

Part I: Learning by Doing Exercise in “Encouraging the Heart”

The Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes and Posner, 1995) surveys self, peer, manager, and subordinate perceptions of leadership practices. For my personal survey, average observer ratings across these four types of survey respondents indicate “Encouraging the Heart” as the lowest rated of the Five Practices of Exemplary

Leadership. Accordingly, an appropriate “learning by doing” exercise was selected from the choices provided from the course syllabus:

“Reward first those who perform above the stated expectations. Ask yourself which of your constituents best embodies the team’s values and priorities. Think of three ways to single out (praise and reward) two to three people in the weeks to com. Write-up who you singled out, why, and how you recognized them. Include the impact this had on them and your department or organization.”

Situation Background

As project manager for a software development project with duration of three months, I hold a daily planning meeting with the entire team of about fifteen software computer programmers and a varying number of additional support personnel every day at 10:00am. The purpose of this meeting is to provide the opportunity for team members to communicate about the project as a whole, what each individual is working on, relative priorities, and problems/opportunities being encountered. Additionally, as software development project manager, it affords me an opportunity to ensure the team is focused on the right things as well as send messages about the things we’re trying to accomplish and how we should be working as a team. The meeting is scheduled for thirty minutes and sometimes takes as few as five minutes. Often, a subgroup of the team stays after the meeting concludes to deal with specific issues that don’t involve the entire team.

Every other Tuesday, this meeting demarcates a milestone in terms of the project schedule and team accomplishments. We use this meeting to celebrate our two weeks worth of accomplishments and to kick off the next two weeks of work. On alternate

Tuesdays, the meeting consists of a larger group of up to fifty technical people as we invite other related but separate teams to participate (production support team, configuration management team, and test team).

The leaders of the software development team, production support team, configuration management team, and test team along with our manager and a few other key people form a leadership team. This leadership team meets daily at 7:30am to discuss project status, make decisions, determine items of overriding importance, and otherwise collaborate as leaders. This has been most effective in backing each other up, optimizing decision making, and achieving project as well as business goals.

Approach

It is on the alternate Tuesday meetings of twenty to fifty people where I conducted my “learning by doing” exercise related to “Encouraging the Heart.” I decided to reinforce core values of the team as well as recognize individuals by placing an item on the meeting agenda for this purpose. The approach has evolved a little, but basically consists of:

- Articulating a core value (without explicitly stating “we’re having a discussion about a particular core value”).
- Describing why the core value is important, what is the motivation, and how we’ve arrived at our conclusions.
- Stimulating interactive discussion by proffering colloquialisms, clichés, slogans, or other clever sayings that exemplify the core value and challenging the team to identify the originating sources.

- Prompting for team contributions of their own familiar ideas of colloquialisms, clichés, slogans, or other clever sayings.
- Concluding by recognizing one or two individuals that have demonstrated behaviors consistent with the core value.

Incident Occurrences

This exercise was conducted three times over a six week period, and is summarized in the following table.

Core Value	Description	Motivation	Saying
Self Leadership	Continuum of maturity in task performance ranging from less mature to more mature: directing, coaching, supporting, delegating.	Growing from being responsive to becoming responsible; taking the initiative to drive a task through to completion despite obstacles.	None
Just Enough, Just in Time	Deliver basic functionality adequate to meet immediate business need, and deliver it sooner than the typical norm. Then, refine, adjust, and enhance in subsequent iterations. Deliver smaller pieces, in shorter time frames.	Often, the details of business rules or technical aspects are not well understood or are changing rapidly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Analysis paralysis” (unable to deliver because all answers are not known) • “Gilding the lily” (adding features that are not necessary for business need) • “Proclivity to tinker” (a desire to make it work better than is actually needed) • “Fallacy of premature optimization” (spending time to address predicted bottlenecks before real world experience reveals actual bottlenecks)

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Core Value	Description	Motivation	Saying
Collaboration	To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor. Others include: developers (inside and outside of team), test team, business partners.	Realize synergy; the results produced by collaborating have more value than the results that each individual would produce working on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Two heads are better than one”• “Three strands together are not easily broken”• “Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, working together is success” (Henry Ford)• “A conference is a gathering of important people who individually can't do anything but together can decide that nothing can be done”

Results

1. **Self Leadership.** In discussion amongst the leadership team, emphasizing this value was thought to be risky in that it might encourage independent behavior on the part of individuals relatively immature in their ability to apply effective judgment in their work. We had quite a bit of discussion around this idea, and there were varying opinions about what to say, whether I should deal with this value first before other values, and whether to bring it up for discussion at all. I decided to go ahead first with this value because I felt it was time to recognize a particular individual who had demonstrated exemplary behavior in this area.

