developing leadership throughout the organisation


He observes that people development can't happen as a result of annual performance reviews: "It should be a daily event, integrated into every aspect of your regular goings-on".

This constant, ongoing commitment to providing learning opportunities (see last edition's article) is fundamental to developing leaders throughout an organization.

Much of the discussion about leadership tends to imply or assume an individualistic perspective of the leader: someone is a team leader, someone else is a director or vice president, someone is leading a project.

But there's an increasing — and healthy — awareness of the need and value in developing leadership that is dispersed throughout an organization.

This approach views leadership as a process that is diffuse throughout an organisation rather than lying solely with a formally
designated “leader”. As a result, the emphasis shifts from developing “leaders” to leaders developing “leader-ful organizations”, where many more people are encouraged – even expected – to exercise leadership according to situational needs.

This collective responsibility for leadership does not negate formal leadership responsibilities but acknowledges every willing person’s potential and opportunity to provide leadership when required. Those with formal leadership roles are committed to a leadership responsibility that encompasses actively developing others who want to learn and contribute.

Several considerations can support the development of dispersed leadership, including:

- Developing a common or shared leadership language
- Developing the skills required to determine appropriate leadership styles for given situations
- Developing a culture that values and enables broad-ranging influence and initiative.

**Developing a common or shared leadership language**

Many companies develop lists or frameworks that identify key “leadership capabilities” – things like “provides clarity about strategic direction”, or “developing others”, or “flexibility”. These help create an overt, explicit expectation and understanding about leadership; about “what it looks like around here” and about what we mean when we talk about leadership. (It also helps in talent spotting because leader behaviours aren’t only exhibited by those in formal positions.)

Organizations often see the value in adopting or creating simple but informative ways of communicating needs and expectations around leader-follower and leader-leader interactions. For example, the Situational Leadership® approach provides a robust “readiness” scale against which both leader and follower can highlight the individual’s present confidence and competence for a specific task. Leaders and followers know that these four levels of readiness should be matched to an appropriate influencing style. Expectations are clear, there’s an objective way of describing the situation and a non-emotional way of providing feedback about the appropriateness of a particular influencing style for the situation.

**Developing the skills required to determine appropriate leadership styles for given situations**

Being able to appropriately adapt our communication and behaviour to others is essential to sustaining effective working relationships. This is particularly true when we’re trying to influence others. “The fool persuades me with his reasons,” said Aristotle. “The wise man persuades me with my own.”

Adapting our leadership style isn’t about compromising our integrity; it’s about taking the initiative to understand the other person’s perspectives and needs. It’s about accepting that “one size fits all” doesn’t apply to human relations and that the “my way or the highway” approach has long passed its use-by date.

Being able to adapt and flex our approach is helped if we have developed:

- A healthy self-awareness
- An understanding of how to diagnose situations and needs
- An appreciation of interpersonal dynamics
- Some expertise or at least familiarity with different influencing and interaction styles.

**Developing a culture that values and enables broad-ranging influence and initiative**

Practically, committing to developing leadership across and throughout an organization has many benefits. It supports flatter and more responsive structures, encourages informal leadership and initiative, stimulates the contribution of more perspectives and voices in the influencing process, and provides greater satisfaction and fulfillment.

Such an environment must be created, sometimes by deliberately challenging entrenched management cultures that actively suppress such initiative and expansion of influence. Peter Drucker once observed that “the leader of the past knew how to tell, the leader of the future will know how to ask”. When you manage “knowledge workers”, that makes even more sense. “Leaders need to be willing to start with asking the question, ‘What needs to be done?’ It’s an apparently simple question,

There is an increasing awareness of the need to develop leadership that is dispersed throughout an organization.

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