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Developing Professional Practice: Leadership and Management

1. Introduction

Effective leadership and management are important aspects of professional practice because they influence how individuals communicate, make decisions, manage responsibilities and contribute towards organisational objectives. Leadership is not limited to individuals who hold senior management positions. It can also be demonstrated by supervisors and employees who influence others, take responsibility and contribute positively to workplace performance. Northouse (2022) identifies leadership as a process involving influence, while management involves coordinating people and resources to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, developing effective leadership and management skills is important for individuals who want to progress professionally.

This report critically reflects on professional practice by considering the leadership and management skills required to become a more effective professional. The analysis has been informed by the SMART Engineering case study provided within the module and by reflection on my own workplace experiences as a supervisor. The seven professional development constructs identified within the module are considered throughout the report: self-management, personal cognitive bias, personal unconscious bias,

accountability, authentic behaviour, interpersonal relationships and professional integrity.

These areas are relevant to my professional development because effective leadership requires more than the ability to manage tasks. A successful leader also needs to understand their own behaviour, communicate effectively, make fair decisions, accept responsibility and develop positive working relationships. The case study demonstrated the potential consequences of ineffective professional behaviours, while reflecting on my own workplace experiences has allowed me to identify areas where I can improve.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model is used to support the reflective process. The model provides a structured way of considering an experience, reflecting on what happened, developing an understanding of the experience and applying that learning to future situations. Reflection is particularly important for professional development because it enables individuals to move beyond simply describing what happened and instead consider what could have been done differently.

The purpose of this report is therefore to analyse the key areas of professional practice, reflect on my own development needs and identify priorities for improvement. These development needs are subsequently converted into SMART objectives, with the full Personal Development Plan presented in Appendix A.

2. Leadership and Management in Professional Practice

Leadership and management are closely related but represent different aspects of professional practice. Leadership is generally concerned with influencing and motivating people, establishing direction and supporting individuals towards shared objectives. Management is more concerned with organising resources, coordinating activities and ensuring that objectives are achieved. However, effective supervisors and managers require a combination of both leadership and management skills.

Northouse (2022) explains that leadership can be understood through a variety of approaches, demonstrating that there is no single leadership style that will be effective in every situation. This is important because workplace situations can vary considerably. A leader may need to be supportive when developing an inexperienced employee but more directive when dealing with an urgent

operational issue. Effective leadership therefore requires adaptability and awareness of the situation.

Mintzberg (2009) also highlights the complexity of managerial work. Managers have to deal with different responsibilities, people and information, often within limited periods of time. This is particularly relevant to a supervisory position, where an individual may be expected to support employees, maintain service standards, respond to customers and deal with unexpected problems simultaneously.

Leadership can also influence employee motivation. Transformational leadership focuses on motivating and developing individuals rather than simply instructing them to complete tasks (Bass and Riggio, 2006). This suggests that a good leader should encourage employees to understand their responsibilities and recognise how their individual contribution supports wider organisational performance.

Reflecting on my own professional experience has demonstrated that leadership is strongly connected to personal behaviour. Employees observe how supervisors respond to pressure, communicate instructions and deal with mistakes. Consequently, leadership development must begin with understanding and improving my own behaviour before attempting to influence the behaviour of others.

My current experience as a supervisor has provided opportunities to develop leadership skills through practical workplace situations. However, it has also demonstrated that becoming an effective leader is an ongoing process. I need to continue developing my confidence, communication, decision-making and ability to remain accountable when situations become challenging.

3. Reflective Approach to Professional Development

Reflection provides an opportunity to examine professional experiences and consider how they can contribute to future learning. Simply experiencing a situation does not necessarily result in learning; the experience needs to be considered critically so that lessons can be identified and applied to future situations.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle provides a useful framework for this process. The model involves four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. The first

stage involves experiencing a situation, followed by reflection on what occurred. The individual then develops an understanding of the experience before considering how that learning can be applied in a future situation. Applying this approach to my own professional practice has encouraged me to consider not only what happened during workplace situations but also why I responded in particular ways. For example, when dealing with workload pressures, my initial response may be to try to solve the problem independently. While this can demonstrate initiative, it may not always be the most effective approach. If a problem could affect a deadline, service or another employee, communicating the issue earlier may allow appropriate support to be provided.

