

# ADVENTURES IN LEADERSHIP: THE CHALLENGES OF MANAGING PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

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Regardless of a manager's industry and level of technology present in the work environment, nothing will be as challenging as successfully filling the role as a "leader" of people. Being a leader does not equate to being a tyrant or an autocratic manager. Leading involves a symbiotic relationship with the followers and the challenge of successfully leading followers in a manner that accomplished organizational objectives while maintaining the highest level of responsibility to the followers.

In today's business and political environment, the real adventure in leadership is effectively responding to change. Change is the one consistent variable in an organization. It is ever present and defies control. It can be managed, however. Positive response to change and the planned management of change is the result of innovative leadership.

To be a successful leader in the management of change, one must first understand the nature of change within the work environment. This means knowing how people change and how organizations change over time. This paper will examine the problematic changes that occur with the aging of people and organizations and how leaders might counteract these age-related changes.

## How We Change

Every human being is a quantity of variables. The environment and one's personality determine which variable will come to the fore. Behavior is a function of personality and environment. In equation form it is expressed as follows:  $B = f(P,E)$ . The environment consists of nearly everything that is extrinsic to one's personality. Other people, machinery, noise, colors and weather all become part of the environment and have an impact upon how we behave.

As if it isn't difficult enough to understand and predict human behavior, there is one important

variable that seems to affect our behavior more than we had suspected—age. Dr. Douglas Bray (1) of AT&T has helped shed some light on the influence of aging upon behavior. His study of personality dimensions was a longitudinal effort that gathered data over a 20-year period. The sample consisted of people entering the workforce in several different industries who were tracked over 20 years. The Edwards Personal Preference Profile was given to the people their first year of employment, their eighth year and their twentieth year.

Besides the Edwards Personal Preference Profile, the respondents were also given the School and College Ability Test (SCAT) and the Sarnoff Advancement Test. The SCAT was used to test verbal skills. Although there is a math segment of the test it was not used. The average (mean) score of the sample of 766 was the forty-seventh (47th) percentile. Scores on the test seem to answer the question as to whether or not our verbal skills improve with age. During the eighth year of employment of the score of the respondents went up to the sixty-fourth (64th) percentile. The score for the twentieth year was still higher at the sixty-ninth (69th) percentile. Obviously most people appear to improve upon their verbal skills as they grow older.

The Sarnoff Advancement Test was used to measure the interest in climbing the organization hierarchy through advancement or promotion. Scores the first year averaged fifty first percentile. Do we show more interest in advancing after eight years of work? No, the interest actually declines. The average score was the twenty-eighth (28th) percentile. More remarkable still is the drop that occurs after 20 years. The average score was the eighth percentile. There may be a number of reasons for this apparent lack of interest in advancement. Some people may have advanced as far as they want to go. For others interests out-

1. Presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture in Keystone, Colorado in August 1987.

side of work might have consumed more attention, time and energy. In any event many organizations base their reward systems and motivational efforts on promotions. Ironically, employees do not seem to value the prospect of advancement as a "motivator."

As a result of the Edwards Personal Profile testing several personality dimensions were identified as being age-related. The first such dimension is **achievement**. Achievement is the need to accomplish something important—to strive for goal accomplishment. This particular characteristic is often equated to a person's goal orientation and his/her work ethic. The average score for first year employees was the sixty-first (61st) percentile, the eighth year the eighty-first (81st) percentile and the twentieth year was the eighty-second (82nd) percentile. Besides being aware of this exceptionally high score, it is important to note that while interest in advancement goes down the drive to achieve actually goes up! Thus instead of emphasizing the possibility of promotion to inspire higher levels of achievement organizations should be concerned with the design of jobs in order to allow higher levels of achievement.

**Autonomy** was also recognized as being a dimension of personality that is age-related. Autonomy is a measurement of independence. The need to do things by oneself and for oneself is tested in autonomy. The need to be independent increases steadily going up from the fifty-third (53rd) percentile to the seventy-first (71st) percentile and to the eighty-fifth (85th) percentile after 20 years. Not surprisingly these scores support what we have known intuitively; we become more independent with age. In a time when team building is becoming more popular, these data suggest that it may get increasingly more difficult to get people to become effective team members as they grow older. Leaders will have to be given more training in team building and will need to know how to build the requisite skills for teamwork.

**Affiliation** is a dimension that is sometimes referred to as the "love need." The need to belong, to be accepted and liked by others is reflected by the affiliation score. Over the three testing periods the change in this dimension is

quite dramatic dropping from the sixty-first (61st) percentile the first year to the thirty eighth (38th) percentile for the second test period and down to the thirty-sixth (36th) percentile the third testing year. People definitely have a declining interest in affiliation as they age. Interests may become more focused upon family and the job, and people external to the immediate family become less important in the social sense. This change becomes a real challenge for leaders to deal with.

