

Balancing the Five Leadership Roles

Thomas J. Moriarty, PE, CMRP

President, Alidade MER, Inc.

tjmpe@alidade-mer.com (321) 773-3356

Let me start by stating the incredibly obvious. Organizational performance depends on people. Also fairly obvious is the fact that an engaged and motivated workforce will be more productive than disengaged and unmotivated workers. In the common language of human resource departments the term is “workforce satisfaction”. Indications of low workforce satisfaction include high employee turnover, high absenteeism, high numbers of grievances and low climate survey results. A workforce that is unmotivated and that has low morale will have lower productivity, experience more process upsets and more recordable safety incidents than a workforce that is engaged and motivated.

As a supervisor or manager in any organization, you have a direct impact on how satisfied your workforce is. Your role as a supervisor or manager is to be responsible for both the short term performance and long term development of your team.

As a supervisor you're lucky if you've had a mentor or mentors that showed you the way to become one of the good supervisors that people like to work for, and who also showed you how to achieve good results. Unfortunately, the studies of why people leave employers indicate that the current mentor system is not effective for most organizations. What the majority of surveys show is that people leave their positions because of poor of supervisors and managers.

Supervisors and managers have the responsibility to provide an environment - to the best of their abilities - that encourages their team members to be engaged and motivated. This is accomplished when we provide opportunities to develop our team members for higher responsibility, give them more responsibility to solve problems and to work on important issues. Developing people helps the organization by distributing decision making; freeing managers for strategic thinking, increasing individual performance, leading to increased reliability at the lowest cost. This of course translates into improved or sustained overall business results. Meeting or exceeding business objectives leads to more stable work environments and increased opportunities for the workforce.

Achieving workforce satisfaction is unquestionably more difficult if the work environment is perceived as dangerous or dirty and if the wages that are being paid are perceived as not particularly good. This is a typical in many manufacturing and maintenance environments. Under circumstances involving arduous environments, our leadership abilities become critical to achieving a great workplace culture that supports performance and business results.

Study	Finding	Relevance
Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), 2004	Common factor among 50 best small/medium places to work; demonstrated ability to engage and empower employees.	Emulating top performers is a best practice. Engaging and empowering your workforce will benefit your organization.
Spherion Corporation Study, 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ 52% of the workforce desire a change in jobs; 75% of those within the next 12 months. ✚ 86% of employees surveyed cited work fulfillment and work-life balance as #1 career priority. ✚ 73% willing to curtail career to make time for family/personal fulfillment. 	People are predisposed to change jobs. Autonomy and working on important tasks lead to more fulfillment in the workplace. Creating an environment that allows the employee to plan time off from work is very important. Stable work management processes and high system reliability lead to this type of environment.
USA Today/Sibson Consulting Study, 2005	32% of high performers are likely to look for new jobs within 12 months.	If your leadership team does not foster an environment to keep top performers engaged you have a high probability of losing them.

Table 1 Employee Turnover Studies

As indicated earlier, there is a recurring theme among research on the reasons given by employees on why they leave their employer (see a synopsis in table 1). The reasons people leave their employer normally include some combination of the following issues:

- ✚ Supervisors/Managers are perceived to have poor supervisory skills or behaviors
- ✚ Few or no opportunities for personal growth
- ✚ Cannot speak freely about concerns
- ✚ Lack of recognition
- ✚ Don't like the work environment
- ✚ Inadequate pay

- ✚ Lack of work-life balance.

There is a strong correlation between workforce dissatisfaction and poor leadership and management practices. I would argue that at least six of the seven common issues are directly affected by the performance of a person's immediate supervisor. For example, as a leader you are in a position to provide opportunities for team member growth, to provide recognition, to shape the work environment, and improve the work-life balance through effective leadership.

The seventh item, compensation, is typically indirectly impacted by supervisors through performance

evaluations. If all other aspects of the work experience are going well, pay is generally not the driver for employee turnover. This assumes the level of pay is reasonable for the work. An employee's self-esteem and ability to advance and earn higher pay is enhanced when they have job satisfaction. When people like what they're doing, their attitude comes through in the quality of their work. A person will not perform to their potential if they are unhappy.

What product does a leader provide?

As a leader, your product, or what you contribute to the value stream is the quality of your team. An organization's goal is normally to produce high quality products/services, at lowest possible cost to increase profit growth; the end game is always financial performance. This is true in facilities management, manufacturing, power generation, etc. It's even true if the public sector; poor financial performance of a government workforce can and does lead to undelivered services, potential outsourcing and lost jobs.

