Short Communication

Improving Team Work through Leadership Practices

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Abstract

Cynefin is an approach that had been developed to assist leaders to define the framework of their own organization. They found that this approach might enhance communication and assist executives in understanding the context in which they are operating. Additionally, it helps them avoid problems that arise when their preferred management style causes them to err [1].

The initial four frames require leaders to diagnose situations and act appropriately based on the given situation, these frames are simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. The fifth one which is disorder is used when the situation is vague and it is unknown which frame to use. Cynefin framework is particularly helpful for leaders who understand that the world is often irrational and unpredictable [1].

Simple Contexts: The Domain of Best Practice

Simple contexts are described by stability and clear cause-and-effect relationships that are evident to everyone where the right answer is self-evident and certain. It is described as "Known Known's," decisions which are unquestioned since all parties share an understanding. Problems with order processing and fulfillment are subject to change.

Simple contexts require straightforward management and monitoring where leaders sense, categorize, and respond to the situation at hand. Leaders usually assess the facts of the situation, categorize them, and then base their response. A command-control style for setting works best in these situations, because both managers and employees have access to the information necessary and there is no exhaustive communication among managers and employees since disagreement about what needs to be done is rare [1].

Complicated Contexts: The Domain of Experts

Complicated contexts may contain multiple right answers, and there is a clear relationship between cause and effect, however not everyone sees it. This is describes as the "Known Unknowns." The leaders in a complicated context must sense, analyze, and respond and it often entails expertise. The complicated context calls for investigating several options and many maybe excellent, however good practice, as opposed to best practice, is more appropriate [1].

Understanding Complexity

Complexity help current and future leaders make sense of advanced technology, globalization, intricate markets, cultural change, and much more. The complexity can help all of us address the challenges and opportunities humans face. Since a complex system involves large numbers of interacting elements and the interactions are nonlinear, and minor changes can produce disproportionately major consequences. Additionally, the system is dynamic and solutions can't be imposed but rather they arise from the circumstances and this is the emergence and in complex systems we cannot predict what will happen.

Humans have distinct characteristics that differ from animals. They have multiple identities and can switch between them without conscious thought, make decisions based on past patterns of success and failure, rather than on logical, definable rules, can change the systems in which they operate to equilibrium states in order to create foreseen outcomes.

Despite its difficulty, and in order to apply the principles of complexity, leaders who want to apply the principles to their organizations, need to think and act differently than they have in the past. Additionally, a leader must listen to the experts and concurrently receiving new thoughts and solutions from others [1].

Complex Contexts: The Domain of Emergence

In a complicated context, there might be one answer, however in a complex context, right answers can't be found. It's the realm of "Unknown Unknowns". Decisions in organizations are complex because some major change such as a bad quarter, a shift in management, a merger or acquisition and this introduces unpredictability and you start to understand why things happen only in retrospect. Therefore, in such situations, the leaders must allow the path forward instead of imposing a course of action. They need to probe first, then sense, and then respond. Leaders face several confrontations in the complex domain and they might fall back into traditional command-and-control management styles. Those leaders might become frustrated and impatient when they don't achieve the results they want since they don't recognize that a complex domain requires a more experimental mode of management.

They have difficulty in tolerating failure which is an essential aspect of experimental understanding. Therefore, a leader will fail if they try to impose order in a complex context in contrast to leaders who will win if they set the stage, step back a bit, allow patterns to emerge, and determine which ones are wanted [1].

Chaotic Contexts: The Domain of Rapid Response

In a chaotic context, the relationships between cause and effect are impossible to determine because they shift constantly and no manageable patterns exist and only turbulence is found. Therefore, looking for the right answer in such a setup is worthless. This is the realm of unknowables.

In a chaotic domain, the leader must first act to establish order, then sense where stability is present and from where it is absent, and then respond by working to transform the situation from chaos to complexity. This will help leaders identify new patterns that prevents upcoming crisis and identify new opportunities. Communication of the most direct top-down or broadcast kind is crucial and there is no time to ask for input. At times when the situation is not comprehensible, the leader should be decisive and this exemplifies good crisis management. An excellent technique is to manage chaos and innovation in parallel. This could be done by appointing a reliable manger or crisis management team to solve the issue at the time of the crisis and picking a separate team and focus its members on the opportunities for doing things differently [1].

Leadership Across Contexts

If a leader is willing to change, this is an indicator of him being a good leader. Good leadership requires openness to change. Skillful leaders know how to identify the context they're working in at any given time and how to change their behavior and their decisions to match that context. They understand different contexts and conditions between them and they prepare their organization to know the difference. Leaders have to operate in ordered domains (simple and complicated), and many leaders usually rely on their natural capabilities when operating in unordered contexts (complex and chaotic).

With the complexity of situations, the leaders' intuition, intellect, and charisma are not sufficient and leaders need tools and approaches to guide them through less familiar grounds.

Leaders need to know when to share power and when to wield it alone, when to look to the wisdom of the group and when to take their own counsel. Leaders have to understand the capability to hold on to complexity and paradox along with the willingness to be flexible is those who are willing to make things happen in a time of increasing uncertainty [1].

