



Create Leadership Synergy - Starting From the Inside Out

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Abstract

Research has shown that leadership plays an important part in workplace culture and productivity, however you can not lead others effectively if you can not lead yourself. And to lead yourself, you have to understand what drives your decisions, your actions and your reactions. This paper is for women in the SETT professions facing the unique challenges of dealing with people unlike themselves, the impact of people's unique individuality and the role of one's unconscious communication habits in reducing leadership effectiveness as well as workplace productivity.

Participants will learn how to obtain data to improve their interactions with others. Examples taken from the Author's work using two scientifically validated assessments (REISS Profile© and PEP™) will illustrate some of the many ways that people are different and how these combinations not only make each of us a unique individual, but can result in challenges when it comes to leading others effectively. This is especially so for women working in non-traditional areas.

Participants will discover how, by using many of the skills that make them successful in the SETT fields, they can uncover the unconscious desires (both their own and others') that too often sabotage well-meaning actions. They will learn how this knowledge can help them act and respond in a manner that will achieve their preferred results. Participants will also learn how knowledge of their own unique driving forces and way of behaving in the world can provide them with increased choices when dealing with others and how this knowledge can increase their

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ability to influence and impact others, gain new respect for their abilities and make them more effective leaders.

Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing organizations to-day is leadership. This has been brought to the forefront in recent years by the scandals of Enron, WorldCom and Arthur Anderson, while closer to home Conrad Black and Hollinger have made front page news. Leadership needs have changed from the military style command and control so common in the past^{[1][2]} however adoption of new, more appropriate styles is slow in coming. The modern workforce no longer accepts the old style. It's members are highly educated and know that they have options - if they don't like the work environment, they can go elsewhere. They expect to be kept in the loop, to be part of the decision making process. They are looking for a chance to make a difference, to be involved. They don't want to be told what to do - they want to be told the expected outcomes and then allowed to decide on the best way to achieve those results themselves. Too often in the past organizations have made use of a very limited portion of peoples' abilities - the rest only came into play outside of work, where people became fully engaged in activities that they did out of commitment, not coercion. Too many leaders expected people to leave their personal problems at home and put financial performance before everything else, in the process creating a workplace where the best in the industry wouldn't want to work. To-day's workers want more, they are looking for leaders that have a meaningful vision for the future and can connect that to the work that needs to be done. They want leaders who care about them as people, who are honest and 'walk the talk', who show their commitment to the company, its' values and its' people by their actions. After all, people don't leave companies, they leave their bosses.

Because of these new demands from the knowledge workforce, success in the future will depend on the ability of the organization to tap into, bring together and use the full potential of all its people - and effective leadership is the key to realizing the full potential of intellectual capital. To lead knowledge workers in the 21st century a leader will have to have the people skills necessary to communicate, motivate, influence, collaborate and delegate among a very diverse, and often dispersed, workforce. A leader will have to have the character traits that call forth the best from others. And the leader must be confident and comfortable in their own skin, so that they can easily identify and bring on board the talent they need to fill the gaps that they can readily admit to having. A participant at the 2004 Canadian Biotechnology Human Resources Report said it well - "the people are the first thing that affect the success of a company - not the technology."^[3] And a 2007 Survey by The Center for Creative Leadership identified *collaboration, change leadership, building effective teams and influencing without authority* as the most needed skills for future leaders - all of which deal with the people side of business^[4] and rely heavily on the ability to communicate and connect with others at a deeper level. These are not skills that you naturally think of when you picture the typical male role model of a leader. They are however, consistent with many of the strengths exhibited by women.

So people management, the ability to bring together and develop multi-disciplinary teams of

diverse people, motivate them, provide encouragement and support when times get tough, mentor, empower and develop each person to realize and contribute from their full potential and then celebrate each and every success along the way – these will be the key leadership competencies of the future. The ability to bring out and bring together the best in oneself and others is what is required for leadership synergy - the result of which is something far beyond the mere additive results of putting highly talented people in the same room. To do this will require strong communication skills and a level of comfort and understanding of one's own abilities - knowledge of self that too few have taken the time to truly acquire. Leadership for the future will require both head and heart skills to gain the commitment of employees. Drucker has said that understanding one's strengths, being able to articulate personal values and knowing where we belong are essential to addressing the challenge of improving the "abysmally low productivity of knowledge workers"^[5]. And strong communication skills are the backbone of effectively influencing and impacting others. They have been identified as key to the success of the virtual leader in the workplace of the 21st century^[6]. These skills all come from a strong foundation of self-awareness, knowledge of core values and belief in oneself. Leadership that produces winning synergy in the workplace is truly an inside job, one that is an ongoing journey of discovery and learning.

