Successful Beginnings

Jean McAtavey, Priva Fischweicher, Jovana Markovic, Levern O'Neal
(Barry University, Miami Shores, FL 33161, USA)

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to introduce a model for managers that will help them to become more successful in developing new employees. Leaders need to create a climate of openness where problems are shared, not hidden. They need to invest time in the beginning of the relationship getting to know their employee which will help to decrease defensives and anxiety related to feedback. It is suggested that when leaders are able to understand an employee's point-of- view, engage in dialogue, in an atmosphere of openness than the employee will have a successful beginning to their new job. The authors argue that the process of communicating feedback should not occur after a performance issue had been noted, rather this communication process that sets the stage for feedback, should occur at the moment the employee starts working for the supervisor. A five step model is introduced to ensure that effective communication exists at the start of a working relationship between leader and supervisor.

Key words: developing new employees; dialogue; leaders; feedback; MBTI; climate of openness
JEL code: Z

1. Introduction

Consider the following scenario from two different perspectives. Mary has just moved to a more senior position within the organization. She is thrilled that John is her replacement because she feels he will operate the division similar to the way she had in the past. On John's first day in his new position, Mary has directed him to complete three major tasks; she has asked him to get to know his new employees, close a deal with a new account and file a report on the budget. During the first five weeks, John spends his time developing rapport with his employees and has closed a deal with a new account which has increased revenue. However, he has not yet turned in his budget report. Although Mary didn't specify to John when he needed to turn in the report, she was certain that he would have made it a priority just as she would have in the past. She appreciates his success in gaining a new client, but she feels he spends way too much time interacting with his staff and is not spending enough time on the details of his job. Instead of approaching John to discuss her concerns she begins to scrutinize his behaviors. By the end of the second month, she is micromanaging his work and excluding him from informal meetings with her other managers. She has noted a couple of other occasions when John has not acted swiftly in carrying out her requests. On the seventh week when John finally turns in his budget report she acts disappointed that it has taken

him that long. She begins to notice that John seems to be avoiding her and this makes her examine his actions even more closely.

On the other hand, John's perspective of his first two months is quite different. He is enthusiastic about working for Mary. One of the first tasks that Mary has given him is to get to know his employees. He thinks this is a wonderful idea because it will allow him to understand his subordinates so he can successfully coach them to reach organizational goals. In another assignment he works diligently at closing a deal with a new client that should increase revenue by 15%. After the sixth week he realizes that Mary is trying to micromanage his work and she seems aloof from him but not to others. He is utterly taken aback with this development. He had originally felt that he and Mary had connected with each other during the interview and that she would be very supportive of his work. He had always received glowing reviews from his previous supervisors and now is becoming agitated by Mary's behavior. He was annoyed that Mary was caustic towards him when he turned in his budget report at the end of his seventh week. He now avoids Mary whenever he can and is thinking about leaving the organization.

Failure to communicate effectively can lead to disastrous consequences such as this. This scenario illustrates a typical work setting where a supervisor fails to engage in dialogue with the employee in order to understand the situation (Senge, 1996) allowing the situation to spiral out of control with the potential of losing a valuable employee.

What can we learn from this scenario? According to Manzoni and Barsoux (2003) the opening story would be an example of the, *Set-Up-To-Fail Syndrome.* The way the syndrome works is that the manager perceives poor performance on the part of the employee even though it may not be the employee's fault. As a matter of fact it can often be the fault of the manager. In response to the employee's perceived poor performance, the manager begins to spend an abundance of time micromanaging the employee. After a period of observation, the manager tells the employee that he/she can no longer make decisions that will impact the organization on their own without prior approval. The manager then begins to micromanage becoming increasingly critical of the employee's actions and engages in comments concerning their work ethics.

By micromanaging the employee, the manager believes that it will increase performance productivity and preclude them from making errors. Contrary to the manager's belief, the employee may construe the manager's leadership style as a lack of trust and confidence. As a result of micromanagement, the employees lose sight of their vision and mission for future endowment. In return the employee begins to feel frustrated and under-valued often responding by staying clear of the boss for fear of being reprimanded again. This reaction convinces the boss even further that the employee is hiding and not working up to their potential. If the employee believes that the manager has reservations concerning their ability to excel, the employee may also begin to undermine their intellectual ability to perform their job tasks when assigned. They begin to fall into predicaments that sabotage their ability to succeed. This cycle continues until the employee is out of the organization by his/her own or the manager's own accord. In either case the organization loses a valuable, potentially high performing employee. In order to avoid this situation all together, Manzoni and Barsoux (2003) suggest that within the first hundred days it is important for leaders to regularly discuss issues as they arise with their subordinates before the relationship spirals out of control.

This above scenario also demonstrates The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory proposed by Graen which suggests that there is no such thing as constant leader behavior across subordinates (Seibert, Sparrowe & Linden, 2003) A leader may be very understanding and friendly toward an employee and very aloof and critical of another. Each employee shares a unique relationship with the boss. The leader classifies employees into *in-groups* and *out-groups*.

