Leadership Strategies for Organizational Change

What do these two terms mean to you? Are they synonyms? Do they mean the same thing to you in your every day work or are they different? The purpose of this article is to look at how these terms apply in business and how they may have a big difference when a business is going through a large organizational change.

First, we should define our terms. What is management? According to the dictionary, management is the act or manner of managing; handling, direction, or control. As a verb, to manage is to conduct business, commercial affairs, etc.; be in charge.

Leadership, according to the dictionary, is an act or instance of leading; guidance; direction. As a verb, to lead is to guide in direction, course, action, opinion, etc.

In practical terms, how do these two terms differ? In the simplest sense, in business you manage things; budgets, schedules, inventory, systems, and processes. However, you lead people; your subordinates or work groups. Are good managers good leaders? Are good leaders good managers? Do they need to be?

Which of these has more emphasis in your daily work? Which gets more attention? Which gets more attention in education today? How many universities offer degrees in management? How many offer a degree in leadership? Try this. Go to the Internet and enter the two terms in your favorite search engine and compare the number of hits for each term. For management I got 945 million hits. For leadership I got 18.7 million hits. That is a difference by a factor of 50! Does this indicate a disproportionate emphasis on management versus leadership?

Leadership Characteristics

Think about the direct supervisors you have had in your career. Who were the ones you liked working for and who were the ones you weren't happy working for? Why did you like working for some and not others? Did they lead from the front or push from behind? How would you classify them; as leaders or as managers?

From the list of your favorite supervisors above, what were their characteristics? What do they have in common? From work done by Kouzes and Posner, 1. the top leadership traits shared by all leaders are:

1. Honest
2. Forward-looking
3. Competent
4. Inspiring
5. Intelligent

How did your list compare? Your list may have had many more characteristics that your top supervisors shared. Did you also include good communicator? Is it understood in the other characteristics? How can a competent intelligent leader who has a vision for the future of the organization inspire his or her subordinates without good communication?

One other aspect that doesn't make the lists, but is in inherent in all of them, is dedication. Leaders are dedicated to the mission, the organization, and the people. People who are inspired know that leaders care about all of those things. Leaders balance these things, and never lose sight of the fact that the people ARE the organization and the face to the customer. Leaders are honest with their people about what they do well, and where they need to improve. They provide opportunities for people to grow and make the organization stronger when they do.

Organizational Change

Are some organizations more adaptable to change than others? Why? When an organization is faced with a need for a change in its operation how do their executives address this change? Do they "manage" the change or "lead" the change? Does it matter? The answer is both. Some aspects of change are managed and some are led.

Looking at the leadership traits above, the need for change is identified by the leader who is forward-looking. In other words they have analyzed their position in the marketplace and identified a need and have a vision of the future after the change is completed. In their analysis they have also developed a business case for the change. They can clearly see that path to the future of the company or organization.

How do they inspire their subordinates to adopt the change? They must communicate their vision and the business case for the change. How and when do they communicate the need for change? The short answer is early and often. A leader will make the need for change a theme throughout the transition from the "old" to the "new" operation.

What about management? Certainly there are many things that need to be "managed" during an organizational change. It will depend on the "things" that are being changed. There will be budgets and schedules to manage. Is it a computer system upgrade or changeover? It may involve both hardware and software changes. If it is an entirely new product or business process there are schedules, possibly equipment, and training involved in moving the business through the change process.

During the change, there are many things being directed and controlled to make the change happen on the technical side. Make no mistake, these things are important for the systems, processes, or equipment to be ready on schedule and on budget.

What about the people? What is being done to get them ready for the systems or process changes? Who are the people impacted? They are all the stakeholders. Who are stakeholders? They may be only employees if the change is strictly internal to the organization. However, there may be external stakeholders also. They may be customers or suppliers. Each group of stakeholders may have a different interest in the change. Each group may need a different

message at different times. Their interests and the impact of the change on them need to be considered and addressed.

Some say that people fear and reject change, yet change happens often in our lives. We leave home and go off to school, work, or the military. We get married. We have children. We buy a car. We buy a house. We willingly, indeed, sometimes eagerly make those changes in our lives. Which is bigger in your life, having a child or a new computer application at work? Do we welcome one and fear the other? Why? What is the difference? In one sense, the changes in our personal lives are self-imposed and those at work are seemingly imposed on us without our input.

The biggest difference is in our mindset. What can corporate executives (leaders) do to make their stakeholders as eager for change as parents anxiously awaiting the birth of their child? If they do it what will the results be? In his book, "Creating Magic," Lee Cockerell 2. cites the Disney Formula for Success:

Leadership => Employee Excellence => Customer Satisfaction => Business Results

Cockerell proposes ten strategies based on his experience that calls for leadership to make change an on-going continuous process and not a single event. His ten strategies and a summary statement are listed below:

1. Remember everyone is important.[3.] All stakeholders are important and need to know it.
2. Break the mold.[4.] Just because you've always done it this way doesn't mean we should continue doing it that way.
3. Make your people your brand.[5.] Your people are your most important resource.
4. Create magic through training. Give all employees the tools, coaching, and sense of purpose they need to be the best.[6.]
5. Eliminate hassles.[7.] Streamline your processes.
6. Learn the truth.[8.] Get the facts from those doing the work.
7. Burn the free fuel.[9.] Know your employees and recognize their work.
8. Stay ahead of the pack.[10.] Keep current on the latest from both your competition and other industries.
9. Be careful what you say and do.[11.] Your employees are watching to see if you walk the walk or just talk the talk.
10. Develop character.[12.] Know your values and remain true to them.

Conclusion

By using the ten leadership strategies, leaders will develop a climate of openness with their subordinates that encourage the free flow of information. It feeds directly into the model of Plan, Do, Check, Act. The organization is constantly evaluating its performance and looking for ways to improve.

However, even in an environment of continuous improvement, there may be instances when a major change will be needed. At some point the business may need a new computer system or a major software modification to go to the next level of excellence. It may be a new product that calls for vastly different production methods. If management operates in a leadership model and has been using leadership strategies for continuous improvement the change will be business as usual. In an environment where change is the norm, change is accepted.

References

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