The Path to Leadership Synergy

Many people, especially in the SETT sectors, have only a limited understanding of themselves, and even less knowledge of the nature of others. This lack of knowledge about what affects the way we interact with others is a serious impediment to effectively influencing and having impact on people and decisions, abilities that are key to addressing the top challenges identified for future leaders^{[3] [4]}. The challenges presented by the new style of leadership are further intensified by the tendency of SETT specialists to prefer working with data rather than people. Many have told me that they prefer to remain in a technical capacity rather than deal with the stress and frustrations of having to deal with people. They often use the excuse that they're technical people, they don't have the necessary people skills that it takes.

However the ability to work well with others and be a great leader is not simply an inborn skill. We can improve our ability to achieve results with and through others once we know what behaviours give us the results we desire. And by gaining a clearer understanding of ourselves and why we react and do what we do, we can see other options and make better choices, in the process developing the self-leadership skills that will make us even better leaders.

One of the biggest hurdles to gaining an improved understanding of ourselves is the fact we don't know what we don't know. If we are to get better, to see new options for improved leadership interactions, we need data to act on. One tool which is widely used to help understand where useful data might be found is the Johari Window, named after the first names of its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham^[7]. It divides the process of human interaction into four quadrants which represent our personal self-awareness. There is the information that is known to self and others, which is the open, public knowledge quadrant and the information that

it known to self, but not others, which is the hidden private knowledge quadrant. Then there is the information that is known to others but is unknown to us, and that represents our hidden, or blind spots. The final quadrant (or pane) is the unknown, information about us that is unknown to both us and others.

To become more knowledgeable about ourselves we need to get additional information that will help us see new perspectives, information that is typically in our 'blind spot'. There are several ways to accomplish this. We can ask somebody to observe us in action and then give us their perspective on what they saw - a technique often used by consultants and executive coaches. We can also ask a number of people who know us for feedback, either on a specific situation, or in general. This type of feedback can be formal or informal. In the work environment it is often undertaken by means of a formal 360E Feedback Survey which includes responses from our peers, direct reports and supervisor. In some cases it also asks that family members fill it out as well. Another way to receive additional information is to use one or several of the available assessment instruments designed for this purpose. Whichever method we use, the information provided will give us additional insights which can help us improve our interactions with others.

Developing the Self-Leadership Skills for Effective Leadership Synergy

To better understand how additional information and improved self-awareness can lead to leadership synergy, consider the following examples based on the Author's work as a trainer and leadership coach.

Use of Feedback and Feed-forward: Feedback can be an important component for self-improvement. The concept of feedback has been around for a long time, however it is a skill many have trouble with when it comes to delivering it. This is likely because it usually deals with challenges and negative performance and few like to hear about what they did wrong. Marshall Goldsmith has said that successful people tend to reject negative feedback because it is not consistent with their self-image^[8]. A recent variation of feedback is the confidential 360° which solicits confidential input from all levels of the organization. The promise of anonymity helps insure that the people participating don't suffer from the 'shoot the messenger' syndrome and provides one of the best ways to discover what actions, or lack thereof, are creating problems in the workplace. Since the reason for the feedback is to improve performance, a better format elicits information on what needs to be done in the future to improve. This variation, called feedforward, was developed by Goldsmith^[8] to overcome the negative connotations surrounding feedback, since it concentrates on identifying positive actions for future choices.

During a coaching intervention the Author employed both feedback and feedforward to advantage in helping a business owner improve his relationships with his staff. The owner had recognized that there was a problem with morale and productivity but felt that the problem belonged to the employees. He was looking for ways to motivate them to work harder. It was agreed that prior to each staff meeting the owner would identify what his expectations were for the meeting and his plans to achieve those outcomes. The owner told his staff that he had hired

the Author to help him improve work relationships, morale and productivity and that the Author would be observing the staff meetings from the back of the room, as well as speaking to them individually. After the first meeting the staff took little notice of the Author and the Author's presence appeared to have no impact on their actions.