It's easy to understand how the workforce converts raw materials into finished products using plant equipment, energy and physical labor. But you as a supervisor or manager do not have the primary responsibility to personally operate machinery or work on equipment. Many organizations have not done a good job of providing clarity to supervisors and managers about what their role is. It's assumed by upper management that all new supervisors or managers know where they are supposed to focus their time and energy.

New supervisors often come from the hourly workforce ranks and a junior manager may come straight from college. Often the lack of clear expectations creates a problem since being an excellent technician, or

graduating from college with a 4.0 grade point average is not itself a qualification for being a good leader.

Many people assume good leadership is a character trait. Leadership can be and is a learned skill; how well you learn the skill is a function of awareness, fortitude and diligence. A new supervisor believes he/she was selected because they are perceived by the organization to be well qualified. Being new in that position, they want the boss to think they have things under control. It's normal for people to have hesitation in asking for help. This is where it becomes critical for leaders to be experts at effective communication and building trust. Communication and building trust are foundation skills for leaders at any level.

Your product as a leader is a high performing team that supports optimum financial performance. So what do you need to do to produce a high performance team? You need to be a high performance leader, of course.

High performance leaders create a workplace culture that develops people leading to motivated team members, low turnover and consistent performance. Developing your people increases their job satisfaction, supports continuous improvement and provides a pipeline for future supervisors and managers.

Retaining employees avoids turnover costs (hiring, training, productivity, etc.) and leads to more consistent performance. Supervisors and managers that build high performance teams are keepers of the organization's future. You need to be more than a manager; you need to have great leadership skills if you are to get the rewards that high performance leadership brings.

The Five Leadership Roles

Below are some concepts which can be used to orient and assess leadership qualities. Take some time to look

at these concepts objectively; self assess your tendencies. Once you understand your tendencies you can work on those aspects that will improve your overall performance.

Each activity that a leader performs can be categorized into one of five roles. Most supervisors and managers spend too much time on the first two roles; technician and administrator. Spending too much time on these two areas result in the workforce feeling like they not empowered. "Micro-management" complaints arise from these two areas. The other three leadership roles are architect, coach and trailblazer. These three roles are the ones that high performance supervisors and managers integrate into their style. Here are some details about the five roles:

Technician – Doing core technical work such as disassembling equipment, performing the tasks associated with core functions that the team members are responsible for carrying out. Supervisors and managers doing technician work use phrases like "If you want it done right you have to do it yourself." When the supervisor/manager is in technician mode they may be considered expert technicians and participate in problem solving. They use analytical tools to diagnose problems; they enjoy being troubleshooters; a reactive "firefighter" role. For supervisors and managers to be respected by their team some level of technical knowledge is appropriate. But it is easy for supervisor/managers to get carried away. When this happens the team feels micro-managed and disempowered. Too much of the opportunity to do satisfying and important work can be taken away from team members. It's important to understand when your team needs your support and when to give them space.

Administrator/Manager – Controlling the day to day flow of work and ensuring tasks are carried out in a consistent manner. This is the leadership role that is responsible for planning and scheduling work, organizing resources, and communicating the near and long term priorities. Administrator/managers make sure the paperwork is done and submitted on time; they run the meetings and maintain process discipline. A supervisor needs to have competence as an administrator/manager but can easily over do this role as well. When too much administrative oversight (bureaucracy) is demonstrated, the team will feel they are not trusted and will have lower job satisfaction. Delegating some of this responsibility is a good way to provide opportunities for team members to stretch their wings. Team members can be tasked with being responsible for processes and activities. This also provides a means for them to demonstrate their abilities and be evaluated for greater leadership responsibility.

Architect – In this role the leader has to have a broader perspective; they look at relationships within the team and between teams. In this way the leader may create or modify processes, refine how they are to be carried out while keeping the long term objectives in mind. They overtly reinforce positive work culture norms (encouraging new ideas and methods). The architect aligns operating systems to the overall strategy, analyzes and improves the existing policies and procedures. While the responsibility for being an architect lies with the leader, it is an area where there is opportunity to share responsibility with team members. The leader can delegate new policy and process drafting, sponsor cross functional teams to solve problems and

encourage team members to help with problem solving. In addition to their having the opportunity to participate, the workforce will likely have a higher degree of buy-in when the policy or process is finalized.

