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THE LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

Leaders who operate in today's networked world of projects and teams find themselves in a dynamic environment that didn't exist just a few decades ago. Where managers once oversaw functions they had previously performed themselves, today's leaders often head up diverse groups of specialists whose areas of expertise are not familiar to them. Where supervisors traditionally worked in close proximity to their staff, today's employees may be located hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Where bosses once wielded absolute authority over compliant workers, today's leaders often work with independent colleagues over whom they have little or no authority.

Although many organizations continue to operate in the traditional mode, the incidence of geographically dispersed workers and lateral structures is on the rise. Today even the most conservative, hierarchical organizations are permeated with technology implementation teams, process improvement projects, new product partnerships, and interorganizational networks. The people who head up these groups find themselves facing unique challenges. These leaders quickly discover that being effective on a succession of complex projects requires a new set of skills and techniques.

When asked to describe what a leader is, most people will say something like: "someone who's in charge," "the person who's accountable," or "the one who has the final say." This command-and-control notion of leadership has been with us for centuries and is pervasive. But in the world of projects and teams, this conventional approach to leading is no longer effective.

People who head up projects staffed with knowledge workers know this. Team leaders know it as well, as do managers whose boomer-age workforce is being replaced by younger workers with different expectations. In every sector of the economy, changing organizational patterns combined with shifts in worker attitudes are ushering in a dynamic new style.

The Transforming Workplace

Over the past several decades, a number of major forces have been altering the workplace. The globalization of markets, the large-scale application of technology, the drive for total quality, the need for superior customer service, and the demand for innovation have all been exerting enormous adaptive pressures.

In response to these trends, organizations of all sizes have been adjusting their structures. Instead of being organized purely by specialty departments such as quality control, human resources, and marketing, many organizations have integrated these functions into networks that are focused on specific customers, products, or market segments.

Where work was once conducted largely within departments, more and more innovative and important work is now being conducted in the matrix, or space between departments and organizations. This change has many positive features: the work is often more challenging and dynamic, people are afforded the opportunity of working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, and ideas are shared across traditional boundaries.

Matrix: the substance in which elements are embedded; a network of interconnected elements; the space between elements; a network of partners.

Matrix Work Is Different

While work within organizational boundaries tends to be ongoing, matrix work is typically carried out as time-limited projects. While staff inside departments are more likely to be long term, project

team workers know that their assignments are temporary. Rather than report to a single supervisor or manager, matrix workers often report to more than one management authority.

One of the main reasons organizations deploy matrix teams is to create a blend of talents capable of breakthrough thinking. When matrix networks are made up of the right knowledge workers, they allow organizations to forge synergistic partnerships and create innovative products.

There are other advantages as well. Rather than being task driven, matrix teams are more likely to be goal driven. They are also more likely to be composed of knowledge workers who have been selected for their specialized expertise and capacity to contribute to the achievement of a specific goal.

On the most elementary level, a knowledge worker is someone who possesses advanced knowledge and is hired to apply that expertise. Some knowledge workers are easy to spot. These are the people with advanced degrees in specialty areas, like scientists, engineers, medical researchers, and software designers.

But there are lots of other knowledge workers who are harder to spot. If we broaden the definition to include those who need to be skillful and use their deductive abilities on the job, then the number of workers who fit into this category expands exponentially. In this context, every salesperson, every customer service representative, and every shop floor worker has knowledge that's important to the success of their respective organizations.

Considering the rate at which unskilled jobs either disappear or continue to migrate offshore, it may not be an overstatement to say that a growing proportion of the employment remaining in developed nations is knowledge work.

Examples of Matrix Networks

Many knowledge workers continue to operate within traditional departments, but a growing number work in groups located in the space between departments. There are countless examples of these matrix structures in every industry and within every sector:

- Teams of managers and external consultants navigating a complex merger or acquisition
- Technology implementation committees composed of technology experts and end users
- Process improvement initiatives made up of engineers, managers, and manufacturing staff
- Coordinating committees made up of managers and specialists from a variety of departments or agencies working together to implement a new policy or program
- Most schools where principals coordinate the efforts of teams of teachers who autonomously manage their classrooms
- Cooperative teams established by former competitors to win and then manage large contracts that are too complex for any one of them to manage on their own
- New business start-up projects composed of specialists drawn from a variety of schools, government agencies, and private firms

More and more work is being conducted in the space between organizations.

This way of organizing work has become particularly widespread in scientific, engineering, and technology firms where it's now common for staff to spend more time working on a succession of projects than working within any particular department.

Changing Workforce Expectations

At the same time that organizations have been transforming, employees have been changing. Decades of higher education and personal autonomy have altered worker outlooks and expectations.

