Helicopter View and Leadership

Dr.Md. Abdus Salam, PhD, MSc, MS, B.Ed., OCT
Principal, Inuujaq School, Qikiqtani School Operations,
Govt. of Nunavut, Canada
kaiser.salam@gmail.com

1. Introduction
In this paper a new concept of helicopter view of leadership is introduced. What are the analogies between helicopter views and leadership views are discussed. There are many definitions of leadership and there are also many leadership myths. A very short and precise definition of leadership is given. There are many types and styles of leadership you can think of that may also create a misty and fuzzy idea of leadership styles and types. To simplify this, only three broad types of leadership based on leadership styles has been discussed.

Based on the experience and leadership role of the author and Whitaker\(^1\) what ten things that great managers do differently has been discussed. This paper is not meant to prescribe a narrow set of instructions. Instead, it frames the landscape of organization from the perspective of great managers and CEOs. What do they see when they view their organization and the people in them? Where do they focus their attention? What guide their decisions? How can the managers and CEOs gain the same advantages?

There is no straightforward answer to the above; if there were, surely we’d all have it by now. Each business organization, corporation, or institution is extremely complex, and so is organizational leadership. But we can work towards understanding what the best mangers do. We can gain insight into how effective we are as leaders.

2. What is Leadership?
Leadership is "organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal". The leader may or may not have any formal authority. Students of leadership have produced theories involving traits, situational interaction, function, behavior, power, vision and values, charisma, and intelligence, among others.

A leader with vision and or goal has a clear, vivid picture of where to go, as well as a firm grasp on what success looks like and how to achieve it. But it’s not enough to have a vision; leaders must also share it and act upon it. Jack Welch, former chairman and CEO of General Electric Co., said, "Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision and relentlessly drive it to completion."

3. What is the analogy of helicopter view & leadership view?
Let us consider a helicopter that is on the helipad and is about to fly up. When a helicopter is on the ground, if the pilot looks down he/she can see/cover a small circular surface area below the helicopter, virtually a little or no information about the surroundings he can get. The more it goes up the more surface it covers means the pilot gradually starts to get clear picture of the ground and surroundings, he can get every details of the area he is covering at this stage. Further he goes up, more information of the area or city he can have. In fact the pilot get a conic view of the area he is in.
Similarly, when a person starts to attain or ascend a leadership ladder, he or she starts to gain more and more knowledge of the inside of the cone he or she is in. As a result when he reaches at the top of the cone, he has a grip and knowledge of what is going on inside of his cone (institution, organization, company etc.). At the same time he must have a clear idea about the mission and vision of an organization and it’s people. As a head or leader of an organization he should see through a cone like a beacon of light that is crystal clear. A leader should see perspective view of an organization like an Architect sees when he designs a house. Following diagram may clarify the above analogy.

4. Types of Leadership
In broad sense, leadership can be divided into three groups based on styles:

a) Authoritarian/Autocratic/Dictatorship Style - Prince Type Leadership
b) Participative/Democratic Style - Benevolent Type Leadership
c) Lead by Example/Innate Style - Charismatic Leadership

Example of Autocratic Leaders:
Whatever types are in between the autocratic and the charismatic styles, I consider as participative or democratic style of leadership. Pretty much we the managers, CEOs fall in this category unless some one really wants to be an autocratic or dictatorship type of CEO or manager.

5. **What Great Managers/CEOs Do Things Differently?**
I am not going to discuss and analyze character traits of a leader such as Integrity, Dedication, Magnanimity, Humility, Openness, Creativity, Fairness, Assertiveness, A sense of humor etc. that have been discussed in numerous articles, papers and focus groups. But in the following I am going to shed some lights on how great managers can or do things differently.
5. 1. The Manager Is the Filter
A member of your staff asks you in the hallway how is your day going?
As a manager you may answer: Things are great, how about with you? Or you can respond: That Jimmy Wallace (client) is getting on my nerves! And all of a sudden that Jimmy will get on that staff’s nerve too.

Here is another scenario that can be filtered in two ways: Say, I am a manager and just met with an angry client Mrs. Smith. While walking through the hallway my Asst. Manager asks, “How is your day? I can chose to filter my response, “Things are great, how about with you?” Or I can respond, “Oh I just met that out of control client, Mrs. Smith. Man, she has some temper! ... What have I accomplished? I have made my Asst. Manager terrified about Mrs. Smith. In the long run, I might have terrified every staff about Mrs. Smith. One way or the other, my response affects the company/organization or institution. By sparing unnecessary bad news, a manager can create a much more productive environment in the office.