The Role of Positivity and Connectivity in The Performance of Business Teams

In assessing team performance Losada has described a nonlinear dynamics (Meta Learning-ML) model of team performance where connectivity, the control parameter was mathematically linked to the ratio of positivity to negativity (P/N) in team interaction. He demonstrated that if we know the P/N ratio, it will then allow the nonlinear dynamics model to show what types of dynamics are possible for a team. Three dynamics had been defined: point attractor, limit cycle, and complexor (complex order, or "Chaotic" in the mathematical sense). The low performance teams end up in point attractor dynamics, medium performance teams in limit cycle dynamics, and high-performance teams in complexor dynamics [2].

Bipolar Dimensions

Improvement of team work could be further analyzed at the organizational level where the organization has the capacity to deal with complex environment through the nonlinear interplay between positive and negative feedback processes. Positivity had been described as the ability to generate expansive emotional spaces that open possibilities for action, whereas negativity creates restricted emotional spaces that close possibilities for action. Additionally, positive emotions broaden thought-action collections and build strong physical, intellectual, and social resources.

Inquiry/advocacy was a part of the bipolar dimension and it has power and clarity for coding and feedback where balancing inquiry and advocacy should lead to more effective action. Other/self was also a highly eliciting variable that in addition was easy to code and provided clear and powerful feedback to participants. This dimension plays a fundamental role in strategic planning, where "Environmental Scan" and "Internal Scrutiny" are key components.

Environmental scan leads to the identification of opportunities and threats, and internal scrutiny leads to the recognition of basic strengths and weaknesses. High performance teams are

balanced in this dimension and have excessive orientation to their external environment.

Teams do vary by performance level on each of the three bipolar dimensions where the P/N ratio has extremely different results for each performance category. For high performance teams, the ratio was 5.614 in comparison to 0.363 in low performance teams. It has to be remembered that dissolution is related to positive-to-negative ratios of less than one and stability is associated with ratios that are around 5.0". On the inquiry/advocacy and other/ self-dimensions, high performance teams achieved a balance between inquiry/advocacy and other/self.

Connectivity (nexi) is an important parameter in the ML model which shifts ordered attractor to chaotic ones. To clarify, the connectivity is a strong and sustained pattern of interlocked behaviors among team members that lasts and indicates a process of mutual influence. These strong cross-correlations are the nexi that a team is able to generate and represent the level of connectivity of the team and the nexi numbers are represent each team performance category and suggest that the connectivity of the team is strongly linked to its performance [2].

Qualitative Observations

Other qualitative observations that have been described by Losada are that high-performance teams are characterized by an atmosphere of buoyancy whereby showing appreciation and encouragement to other members of the team creates emotional spaces that were expansive and provided potential for action and creativity [2].

Nonlinear Dynamics Modeling (Meta Learning Model)

The Meta learning is defined as the "Ability of a team to dissolve attractors that close possibilities for effective action and to evolve attractors that open possibilities for effective action" [3].

Dissolving attractors is a process where positive emotions undo the effect of negative emotions. By "Meta Learning," teams will be able to surpass these restrictive attractors and reach the dynamics of complexors. Complexors have a very different type of stability, are dynamic, flexible, and innovating, and allows high performing teams to respond to unceasingly changing and challenging environmental demands. The effects of connectivity on the equilibrium structure where when connectivity is high (nexi = 32), a dynamical balance is observed between inquiry/advocacy and other/self as well as a higher ratio of positivity to negativity in addition to the complexors that lead to high performance [2].

Therefore, this nonlinear interaction that affects the ratio of positivity to negativity shows that when P/N is high, it generates an expansive emotional space, and when it is low, it generates a restrictive emotional space and to do a powerful inquiry, we need to put ourselves sympathetically in the place of the person who is being asked [2].

The authors have concluded for the great need to have highly connected teams within organizations with the kind of durable resources that strong and lasting nexi generate. They also have emphasized on the fact that organizations need to have the polarity of other and self, of you and I, to be incorporated into a sense of we; where the polarity of inquiry and advocacy, of questions and answers, can drive a constructive dialogue; where the abundance of positivity, grounded in constructive negative feedback, can generate the state of realistic enthusiasm that can thrust organizations into excellence [2].

As we are halfway through the 7-week course, I see our team as a high performing team, and the only struggle we might be having is time. Everyone is committed and busy during the weekday, where free time might not be the same for all. Eventually, we have managed to meet in break times, but I guess if it was for the sake of work, we would work better in finding a common free time amongst the members. Additionally, in order to know accurately our performance level, we have to know the ratio of positive to negative interactions to find the nexi value (connectivity), then run the ML model and find the type of attractor dynamics (fixed point, limit cycle, complexor) that, in turn, indicate the level of performance associated with each of those particular attractors. I would say that we are a high performing team since we have a high P/N ration, the type of attractor we have is a complexor and as a high performing team, we did not get trapped into limiting dynamics since we sustain a high ratio of positivity to negativity and we also maintain equilibrium between inquiry and advocacy as well as between other and self [2].

References

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