**Aggression** is part of an individual's personality that is a manifestation of hostility and the desire to strike out at others. Aggression goes beyond assertiveness and deals more directly with one's capacity to display hostility. The first year's score was the fifty-fifth (55th) percentile. Eight years later the average score was at the sixty-first (61st) percentile. During the twentieth year the score had risen to the sixty-eighth (68th) percentile. Besides becoming less interested in being social, the average person seems to grow more aggressive as he/she grows older. This may translate into people being less likely to passively accept conditions that are not acceptable to them in the work environment. Indeed, their reaction may be somewhat hostile to things that do not please them.

The final dimension that appears to be age-related is **intraception**. This measure is concerned with the need to understand others' motives and feelings. Scores were relatively low the first year at the thirty-fifth (35th) percentile and dropped to the twenty-eighth (28th) percentile the last year of testing. These scores indicate a need for training and education in the area of motives and behavior with emphasis upon the cause and effect of individual and group organizational behavior.

When examining the results of Bray's research illustrated in Table 1, it is clear that some personality dimensions will change with age. The implications for managers who must provide leadership within the organization are many. A question to be answered is what is the best way to deal with people who are obviously changing? What kinds of leadership will be the most effective? Consider the profile of the average person in this study. After 20 years the average individual is smarter, not interested in advancement, more achievement oriented, more independent, less

friendly, nastier and not especially concerned with the motives and feelings of others! It is definitely a challenge to provide leadership to this kind of person. Most of the changes are in direct opposition to the assumptions made in most organizations as to how best to provide leadership and incentives to perform. Before looking at some possible leadership responses to these changes, we should be aware of the possible changes in the organization itself.

**Table 1. How individuals change**

	Years in Workforce		
	0	8	20
SCAT - Verbal	47	64	69
Sarnoff-Advancement	51	28	8
Edwards Personal Preference:			
Achievement	62	81	82
Autonomy	53	71	85
Affiliation	61	38	36
Aggression	55	61	68
Intracception (understand motives and feelings)	35	31	28

Source: Douglas Bray, "Inter-Organizational Testing Study" (AT&T, 1981).

### How Organizations Change

Like individuals, organizations change with age. Most organizations mature with their product or service and learn to become more responsive to changes in the environment. But, for some, maturity means stability and the belief that there has been enough change. These organizations may forget what brought them to the level of competitive status or service they now enjoy. Protection of position becomes important and innovation is unfortunately given a low priority. The kinds of changes that occur for this type of organization are not those that move the company forward. They are changes that are meant to maintain the status quo. These changes are reactive as versus pro-active. Like any organism the organization does what is perceived to be necessary in order to maintain and protect its life and its "life style."

Leaders in this type of organization find that they are overburdened with "administrivia" and putting out fires. In a study of five executives, Henry Mintzberg found that they rarely had time to think about anything except the question immediately before them. Half of their activities

lasted more than an hour (3). In a similar study of 160 British managers, it was found that they were able to work for half an hour or more without interruption only once every three days (3). In these types of situations organizations rely upon "routines" and standard operating procedures. Compared with these symptoms of a lack of leadership is the increase in bureaucracy. Paperwork, multiple approvals for any expense, monitoring of all decisions and actions and strict adherence to an ever increasing number of rules, regulations and policies signal the growth of a thriving bureaucracy.

These kinds of changes just perpetuate and strengthen the organization's existing personality. Yes, organizations do have a personality. For organizations, it is referred to as organizational climate. Climate is essentially the manifestation of employee attitudes toward the organization (2). Thus, the organization behavior of employees is a result of the interface between individual personality and organization personality. Altering the equation referred to earlier, this relationship can be stated as follows: Organizational behavior is a function of personality and organizational climate, **OB = f(POC)**.

Although the dimensions that are used to measure individual personality are somewhat different from those used in measuring organizational climate, they can be used for purposes of illustrating the changes that can take place with organizational age. If an organization could take a SCAT, would the verbal skills improve over time? Definitely! With maturity, organizations communicate more frequently and generally better. More networks exist, and, most importantly, the organization's leaders improve their communication skills while improving the general level of verbal exchange within the company.

How about the Sarnoff Advancement test? As discussed earlier it appears that as organizations mature their leaders seek to maintain a status quo. Moving forward no longer holds the same priority. The advancement score would undoubtedly be lower for organizations just as it is for individuals. For organizations, advancement means growth and risk.

The age-related personality factors for individuals also apply to organizations. Achievement

would probably go up as most people want to achieve and do their best. The organization definitely has goals to accomplish. With maturity, goals are usually more numerous and more specific. Regardless of the results, the desire to achieve is there.

Similarly, autonomy also increases for organizations. With age and size, organizations become more independent and more self-reliant. On occasion this even results in what we might call "innovative isolationism." In other words, when a company believes in the N.I.H. (Not Invented Here) concept, it is usually shut off to new ways of thinking that are being used outside their organizations.

Because of this autonomy the affiliation level also drops. Size and more formal hierarchy usually limit the kinds of informal relationship that existed when there was less formality in the smaller organization. Although people may have more contact with different people, the interchanges seldom have the quality of those enjoyed before.