In the 1950s workers were looking for steady employment, a fair salary, and opportunities for advancement. This was the nine-to-five world of clear job descriptions and stable work assignments. Workers could expect to put in their hours and go home to focus on

their family and other interests. The worker of the 1950s was accustomed to the hierarchical nature of the workplace and expected leaders to be directive and authoritative.

Members of Generation X and younger have grown up in a radically different culture than even the baby boomers, who currently dominate the workplace. These younger workers have known constant change and are accustomed to working in teams. Unlike their parents, they don't expect lifelong employment. Instead of permanence, they're more interested in finding meaningful work that features opportunities to learn and grow. They also expect to be personally engaged at work; they want to control their workday and have a voice in important decisions that affect them.

Today's workers are accustomed to greater personal autonomy than previous generations.

Technology Matters

Surely the most significant change of the past few decades has been the impact of technology, which has radically altered every aspect of how people do their work. The arrival of the personal computer made it possible for employees to access a world of information, create complex personal networks, and conduct work across distances.

In contrast to employees of the 1950s, who were dependent on their manager for corporate information, today's wired employees can access business data and read the latest news on the company intranet. Where employees once had to gain approval to communicate with colleagues outside their department, information now whizzes back and forth across organizational boundaries.

Technology has also changed the structure of work. Today's knowledge workers can operate from anywhere and at any hour using their laptops and cell phones. Teleconferences have replaced many meetings, a trend that's going to grow as videoconferencing technology becomes more widespread. It is no longer unheard of for team members to work on a project for months without ever having a face-to-face meeting.

The Transforming Workplace

From	*To*
Stable departments	Shifting networks of teams
Vertical hierarchies	Lateral matrices
Task orientation	Goal orientation
Homogeneous staff groupings	Diverse skill sets
Geographically close	Geographically scattered
Communications dependent	Personally networked
Leaders know the work	Leaders may not know the work
9 to 5	24/7
Information dependent	Widely networked
Operating without technology	Totally wired
Expectations of lifelong	Expectations of autonomy employment and personal growth

Implications for Leaders

The combined effect of these trends is changing what it means to be a leader in today's world of work:

- When employees don't know as much about the content of their work as their supervisors and managers, it's appropriate and effective for these leaders to direct the details of staff efforts. But when team members are experts in specialty areas that are unknown to the leader, it is impossible for the leader to direct staff efforts.
- When employees work in centralized locations, the leader can monitor employee efforts during preset hours of operation. But when team members work in remote locations and set their own timetable for achieving personal deadlines, the leader is in no position to judge staff effectiveness through direct observation.
- When the leader has direct control over the budget and the hiring and firing of staff, he or she has the authority to control

workload assignments and discipline staff. But when team members are assigned to a team or committee in which both staffing and budgets are controlled elsewhere, the leader has few levers to control member actions.

- When staff roles are narrowly defined and feature repetitious tasks, it's often appropriate for the leader to provide oversight to ensure that work gets done. But when the work demands creativity and innovation and results depend on people taking initiative, close oversight is futile and serves only to undermine individual initiative.

Just as the advent of the industrial age created the need for new approaches to managing work, the proliferation of matrix structures is creating the need for a transformation in the role of the leader. This change also represents an opportunity for leadership thinking to make a quantum leap forward by taking on the form that reflects the dimensions of the Internet age.

Leaders in Matrix Networks

- Instead of dealing largely with individuals, they work with people in groups.
- Instead of supervising hours of operation and measuring workload, they help staff identify parameters within which they can become self-managing.
- Instead of directing tasks, they motivate people to achieve superior results.
- Instead of directing the mission, they align team efforts with organizational goals.

The Overlooked Tool Set

For leaders searching for strategies to manage these new realities, there's good news. The leadership style that's most effective in this setting has already been developed and refined. It is known as facilitative leadership.

Facilitation is a process through which a person helps others work effectively. It draws out the knowledge of group members in order to achieve superior results. It values everyone's contribution, shares power, and instills ownership. Facilitators help groups improve the quality and quantity of their work by getting members to work together more effectively.

The facilitator is one of the most important roles to emerge in the modern workplace. It was developed in the middle of the twentieth century as a blend of management theory and applied behavioral science. It was created in order to engage and empower followers so that their expertise and knowledge would be fully used.

The tools and techniques that matrix leaders need can be found in facilitation.

Of all the skill sets that support the shift from the traditional, directive mode to the style most needed by matrix leaders, none is more relevant than the role of facilitator.

What Is Facilitative Leadership?

