

Empowering and directive leadership styles

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ABSTRACT

The present case study has been designed for students of organizational behavior courses that include a lesson of team leadership. To set the foundations of the topic and based on team leadership literature the definitions of the two most important leadership styles (i.e., directive and empowering) have been provided. Besides, the authors summarize previous evidence on differential effects of both team leadership styles on both team processes and team performance. Authors propose some questions for discussion in order for students think which kind of leadership style is better for teams. Additionally, this activity includes an instrument so that students can assess their own leadership characteristics.

Keywords: directive leadership, empowering leadership



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INTRODUCTION

Organizations increasingly rely on work teams to face challenges derived from the complexity of modern work, and team leadership is recognized as one of the most important characteristics that makes them effective (Zaccaro, Rittman & Marks, 2001). Consequently, the body of research on team leadership has grown considerably over the last decades (Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm & McKee, 2014).

Fleishman and colleagues (1991) conducted a research in which they identified 65 different systems to classify team leaders' behaviors that were present in leadership literature. However, they noted a common trend to categorize leaders' behaviors under two broad categories: directive and empowering. On the one hand, directive leadership is related to the superior positional role that leaders play in teams and concerns behaviors such as providing followers with guidance in terms of goals and means of achieving them (House, 1971, 1996; Martin, Liao & Campbell, 2013). Directive leaders are the ones most likely to make decisions in the team and they give instructions to the other team members (Bass, Valenzi, Farrow & Solomon, 1975; Sims, Faraj & Yun, 2009).

On the other hand, empowering leadership is related to behaviors aiming to increase subordinates' autonomy and responsibility (Lorinkova, Pearsall & Sims, 2013). In empowering led teams, leaders influence the rest of team members by sharing power and supporting motivation and development (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). Empowering leaders focus their efforts on encouraging team members to exchange information and ideas and a collaborative decision-making process (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades & Drasgow, 2000).

Existing research provides evidence on the differential effects of both kinds of team leadership styles on team processes and team performance (Lorinkova et al., 2013; Yun, Faraj & Sims, 2005). The experimental study by Lorinkova and colleagues (2013) found that although directive led teams initially performed better than empowered ones, the latter would outperform the former on the long run because they were associated with higher levels of team learning and coordination. In the study of Yun and coauthors (2005) conducted with trauma resuscitation teams, they found that empowering led teams seemed to be beneficial for teams facing tasks of low complexity whereas directive led teams was positive for teams facing high complexity tasks as well as when team members had little prior experience.

Proved the importance of team leaders for teams and the differential effects of the two widely known leadership styles in different kind of situations teams encountered, team leadership is a common topic in most of the organizational behavior and business management courses. Therefore, it is crucial for future professionals to learn about main characteristics of team leadership styles and their differential benefits and potential applications. In this sense case studies are a very well known methodology that has been applied in the context of business for many years (Falkenberg & Woiceshyn, 2008; Cagle & Baucus, 2006). In particular research suggest that case studies necessarily implies pedagogical positive advantages such as a more meaningful learning which results in benefits for both students and instructors. (DesJardins & Diedrich, 2003). In particular study cases are a good way to bring real life scenarios and choices that are close to students particular circumstances and consequently this activity has been designed presenting a case in which an hypothetical student is faced with a dilemma related to his two supervisors' leadership styles.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE

This case is intended to be a team-based assignment for students of organizational behavior courses that include a lesson on team leadership. The case has been specifically

designed for students of the bachelor of psychology, tourism management and business management. It can be used as an introductory team-based assignment for team leadership as well as a comprehensive assessment of the team leadership part of the course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the role of a leader in a team, define empowering and directive leadership styles and differentiate their characteristics.
2. To utilize validated instruments to measure empowering and directive leadership styles
3. To employ analytical skills to evaluate teams led by empowering and directive leaders.
4. To apply conceptual knowledge about empowering and directive leadership style to hypothetical situations

THE CASE SCENARIO

Jules is a student who is about to finish his bachelor. He enrolled as a trainee in the Human Resources department of a chain of hotels for six months. When he finished his traineeship he was offered a fix position in the same company but in the Housekeeping department. Jules thinks this is a great opportunity in order to combine this fix position with the master's degree he wants to pursue next year.