After each meeting the Author held a de-briefing session with the owner, asking questions to help him step back and see what had happened as opposed to what he had wanted to happen, and telling him what she had observed. This process allowed him to see his actions as others did and helped him realize that even off-hand comments said in jest could be taken negatively and lower morale. The new information, combined with the time spent on reviewing and reflecting on what actually happened, as opposed to what he had wanted to happen, helped him see how his actions were affecting his employees. Over time, with input from the Author and his staff, he changed his behaviours and achieved the results he wanted, not by changing others but by changing himself. Because the effect of his actions on his employees were a 'blind spot' for him, known to his staff but not to him, it is unlikely that he would have resolved his employee problems on his own. With the help of an external, arms-length coach, however, asking pointed questions and providing a safe place to reflect and discuss what was happening, he was able to recognize the impact of his actions on his employees and he chose to change his behaviour.

Use of Assessments: Another way we can gather information to help us improve our ability to work with others is through assessments. There are many assessments on the market which have been scientifically validated and can supply information on a wide variety of personal attitudes, values, traits and characteristics. Examples of some of the more common ones the Author has used in coaching leaders include the Birkman^[9], DISC^[10], Myers-Briggs^[11], Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument^[12], Personal Interests, Attitudes and Values Profile (PIAV)^[13], the Platinum Rule^[14], Reiss Profile of Fundamental Goals and Motivational Sensitivities^[15], and Path Elements Profile™ (PEP)^[16]. It should be remembered, however, that while assessments can provide useful information they are simply a representation of a moment in time, not who you really are. Any results should always be reviewed by asking "how true is this of me?" and "how true is this of me at this moment in time?"

To show how information from assessments can be used to further your leadership development and contribute to developing leadership synergy two examples will be presented. The Reiss Profile and the Path Elements Profile™ are two of the Authors' favourite assessments because they are easy to understand and to remember, which improves the likelihood that they will produce lasting results.

The Reiss Profile of Fundamental Goals and Motivational Sensitivities was developed by Dr. Steven Reiss from research involving over 6,000 people and an initial list of 300 desires. The results of his studies identified 16 unique, statistically significant desires and was used to create an assessment instrument that provides a comprehensive measure of each these 16 basic human desires for a person. Desires that are statistically significant, either positive or negative, help explain what drives people, what's important to them and how strongly they feel about the issue.

The 16 basic desires that met all of Dr. Reiss's criteria for independent significance are: Power (the desire for influence); Independence (the desire for self-reliance); Curiosity (the desire for knowledge); Acceptance (the desire for approval); Order (the desire to organize); Saving (the desire to collect); Honour (the desire to adhere to traditional codes of morality); Idealism (the desire for social justice); Social Contact (the desire for interaction with other people); Family (the desire to raise one's own children); Status (the desire for prestige); Vengeance (the desire to get even with others); Romance (the desire for sex); Eating (the desire to consume food); Physical Activity (the desire to move one's muscles); and Tranquillity (the desire for emotional calm).

The strength of an individual's desire is an indicator of the core motivation that drives many of the actions that people take, often at the sub-conscious level. These deeply held desires are behind what is commonly referred to as "hot-buttons", incidents that elicit strong emotional reactions, often out of the blue. While people come to recognize their 'hot buttons', few understand what causes their reactions.

Reiss found that our desire profile plays a major role in how we communicate with other people - if their desire profile is similar to ours, communication will be easy. If, however, their unique desire profile is too different from ours it can lead to their "not getting it", and no matter how much more information we provide, it will not solve the problem. If anything, it will only serve to intensify the differences between us. This is an important point, given the significance of communication in the modern workplace. A recent survey carried out by the Author of environmental consulting and engineering firms identified 'communications' as the skill considered most important for staff at every level. It is also fundamental to establishing the deep connections required for leadership synergy and business success.

