

Leadership Development 1

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Question #1: Define consensus and collaboration in your own words, give an example of how each can be applied in a grove setting, and explain which you prefer and why. (min. 250 words)

Consensus – this is a technique where all the individuals concerned in the decision-making process come to a general agreement about what needs to be done. This can work well within small groups, where there is clear communication, but has been known to stymie progress in larger ones.

In smaller groves, consensus is often used for all formal decision-making. After all, with only three or four people involved, each person's opinion needs to be taken into account to keep relations within the grove amicable. This also allows them to forge a single grove identity. I have had experience with this first-hand in the early days of Sonoran Sunrise Grove. However, as the grove grew in size, this system became unwieldy, with one or two people holding the rest of the group to ransom. We finally had to change the system to one with an elected board, which made all the day-to-day decisions.

Collaboration – this is a technique where two or more individuals cooperate with each other to produce or create something. This works well in situations where there is a clear hierarchy of authority, however loose. It does require a common vision, though, to enable clear communication.

A good example of collaboration in a grove setting might be in the organization of an ADF festival. Here, a leader or small committee might decide policy (often through consensus) and then find volunteers to handle the various tasks required. Depending on the size of the festival, the grove might have volunteers actually organizing and directing other volunteers in these tasks (such as in registration, booking and hosting presenters, negotiating with the venue, etc.).

Which is best?

Either of these two methods could be appropriate depending on the situation involved. In a small setting, with few people involved, I could see employing consensus, even though it is difficult, because it allows everyone to feel like they were part of any decision. However, the transition between consensus and collaboration can be a rocky one, and has to be managed gently and with sensitivity. Assuming that any given group can be expected to grow and mature, it might be best to employ collaboration from the start to be able to avoid the growing pangs of that difficult transition. It would probably be best to limit the use of consensus to temporary, small groups that are not intended to last and grow.

Question #2: Describe the following traits of leadership, a) Direct, b) Indirect, c) Reserved, d) Outgoing, e) Urgent, f) Steady, g) Unstructured, h) Precise. Describe the types which best fit you. (minimum 100 words for each trait, and 100 words for the self-description)

Direct – Here, the person presents ideas and asserts himself with a direct approach. S/he comes across as self-assured and forceful and prefers to face problems and people head-on. S/he also tries to get vague or hidden issues dealt with and out of the way and often tends to tell folks what to do instead of asking them.

One advantage of direct leadership is that those who are being led have a clear and concise idea of what is expected of them, which removes doubt. However, it can also stifle creativity if folks believe that they will be shot down for taking the initiative.

Indirect – With this form of leadership, diplomacy is the byword. This leader doesn't tell his people what to do, but rather leads through gentle persuasion, presenting ideas and issues carefully and diplomatically. S/he asks rather than tells. These ideas might be understated and modest, and this leader is seen as supportive and unassuming. This leader is a facilitator in discussions, and usually keeps his/her own issues in the background, rather letting others hash out the problems.

There are situations or groups where this approach can be very effective, especially when conflict is likely or where strong personalities are trying to come together. On the other hand, this kind of leader might be seen as weak or wishy-washy, and unable or unwilling to take a stand.

Reserved – The reserved type of leader is one who is not easy to read. S/he is most comfortable dealing with others on a one-to-one basis instead of in groups and appears to be very private and self-contained. This person also doesn't deal well with group discussion as a method of clarifying issues and solutions, but rather likes to think things through and clarify his/her feelings.

This is a leader that can be hard to work for. S/he rarely displays thoughts and emotions during discussions, and therefore doesn't influence discussion or give cues to the others at a meeting as to how s/he is thinking, which can be disconcerting. On the other hand, this type of leader can be seen as fair and not likely to take sides in a discussion before hearing all the arguments.

Outgoing – The outgoing leader is one who interacts easily with others putting them at ease and making them feel important. These people share their emotions easily and like to talk out problems with others to clarify feelings. And they love groups and lots of activity, which energizes them. They are also very expressive and use gestures when talking.

This kind of leader can really get folks energized and excited about projects. They are very approachable and easy to talk to. Sometimes, however, they may have more style than substance, hoping to 'jolly' everyone along even when their strategies or ideas are lacking.

Urgent – The urgent leader takes action and makes decisions easily, being willing to take the consequences of possible hastiness – after all, s/he can always take another decision to fix the first one! This person prefers short-term projects to long-term ones because they give results more quickly, giving more instant satisfaction. They are quick to react to frustration and conflict with anger, but they also get things done.

This type of leader can be very difficult to work for, as one never knows what's going to happen next. Since they are volatile, they can also take things the wrong way, forcing the employee to tread very carefully. On the other hand, in situations that require instant judgment calls and fast decisions, this type of leader can be one of the best.

Steady – The steady leader is patient and cautious. They think things through and act with deliberation and only when ready. They also get things done because they stick with projects until the end and are happy to take on long-term projects rather than quick ones. They are also even-tempered and work at an even steady pace, taking lots of advice and giving their employees time to reflect on the implications and results of any possible action.