Facilitative leadership is a skilled approach to leading that's based on the core beliefs and practices of group facilitation. It makes extensive use of process tools in order to provide structure and casts the leader in the role of helper and enabler.

Facilitative leaders share the core beliefs of facilitation:

- People are intelligent and capable, and they want to do the right thing.
- Everyone's opinion has value, regardless of an individual's rank or position.
- Groups can make better decisions than individuals acting alone.
- People are more committed to the ideas and plans that they create.
- People will take responsibility and assume accountability for their actions and can become partners in the enterprise.

- The role of the leader is to evoke the best possible performance from each member of their team.

The ultimate goal of the facilitative leader is to develop the leadership talents of others by instilling confidence, authority, and responsibility in each person. They aim to create organizations that are participative, responsive, and essentially self-managing, exactly the kind of workplace in which knowledge workers thrive.

To place facilitative leadership in context, it may be helpful to compare it to the leadership styles of traditional directive leaders.

Traditional Directive Leaders

This is the traditional command-and-control style that was created for a bygone era when a great deal of work was deliberately reduced to its simplest components and mechanized. This leader sets the direction, has the final word, and is personally held accountable. The style is based on the assumption that the leader is the most knowledgeable and experienced person in the group and should therefore exert control over the important aspects of the operation. In this mode, followers are viewed as less capable than the leader and in need of both direction and control.

Directive leaders have a high involvement with the content of the work being performed but have a relatively low involvement in the relationship elements. In other words, they spend most of their time ensuring that their people know what to do, place less emphasis on developing staff relationships or personal capabilities, and typically have the power to hire, fire, or redeploy their people and have the final word in major decisions.

Traditional directive leaders:

- Are task focused
- Set direction and make strategic decisions
- Control work assignments
- Work with people individually

- Control information
- Retain the right to make decisions
- Place a minor emphasis on people skills
- Have rank and privileges
- Relate in a distant and formal style
- Communicate down
- Hold few meetings
- Rarely give or receive feedback
- Feel that staff work for them
- Retain accountability for outcomes
- Work to meet the expectations of their managers

The directive mode is effective where the leader possesses expertise that is essential to the operation and when staff members need both direction and oversight in order to do their jobs.

Today's More Engaging Leaders

Over the past few decades, most workplaces have become more informal. In addition, managers and supervisors have been sensitized to age group, gender, and diversity issues. Many have worked on teams and have developed their meeting and group membership skills. These leaders are communicative and people savvy. They're more relaxed in their approach and tend to be more willing to engage than the classic command-and-control boss is. They're good listeners and know how to ask probing questions. They're participative and support the value of teamwork.

Today's more engaging leaders are still highly involved with directing tasks, but they combine this with an increased focus on both improving how work gets done and enhancing interpersonal relations. Although they're more process focused, these leaders continue to be primarily accountable for the results that their people achieve.

This approach to leading is very effective when leaders have sufficient expertise to be in a position to evaluate and direct the work of their staff. It is also the desired approach to take when staff members lack total proficiency and need development. Many of today's leaders are very effective operating in this high involvement style.

Thus, in contrast to traditional directive leaders, today's more engaging leaders:

- Are open, informal, and friendly
- Possess interpersonal skills
- Value teamwork and collaboration
- Are customer focused and quality conscious
- Are interested in continuous learning
- Are willing to engage and empower their people
- Have meeting management skills
- Are receptive to change
- Are communicative and open to feedback
- Are highly involved in improving both work processes and staff capabilities
- Are still involved in directing tasks
- Remain accountable for results
- Still feel that staff work for them
- Still work to meet the expectations of their managers

Supervisors and managers who exhibit these traits are well on their way to being facilitative leaders and often think that they're already there. But true facilitative leadership requires a further shift.

The Traits of Facilitative Leaders

True facilitative leaders are more than just people savvy; they're group process focused. They not only hold meetings to gain staff input, they know how to structure every type of conversation to

ensure effective collaboration. They do more than delegate; they systematically empower. They are not only open to employee input; they deliberately structure activities to ensure that staff evaluate them and each other on a regular basis.

Leaders who operate in this mode deliberately leave content matters to group members while they focus their energy on building effective partnerships and networks. They also focus on providing the enabling structures that support superior performance. Rather than coming to meetings to make decisions, these leaders provide decision-making structures. Rather than deciding strategy, identifying priorities, and assigning responsibilities, they provide the right structuring tools so that members can create those plans for themselves. Rather than make things happen, they enable others to get things done. They are helpers and enablers.