An example of how this plays out in the workplace can be illustrated by the desire for Order. People with a high desire for Order will keep everything in its place and have a place for everything. These are the people with a clean desk and an orderly filing system. But imagine the frustration of an assistant working for a boss who has a very low desire for Order, which can also be called a high desire for flexibility. No matter how many times she explains her filing system to him and how to find what he needs, he can't understand why she just doesn't leave everything out where he can 'find' it. To him it's a waste of time putting things away that you will likely need tomorrow or the next day! So frustration builds, lines of communication break down, stress mounts and the cost in wasted time, inter-personal friction and lowered productivity mounts. This is an example using just one desire - now imagine the variables at work with 16 basic desires and an almost infinite number of combinations and you can see how discord can arise in the workplace.

To make matters worse, everyone automatically thinks that their way is the best, not just for themselves but for everyone else as well. Reiss called this 'self-hugging'. And taken to its extreme it results in 'everyday tyranny', a term Reiss used to describe the use of pressure tactics

to try and get others to change their basic goals, values or life style^[15]. Another term for this is 'bullying'.

You should now be able to see how an understanding our own core desires and having the knowledge to help us understand those of our co-workers can de-fuse situations and reduce unnecessary friction between people with different core values. It can also provide us with the knowledge we need to create other ways to respond, ones which are more sensitive to the different motivating factors of our co-workers and ones which are far more likely to help us build synergy and get results with and from others. A national not-for-profit client of the Author was able to significantly improve workplace productivity after the senior management team all took the Reiss. As an example, the CFO was very high on order and there was significant friction between her and several others because of poorly done reports, overly casual estimates of costs and late submission of expense claims. Once they realized that these things were very important to her, they took them more seriously and made an effort to improve how they completed these tasks.

A second assessment which has proven very useful in helping leaders work better with others to increase the synergy in their workplace is the Path Elements Profile™, or PEP. It is a personality assessment and team communication tool developed by Laurie Beth Jones based on years of work with teams and leaders in many different sectors. While it is based on the four quadrant personality types like Myers-Briggs and DISC, it was designed to be simple, memorable, intuitive, fun and applicable in many situations. It uses the four basic elements - Earth, Water, Wind and Fire - to help people recognize their strengths and their challenges when working with others^[16]. It uses a simple on-line survey to identify how you interact with the world around you. Because it uses the natural elements people find it easy to remember, and because each element has characteristics that can be seen as both negative and positive, it illustrates how each of us is capable of a wide range of responses. It is up to us to consciously choose the most appropriate in any given situation.

Awareness of our own element and the elemental make-up of our team members can help us build the cohesiveness that can lead to synergy. For instance, if I'm working with a Fire leader, I know that he is oriented towards tasks and activities – that he wants to see results. He also prefers to have the authority and control in his hands - Fires like action. In fact their default mode is the 'driven' leader that matches the stereotype of the type "A" personality and they often earn the reputation of being uncaring with respect to other people. The Author has worked with many Fire personalities during her career in research and as a leadership coach. Knowledge of their elemental make-up, however, can open new avenues for exploration, new perspectives on ways of interacting with others, both for them and for those of us who must work with them. After all, while fire can be described as blazing, catalytic, consuming and intense, it can also be attractive, cozy, glowing and civilized. The question becomes one of which attributes would be most likely to produce the desired result.

For instance, if you're an Earth leader, you are generally motivated towards order and stability,

and like Fire, you are oriented towards tasks and results. However while Fire tends to like to move fast, you want to make sure you have all the necessary information, you prefer order and structure - no fly by the seat of the pants projects for you. In fact if you work with Fires, they will complain that you're taking too long and are holding them up. Knowledge of the attributes of Fires will help you manage your interactions with them to bring out both the best in you and them. They like to be in charge and do their best work when they have specific areas to control. They also like to be at or near the center of attention, so make sure they get recognition and on-going praise.

While Executive Director of a not for profit the Author worked with a Fire who was a member of the Advisory Board. Unfortunately he had a bias (all be it unconscious) to using only a portion of his full range of attributes. As a result he tended to rub many people the wrong way and created friction and tension which resulted in unproductive meetings and less than optimal results. If he and those he worked with had had a better understanding of his natural element, more would have been accomplished in less time with less stress, for everybody.