This sort of boss is quite predictable and rarely gives his/her employees any surprises. Steady leaders are in for the long haul and can be counted on. However, should any situations arise that call for quick thinking and quick action, they could be unable to act decisively in a timely manner.

Unstructured – The unstructured leader is one who loves flexibility and who likes to keep time unstructured. These unconventional leaders often inspire by not using normal or usual procedures and are often very open to unusual ideas. They also enjoy the challenge of coming up with these new and unusual ways of achieving their goals.

Many people have a great deal of trouble working in unstructured or even chaotic conditions, while this kind of leader often thrives in such environments. However, they can also be quite frustrating for workers who like a bit more order in their lives and this can lead to conflict.

Precise – The precise leader is the most structured of these types. They love to organize every detail and spend lots of time on organization. They tend to use established and time-tested procedures and concepts and can be somewhat predictable. Ambiguity and innovation can be very frustrating for these leaders.

This is exactly the type of leader one would want to take charge of an unstructured or chaotic situation to bring order to it, and they can be good at finding new ways at making policies or systems more efficient and run more smoothly. They are predictable, but might have trouble coming up with an effective response to an unusual situation.

And who am I?

I'd like to think that many of these traits apply to me in different situations, but I'd say that I am primarily Indirect, Reserved and Unstructured. This might surprise anyone reading this essay, but I have had to learn how to overcome the negative sides of myself. When necessary, I can be very direct, but I know myself and that I lead through consensus better than by fiat. I am also very reserved, and enjoy working by myself, but have also had to learn how to be outgoing and vivacious, though it does take a toll on me. I just know that there are times where a kind and encouraging word from me can work wonders for someone's morale, even if I don't happen to feel up to it at the time. I also have to force myself to put in a steady day's work, as I find myself getting distracted from boredom, and have to force myself to keep going. I do have self-discipline, luckily, and rely on it to do the work I need to do. (Handley)

Question #3: Define the seven primary skills of leadership (structure, strategy, staff, style, systems, shared values, strengths/skills).

- a. Identify the three skills that you are strongest in.**
- b. Identify the three you are weakest in and explain how you plan to improve these skills**

(min. 400 words describing improvement outlined in section "b" of this question)

Structure – This is the organization of the various individuals (or corporate sub-entities) that is designed for greatest productivity and/or for a specific purpose. The leader is responsible for creating (or maintaining or changing) how the folks under him/her interact and do their jobs.

Strategy – A strategy is a plan of action or policy for achieving a specific goal or overall aim. A good leader not only creates but also implements strategies.

Staff – Staff (or at least the folks who are working for the leader in some capacity) are critical for a successful outcome. A good leader does not just pick good staff, but s/he also manages them in the most efficient, yet compassionate manner possible, making work a win for everyone.

Style – The style of a leader refers to the list defined in question #2 above. These include Direct, Indirect, Reserved, Outgoing, Urgent, Steady, Unstructured and Precise.

Systems – Systems are a set of principles or procedures by which something is done. Unlike strategies, which are overall plans for projects, systems are the day-to-day procedures that guide everything in the organization regardless of any strategies in place, such as reporting rules, database updating procedures, etc. A good leader is able to maximize and optimize the systems in place to increase efficiencies and productivity.

Shared Values – A primary skill of a good leader is to inspire his employees to dedicate themselves to the core values of the organization, and to practice tolerance of those employees as long as they adhere to those values. Shared values help everyone work together for greatest productivity and efficiency.

Strengths/Skills - These are somewhat self-explanatory. The more skills a leader has, the better s/he will do. All leaders have strengths and weaknesses, and an ability to emphasize the strengths and de-emphasize the weaknesses is of vital importance. A good leader finds employees who have skill strengths that complement his/her weaknesses.

- a. My strongest suits out of these categories would probably be Structure, Staff and Systems. I operate well under clear structures, and when procedures or structures in our systems that I have inherited suddenly display signs of dysfunction, I am completely comfortable going in and revamping the entire thing, with the input of others involved. And I think I'm good at picking folks to do specific jobs, especially considering the small pool of talent I have to work with. When I get an idea for a program (or borrow one from someone else) I'm also pretty good at coming up with a strategy to accomplish the goal – and with my management style I also get lots of feedback from others.
- b. My three weakest suits out of these categories would probably be Style, Shared Values and Strategies. I have mentioned already in question #2 that I recognize my working style weaknesses and am working to compensate for them. I also realize that while I have values in ADF that are shared by much of leadership, I must do more to communicate those values to the membership and get buy-in from them. While I can come up with strategies for specific projects, finding one to gain shared values throughout ADF considering my style deficiencies has been daunting. However, I believe that I have now done so.

This strategy for overcoming my weaknesses and helping ADF grow at the same time is to subtly institute the Gung Ho program. This program is about ways to increase productivity and boost morale in the organization by creating shared values and goals and increasing a sense of ownership by the members of our church.

