Philosophy of Leadership

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Introduction

Leadership is a constantly evolving and ever-changing problem with no one correct solution. Every leader, at any level of an organization, must develop their own unique philosophy on what leadership means to them and how they believe their skills can best be applied to the amorphous problem of leading. Even within the several theories and styles of leadership, there are infinite variation that all have positives and negatives.

This document aims to outline my personal philosophy on leadership and the theories, principles, and ideals that I believe to be the most broadly important in the types of organizations I am a part of. As a senior software engineer for a large, socially progressive video game development company, my personal philosophy is based largely on ethics, ideals, and culture. The majority of my interactions are with engineers and creatives, which further skews my philosophy of leadership towards one where culture, individual autonomy, and bottom-up decision making are highly valued.

Theory

There are several well-known theories on leadership and how teams of certain types are best led, and these theories often have one or more associated leadership styles. The similar Contingency Theory and Situational Theory both posit that there is no one best type of leader or leadership style, but instead the type of leader and style of leadership considered best for any given team or organization is based on a number of factors such as the maturity level of the team, the work environment, and the type of work being done (*Leadership Theories - Learn About Key Leadership Theories* 2020). Environmental Theory posits that the best style of leadership is one where it is the leader's responsibility to create the environment for their followers to flourish and do their best possible work (LaMarco,

2019). The Functional Theory posits that the strongest leaders are those that analyze the wants, needs, and goals of their followers and do whatever it takes to meet those needs (LaMarco, 2019).

My personal theory on life is that people are generally good, and my personal theory on leadership is rooted in that belief. I believe that people generally want to contribute to society and the groups they're a part of to their best of their ability. My theory on leadership is that a leader's role should be to do everything in their power to ensure that their followers are free to contribute to the best of their ability, and that those abilities increase over time. Much like Environmental Theory, this means establishing and communicating goals clearly, so followers know what they're working towards; removing obstacles and distractions that get in the way, such as worrying about healthcare or sick leave; and building a culture that followers want to be a part of. It is the followers' choice to be part of a team, and no amount of money or threat of punishment will unlock a team's potential as well as clearing obstacles and letting them flourish will.

With this personal theory of leadership, the natural styles of leadership are those which aim to remove obstacles, build a strong culture, and nurture followers to be their best selves. As such, I believe that leadership styles such as Coaching, Transformational, and Servant Styles which all focus primarily on the growth of followers and ensuring their motivation through engagement and encouragement, make the most sense within my personal theory of leadership (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). My personal style of leadership is a mixture of these three styles, as I believe that the best way to encourage a team and achieve greater goals together is through removing obstacles as quickly as possible and promoting a great culture which encourages followers to feel as comfortable as possible in their work and environment.

Principles

There are an infinite number of leadership principles which are touted as important or mandatory, but as with leadership theories and styles there is never a one size fits all solution. The key principles of my philosophy of leadership boil down to three categories. First is people; who makes up the team, how are they treated, and how are they encouraged to do their best work possible. Second is process; how does the team operate, how are decisions made, how does the team communicate. Third is product, or the output of our team; how do we guarantee quality, how do we take the customers' or consumers' feedback.

The 'people' category of principles is, in my philosophy, the most important aspect of leadership by an impossibly large margin. Teams are more than the sum of their parts and teamwork is what has enabled humanity to become the dominant life form on this planet. Neglecting the health and wellbeing of your teams, be it physical, mental, or emotional, is a death knell for the team's productivity. Just as a bad apple spoils the batch, having one or more team members become unproductive drags the entire team down. To combat this, leaders need to ensure that their teams are taken care of in every way possible from hiring, to the day-to-day, to when they eventually leave the team. During scouting and hiring, diversity and inclusion are paramount principles in order to build a strong team built from a complex mix of differing backgrounds and opinions. During the day-to-day, serving the team and ensuring they feel heard and feel like they are being made aware of important information is key. When it eventually comes time for a teammate to leave the team it is important to be happy for them, as they were either unhappy on the team and are moving on to another team where they can be more successful or they gained enough working with the team that they are moving up and advancing in their career, either way growth and change are happening.