During his traineeship Jules was very happy with his job because he liked a lot the structure of the department and also the team procedures. In particular he was very satisfied with the way the objectives were set, the deadlines to reach those objectives and the attitudes of his supervisor and his workmates. His boss always emphasized the need of working all together in order to reach the objectives of the department and often encouraged participative decision-making processes. In particular, the team leader would organize periodical meetings in which the objectives of the department were discussed. Besides, his supervisor always ask his and his colleagues' opinions and ideas about the departmental task, not only in those periodical meetings but in the daily routine. What Jules most liked is that he used to feel that his contributions were always taken into consideration in the daily life of the work team. Besides, the available length of time to carry out each task was normally enough and consequently the team did not have to work under high levels of pressure. Additionally, if one of the team members had any piece of information useful for others that would help to reach the departmental objectives, they would set a meeting to share this information with the rest of the team. Besides, if he needed something, his colleagues were always willing to support him and help him without any request. Even since the third month, he was also able to identify his workmates needs and help them when they need it, which make Jules felt part of the team.

However, in the new department where he took the fix position the situation has dramatically changed. Although he somehow likes the new tasks he performs everyday and his recently acquired responsibilities, he does not feel comfortable anymore in the company for several reasons. In particular, Jules has perceived a huge change concerning the departmental meetings. Although team meetings take place more often now than before, team members' participation is quite limited. The new supervisor assigns everybody their tasks and also set performance goals and deadlines. Besides, Jules see little to no opportunities of suggesting ideas. In addition, deadlines in this department are quite shorter and the team needs to work under pressure in order to successfully reach the established performance goals. Another important issue is that Jules feels he is not closed enough to his new

workmates. In this department people seems to be always occupied with their tasks and they don't need to help each other. He always has something to do as well and he would not have time to support his new colleagues with their tasks if he was asked to. However, the team is apparently happy with these procedures and they reach their objectives year after year.

INSTRUMENT FOR ASSESSING LEADERSHIP

The following instrument consists on a set of 10 items to be answered on a 5-point lykert scale (1 = "very uncomfortable", and 5 = "very comfortable") that mixes items from the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) developed by Arnold and coauthors (2000) and the Directive Leadership Scale (DLS) developed by Durham and coauthors (1997). What kind of leader are you? Now think about when you have been in charge of a team, are you comfortable with the following situations?

1. Taking charge of the team
2. Encouraging team members to set their own performance goals
3. Criticizing team members' behaviors
4. Suggests team members to express ideas and suggestions
5. Giving orders and commands to the rest of team members
6. Listen and consider ideas and suggestions even when I disagree with them
7. Assigning other team members' roles
8. Encouraging team members to work together
9. Setting performance goals to team members
10. Stimulate team members to solve problem on their own initiative

Now sum up the points you obtained in the even and odd questions and compared them. If you obtained a bigger mark in the even questions you can consider yourself a more directive than empowering leader. Alternatively, if you had higher score on the odd questions, you can call yourself an empowering leader.

CASE QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What are the main objectives of a team leader? What kind of leadership styles do you find in each of the departments? Describe their characteristics (learning objective 1)
2. What kind of leader are you? (learning objective 2)
3. Which leadership style do you think is more effective? Consider strengths and weaknesses of each leadership style (learning objective 3)
4. Imagine the situation in which the leadership styles of both departments are exchanged: would each department reach their objectives? How would the new situation affect employees? (learning objective 4)

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR INSTRUCTORS

Question 1 set the foundations of the lesson. First, students will identify the main tasks of a team leader. Besides, the main characteristics of each leadership style are easily identifiable in paragraphs 2 (empowering) and 3 (directive). Question 2 is useful for students to know how they can use validated instruments to measure both kind of leadership and they will learn about directive and empowering main characteristics by working with the items of the questionnaire provided. In addition, they will know about their own leadership tendencies

and what they should work on if they want to improve each kind of leadership behaviors on themselves.

Question 3 and 4 are the most important of the case scenario. They will make students to position themselves by empowering leadership styles because Jules was happier when he was working in a team led by an empowering leader. However, the information provided stresses the fact that the department led by a directive leader is working well and that team members are happy with the procedures. The instructor should moderate the discussion and focus on the contingency factors that make one leadership style or the other more suitable. The literature review provided is also useful as it provides evidence on when directive or empowering leaders are more appropriated and it does not benefit one style over the other one.

EVALUATION

| Score level | High | Medium | Low |
|--|--|---|---|
| Question 1: 10% Question 2: 10% Question 3: 20% Question 4: 20% | Arguments support answers and reflect application of critical thinking | Average support of answers and average application of critical thinking | Inconsistent support for solution and lack of critical thinking |
| Formatting: 10% | It follows guidelines (letter 12 and double space) | One element of the guidelines is missing | Both elements of the guidelines is missing |
| Spelling: 10% | No spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors | Between 1 and 3 spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors | More than 3 spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors |
| Organization: 20% | Information clearly organized | Information is not consistently organized | Information is not organized |

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