The case study also reinforced the importance of accountability. The module's worked example demonstrates that problems can become more difficult when individuals do not take ownership or communicate concerns early. This is directly relevant to professional practice because failing to communicate a developing problem can potentially create greater consequences later. Reflection has therefore encouraged me to focus on what I can personally improve, rather than concentrating on what managers or colleagues should change. This is particularly important for leadership development because an individual cannot control the behaviour of everyone around them, but they can control their own communication, decision-making and response to workplace situations.

The reflective process has identified several areas for development, including self-management, accountability, communication, decision-making, interpersonal relationships and professional integrity. These areas are considered individually below.

4. Self-Management

Self-management is an important component of effective leadership because leaders must be able to manage their own time, emotions, priorities and behaviour before they can effectively support other people. Emotional intelligence research highlights the importance of self-awareness and self-management in leadership because an individual's emotions and reactions can influence relationships and workplace effectiveness (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002).

My own workplace experience has demonstrated that self-management becomes particularly important during busy or unpredictable periods.

Supervisors may have to manage several responsibilities simultaneously, meaning that it can be easy to become overwhelmed or focus on the most immediate problem rather than considering priorities as a whole.

One area I have identified for development is my ability to remain organised when several tasks require attention at the same time. A more effective approach would be to establish priorities, identify which tasks are urgent and determine which responsibilities can be delegated. This would allow me to manage my workload more effectively while also giving other team members opportunities to take responsibility.

Delegation is an important part of leadership because attempting to complete every task personally can be counterproductive. It can increase pressure on the supervisor while limiting the development of other employees. Effective delegation therefore requires trust and clear communication.

Self-management is also linked to confidence. Bandura (1997) explains that self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their ability to perform successfully, can influence motivation and behaviour. Developing greater confidence in my own ability to make decisions should therefore allow me to respond more effectively to workplace challenges.

My development need in this area is consequently to improve how I manage pressure, prioritise tasks and recognise when support or delegation is appropriate. Rather than automatically attempting to resolve every issue myself, I need to assess the situation, communicate where necessary and use the resources available to me.

5. Personal Cognitive Bias and Decision-Making

Decision-making is an important responsibility within leadership and management. However, decisions are not always completely objective because individuals can be influenced by previous experiences, assumptions and cognitive biases. Kahneman (2011) explains that human decision-making involves both rapid intuitive thinking and slower, more deliberate thinking. This demonstrates why individuals should sometimes pause and examine their initial judgement before making an important decision.

This is relevant to my professional practice because previous experiences with employees may influence how I interpret future situations. For example, if an employee has previously made a mistake, I may unconsciously expect similar behaviour from them in the future. This could influence the way I respond to a new situation, even if the circumstances are different.

Reflection has shown me that effective leadership requires me to question my assumptions. Instead of immediately deciding who is responsible for a problem, I should consider the evidence available, listen to different perspectives and establish the circumstances before reaching a conclusion.

This is particularly important when making decisions that affect other employees. A leader who repeatedly makes decisions based on personal assumptions could unintentionally create perceptions of unfairness. This could damage trust and employee relationships.

My development priority is therefore to become more deliberate when making significant workplace decisions. I can achieve this by asking myself what evidence supports my initial judgement, whether there could be an alternative explanation and whether I would make the same decision if the situation involved another employee.

Developing this habit should help me become a more balanced and objective decision-maker.

6. Personal Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias is another area that requires consideration within professional leadership. Individuals naturally categorise people and situations, and social identity can influence how individuals perceive members of different groups (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Although unconscious bias does not necessarily involve deliberate discrimination, it can still influence professional decisions. Within a workplace, unconscious bias could affect areas such as delegation, communication, recognition and opportunities for development. For example, a supervisor may naturally delegate an important task to an employee they already trust because they have previously demonstrated competence. While this may appear practical, repeatedly doing so could prevent other employees from gaining experience.

Reflection has therefore encouraged me to consider whether my workplace decisions are based on objective requirements or personal preferences. It is

important that employees are given fair opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and develop new skills.

This also connects with professional integrity because effective leadership requires fairness and consistency. A leader should be able to explain why a decision was made based on workplace requirements rather than personal preference.