Increases in aggression usually can be seen in the market place and in the internal control that is implemented to enforce organization rules and regulations. Mature organizations must look to stealing someone else's customers in order to gain a larger market share. This requires aggressive actions and attitudes.

And yes, intraception also falls off just as with individuals. With growth and maturity the routine procedures and the bureaucratic rules seem to multiply. This creates a situation in which some decisions do not have to be made. The bureaucracy takes care of many problems—no decisions necessary. Cold perhaps, but consistent in the application of organization law. Personal motives and feelings may have to take a backseat.

So, how can these changes and problems be dealt with? Leadership! Innovative, provocative, productive leadership. Leadership that demonstrates a concern for the followers and recognizes the higher level motives and goals of the organization.

### **Leading Versus Coping**

Too often organizations try to cope with change and more or less "go with the flow." This coping strategy really amounts to defaulting managerial

prerogatives to the vagaries of change within the environment. Technology, competition, clientele and the marketplace may be dictating decisions and actions rather than leaders who have formulated strategic plans and a systemic decisional process. Coping with change is simply taking a trouble-shooting posture that reacts to situations and attempts to put out the fires.

Leading, on the other hand, involves foreseeing problems and having the vision to focus resources in a direction that will guide the organization toward higher performance while taking steps to minimize the possibility of negative impacts of change before they occur. In this regard, the nature of the leadership process is as follows:

1. To help define the mission of the group.
2. To help create an environment in which group members can become committed to the objectives of the group.
3. To serve as an interpreter of messages and behavior of other groups and individuals who may have some influence on the group.
4. To coordinate the activities of group members to insure compatible and consistent efforts toward goal achievement.
5. To provide needed resources for the group.

The manner in which managers relate to subordinates and make decisions is influenced greatly by their managerial philosophies. Effective leaders will recognize how their philosophies and the needs of their followers can be blended. Flexibility in leadership style and a certain tolerance for ambiguity are necessary. Being able to read and interpret a situation is an important element of the leadership process. On many occasions coaches or participants in athletic events have used the phrase "we are not going to worry about our opponents; we're just going to go out and play our own game." This is fine if the team can overwhelm its opponent to the extent that everything goes its way, but this is seldom the case. Really astute leaders have the ability to adapt to the situation. If the situation calls for a rather subtle approach, the leader who "sticks with the game plan" and comes on too strong may make a grievous error. This capacity to meet the situation with the appropriate action is but one of the qualities which seems to distinguish true leadership from a more simplistic form of directing used by those who

“hope to cope.”

### **S.O.S. Leadership**

S.O.S. leadership sounds like an oxymoronic phrase. In this case S.O.S. is not used as the international distress symbol but by remembering this acronym it can **help leadership**. The S.O.S. stands for **Symbiosis, Osmosis and Synergism**.

In biology the term symbiosis is used to describe a mutually beneficial relationship between two dissimilar organisms. While the leader and the followers are not dissimilar organisms, their roles are dissimilar, and when both roles are fulfilled, there can be a mutually beneficial relationship. In most cases, a group requires some organization and some leadership to provide unity of direction. Likewise, leaders are dependent upon the group for the implementation of plans. In other words, a successful group, formal or informal, has recognized the importance of the various roles of the individuals and exhibits a successful coordination of the roles.

Osmosis is a term used to describe a process of gradual absorption or merging, suggesting such diffusion. By allowing employees to participate in decisions they can feel ownership of ideas and actions. An internalization of organizational goals and objectives helps to create a situation where the values and goals of an organization and its members can be gradually mingled so they become one. This process will help develop a climate that is based upon commitment to goals, to the leaders and to the followers, as versus a climate of control wherein unification is attempted through rules and regulations.

Synergism is frequently used to describe cooperative action between two different entities. Where synergism exists, the cooperation between two separate groups or entities is such that the outcome of the cooperative effort is greater than the outcome had each group or entity worked independently. In work groups where roles are clearly defined and there is appropriate delega-

tion, a cooperative team effort is necessary if the output is to increase at a greater rate than the input. If there is such an increase as a result of the teamwork, a synergistic relationship can be said to be in existence. In order to reach this level of cooperation, the group would need to display a great deal of trust and confidence in the supervisor (leader) and vice versa. This mutuality implies a symbiotic relationship where each party is in some way dependent upon the other.

Of course these explanations are “word games” to a certain extent, but the point is this. There is a very special relationship between leader and followers. The roles of each must be clearly understood by everyone. Even then there will be difficulties because of the numerous human variables that come into play. The relationships in the work environment that are truly synergistic and symbiotic are ideal and something to continually strive for. It is a responsibility of the leader to convey, through words and action, the nature of the relationship that should exist within the work unit. Only by possessing much knowledge about the members of the group and the objectives and the function of the leadership role, can a manager accomplish this task. This knowledge plus the willingness to be pro-active as versus reactive can make the challenges of leadership into a most rewarding and positive adventure.

### **Literature Cited**

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