The Open Leadership Definition

theopenorganization.org

A summary of open leadership mindsets and behaviors

Transparency

How Open Leaders Think

- Everyone deserves clear, direct, and constructive feedback that's as unbiased as possible, and I should expect to receive it from others.

- Does everyone affected by or interested in this decision understand who made it and how we arrived at it?

- All members of the organization are potentially stakeholders in my work and partners in my decisions and should have access to materials about them if they want them.

- Vendors, partners, customers, communities, and other external stakeholders are also members of my open organization, and I need to be as transparent and share information and knowledge as much as possible by demonstrating the same consistency in behavior.

- Even though this situation doesn't allow me to be as transparent as others might expect, have I explained it as thoroughly as I can?

- People will trust and respect my leadership ability only if I'm honest with them and provide as much detail as possible.

How Open Leaders Act

- Make notes, records, and procedural documents accessible to others "by default"

- Take time to make materials accessible to others at the outset of a project or decision-making process

- Continually converse with organizational stakeholders about the progress of their projects and important decisions that might affect them

- Often without prompting, share the context for their teams' work, explain their understanding of its purpose and importance, and remove barriers to any information and resources their teams might require for doing their best work

- Create spaces where people feel comfortable voicing concerns and speaking candidly about perceived shortcomings or limitations of ongoing work,and share their own concerns to the degree they are comfortable

- Encourage others to share stories about both their successes and their failures without fear of repercussion, and share their own when possible

Inclusivity

How Open Leaders Think

- My own experiences limit my perspective, and I need to find others who can help me broaden that perspective.

- Whose voices aren't currently represented in the present conversation, and how can I invite them to join it?

- How can I equip and empower others to participate in this process or project?

- I need to work with the community to establish the conditions, activities or processes to help my colleagues feel psychologically safe enough to ask questions, contribute their own ideas, admit mistakes, and challenge authority and the status quo.

- Do others rely on me in ways that constrain their ability to work most effectively?

How Open Leaders Act

- Remain conscious of voices not present in dialog and actively seek to include or incorporate them when making decisions and building teams

- Ensure team processes, procedures, and norms are documented, shared, and easily accessible

- Regularly assess and respond to feedback they receive, and cultivate a culture that encourages frequent dialog regarding this feedback

- Recognize their biases and shortcomings, and empower others to help them overcome their limitations

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Adaptability

How Open Leaders Think

- Our work—and the ways we work—can always improve and evolve because conditions are always changing.

- How can I make sure our work still fits the needs of the people we claim to serve?

- Because it's not common for leaders to ask for feedback, I can't expect that people around me will offer it if I don't request it.

- The processes and strategies that have helped us succeed in the past might not be the same ones that lead to success in the future.

- What can I do to help people on my team trust the idea that they can make mistakes?

How Open Leaders Act

- Intentionally and proactively request feedback on their projects and their work

- Create systems and processes that are not only predictable and clear but also flexible enough to allow for revision in light of changing circumstances

- Request review of work from their stakeholders before the work is finished, and encourage their teams to do the same

- Initiate conversations about team failures or setbacks with a spirit of empathy and curiosity

- Implement various channels and mechanisms to facilitate and collect feedback, and prompt others to use them

- Mark team and project milestones with opportunities for collective reflection, discussion, and adjustment

Collaboration

How Open Leaders Think

- Collaboration means more than "working together"; it involves complex negotiation at any point in a project, from problem identification, brainstorming, solution building, and evaluation.

- I need to involve the people affected by this decision throughout the process of making the decision.

- No one is exempt from collaborative processes, and my job is to facilitate them wherever and whenever possible.

- How can I ensure that others can build on my team's work when we release it?

- Are the team's norms and expectations for joint work as clear to everyone as they could be?

How Open Leaders Act

- Encourage people to initiate and continue projects together, not individually

- Celebrate team milestones in ways that create social spaces, increasing team cohesiveness and trust between individuals

- Empower groups to arrive at timely and effective conclusions while accommodating members with different preferences or constraints

- Coach others through conflict that arises from collaborative negotiation by keeping the group focused on its shared challenges, and goals or outcomes

Community

How Open Leaders Think

- How can I best serve the group?

- Power belongs to anyone in the group who enacts communal values, and can be transferred, circulated, and shared by anyone at any time.

- Have we documented our group's conventions and made expectations for collective work clear to everyone?

- Our team's shared values, principles, and goals should guide our decisions, inform our feedback, and serve as the metric by which we judge our successes and failures.

- Have I helped the community identify and assemble the collective skills and values it needs to be successful in achieving our purpose?

How Open Leaders Act

- Demonstrate the group's norms through explicit behaviors that reinforce the group's shared expectations for community members.

- Support the community's culture by helping new members understand the processes, values, and community engagement guidelines, including the guidelines for dissent and conflict, which allows community members to disagree or bring innovative ideas to the group.

- Act as facilitators, moderators, or coaches for others in the community, being neither too authoritarian and dictatorial nor indifferent and disengaged.

- Ensure that conversations and decisions balance individual needs with collective desires and expectations (including their own).

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