Reflections on My Poster Café Experience

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Abstract

This paper gives a summary of the book I chose for my presentation, “Turn the Ship Around!: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders” by David Marquet. In addition, it includes my learning plan to effectively help my classmate understand the new human management approach and how it relates to agile methodologies, the reality and how I will improve my learning plan for next time.

**BOOK SUMMARY**

The chosen book for my café presentation is “Turn the Ship Around!: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders” by David Marquet. In this book, the author demonstrated the shift in his mindset about the definition of leadership and what makes a person a great leader, from the traditional approach of command-and-control style to encouraging others to become leaders themselves. The new leadership approach did not just make Marquet a better leader but also created a self-managing team of empowered people who performed and succeeded as one unit.

The first management principle is to help people focus on doing their best and not just avoiding mistakes. In fact, Marquet did not want to punish his crew members for their mistakes. Instead, he wanted to cultivate a culture when mistakes were recognized and communicated early between any levels in the chain of command (sometimes even before it was attempted), shifting the focus from blaming to a learning attitude for continuous improvement. Second, managing people does not equal micromanaging them but providing a safe environment for them to think and be creative. Over time, the leader slowly gives away control while his or her people are gaining more control and freedom. Eventually, they should move from “Tell me what to do” to “I’ve done X because Y” (Marquet & Stephen, 2013). Good leaders should not give orders and specific instructions but only intent. For control to be decentralized and distributed, there needs to be technical competence (from the people) and clarity (from all levels throughout the teams and organizations). In summary, in the new area of technological advancement, effective leaders should invest and utilize their people’s cognitive and decision-making power through the leader-leader approach. This model emphasizes that success can only achieved by leader giving away control and empowering their people to be leaders themselves while maintaining technical competence and clarity throughout the organization. This resonates with agile principles and values of self-organizing teams as well as the shift of management from command-and-control style to supporting roles.

**MY LEARNING PLAN**

**The Presentation Flow**

*What was my intentional "learning plan" with respect to how I and my poster would help you manage the conversation and learning of the audiences at my poster?*

From attending other poster presentations before mine, I realized that I did not want to follow the traditional way of presenting every single important point straight from the book as I found myself not remembering them much after the presentation was over. In addition, there are many leadership concepts and practices as well as author’s specific implementations for his ship that could not be covered entirely in a 15-minute presentation. Therefore, I decided I would present the audiences with the general situation: Captain Marquet was trained for taking over as commander for the USS Olympia but was assigned last minute to a different ship, USS Santa Fe. Because it was completely different from the Olympia, Marquet had little knowledge of the submarine and had to rely on his crew members on many aspects of decision making. Second, I continued with the scenarios and examples of how the leader-follower model failed. One scenario showed how the crew members just blindly followed Marquet’s order, despite knowing that his order was wrong. The example served as the best demonstration to the audience the danger of the command-and-control leadership style. It also highlighted that in the absence of the commander, the crew members would not be able to function and make decisions by themselves. Additionally, the example revealed how the traditional leadership approach demotivates people as well as underutilizes their knowledge and creativity. Third, I presented Marquet’s ways of gradually implementing the new approach by first changing the language and communication style. The author mentioned the use of the “Ladder of Leadership”, dissected what keeps people at the bottom of the ladder “Tell me what to do” and how to help them ultimately move to the top. By not giving orders and letting people communicated what they think should be done and give the “why”, he empowered and provided a safe environment for his crew members to make decision and think as a leader on the next level in the chain of command. Moreover, this communication style requires the crew members to back up their decision with reason and knowledge. Therefore, it provides clarity, the leader knows it is safe to continue giving others control and he can trust his members’ competence. Fourth, I concluded the presentation with the positive changes Marquet’s new approach brought to the USS Santa Fe such as 100% reenlisting rate, highest inspection score and creating more leaders (more future captains of submarines).

After multiple practice at home, the average of my presentation was about 10 minutes. I used the last 5 minutes for a group activity. My audiences would receive a stack of paper with 8 scenarios from the book. One of the audiences would read the case out loud and the group decided together what LeSS principle(s) are the most similar or related to the scenario. This would help check the audiences’ understanding of the book as well as reinforced main agile values of self-organizing teams and giving freedom and control to teams.