The 'process' category of principles covers the principles that govern how the team operates and how whatever the output of the team comes to be. Even a perfectly composed team will flounder without good process. The first key principle of the process category is listening and working together. As stated above, teamwork can produce spectacular results, but only if the leader actually listens to and values the opinions of their followers. In a business setting, teammates aren't just randomly selected based on proximity, they are hired for their skills and abilities. These skills and abilities are almost exclusively better than those of the leader, which is why they were hired, so leaders should listen to the advice of their followers and make use of that input. The second key principle is ethics and the ethical implications of the process. If a leader was successful and guided their team to an important goal but did so at the cost of their or any of their followers' morality, the goal can hardly even be called satisfied. Regardless of legal or regulatory implications for these unethical processes, the effect on the team and its members will never be worth the cost in the long run.

Lastly, the 'product' category of principles covers the principles that govern how the output of the team is handled. Not all teams have a physical product to deliver as their output, but all teams have some form of output, be it a service, a piece of software, a score on a board, or anything else. Teams form to solve some kind of problem, that is the output. The key principle in this category is listening to the customer. The customer might be the consumer of a physical or digital good, another team, or society as a whole. Regardless of who or what the customer is, their opinions, needs, and wants are integral to the team's success. A leader needs to value the customer because it is how they know in which direction to guide the team.

Attitudes and Behavior

We are what we do. No matter what principles we hold or attitudes we have, it is our behaviors that determine what mark we leave on this world and those around us. My philosophy of leadership

values behaviors that correspond to the principles and theories outlined above. In an ideal world, the attitude of the leader also matches their behaviors, but what we do trumps what we believe. The behaviors that I believe are key to being an effective leader are numerous, so for the sake of brevity I will sum up the most important in my philosophy.

The first behavior is perseverance. Life is a series of failures; this is the only way we learn and grow. As it is in life, it is as a leader. Leaders need to exude perseverance and have the humility and tact to accept losses and failures as perfect opportunities for themselves and their teams to become better. Through perseverance and responding positively to adversity, leaders become stronger versions of themselves. A leader who buckles under the pressure of failure, skirts responsibility, or worst of all passes responsibility onto a subordinate, will not only lose the faith and respect of their followers but miss out on a valuable opportunity in disguise.

The second behavior is humility. Good leaders know that they are not the center of the world. If a leader was responsible for all the team's successes, then they wouldn't have needed the team to begin with. Leaders need to behave with humility to be effective. This includes passing incoming praise onto the team members, accepting input and opinions from the team, and owning up to one's mistakes. Along with humility comes gratitude. Followers are what make a leader a leader, ensuring that they know you're grateful for the things they do is not only nice to goes towards building a better culture of more successful teammates.

The final behavior of my philosophy of leadership is fostering growth. The leader is responsible for their team, and a team that never changes is doomed to failures. Good leadership means fostering growth and changes within your team. Whether it's through mentoring or coaching, conferences, or trainings, ensuring that the members of your team are constantly growing more competent and effective has a multiplicative effect on the team. Many leaders worry that followers which grow too

much will either leave the team or usurp the leader themselves, but both these situations are a positive outcome. If a team member gains skills and abilities enough to displace the leader of that team, then the leader has done an excellent job at coaching.

Conclusion

In this paper we've discussed my personal philosophy of leadership. This philosophy is centered in the belief that teams work best when they are allowed to flourish, and their growth and advancement are integral parts of the culture. This philosophy is also centered in the belief that leadership means humble service, placing the team and their needs above oneself. I believe that most people are inherently good and want to contribute to something larger than themselves, this is how we have advanced as a species, they just need guidance and freedom from distraction in order to contribute to their fullest potential. We've discussed how the leadership principles of people, process, and product can guide a leader to building the most effective possible team through diversity, ethical behavior, and openness to input both internal and external. Lastly, we've discussed how leadership behaviors such as perseverance and humility can not only build a stronger team, but also grow a better leader. To paraphrase Lao Tzu very loosely, a good leader is one who when their work is done, their team says, "we did this ourselves."

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