As in the aforementioned case the employee, John, begins work and is evaluated by the leader. When Mary categorizes the other managers into her in-group they are likely to receive more challenging and meaningful assignments and rewards. When John was cast out of the in-group he felt alienated and abused. John received little positive reinforcement and felt like he was being forced out of the organization (Nuri, 2011). A leader should avoid at all costs classifying employees into in-groups and out-groups. It is also the leader's responsibility to be an effective role model (Goldberg, 2008). A leader needs to understand the employee's point-of-view, work styles and preferences. Publicly admitting bias to any employee should be avoided as this can only make another feel superior or inferior within the situation. A leader can avoid setting themselves up to fail by providing support emotional and otherwise and treating their employee as they would like to treated.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a model (Figure 1) for managers that will help them to become more successful in developing new employees. Leaders need to create a climate of openness where problems are shared, not hidden (Russ-Eft & Preskell, 2009). They need to invest time in the beginning of the relationship getting to know their employee which will help to decrease defensives and anxiety related to feedback (Manzoni & Barsoux, 2009; Bovee & Thill, 1992; Jarvis, Holford & Griffon, 2003).

It is suggested that when leaders are able to understand the employee's point-of-view, engage in dialogue, in an atmosphere of openness than the employee will have a successful beginning to their new job.

2. Selected Review of Literature

To carry out this research it was necessary to complete a review of current literature. This involved a selected literature review using multiple books, ERIC and ProQuest.

2.1 Climate of Openness

A leader has a responsibility to develop effective communication (Locke & Latham, 2012; Griffith, 2002). Effective communication requires organizational leaders to create an open climate for effective learning to take place (Senge, 2006; Gase & Medsker, 1995). Communication is a two-way process of sending and receiving (Anovick, 2010). Many leaders still only focus on the sending portion and ignore the receiving. Many organizations are de-emphasizing status and power differences to encourage more open leader-subordinate communication (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009).When status differences and open communication exists subordinates feel less threatened in expressing an opinion or asking a question. A climate of openness also involves openness to information that encourages sharing and debate (Senge, 2006). In a climate of openness leaders and subordinates can collaborate together to develop explicit performance goals. These goals will help guide performance of the new employee as well as feedback. Feedback allows employees to know if they are on track to achieve a desired outcome or need to alter their strategy to attain the goal (Locke & Latham, 2012). In the beginning scenario, had there been a climate of openness, John may have felt more comfortable asking for feedback when his boss showed signs of disapproval thus preventing the situation from spiraling out of control.

2.2 Dialoging

Many people use the terms "dialoguing" and "discussing" interchangeably. There is, however a very definite distinction between these terms. It is important to differentiate between these terms here because it is through dialoguing that reflection and inquiry can take place where an understanding of each other's point-of-view can develop (Nichol, 2005; Senge, 2006). The difference between a dialogue and a discussion is that in a dialogue no

one is trying to win. Smith (2001) stated that the concern for those engaged in dialogue is not to win the argument, but to advance understanding and human well-being (p. 1). During a discussion individuals may present their ideas and in the process everyone listening to the discussion has the opportunity to analyze and divide these ideas and assumptions from their different points of view. Nichol (2005) contends that the purpose of discussion is to make sure that the individuals presenting the ideas get the members of the audience to accept their ideas and persuade them to change. In contrast dialogue is an exploration of ideas (Nichol, 2005). During dialogue everyone works together contributing towards the idea where each person's idea adds to the last (p. 1). More importantly, those engaged in the dialogue are simply trying to learn and create. They suspend their individual assumptions and explore ideas and issues (Nichol, 2005; Senge, 2006). The process of dialogue opens up the possibility of transforming relationships between people, and the very nature of consciousness in which these relationships arise.

Senge (2006) defines dialogue as being based on the principles of Bohm (1996); to be able to freely listen to others suspending thoughts, impulses and judgments without trying to influence the other. Senge (2006) states that a dialogue is a state of mind, whereby an individual is truly present in the moment, listening intently, and being able to engage in dialogue with another person free from internal or external distractions. Imagine the different outcome had John and Mary taken time at the beginning of their relationship to sit together and dialogue gaining an understanding of each other's point-of-view on how to best work together.

2.3 Myers Briggs Type Indicator

The authors of this paper contend that if a working relationship between leader and employee is based on knowing each other's personality and work preferences at the beginning of the relationship then a foundation can be established where each other person has a better indication of what is expected. There will be less of a chance for miscommunication to develop. In addition, if the leader models behavior that teaches fairness and inclusiveness then less in-group and out-group phenomena will occur. One of the most widely used instruments to assess personality preferences is The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The MBTI is an instrument that will help develop an awareness of employees preferred approaches to handling work situations. It can help employees and leaders develop alternative strategies to problems that may increase the likelihood of performance improvement.