5. 2. Its People Not the Program
There are two ways to improve a company significantly:

   a. Get better staff
   We can spend a great deal of time and energy looking for programs that will solve our problems. Too often, these programs do not bring the improvement or growth of a company we seek. It is never about programs; it is always about people. We have to keep in mind that programs are never the solutions, and they are never the problem. Best managers get better staff during the hiring process. They do not hurry, but continue their endeavor until a staff suitable to the company is found. A better staff can make a difference in your company in a shortest possible time. If you make a wrong judgment in hiring, no matter what best program you have in your company, it will not work. So, it is the people not the program that can make your plan a success. I am not saying that good programs are not important. But I would like to emphasize that we need good people to carry forward a good program a success.

   b. Improve/train the staff you have
   Effective managers encourage and support individual staff development². Regardless of the need for and commitment to whole organization, best managers do everything they can to promote the effectiveness of each individual staff member as a way to improve the company. Ineffective managers pay much less attention to allowing or supporting individual growth. Instead, they focus their efforts on whole company goals and issues. As a manager/CEO, we must recognize that no matter what programs we introduce or seek to strengthen, our most important work is to improve the people in our company.

5. 3. Who is the variable?
More precisely, who is the variable in the section of a company and who is the variable in the whole company? For the section head or team leader we may ask the question, “what if the team does poorly? Or for the manager/CEO, “what if the company does poorly?”
5. 4. Treat Everyone with Respect, Everyday, and All the Time
Each of us can remember at least one occasion in our professional lives when some one in a leadership role treated us inappropriately. No matter how many times he treated us well, we only remember the inappropriate one, no matter how long ago it was. Treat everyone as if they were good. Above applies to all employees, clients, as well as your competitors. Please consider the following memos:

   a) Reminder! All quarterly business reports are due promptly by 5:00 pm today
   b) Dear Guests! Stop! Take off your outdoor shoes while entering the office.

At first glance you may say that there is nothing wrong in these two memos. But if we look carefully, by putting these memos in the company, we might have offended 90% of the employees who submit their report on time. In order not to offend 90% and reach the other 10% we may rephrase the memos as follows:

   “Thanks so much to those of you who are turning in quarterly business report promptly. It makes much more manageable for Mrs. Rebecca to compile and submit the same to the CEO for the board meeting. Anything we can do to help her helps all of us. Thanks again.”

Similarly, we may rephrase second memo as follow:

   “Thank you to those who take off their outdoor shoes regularly while entering the office. This helps us to keep the office clean.”

5. 5. Focus on Behaviour, Then Focus On Beliefs
Effective managers recognize the difficulty of changing a person’s lifelong beliefs. Sometimes what really matters is not beliefs but the behaviour. Your clients scan your gesture and posture. Change in behaviour of your employees may lead to change in beliefs. You may tell your employees that you don’t have to like all the customers; you just have to act as if you like them all.

5. 6. Do not Bring Personal Problems To The Office
You might have strong arguments with your partner last night or you are not happy what your daughter is doing and so on. Never bring your frustrations from last night to the office next day. Smile and show to all as if you are happy. This creates a congenial atmosphere that a company needs. Remember, if a CEO sneezes, managers catch cold, and the company gets pneumonia.

5. 7. Practice Patient Hearing, Do Not Interfere In The Middle
As a leader, we sometimes do not realize that patient hearing is important to have a caring relationship with the employees. We need to practice patient hearing to any problem and should not interrupt in the middle of a conversation.

5. 8. Understand High Achievers
One of a manager’s greatest challenges is to work successfully with high achievers. Our high achievers do so much within a company; if we do not work with them effectively, we will lose their valuable contributions, which often cannot be replaced. Effective managers understand these key people, are sensitive to their needs, and maximize their ability.
5. 9. Train the Trainers

Model Effective Interaction:

Hiring a ‘GPA 4’ employee mean nothing in life if we cannot teach our employees how to get along with others. We cannot expect young people to learn this of their own; we must model it for them. This is one reason we have to develop ways for trainers to work together in our companies.

5. 10. The Manager is the Change Agent-Prepare to Lead Change

To lead change, the leader must understand change. To understand change, the leader must understand how to change. To understand how to change, the leader must personally experience the change process. Through experiencing the change process the leader identifies with the personal struggle faced by the members of his/her organization. There could be three kinds of CEO/Managers - a) those who make things happen, b) those who watch things happen, and c) those who say, “what happened?”

Best managers are the first type of leaders. They make things happen.

6. Conclusion

The word ‘leadership’ is a puzzle. Every leader sees leadership from different angles and defines from his or her perspective of view. It is difficult to have a unified, simple definition of leadership. Also there could be dozens of types of leadership that we can think of. However, in this paper a simple definition and only three kinds of leadership is proposed. As a leader we should look for efficient people along with looking for good programs in order to achieve a set goal or fulfill a vision. Good program in most cases do not work in absence of good people. So it is the good people, not the good program we should look into first. It is obvious that a leader is a change agent and therefore a leader must be prepared to lead change. In order to lead a change, a leader himself must change to lead a change. To lead a change a leader must also have a helicopter view.

References


5. http://www.what-are-good-leadership-skills.com/example-leadership-skills.html

6. Battiste, Marie. Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in first nations education. A literature review with recommendations. National working group on education and Minister of Indian Affairs and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Ottawa, Canada