My development need is therefore to increase my awareness of potential unconscious assumptions when making decisions. Before allocating important tasks or responsibilities, I should consider whether there are other suitable individuals who could benefit from the opportunity. This could support both fairness and employee development.

7. Accountability

Accountability is one of the most important development areas identified through the case study and my own reflection. Accountability involves accepting responsibility for actions and decisions and taking appropriate action when something does not go as planned.

The SMART Engineering example provided within the module demonstrates the importance of communicating risks to deadlines at an early stage. This is particularly relevant to my own professional practice. When faced with a problem, my instinct can sometimes be to attempt to solve it independently before informing someone else. Although this can demonstrate initiative, it can also create unnecessary risk if the issue becomes more serious.

For example, if a workload issue could affect the completion of an important task, communicating it early gives a manager an opportunity to provide assistance or reorganise priorities. Waiting until the deadline is close could make the situation more difficult to resolve.

Accountability should not therefore be interpreted as personally solving every problem. Instead, it involves taking ownership of the situation and ensuring that appropriate action is taken.

Goal-setting can also support accountability. Locke and Latham (2002) highlight the importance of clear goals in directing effort and improving performance. Clear expectations allow individuals to monitor their progress and recognise when additional action may be required.

My specific development need is therefore to communicate potential risks and problems earlier. I will aim to raise relevant concerns promptly, explain the issue clearly and, where possible, suggest an alternative course of action. Evidence of improvement can include keeping a brief record of situations where I identified and communicated a risk, considering whether the problem was resolved more effectively and seeking feedback from an appropriate manager.

8. Authentic Behaviour

Authentic behaviour is important because employees are influenced by the consistency between what leaders say and what they actually do. Authentic leadership involves self-awareness, transparency and behaving consistently with personal and professional values (Northouse, 2022).

In a supervisory position, authenticity can be demonstrated by being honest, reliable and consistent. A supervisor who expects employees to meet certain standards but does not demonstrate those standards themselves may lose credibility.

However, authenticity does not mean that a leader should communicate every personal thought or emotion. Instead, it means communicating honestly while remaining professional and recognising the responsibilities associated with a leadership position.

One area I have identified for development is confidence when dealing with difficult conversations. It can sometimes be easier to avoid uncomfortable conversations with colleagues, particularly when there is an existing working relationship. However, avoiding an issue can allow it to continue or become more difficult.

Developing authentic behaviour therefore requires me to communicate professionally even when a conversation may feel uncomfortable. I need to be able to explain expectations clearly, listen to the other person's perspective and address problems rather than avoiding them.

This should help me become a more confident and consistent supervisor. It should also demonstrate to colleagues that workplace standards apply consistently and that issues can be discussed openly.

9. Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are central to leadership because managers and supervisors achieve objectives through interactions with other people. Communication, listening, negotiation and conflict management are therefore essential professional skills.

Edmondson (1999) identified a relationship between psychological safety and learning behaviour within teams. Psychological safety involves creating an environment where individuals feel able to ask questions, raise concerns and admit mistakes without fear of negative interpersonal consequences. This is relevant to leadership because employees need to feel that they can communicate problems before they become more serious.

My workplace experience has shown me that communication needs to be adapted depending on the situation. Giving instructions during a busy period may require concise communication, while discussing an employee's performance requires a more supportive and considered approach.

I have therefore identified active listening as an area for development. Listening effectively involves allowing another person to explain their perspective rather than immediately preparing a response. This can reduce misunderstandings and demonstrate respect.

Conflict management is another important element. Conflict cannot always be avoided in a workplace because employees may have different opinions, expectations and working styles. However, unresolved conflict can negatively affect teamwork. Developing confidence in addressing disagreements at an early stage should therefore be part of my development.

My objective is to improve the quality of my communication by listening more carefully, asking appropriate questions and ensuring that employees have the opportunity to explain their perspective before I make a judgement.

10. Professional Integrity

Professional integrity involves acting honestly, fairly and consistently with appropriate professional and ethical standards. It is particularly important for leaders because employees observe the behaviour of individuals in positions of responsibility.

Ethical leadership research suggests that leaders influence employees through their own behaviour as well as through the standards and expectations they communicate (Brown, Treviño and Harrison, 2005). Therefore, professional

integrity needs to be demonstrated through everyday behaviour rather than simply being viewed as a personal value.

