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Leading Others

Chapter Overview

As a 21st-century engineer, you will be working with and working for others, and will be in a position to “lead” others throughout your career, making leadership a fundamental skill to your success. Leadership is the ability to lead; effective leadership can be nurtured and developed through experience, practice, and training.

Over the years, a number of leadership theories have been developed to aid the practice of leadership, each reflecting and contributing to the organizational paradigm of their times. Traditionally, leaders made use of authority and coercion to manage followers. This style of leadership is dependent on the positional power of the leader relative to the follower, and is reflected in the traits, behaviour, and transactional theories of leadership. In the 1980s, transformational leadership rose to prominence. A good transformational leader influence followers through vision, inspiration, and charisma, and does not micro-manage. In a way, transactional leadership is about “telling”, transformational leadership is about “selling.” A risk of the transformational leadership is that one can mistake the passion and confidence of the leader for truth and reality.

The massive transformations of the 21st-century in economy, society, and technology have propelled evolutions in leadership theories and approaches. In particular, there is a continued “flattening” of hierarchies that challenges the traditional “leader-follower” duality, and a demand for broader ethical considerations in organizations. These challenges have led to the waning of authoritative and transactional leadership styles, and contributed to the rising popularity of authentic leadership. To be authentic means to act in accordance to one’s inner thoughts and feelings, to be one’s “true self.” Authentic leadership embraces the self-awareness and inspirational aspects of transformational leadership, but shifts its focus from charisma to authenticity, and includes a stronger emphasis on ethics (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Another aspect of authentic leadership is the “owning”

of all our inner feelings and thoughts, including the “darker” ones associated with anger, sadness, and vulnerability. A third aspect of authentic leadership is the recognition of strengths that are unique to each individual, and the positive value of acting from one’s strengths.

Regardless of leadership styles, leadership is fundamentally about relationships. One theorist identified three types of leader-follower relationships: regressive, symbiotic, and developmental. In regressive relationships, followers are dependent on the leaders. In symbiotic relationships, followers contribute to the leaders’ personal goals, and enhance their self-worth in return. A developmental relationship is the preferred leader-follower relationship, where the leader enables the follower’s growth and learning. It is ideal for a modern leader to care about the well-being of the follower beyond their ability to perform.

Emotional intelligence is another key ingredient to modern leadership. Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing emotions in ourselves and in others, and the ability to manage emotions in ourselves and in our relationships. Emotionally intelligent leaders are self-aware, empathetic, and capable of regulating their own emotions and motivating others through emotions. Like other components of leadership, emotional intelligence can be developed through experience, practice, and training.

Leadership does not exist in a vacuum – company cultures can impact the style and effectiveness of leadership. Modern companies are looking for transformational and authentic leaders, and the impact of such leaders are immeasurable. It is important to note that both women and men can be equally effective as leaders, although some female leaders have demonstrated different leadership styles compared to their male counterparts. Lastly, it is important to remember that we will always have at least one person to lead: ourselves.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will:

- discover the impact and value of leadership;
- examine the evolution of leadership theories and styles;
- discover the superiority of influence over authority;
- be introduced to different leader-follower relationships; and
- explore the impact of culture and gender on leadership.