Coach – When a leader is in a coaching mode their primary objective is to develop people. They determine what is needed to motivate and inspire and they use communication and trust building skills to develop their team members. A coach will set expectations for performance, encourage people to make decisions and encourage them to take responsibility. Coaches evaluate abilities and knowledge, and then help people improve through guidance and education. They put thought into performance reviews; both formally and informally to correct and mentor. Important aspects of coaching include developing trust, giving productive feedback and conflict resolution. Many people are not comfortable in this role because it can produce uncomfortable moments when dealing with personal or performance issues. In my opinion, when you are on top of your game, coaching can be the most rewarding aspect of being a leader. As a coach your job is correct and encourage in such a way that allows the team member to be confident.

Trailblazer – The trailblazer imagines the future. They focus on a vision of what could be. They ask "what if?" In this role leaders present challenges for themselves and their team members. The vision of the future is converted into objectives and goals. There is certainly risk taking involved in stretching the organization. Trailblazers have to consider the risks and rewards for going down this path. There may be a tendency to move too fast (outpacing available

resources) so the leader also needs to be prudent in how far to take the effort. Trailblazing activities are more interesting when you include your team in the thought process. Working with team members to look several months or years down the road can be enlightening and stimulating. They will come up with issues you didn't think of and it is another opportunity to evaluate team member judgment and ability to contribute at a higher level. Including team members in trailblazing activities builds their self esteem and makes them feel that they are respected and a part of the organization's growth.

The key to effective leadership is finding the right balance between these five roles. It is not expected that you devote 20% of each day to each leadership role. There is no "optimal" percentage of each role because the balance is dynamic; dependent upon the skills and motivations of your team. The make up of the team you lead, combined with your personality and the objectives you have will determine the emphasis placed on each of the five leadership roles at any given time. As the team matures your focus will shift. New team members may require more coaching; experienced team members may be given more latitude to refine policies and processes. Because your product as a leader is the quality of your team, you do need to be aware of each area and to make team development an important part of your leadership style.

If there is not a good balance in your use of the five leadership roles, the quality of your team, and the organization, will suffer. This explains the seven typical reasons why people leave their employer.

It may be helpful to consider a quote from Demming, the champion of quality management. He stated that "Leaders should work 'on' systems, not 'in' systems".

He recognized that too often supervisors and managers get caught up working on technical and administrative details (working 'in' the system), and not enough time developing people and processes (working 'on' systems).

How are you doing in the leadership roles?

Most supervisors/managers are comfortable performing the technician and administrator/manager functions. I believe supervisors and managers perform as technicians and administrator/managers more than we should. So what we need to do is determine where we should improve. So the question becomes; how do you know where you need to focus?

Leaders can develop their plan for improving the balance of their leadership roles by self-evaluation. A tool is included at the end of this article; it is one way to self assess your current leadership profile. The self assessment survey is just a quick snapshot of your style. By objectively looking at yourself through the survey you can better understand areas that may require more attention. Here is a brief description of the survey elements:

Charter - The team should have a charter to focus the team on customer requirements, providing a common mission and ensuring alignment with the larger organization's goals. The charter provides understanding of how the team and individuals affect the larger organization. If the charter is well done it helps people make decisions when policy guidance is not clear. Tracking and making metrics available for the team underscores important activities so they know how they are performing relative to expectations.

Design - Team design refers to things like core work processes, roles and responsibilities, understanding how jobs are interrelated and the clarity of procedures used to carry out tasks. Design also includes provisions for improving the current processes; how input from the team is evaluated and adopted when good ideas are surfaced. Leaders ensure their people are technically competent to carry out the processes each person is responsible for. We also make clear the level of decision authority our team members have; how empowered they are.

Relationships - Team relationships deal more with cultural issues within the team. The identity of the group such as how they assist one another by being multi-skilled, or open to being a good teammate and lending a hand when necessary. Relationships are supported by policies and procedures that are fair and equitable. Is there an atmosphere of camaraderie and team affiliation? Under these circumstances trust and mutual respect are high. Team members listen to each other and people feel safe expressing their opinions. When conflicts do arise the conflicts are more productively dealt with because people look for mutually beneficial solutions.

Note that these three areas (charter, design and relationships) are aligned with the attributes of trailblazer (charter), architect (design) and coach (relationships).

We all have a bias towards certain of the five roles. Improvements in employee satisfaction and overall performance result from being more diligent in applying the trailblazer, architect and coach roles. Remember that our success as a leader depends on our ability to balance the five roles appropriate to the needs of the organization.