During the team meeting, I found that the subject of self leadership was awkward to discuss and difficult for people to contribute to the discussion primarily because of the complexity of the idea. At the conclusion of my discussion, I recognized an individual that demonstrated exceptional performance and perseverance in a major breakthrough in automated software testing. The

recognition of the individual went exceedingly well as the team was well aware of this person's extremely valuable contribution, and there was great applause around the room. I later received a personal email from the individual thanking me for the recognition.

I did notice body language on the part of at least one individual that indicated a little discomfort that was probably due to that person's less than successful involvement in the same area. My impression of discomfort on the part of this individual was later confirmed by one of my peers. However, this gave me the opportunity to have a personal discussion with this individual in which I was able to offer encouragement and a promise of recognition when this individual achieved a certain milestone. In retrospect, this particular value was too complex to explain effectively and easily (especially for the initial effort!).

2. Just Enough, Just in Time. This value has great emphasis within my company's Information Technology (IT) organization, one of the main reasons being that the Chief Information Officer regularly espouses it. Our project in particular has been the model for the corporation in this area, so it's something the leadership team as well as the project team discusses often. This made it easy and natural to discuss as part of our weekly team meeting. This time, I decided to challenge the team to come up with a saying or cliché that exemplified the value. This approach prompted good natured humor and discussion and the team seemed to connect popular wisdom represented by the saying to the value discussion.

I recognized an individual that demonstrated significant progress that began with an inability to deliver results without knowing all the answers up front and ended by being able to deliver a testable (yet less than 100%) solution on time. This individual subsequently iterated on the work product refining and adding value to the original results. Recognition of the individual demonstrating the behavior was again greeted with applause by the team.

3. Collaboration. This value is also one the leadership team emphasizes and works to promote within the project team. This again made it easy and natural to discuss. We've worked hard to establish conditions (such as co-location and specific work processes) that promote individuals working together to solve problems. For this value, I used a Bible verse and challenged the team as to its source (a couple knew it was from the Bible, but no one knew which book)! I recognized three individuals on the test team that proactively demonstrated a willingness to seek out participation from development and business team members resulting in productivity improvements. Recognition was well received by the team at large.

Observations

1. Controversial Idea. Initial discussion with my peers on our leadership team resulted in mixed reactions toward the idea of recognizing individuals for exemplary behavior. Some felt that recognizing one individual would tend to demoralize others who were not performing at the same level. Nevertheless, my manager agreed in principle that individual recognition was appropriate and beneficial.

2. Expressions of Appreciation. Generally, it seems to have worked out well because the individuals recognized have personally expressed appreciation for the recognition. The team as a whole also seems to appreciate the opportunity to recognize others within their midst that deserve it. Recognition of individuals in front of the a team has also prompted me to have additional conversations with those I recognized as well as conversations with others on the team that I otherwise may not have had. This has resulted in better personal relationships between myself and team members.
3. Feelings of Omission. At least on one occasion, one individual seems to have felt slighted when I recognized someone else when both were involved in the same work activity. In this case, I've been disappointed with the one individual's inability to make significant contributions. This individual also seems to have received the message that expectations are high for exemplary behavior and the recognition that goes along with it. It has given me the opportunity to have a personal discussion about performance expectations with this individual, and I believe has resulted in a closer and more productive working relationship between us.
4. Prompting Interesting and Valuable Discussion. While providing the opportunity for me and the team to recognize outstanding performance by individual team members, this approach has also provided the opportunity for the team as a whole to have interesting discussion around the strategies, goals, and behaviors that we're embracing as a company, IT organization, and project team. This

opportunity has provided the means to send powerful messages from leadership to the project team about what is important.

5. Becomes Increasingly Easier. As I've progressed through this approach, discussion of values and recognition of individuals is becoming both more effective and easier to address within the context of the team meeting. I've made adjustments in my delivery approach and content, and the team is responding easier during the ensuing discussions. My peers on the leadership team have remarked more than once about how well this has been going.
6. It's Been Fun! The use of sayings, clichés, proverbs, and slogans has become increasingly more enjoyable for me and the team to discuss at the team meeting. It's provided an opportunity to inject a little humor into the meeting that we all enjoy. We come up with sayings that exemplify the exact opposite of the value we're espousing, have fun with colloquialisms in other cultures and languages (as our team is quite diverse), and poke a little fun at me and others!

Part II: Personal Improvement Action Plan

Leadership Practice: Encouraging the Heart

Improvement Goal: Improve my personal relationships with those around me. Become more attentive to the needs of the members of the team which I lead, the leadership team in which I participate as a peer with other team leaders, and my manager and business partners whom are my primary customers.