In my poster, I included the four pictures. The first two are the photos of the USS Santa Fe submarine model and a picture of the author. The other two pictures are photos of two different workplaces: a chicken factory and a technology company’s office. These two photos are to demonstrate the contrast and the shift from physical labor to cognitive and decision-making tasks. This shift requires a change in leadership style from leader-follower to leader-leader model in order to fully empower and utilize the thinking power of the workforce. In addition, I also include the Ladder of Leadership for communication as well as the model for Giving Control and its supporting pillars: technical competence and clarity. Another table to summarize the key differences between leader-leader and leader-follow approaches is used in the poster. I used Velcro tape and blank paper to hide some bullet points in the leader-leader column as I planned to ask my audiences to fill in the blank space at the end of the presentation to solidify their knowledge. Last but not least, I put all the important LeSS principles and implications for leaders (Product Owner/Manager and Scrum Master) I could relate to from reading the book in another table. This table would be later used as reference for audiences when they do group activity at the end of the presentation (connecting LeSS principles to the scenarios).

**Management Principles**

*What management principles did I use to design the way that I and audiences would interact with my poster and learn?*

I designed the poster and chose what book contents to include with “lean thinking” and “more with less” principles my mind. I want the minimum word quantity that can deliver the most amount of information. During my presentation, the only two section I referred/pointed to were the Giving Control chart and Ladder of Leadership communication chart. I hope that the audiences can read the poster and deduce their own understanding of the two tables comparing the two leadership styles as well as LeSS principles.

**Metrics to Evaluate Effectiveness of My Presentation**

*What metrics (qualitative or quantitative; subjective or objective) did I plan to use to measure the effectiveness of your learning plan?*

As mentioned above, to evaluate my audiences’ understanding of the main concepts and if they followed my presentation, I invited them to participate in an activity as a group to connect LeSS and agile principles to specific scenarios from the book.

**THE REALITY**

In reality, there were four things that did not go as planned. First, I forgot to ask the audiences about their opinion of the two pictures comparing two different workplaces. This would have given them a great contrast and room for contemplating if command-and-control style is still effective in today’s world. Second, because I prepared the Velcro and blank paper to hide information on the poster before rolling it, the pieces of paper were completely curl and revealed all the hidden information when the poster was unrolled. Therefore, the activity when the audiences would fill in the blank of the leader-leader table was not possible. The third thing that did not go as planned was the long wait time for the fourth audience group. The first three presentation rounds served many students. However, in the fourth round, I waited approximately 5 minutes and there was only one student at my booth, Arnish while many other students had not finished listening to other presentations. Therefore, I decided to start the fourth presentation with only one student. After finishing the fourth presentation early, another student, Sukriti came to attend my presentation while I was putting away my poster. Not wanting to miss any opportunity to present the book, I immediately put up my poster again and started the fifth round of presentation. However, I could only finished half (5 minutes) of the presentation because time for presentation was over and everyone had to go back to their seats. One of my audiences, Jackson gave a recommendation to make the poster less crowded by removing less important texts. Personally, I think the information was already highly condensed and reducing the font size by a small amount as well as keeping the tables and charts farther away from each other would make the poster less crowded. However, I did not the crowding issue until the poster was already printed. When created the poster, I specifically wanted large font sizes so audiences who stood far away could still read the details. Consequently, it was my bigger priority compared to keeping a farther distance between the tables and figures.

On the other hand, there are also things that went as planned or even better. First, I did finish the presentation in 10 minutes and my audiences had enough time to participate in the group activity. Second, surprisingly, the audiences did not expect that and seemed to look forward to it. All the audiences did well, demonstrating their understanding (Evaluation metric: effectiveness of presentation 100%). Many also mentioned they enjoyed the interactive part of my presentation (Evaluation metric: psychologically engaging 80% by people telling me online and in person they enjoyed the group activity). Third, I read every single comment in my Canvas discussion and not a single one of them copied what was on the poster. In fact, most comments were written in the audiences’ own words and reflected what most stood out to them (Another metric for effectiveness: 100%). One of the audiences, Chaeng said she wrote her review for my presentation first as she had three things she learned from my presentation that she could talk about right away without looking at her note or my poster file. Some audiences liked the idea of moving people up the Ladder of Leadership, some agreed with the fact that “good leaders say I don’t know” (Marquet & Stephen, 2013). while others embraced the idea of leader giving up control and providing people freedom to ultimately create more leaders. When I saw the comments, I knew I had successfully communicated to my audiences the most important ideas in this book that are also central in agile principles: giving people safety and freedom to take risks and new responsibilities, make decisions and be creative.

**IMPROVEMENT FOR NEXT TIME**

Based on the feedback I received and how the presentation turned out, first, I will reduce the font size to allow more spaces between the tables and figures. Second, I will put on the blank pieces of paper to hide information (for fill-in-the-blank group activity) when my poster is made flat. Third, I would try asking the audiences for their opinion of the pictures of two workplaces. This is to engage their thinking about the economy’s shift from needing physical labor to cognitive and decision-making power. Last but not least, I will wait to have a larger group of audiences before starting a new round of presentation.

# References

Marquet, D., & Stephen, C. R. (2013). *Turn the Ship Around!: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders.* Portfolio.