Developing a Leadership Skills Action Plan

After you determine the areas you'd like to improve the next step is to put together an action plan to better apply all five leadership roles. The first step is to list the areas you'd like to improve. Refer to the list a couple of times per day until thinking about these areas becomes second nature. Think proactively about opportunities to work on each of these areas. The simple act of thinking about the five leadership roles will improve your chances of success.

Find out if your organization has training available that addresses skills that may improve your weak areas; examples are communication, building trust, giving productive feedback, conflict resolution, time management, developing measures and group decision making. Ask if your organization sponsors tuition reimbursement for course you take outside the workplace. If training is available, get involved and participate in those training opportunities.

There are leadership training and coaching resources that can be a valuable resource. When choosing a service provider, be sure to choose one that uses professionally developed materials that can provide consistent training and coaching. The materials should follow the adult learning model (explain the concept, provide an experience of the concept, then practice the concept). Find a service provider that has a comprehensive selection of training materials from foundation skills to advanced team building topics. It's also recommended that you choose a coach/instructor that has experience working in your environment or industry. Many times, a good instructor with professionally developed materials can miss the mark because they can not relate to your situation.

Informal Leadership Development through Mentors

Don't overlook the talent you may have on your staff. In the military services, leadership development is expected at every level; it's a critical function. Mentoring is a major component of military leadership development. Every junior enlisted person and junior officer has had experienced people take them under their wing. The mentors provide the nuances of how to handle particular situations as the service member progresses through each level of their career. It is extremely effective in the military because of the military culture, honed over decades of consistent core values.

You will undoubtedly be able to find someone at every level in your organization who has abilities that are respected in one or more of the five leadership roles. These traits may be embodied in one person, or you may need to connect with several people to obtain a complete mentorship skill set.

As you organize your plan and put it into action, remember that leadership is a dynamic thing. If you're doing it right, you will have team members taking on more and more responsibility, while your team's performance gets better and better. You will have more time for architect, coach and trailblazer functions. However, your team will change over time; new people come aboard, others will move on to new positions and the organization itself will likely be "reengineered" or otherwise shuffled periodically. This will require you to be vigilant and frequently reevaluate time allocations among the five leadership roles. A good leader can recognize and adjust the allocation of time to the five leadership roles.

Something a hard-nosed boss of mine used to drill into us was, "If everything seems under control you've probably forgotten about something." This is a good way to think

Alidade MER, Inc



about your quest for developing high performance teams. If everything seems to be on track, where else can you improve the quality of your team?

One of the most challenging parts of leadership is having the fortitude to trust in other people to accomplish the things you know you can do well; particularly when it is an important issue. Empower your team with increasingly important tasks and they will grow more confident and satisfied with their job. Leading a team full of independent and empowered people has its own challenges and will keep you on your toes.

Don't expect to become proficient at all five leadership roles over night and do expect that there will be times when things don't work out well; it's all part of being a leader. Achieving the right balance will provide you with a more fulfilling career, improve the work environment for you and your team and will move your organization closer to high performance.

Your product as a leader is a high performance team.

Are You Maximizing your Value as a Leader?

Rate the extent to which each of the following statements is true for your team or work group by using the five point scale. Lowest score areas may need attention:

1 None 2 A Little 3 Somewhat 4 Quite a Bit 5 Very Much

Charter

- My team completely understands our customers and their requirements.
- My team and I share a common understanding of our mission.
- Everyone understands the strategy of the larger organization.
- People know how their actions impact the organization's strategy.
- Our values have been clearly articulated and are demonstrated on a daily basis.
- I live our values and insist that others do as well.
- Our team goals have been clearly defined.
- We have good metrics for tracking our compliance with processes and performance.

Design

- Team members understand and consistently follow our core work processes.
- We have streamlined our processes to be as efficient as possible.
- Roles and responsibilities of team members are clearly defined.
- People understand not only their own jobs, but how jobs interrelate.
- We are technically competent at what we do.
- Clearly defined work procedures help us to be consistent and to coordinate our efforts.
- Decision authority is clearly defined.
- Our systems are aligned to support us in how we execute our responsibilities.

Relationships

- Members of the team care about the work they do and work hard.
- A positive and friendly atmosphere exists.
- We cooperate with each other.
- Trust and respect are high.
- Team members listen to each other and everyone is free to express themselves.
- We work through conflicts and arrive at win-win solutions.
- Personnel policies and procedures are fair and equitable.

Figure 1 Leadership Self-Assessment