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Underrepresented yet Necessary Practices of Leadership

Leading Below the Surface expresses the importance of building genuine relationships with team members in order to better understand and empathize with them. Every person has developed different knowledge, perspectives and experiences (Wilkins 2021), so understanding these unique qualities for each team member can help a leader better understand what they need, how they lead themselves and how they can best be led. These diverse qualities manifest in a variety of different leadership styles among individuals and responses to different leadership styles. Few leadership styles are represented in the dominant leadership standard, however, so a lot of leadership potential among team members is overlooked and team member needs may not be met due to a leader that does not understand them. Practicing the concepts of *Leading Below the Surface* to build good relationships with team members can help a leader understand their team members well enough to recognize what they need and build trust in one another. Demonstrating interest and empathy towards a team member creates the trust needed to develop a good working relationship and shows them that they are valued. Focusing on people over performance connects to course topics as well as it also builds trusting relationships. This involves relating to one another, being open, honest, and more human (Brooks 2021). Leaders should trust their team members to practice excellence without micromanagement, and their team members will trust them in return. These leaders can demonstrate even stronger trust by giving team members critical responsibilities, allowing them to provide input and approach problems with their own methods.

Wilkins brings up a critical point in *Leading Below the Surface* about dominant leadership standards. Very few demographics of people are represented as leaders, particularly in

a corporate setting, so only certain types of people with a narrow collective set of perspectives and experiences set standards for leadership ideals and practice. Those who do not commonly fit these leadership standards have widely varied views on leadership and how it should be practiced. Often, however, they find themselves unrepresented in leadership roles. They may be pushed aside to an outer group and overlooked for leadership roles due to the affinity bias of those making leadership decisions. In one of her corporate succession planning positions, Wilkins studied the profiles of the only two women considered for senior leadership roles within a talent pool of 90% men. She argues from her findings that people who do not fit the norm have to practice self-authorship to advance far in most corporate settings; create their own concepts of leadership to apply in an environment where the unspoken norms do not work for them (Wilkins 2021). It is far more difficult to create unique concepts of work and leadership based on differing experience than it is to follow well-known leadership norms. This is why it is important for leaders to not only build a good relationship with their team members, but actively seek to understand members' unique knowledge and experiences to broaden their perspective on the world and better understand the value each member brings to the team. Knowing the individual motivations and ambitions of each team member can also help a leader delegate tasks that align with the team members' own ambitions as long as overlap exists between team objectives and individual ambitions. These team members are likely to be more productive and report higher job satisfaction. Leaders who learn these details about their team members gain a more complete picture of each member as a person. They can use these details to make decisions that are not governed by narrow leadership norms, elevate various types of people to leadership roles and break the pattern of the dominant leadership standard. Discovering team members' individual motivations has another benefit as well. In a survey conducted by Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, 75%

of participants scored high on levels of happiness but low on levels of meaning (Cole 2014).

Finding meaning in work is one of the best ways to improve productivity, but it is underutilized.

Understanding team members' individual knowledge, perspectives, experiences and motivations

through below-the-surface leadership gives leaders the critical insight they need to create

purpose in the work of the team and make use of team members' individual motivations where

possible.

Values of inclusion in an organization are critical to close relationships and effective

teams. As Wilkins mentions in *Leading Below the Surface*, people are naturally exclusive

because they have biases that affect who they choose to work and interact with. Affinity bias

causes people to favor those who are similar to them, while in-group bias causes people to favor

those who they already know (Wilkins 2021). These biases are counterproductive to the team

because they create a work environment where some members' need for inclusion is not met.

When this basic need, among others, is not met, the team members' well-being and productivity

are negatively impacted. It takes a below-the-surface leader to reverse this trend and create an

organizational culture of inclusion. This involves being aware of instances of exclusion within

the team and using legitimate or referent power to address it. As discussed in our topics, people

tend to form a natural hierarchy in the absence of a formal one. Natural hierarchies are more

prone to exclusion as people follow their natural biases to form them, but a well-constructed

formal hierarchy can create a more inclusive environment. This type of hierarchy ensures that

every team member has a role and is doing important work that integrates into the larger team

objectives. A formal hierarchy fulfills team members' needs for order and security in their role

(Pfeffer 2014). In an unstructured environment, natural hierarchies can form through the

influence of affinity bias but also around team members with higher perceived power. Referent

power and expert power are commonly recognized in these environments because legitimate power is not present and team members may not have the means to use reward or coercive power before the hierarchical structure is established. While a non-hierarchical organization has its benefits, a natural hierarchy will most likely form around these types of power. People who become informal leaders due to their power should address any exclusion that follows to ensure that team members' need for inclusion is met. They have the ability to involve excluded members in team activities and work, highlight these members' valuable qualities, and give them work critical to organizational goals so that the team can see their value and rely on this team member as they rely on each other.

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