The MBTI is taken by more than two million people each year. The instrument consists of more than 100 questions about how a person feels or prefers to be in particular situations. The instrument is based on the work by Carl Jung which states that differences in people's behavior result from preferences in their information gathering, decision making and communications. It indicates a person's preference for energy (introversion versus extroversion), information gathering (sensing versus intuition), decision making (thinking versus feeling) and lifestyle (judging versus perceiving) (Quenk, 2009; CPP, 2009).

Sixteen different personality types are possible from the four preferences. For each type a person has strengths and weaknesses. Individuals who are provided with training on the use of the MBTI, understand how different perspectives and methods can lead to useful and effective problem solving strategies (CPP, 2009).

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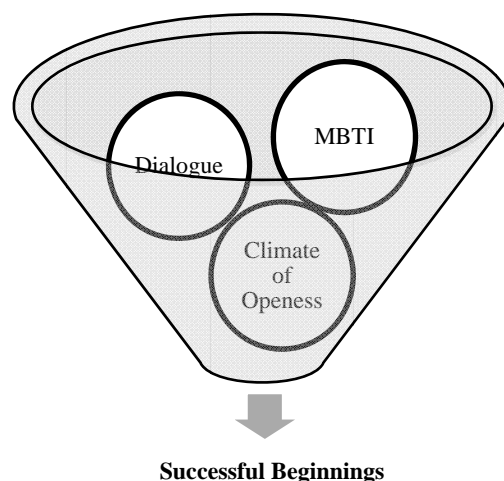
Figure 1   Model for Successful Beginnings

3. Putting the Model into Action

Figure 1 shows the factors (climate of openness, dialogue and an understanding of the MBTI) that contribute to successful beginning for new employees. If Mary has developed a climate of openness at the beginning the flow of communication would have been easier. It would have set the stage for effective dialogue and exploring their personality type. Mary is portrayed as having an introversion, sensing, thinking and judging (ISTJ) type. This type is characterized as being quiet, logical and orderly. She likes to be very organized and follow through on tasks and reach goals in a timely manner. John's type in contrast is an extroversion, intuition, feeling, and perceiving (ENFP), focused on getting to know his direct reports and providing them with support. Their different perceptions on what was important, translated into different expectations between John and Mary. Had they dialogued about their preferences and had Mary expressed her expectations to John the relationship may have gotten off to a better start (Quenk, 2009; CPP, 2009). John would have understood his type and the relationship of his preferences to the way he interacts with his boss. If John and Mary were to understand their styles and each other's, they would be more effective in communicating with each other. They could see how different perspectives and methods could lead a person to prioritize work tasks. This information could be expressed through dialogue and conflicts could be resolved.

The authors propose is a list of events that need to take place to ensure that a successful start is made between employee and leader. Human resource development practitioners could provide training to the leader and employee on how to interpret their different personality types and help facilitate dialogue and a climate of open communication to encourage successful beginnings.

Table 1   Climate of Openness

Steps	Approaches
1	Have both the leader and the employee take the MBTI.
2	Train the leader and employee in the understanding of personality types according to the MBTI.
3	Encourage the leader and employee to dialogue about their personality types, specifically how they are similar and how they are different and how they might approach situations, decisions and tasks differently from one another.
4	Encourage the supervisor to collaborate with employee to set specific goals.
5	Follow up often on progress towards the goals and address issues that arise in a timely manner.

4. Concluding Remarks

Manzoni et al. (2003) is of the opinion that managers should keep an open mind when dealing with each employee because each circumstance and personality will be different. As a part of organizational learning and development it is recommended that managers embrace training on how to combat dilemma's within the organization in an effort to reduce the need to micromanage their subordinates.

In conclusion, leaders need to consider utilizing the MBTI to get an understanding of the employees and their work preferences. They need time to dialogue with one another about their preferences and the expectations for the job. While some managers believe that micromanaging is beneficial to the organizations, it causes their employees to lose a great deal of respect for them. Respect in an organization is an important component to the success of the company. Being able to have respect for individuals within the work force will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive advantage, increase work efficiency, and effectiveness.

5. Recommendations for Future Research

One of the goals of this research paper was to develop ideas for future research. Observing and interviewing leaders who engage in the prescribed model in a qualitative study would help both practitioners and researcher gather in-depth understanding of this human behavior and the reasons that govern it. Quantitative approaches could help strengthen the proposed approach as well as develop instruments that could be utilized to test these characteristics. A direct hypotheses stemming from this paper is: understanding personality types according the MBTI, creating a climate of openness and establishing effective dialogue with employees are predictors of successful beginning of new employees. Questions to consider: What other factors need to be considered in setting the stage for a productive leader and employee relationship so that the employee does not get set-up- to-fail? What are the next steps that need to be considered to ensure the employee and leader relation stays on track?

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