This program is based in nature imagery, which is good (even if it sounds a bit hokey). The first phase, which relates in part to shared values, is called 'The Spirit of the Squirrel' (Blanchard, 27-48) and is all about observing how squirrels work in the wild and applying this to the workplace. Squirrels work very hard, gathering up and storing nuts for the winter because they are motivated to do this for survival – if they don't do this, they will die. They do the work because it is *important*.

Work must be understood to be important, it must lead to a well-understood and shared goal, and values must guide all plans, decisions and actions. I have begun this part already in recent posts to the ADF-Discuss list emphasizing the importance of **ghosti-* in the relationships we as members of ADF have with ADF herself in addition to our groves.

The next phase of this program is called 'The Way of the Beaver' and is based on how beavers interact in building their dams. Beavers don't achieve their engineering marvels

because some other beaver is ordering them around, rather they each know what needs to be done and then each beaver just gets on with it. (Blanchard, 74-93) This means that folks should not be micro-managed, and if they've bought into the goals of their project and of ADF as a whole, they will do their jobs just fine.

The third and final phase is called 'The Gift of the Goose' and is based on the fact that geese spend so much of their lives honking! Gift of the Goose brings enthusiasm to the Spirit of the Squirrel and the Way of the Beaver – this is all about cheering others on. And it's not just the leaders cheering on the folk, but also the folk cheering on each other. But for this to work, congratulations must be both timely and deserved. If folks don't deserve congratulations, they can at least be given encouragement instead. Also, it's not about competing against each other – there is no score and no game (to use a sports metaphor) but rather it's the progress that counts. (Blanchard 129-150)

Question #4: Define the stages of burnout. Identify how you can utilize the strengths and skills of team members to avoid burnout in yourself and others. (minimum 200 words)

Burnout is caused by one or more of six mismatches between the nature of a person and the nature of their job. When the gap between people and their job's demands becomes too great, burnout occurs. (Maslach 9-17)

Work Overload – Here the workload is far larger than can be reasonably completed by someone in the same amount of time. The workload also increases as the tempo of work increases – the Internet, for instance, allows (and sometimes demands) instant communication, cutting down on the time people have to complete tasks.

Lack of Control – People like to be able to do things their own way, to make their own decisions and to solve their own problems, but overly restrictive policies and procedures can frustrate people and stifle creativity and initiative.

Lack of Reward – In a church like ADF, monetary reward is not available, so here we are talking about encouragement, praise and recognition. A lack of these things causes a feeling of loss of self-worth and most devastating is the loss of the individual's internal reward for a job well done.

Lack of Community – While there are many issues that can give a person the sense of being isolated from their community, the worst one, and one that has plagued ADF in the past, is chronic, unresolved conflict. This causes frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, disrespect and suspicion, all leading to more isolation.

Lack of Fairness – Without fairness in the workplace, people are not shown respect and their self-worth is undermined. Without fairness, trust in the organization is lost, and morale is destroyed.

Value Conflicts – Sometimes there is a mismatch between the job's requirements and a person's personal values. Sometimes people feel a need to behave in an unethical way when they don't want to, and this can also lead to painful conflicts that undermine their pride, integrity and self-respect.

There are five steps that can be taken to help prevent or stop burnout from continuing. First, the person involved has to recognize the problem and decide to do something about it. This means doing the background work required and involving others to take direct action. But even though one person can begin the process it takes a group to sustain it. The group (or in our case, the leaders) must reach a consensus about what is to be done and the steps needing to be taken to accomplish it. The solutions that they come up with must then be implemented in the context of the entire organization, and it is probably best to focus on one mismatch at a time. But what is most important

to remember is that this is a process, and that the outcome is only a process – not a 'happy ending' in itself. The team's strengths and weaknesses will dictate who does what in this process. (Maslach 82-83)

Question #5: Using the information you have learned in this course, what do you feel makes a person an effective leader in ADF? (min. 200 words)

Effective leaders in ADF have to be people who know themselves and recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. All of the leadership styles, such as direct, indirect, etc., can work very well in any situation, as long as the leader knows how that style will affect those working with him/her and how that style can be blended with other styles to achieve the most harmonious and effective result.

Perhaps the most necessary skill not mentioned specifically in this course but alluded to obliquely, is the ability to listen – to listen intently and to withhold judgment until all the facts are in. The leader also has to be aware enough of those working under him/her to recognize and address any issues of burnout that may be arising, including any coming up in the leader's own life.

But I believe that a shared, common culture, values and set of goals in ADF for our leaders are of prime importance. We have the advantage of not being a dogmatic religion, but this diversity can also be a hindrance to common values and action. Development of, and buy-in to our basic cosmology, including in particular the concept of **ghosti-* (reciprocity) upon which our religion is based, is vital. All our leaders need to be able to support the vision of ADF as it has been articulated over the past years, and the Leadership needs effective leadership for this to happen.

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