Treviño, Hartman and Brown (2000) distinguish between being perceived as a moral person and acting as a moral manager. This distinction is useful because believing that I have strong values is not sufficient. Those values need to be demonstrated through decisions, communication and treatment of others. Professional integrity may become particularly important when dealing with confidential information, employee performance, customer complaints or disagreements. In these situations, the easiest option is not necessarily the most appropriate one.

My development priority is therefore to maintain consistency between the standards I expect from other people and the standards I demonstrate myself. I should also consider the wider consequences of my decisions rather than focusing exclusively on the immediate outcome.

Maintaining professional integrity should help strengthen trust between myself and colleagues and contribute towards a more positive professional environment.

11. Integrating the Seven Development Areas

Although the seven constructs have been considered separately, they are interconnected and collectively contribute towards effective professional practice.

For example, self-management influences interpersonal relationships because a supervisor who manages their own emotions and workload effectively may be better positioned to communicate calmly with colleagues. Similarly, recognising cognitive and unconscious bias can improve decision-making and contribute towards professional integrity.

Accountability is also connected to authentic behaviour. A leader who accepts responsibility for mistakes and communicates problems honestly demonstrates authenticity. At the same time, strong interpersonal relationships can make accountability more effective because employees may feel more comfortable raising concerns.

Leadership behaviour can also influence organisational culture. Schein (2010) argues that leaders have an important role in shaping organisational culture through the values, behaviours and expectations they establish. This

demonstrates that personal development is not solely beneficial to the individual. Improvements in leadership behaviour can also influence the people and environment around them.

The analysis has therefore demonstrated that professional development should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a fixed achievement. Effective leaders need to continually evaluate their behaviour, identify areas for improvement and apply learning to future situations.

12. SMART Personal Development Plan

The reflection and analysis undertaken in this report have identified several development priorities. These include improving communication of risks, strengthening self-management, becoming more aware of bias, developing interpersonal communication and maintaining professional integrity.

These broad development needs need to be converted into specific SMART objectives. Doran (1981) explains the SMART approach as a way of establishing objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. This approach is particularly appropriate for my professional development because it ensures that goals are not simply general statements such as “become a better leader”.

For example, rather than identifying communication as a general development area, the objective could focus specifically on communicating potential risks to deadlines or workplace problems earlier. The objective can then identify the action required, how progress will be measured and when the objective will be reviewed.

The same approach can be applied to interpersonal communication. Rather than simply stating that I want to improve my communication skills, I can establish an objective focused on active listening during workplace conversations and seek feedback on whether my communication has improved. The objectives should remain realistic and focus on behaviours that I can personally control. They should also include appropriate support, such as feedback from a manager or colleagues, workplace experience and relevant professional resources.

The complete SMART Personal Development Plan is therefore provided in Appendix A. It identifies the construct, development need, objective, actions, evidence of progress, resources or support, timescale and expected difference.

13. Conclusion

This report has critically examined leadership and management within professional practice and reflected on seven key areas: self-management, personal cognitive bias, personal unconscious bias, accountability, authentic behaviour, interpersonal relationships and professional integrity.

The analysis demonstrates that effective leadership requires considerably more than managing tasks or instructing employees. It involves self-awareness, communication, ethical behaviour, accountability and the ability to develop positive professional relationships. The SMART Engineering case study provided useful insight into the consequences of ineffective professional practice, particularly regarding ownership and early communication of risks.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model has provided a useful framework for reflecting on professional experiences and identifying how future behaviour can be improved. Reflection has allowed me to move beyond simply describing workplace experiences and consider what those experiences demonstrate about my current strengths and development needs.

The main development priorities identified are improving self-management, communicating risks earlier, challenging personal assumptions when making decisions, strengthening active listening and maintaining consistent professional standards. These areas have been selected because they are directly relevant to my professional role and are areas over which I can personally take responsibility.

The use of SMART objectives provides a practical way of turning these development needs into measurable actions. Rather than treating professional development as a one-off activity, the PDP provides a framework for continuing to review progress and make improvements.

Ultimately, effective leadership is an ongoing process of learning, reflection and adaptation. By recognising my current development needs and taking responsibility for addressing them, I can improve my professional practice and develop the leadership and management skills required for future career progression. The SMART Personal Development Plan in Appendix A provides the practical framework for achieving these improvements.

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