Action Items:

1. Read at least one book related to improving my personal interaction skills.

2. Eat lunch with one or several members of my team at least once a week.
3. Make a point of visiting for a few minutes with at least one team member near the beginning of each day to inquire about their family, hobbies, or other interests outside of work. Use the opportunity to offer a word of praise or encouragement.
4. Eat breakfast or lunch with my manager at least once a week.
5. Meet with at least one peer on the leadership team each week for coffee for fifteen minutes at least once a week.

Completion Dates: Conduct action items for the duration of the next software release cycle, a period of twelve to fifteen weeks beginning in April and running through mid July.

Measures of Success: Accomplish action items 2 through 5 a minimum of 80% of the time over duration of next software release cycle.

Support: My manager and a fellow project manager on the leadership team are available for guidance and encouragement for these activities.

Leadership Practice: Inspiring a Shared Vision

Improvement Goal: Improve my capability to have visionary discussions with the team I lead, the leadership team in which I participate as a peer with other team leaders, and the manager and business partners whom are my primary customers.

Action Items:

1. Read at least one book related to improving my ability to recognize, formulate, and articulate vision as a leader.
2. .Discuss with my peer leadership team those values, practices, and processes that we are attempting to instill in the behavior of our project teams. Gain

consensus on these points and their articulation. Conduct these discussions once a week as part of our daily leadership team meeting.

3. Prepare and discuss values, practices, and processes with the project team which I lead. Identify, define, and discuss major themes for improvement for the next software release cycle with the project team which I lead. Conduct this discussion as an agenda item once every two weeks during the daily team planning meetings.
4. Meet with at least one business partner to discuss visionary aspects of the software development process that we're trying to instill within the project team. Conduct this discussion as an agenda item once a month over the duration of the project.

Completion Dates: Conduct action items for the duration of the next software release, a period of twelve to fifteen weeks beginning in April and running through mid July.

Measures of Success: Accomplish action items 2 through 4 a minimum of 80% of the time over duration of next software release.

Support: My manager and a fellow project manager on the leadership team are available for guidance and encouragement for these activities.

Part III: Feedback Sessions for Personal Leadership Development

For my personal Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes and Posner, 2001) survey, in addition to a self survey, I surveyed a fellow project manager on my leadership team, my direct manager, and one subordinate that is a member of the team of which I am project manager. I conducted one-on-one feedback sessions with each of these

individuals. Based upon the Kouzes' and Posner's (2001) recommendations (pp. 83-87), I created an agenda and conducted the feedback session accordingly.

Agenda

1. Thanks! Express gratitude for responding to initial survey and participating in feedback session.
2. Purpose: Obtain feedback to help understand (not fix!) my leadership behaviors and opportunities for improvement. Feedback is difficult to give and to receive!
3. Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model. Show summary of leadership model (Kouzes and Posner, 1995; p. 18).
4. Scores. Show summary of survey scores (Kouzes and Posner, 2001; p. 25).
5. Strengths. Discuss strengths as revealed by survey: Enabling Others to Act and Modeling the Way.
6. Opportunities for Improvement. Discuss weaknesses as revealed by survey: Encouraging the Heart and Inspiring a Shared Vision.
7. Largest Gap. Discuss largest variance in scores between different respondents to survey: Enabling Others to Act.
8. Feedback and Suggestions. Solicit specific areas in which I can improve.
9. Other Comments. Ask for any other comments or questions about leadership model, survey, or my leadership behaviors.

Manager Feedback

Strengths. My manager saw my greatest strengths in the areas of Modeling the Way and Enabling Others to Act, and remarked specifically on the good job I'm doing in managing my current project. My manager noted that I was not at the top of on his list

when he took over as Program Manager ten months ago, and that I surprised him (and others on the project) in how capably I am meeting my leadership responsibilities since I took over as software development project manager four months ago. He complimented me on the coaching I'm doing for a more junior member of our leadership team (Enabling Others to Act) as well as how satisfied project team members are with my leadership style (Encouraging the Heart). To my surprise, my manager indicated he saw me as more of a people person and a leader of people (Encouraging the Heart) rather than a technology person (which in the past I have viewed as my strong suit). He also noted my attention to detail and persistence in following through in performing activities (Modeling the Way).

