

2 Leadership

Text

The changing nature of leadership

Many settings still call for at least some degree of leadership, although the nature of that leadership continues to evolve. Among the recent changes in leadership that managers should recognize are the increasing **role** of leaders as coaches, and **gender** and **cross-cultural** patterns of leader behaviour.

Leaders as coaches

Many organizations today are using **teams**. And many other organizations are attempting to become less **hierarchical** – that is, to **eliminate** the old-fashioned command-and-control **mentality** often **inherent** in bureaucratic organizations and to **motivate** and empower **individuals** to work independently. In each case, the role of leaders is also changing. **Whereas** leaders were once expected to control situations, direct work, supervise people, closely **monitor** performance, make decisions and **structure** activities, many leaders today are being asked to change how they manage people. Perhaps the best description of this new role is for the leader to become a coach instead of an overseer.

Consider the metaphor from the standpoint of an actual coach of an athletics team. The coach plays a role in **selecting** the players for the team and deciding on the general direction to take (such as **emphasizing** offence versus defence). The coach also helps to develop player talent, and teaches them how to execute **specific** plays. But at game time, the coach stays on the side line; it's up to the players themselves to execute moves and get the **job** done. And while the coach may get some of the **credit** for the victory, he or she didn't actually score any of the points.

Likewise, then, from the standpoint of an organizational leader, a coaching **perspective** would call for the leader to help select team members and other new employees, to provide some general direction, to help train and develop the team and the skills of its members, and to help them get the information and other **resources** they need. The leader may also have to help **resolve conflict** among team members and **mediate** other disputes that arise. And coaches from different teams may need to play important roles in **linking** the activities and **functions** of their respective teams. But beyond these activities, the leader keeps a low profile and lets the group get its work done with little or no direct oversight from the leader.

Of course, some managers long accustomed to the **traditional approach** may have trouble changing to a coaching role. But others seem to make the **transition** with little or no difficulty. Moreover, companies such as Texas Instruments, Halliburton and Yum! Brands have developed very successful training programmes to help their managers to learn how to become better coaches. Within the coaching role, some leaders have also excelled at taking on more responsibilities as a mentor – the role of helping a less-experienced person learn the

ropes to better prepare himself or herself to advance within the organization. Texas Instruments, again, has **maintained** a very successful mentoring programme for years.

Gender and leadership

Another factor that is clearly changing the nature of leadership is the growing number of women advancing to higher levels in organizations. Given that most leadership theories and research studies have focused on male leaders, developing a better understanding of how females lead is clearly an important next step. For example, do women and men tend to lead differently? Some early research suggests that there are indeed fundamental differences in leadership as practised by women and men.

For instance, in contrast to original stereotypes, female leaders are not necessarily more nurturing or supportive than male leaders. Likewise, male leaders are not systematically more harsh, controlling or task-focused than female leaders. The one difference that does seem to arise in some cases is that women have a tendency to be somewhat more autocratic.

There are two possible explanations for this pattern. One possibility is that women may tend to have stronger interpersonal skills than men and are hence able to better understand how to effectively involve others in making decisions. Men, on the other hand, may have weaker interpersonal skills and thus have a tendency to rely on their own judgement. The other possible explanation is that women may encounter more stereotypical resistance to their occupying a senior role. If this is the case, they may actively work to involve others in making decisions so as to help minimize any hostility or conflict. Clearly, however, much more work needs to be done in order to better understand the dynamics of gender and leadership. It is obvious, of course, that high-profile and successful female leaders such as Andrea Jung (CEO of Avon Products) and Condoleezza Rice (former US Secretary of State) are demonstrating the effectiveness with which women can be truly exceptional leaders.

Cross-cultural leadership

Another changing perspective on leadership relates to cross-cultural issues. In this context, culture is used as a broad concept to encompass both international differences and diversity-based differences within one culture. For instance, when a Japanese firm sends an executive to head up the firm's operation in the United States, that person will need to become acclimatized to the cultural differences that exist between the two countries and consider changing his or her leadership style accordingly. Japan is generally characterized by collectivism, while the United States is based more on individualism. The Japanese executive, then, will find it necessary to recognize the importance of individual contributions and rewards, and the differences in individual and group roles that exist between Japanese and US businesses.

Similarly, cross-cultural factors also play a growing role in organizations, as their workforces become more and more diverse. Most leadership research, for instance, has been conducted on samples or case studies involving white male leaders. But as African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics and members of other ethnic groups achieve leadership positions, it may be necessary to reassess how applicable current theories and models of leadership are when applied to an increasingly diverse pool of leaders.

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