One of the strengths of the PEP assessment is that the use of elemental language removes many of the limitations produced by other assessments that put a single label on people, which they then use as an excuse or justification for their actions. While a complete understanding of what the label represents would be useful, too often people forget the details and only remember the label. Everyone understands the elements of Earth, Water, Wind and Fire and everyone can visualize a wide range of descriptors for each element. This helps someone ask - 'how can I best respond to this situation to get the results I want'. This is particularly useful in preventing a repeat of actions which have proven unhelpful in the past. Since it is easy to remember and makes use of what people already know there's no need to learn a new 'language' or to try and remember what a bunch of letters represent.

It should be noted that not only are the communication, interpersonal and leadership skills which support leadership synergy enhanced by the increased self-awareness provided from assessment results, but the ability to manage stress effectively is also improved. Acquiring the skills to recognize the most appropriate way to interact with others will result in less miscommunication and friction among co-workers and this will in turn reduce the frustration and stress often associated with working with others. Given that 88% of leaders taking part in a recent survey identified work as a primary source of stress and having a leadership role increased the stress factor^[17], any knowledge that improves your ability to work better with others delivers the added bonus of providing you with a way to manage your stress levels in the workplace.

While it is an advantage to have everyone in a work-group take the same assessment we've taken, as was done with the not for profit group, it is not necessary for us to improve our ability to work with others. The knowledge we gain from the assessment about ourselves and about the assessment criteria will provide us with benchmark data which, when combined with our skills of observation, our analytical nature and our problem solving capabilities, will help us get a pretty good picture of why people act the way they do. Listen to what they say, the words they use, watch how they spend their time and look for patterns in behaviour. With practice you'll

find you'll get pretty good at identifying what's really important to them. Then use this information to improve how you interact with them and watch your results improve. I have personally found the information gained from assessments I've taken to be invaluable in my work with others.

Conclusions

Leadership synergy, the bringing together of people and influencing them to put their best foot forward and become fully engaged in your endeavour to produce extraordinary results, is a daunting task. People are complex and, like an iceberg, what gives rise to their actions and impacts on others lies mostly hidden beneath the surface. The same can be said for each of us - for it is the rare person who truly understands what drives their actions and reactions. To lead others you must first be able to lead yourself. And to lead yourself you must find out as much about yourself as you can.

In the past women have often been passed over for leadership positions because they were considered not to have what it took to lead in the business world. The new skills and abilities that have been identified as essential to effective leadership in the future, however, (e.g. interpersonal communication, the art of collaboration, leading change, building effective teams and influencing without authority^{[3][4][5][6]}) are ones that women have made use of throughout the ages. And when you combine strengths in interpersonal skills, a bias to self development, a willingness to support others and a less ruthless nature with the observational and analytical competencies which are standard among the SETT community, it becomes obvious that with the appropriate guidance and support, women can enhance and develop the skills and abilities which will set them apart as truly synergistic leaders. Women have the ability, the skills and the talent to make a major contribution by taking on more leadership roles. While it won't be easy, the very fact that this conference exists illustrates that women are willing to collaborate and work together to make improvements – key competencies for the 21st century leader.

This presentation has provided three means of learning more about yourself. Your job now, if you wish to accept the challenge and become a leader, is to put this new information into action, since leadership is, after all, about action. There are a variety of sites on the web that provide free assessments. One of my favourites is Dr. Martin Seligman's Authentic Happiness site^[18]. Or if you are interested in the two I spoke of, you can contact me afterwards to learn more. And of course the easiest way to start might be to find a colleague you work with, or a friend you trust, and simply ask them "How can I do better?", or "How can I be a better team mate at work?" If you are already in a leadership role, you can ask your direct reports "What can I do to be a better leader of this group?" Once you have your answers, design a learning agenda that identifies one or two key behaviours that will produce the outcomes you want, then ask for support and feedback while you put these new behaviours in place.

The SETT communities need more effective leaders, ones who can create the synergistic effects that will produce outstanding results for themselves, their organizations and their communities.

Women are well positioned to be key players - now is the time to take your first steps on your journey to creating leadership synergy.

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communication and interpersonal skills helped her evolve through challenging career opportunities in England, Canada and the U.S., encompassing work in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. In 1998 she started her own consulting business, working with business owners who wanted to improve their bottom line by creating great work environments and senior professionals in transition to leadership roles. She now specializes in helping science based professionals and technical experts enhance their interpersonal skills and improve their ability to get the results they want working with and through others.