Opportunities. Generally, I was disappointed in the lack of constructive feedback on my leadership behaviors that I was able to obtain during the meeting. My manager indicated that he had initially thought that I was strong headed and unable to change my position, but that he had changed his mind after watching me over the last few weeks change my position when provided with additional and convincing information. We discussed the perception of others that I can be inflexible, and that I need to actively solicit ideas from others and make them understand that I am also actively considering their ideas. He encouraged me to be more open minded and seriously consider the input of others when making decisions. I pressed more than once for additional improvement opportunities, and my manager apologized for being unable to provide any additional constructive feedback.

Discussion of Largest Gap. In reviewing the summary scores for the leadership evaluation, we noted how close my self ratings were to the other observers. We also noted and discussed how I tended to underestimate my own abilities as my self scores were lower than all other respondents. We discussed why the largest gap amongst the observers was with my direct report, and agreed that this was probably due to the fact that I had recently taken over as software development project manager when I asked the direct report to respond to the evaluation questionnaire.

Coworker Feedback

Strengths. My coworker saw my greatest strengths as being in the areas of Modeling the Way and Enabling Others to Act, but also included Challenging the Process. He noted that the people on my team seemed to respond to my guidance readily as I worked with them on a day to day basis and helped them to solve problems (Enabling Others to Act). My coworker remarked specifically on the differences between our styles with regard to forging closer relationships with team members, and how well the team like and respected me (Encouraging the Heart). This surprised me, as my personal view and the survey results do not indicate this as a particular strength of mine.

Opportunities. Generally, I was disappointed in the lack of specific and constructive feedback on my leadership behaviors that I was able to obtain during the meeting. My coworker indicated that he thought I could respond more quickly to my gut instincts and early impressions. He noted that I had a tendency to follow a direction (technical approach, problem solving, or people oriented difficulties) too long even when I felt early on that the approach being pursued was going to present problems (Enabling Others to

Act). I pressed several times for additional opportunities, and my coworker apologized for being unable to provide any additional constructive feedback and opportunities for improvement.

Discussion of Largest Gap. In reviewing the summary scores for the leadership evaluation, the discussion paralleled that with my direct manager. We noted how close my self ratings were to the other observers and how that indicated that I have a pretty realistic assessment of my leadership behaviors. We also noted that my self scores indicated that I tended to underestimate my own abilities. We discussed why the largest gap amongst the observers was with my direct report, and agreed that this was probably due to the fact that I had recently taken over as software development project manager when I asked the direct report to respond to the evaluation questionnaire.

Direct Report Feedback

Strengths. My direct report saw my greatest strengths in Modeling the Way and Challenging the Process. We discussed the nature of our relationship and interaction at the time he responded to the survey. We noted that this time was before I had assumed the software development project manager role and also noted our struggles as a subgroup within the overall team in overcoming frustration and technical challenges as well as learning to work together. He felt that, after observing me for the last several months as software development project manager, my leadership capabilities were far greater than he had initially thought. He specifically mentioned strengths as the manner in which I related to others (Encouraging the Heart) and in articulating what the team as a whole is attempting to accomplish (Inspiring a Shared Vision).

Opportunities. Again, I was disappointed in the lack of specific and constructive feedback on my leadership behaviors that I was able to obtain during the meeting. My direct report indicated that I need to work on understanding what's important to people (Encouraging the Heart). We discussed his view that I need to be more forthcoming in the reasons for some of the changes in personnel assignments within the team. We talked specifically about changes that I had made in his work assignment as the project progressed. Initially, he had been a little hurt and confused about the change, but saw over time that the change worked out better for everyone involved as it forced collaboration between different team members that otherwise would not have occurred. Other feedback centered on my personal expertise and his desire to see more technical software development expertise, more emphasis on a system architect role, and a stronger attitude for need of documentation.

Discussion of Largest Gap. In reviewing the summary scores, my direct report indicated that if he were to respond to the survey now, he felt that his scores would likely be higher overall and felt the rankings might also vary. We discussed his relatively low score for Enabling Others to Act (which my manager, coworker, and myself saw as strengths) was probably due to the technical and team challenges we were facing at the time within the subgroup as we struggled to implement new technologies and approaches.

Conclusion

Over the course of several months studying Kouzes' and Posner's (1995) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model, using it as a basis to survey, evaluate, and obtain feedback on my own leadership behaviors, applying it through on the job experiences, reflecting upon it, and developing an action plan based upon it has been a very rewarding personal growth experience. The Kouzes and Posner (1995) model articulates a model of leadership I and others on my leadership team have intuitively embraced for quite some time. These experiences have provided me the opportunity to grow my own leadership skills and have been the impetus for many meaningful conversations with my fellow leaders on the leadership team in which I participate as well as my own manager. I'm certain that there will be many opportunities in my future leadership endeavors to apply the lessons I've learned, and to ever continue to grow in my application of these principles.

References

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