Although this style is not applicable to all situations, it is the right approach for groups whose members are capable of both making effective decisions and working independently. It's ideally suited for projects and teams where the leader is coordinating the efforts of competent specialists whose work he or she isn't in a position to understand. This style is also relevant for any work group where members are highly skilled and accountable for outcomes. Any leader can shift to the facilitative mode once his or her staff possess the capacity to work independently and assume responsibility for outcomes.

Facilitative leaders:

- Firmly believe in the principles of collaboration and participation
- Are master facilitators who are familiar with an extensive set of organizing tools
- Systematically empower in order to transfer content control to their staff
- Strive to build collaborative decisions based on staff input
- Possess and use high-level interpersonal skills like active lis-

tening, questioning, and paraphrasing when interacting with others
- Understand how to build and maintain high-performance teams
- Are excellent communicators who freely share information
- Operate without status or rank consciousness
- Focus on continuous improvement of both the work and the operation
- Actively engage in giving and receiving feedback
- Train and coach their people
- Manage conflict and mediate disputes skillfully
- Share accountability for outcomes with team members
- Work to meet the expectations of stakeholders, including their staff

The Need for Versatility

While each approach to leading has its place, it's critically important that every leader be capable of variable styles. Leaders who acquire facilitative skills will gain the versatility of being able to operate in a process-oriented mode in some settings while retaining a task-oriented approach in other situations.

> All leaders need to be capable of operating in both modes: the task-focused directive mode for situations where close oversight of tasks is needed and is workable and the process-focused mode to provide structure when leading teams of experts.

Without the ability to shift to the process mode, leaders will be compelled to use a directive approach even in situations where it doesn't work. This is now happening in many organizations where projects are being managed by controlling leaders who end up micromanaging their highly skilled colleagues when what is really needed is process support.

Organizational Benefits of Deploying Facilitative Leaders

Facilitative leadership holds the promise of being the foremost leadership strategy for the networked world. When organizations deploy skilled process specialists to lead their projects and teams, they reap a number of significant benefits:

- When operational elements are continuously reviewed and improved, the overall effectiveness of the operation increases.
- When meetings are highly structured and assertively facilitated, dialogue becomes important and valuable.
- When employee ideas and active involvement are sought, there's more collaboration and innovation.
- When staff members are empowered and supported, creativity and innovation increase.
- When staff are treated as valued colleagues, commitment and motivation increase.
- When teams are carefully managed through their development stages, more teams attain the high-performance state.

Personal Benefits of Shifting Styles for Leaders

Supervisors and managers who feel that they're operating effectively when they control tasks and are the main decision makers will naturally wonder why they should bother changing. Here are some of the benefits related to adopting a facilitative approach:

- The increased ability to help others make complex collaborative decisions
- Enhanced capacity to build and maintain healthy teams
- Greater use of staff resources
- Staff who are more engaged and more responsible for their actions and for finding and solving problems

- Shared accountability for results
- Greater commitment and buy-in through input and involvement
- Team members who are more self-managing
- A more collegial and participative culture
- An expanded tool kit for managing group dynamics and leveraging staff resources

Perhaps the greatest gain is that staff in a participative environment act more like leaders themselves. Not only does this approach share the burden of responsibility, but it also creates a rich source of leaders for the entire organization.

One definition of a leader: someone who creates leaders.

Making the Match

Facilitative leadership is not the right approach for every situation, but it is right for situations that feature most of the traits in the following checklist. Use this checklist to determine if your project or team is in need of this type of leader:

- ❑ The group consists of strong subject matter experts who need to align around new organizational goals and outcomes.
- ❑ Individuals with different performance measurement systems need to work together to produce a collective outcome.
- ❑ The group has been charged with the responsibility of achieving specific results that require initiative, innovation, and creativity.
- ❑ The group needs to become a cohesive team and periodically meet to maintain and improve team effectiveness.
- ❑ Group members will be held personally accountable for the extent to which they contribute to the achievement of specified results.

- ❑ Individual members are required to be self-motivated and self-managing because they work independently.
- ❑ The members have access to technology and can communicate freely across organizational boundaries.
- ❑ The group is dealing with challenges such as collaborating between historically hostile parties or dealing with complex bureaucracies.
- ❑ The decisions being made by group members require broad support and commitment from key stakeholders.
- ❑ Some of the decisions that the team will need to make are extremely complex and sensitive.
- ❑ High levels of collaboration will be needed to arrive at solutions that have the commitment of a diverse set of stakeholders.
- ❑ The leadership position has been designed without traditional levers of power and control, or the leader is operating without direct authority over some or all of the members.
- ❑ The complexity of the situation or past history calls for the presence of a leader who is seen to be neutral by all parties.
- ❑ The situation periodically requires that the leader manage conflicts or negotiate between parties who are at odds.