
LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK IN EARLY YEARS

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Leadership and Teamwork – Reflective Paper

This essay focuses on the group discussion/team meeting that was held on the 22nd of January 2018. I will be analysing and reflecting on the group discussion/team meeting by looking at the leadership style and how it had an impact on the team and how this is implemented to early years settings. I will be discussing the leadership style used in the group discussion/team meeting and how this contributes to the quality of an early years setting as well as the retention of a quality early years workforce team. I will be focusing on the leadership style that was used and analysing it by suggesting alternative styles that may or work better.

The leadership style utilised within our group was autocratic, this style is also widely recognised as authoritarian leadership (Kendra Cherry, 2017). Characteristically it involves an individual having absolute authority and control over a group, and there is little input from other group members. Autocratic leadership can also be defined as a strong leadership style. The leader can set clear roles and assign specific tasks to individuals providing them equal contribution. This can result in a project deadline being met and the overall success of a team (Steven Gans, 2017).

However, any style of leadership has its advantages and disadvantages. Focusing on the advantages, if a quick decision is required, the leader does not have to consult with a group of people, and as a result, fast and effective decisions can be made (Vinish Parikh, 2016). This can have significant benefits to an organisation, allowing it to respond more rapidly to its external environment in which it operates and its customers' demands (Eryn Travis, 2018). This can result in the organisation becoming more effective within the market it competes, as the external environment can change very quickly. Also, according to Matthew Ward and Chris Rhodes (2014), a large amount of childcare settings is set up as small to medium enterprises (SME's). SME's compete against large organisations and they can fail due to fierce competition, however if the SME can adapt to trends quicker by utilising an autocratic leadership style, then it is more likely to succeed and as a result can ensure jobs are kept which limits a high turnover of staff, known as staff retention (Clare Johnson, 2017). During the group discussion, I feel that the coordinator had the ability to make quick decisions to provide other members of staff with an action plan by the next meeting. The coordinator used her power to take charge of the meeting, organising what was going

to be discussed by who, which prevents time wasting. During the discussion the coordinator gave all members of the group a chance to talk about their given topic, although she made the decision on future plans herself.

Now focusing on the disadvantages. By having an autocratic leadership style, it can discourage ideas and creativity from other members of staff, which can result in the leader becoming a dictator (Krishnan, 2003). By following the autocratic leadership style can deprive the setting of lack of creative solutions as one person is defining everything although other people may have ideas the leader hasn't thought about. When the leader is following an autocratic style, it does not allow other member of staff to provide the setting/leader with their knowledge and experience that the leader may not know about because they are not encouraged to contribute, this is also known as dictating (Scott Williams, 2014). This happened throughout our group discussion, where the coordinator shut down any ideas made by members of the group. When this occurs, team members become dissatisfied and may leave the organisation, taking with them skills and experience that could have been utilised within the early years workforce/environment. This happens due to members of the team not feeling 'engaged' in a process which is when they lose interest and feel undervalued, as if they are not making a difference to the workplace. Relating this to the group discussion - I feel that when the coordinator spoke, she shut down a lot of ideas suggested by myself and the team which made me feel frustrated due to wanting to contribute and share ideas, which then makes me feel as if I am making a difference. Another reason why this is a disadvantage is because not all members of staff are happy completing their job, many are ambitious and aim/desire for promotion. Therefore, stifling will not encourage me to grow as an individual within the early years workplace. I feel that throughout the discussion the coordinator was very impatient with suggestions made by myself and the others, which then made me feel undervalued and not part of a team.

As an individual within the group discussion, I can suggest that the autocratic leadership does not fit all types of people. I have always argued that as a leader you need to acknowledge that individuals have different needs and one style of leadership does work, for example 'one size does not fit all'. This links to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. Maslow suggests that people are motivated by certain things in life and where they are on the pyramid will highly motivate them. Most people want to reach their full

potential and where they are on the pyramid will determine their needs. Maslow argues that when one level is met people will move on to the next level until they reach the top. Therefore, this shows that team members are on different levels which supports that one leadership style for not fit all members of staff at an early years setting/workforce team. For example, the person on the bottom may be happy with the autocratic style, being told what to do at the setting, which shows they are happy that their basic needs are met by having a job that is clearly defined. However, someone at the top of the pyramid would want more from life and would be aiming for promotions and to reach their full potential. In that case autocratic would not suit the members of staff at the top of the pyramid as they would feel stifled. These members of staff want to be creative, share their knowledge and experiences which enables them to be 'pushed' so they can realise their full potential and progress within the early years environment. Maslow (1943, 1954) stated;

"People are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behaviour. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on."

Therefore, Saul McLeod (2017) suggests that leaders should manage the person at the bottom differently to the person at the top as they have different needs. He states that they are equal but are motivated by their needs, which are different. He suggests that within a workplace everyone is treated with the same respect, but they are treated with the style of management that motivates and suits them as individuals rather than looking at them as one. During the group discussion I felt that the coordinator treated us as one and not individually. I felt that if she had got to know each member of staff individually and knew what level we were on it would have been a more successful team meeting. I say this because, if the coordinator knew us individually she would have been able to adapt her leadership skills throughout the meeting, by knowing what members of staff preferred what leadership style and approach. The coordinator did not have any adaptive skills and was treating us all on a lower level, where she used an autocratic leadership style and took full control and made all choices alone. However, as a leader you must bear in mind that people's needs change, and six months down the line a member of the team may have moved on to the next level.

The leader would know when these changes have taken place by communicating effectively and regularly with the members of staff at the setting, ensuring that individual and staff meetings are taking place and by taking an interest in them as individuals. For example, transactional leadership could work for the bottom of the pyramid, and transformational for the top.

Transactional leadership style is centred on performance, using an exchange process, and to support this statement Lindgreen A, Palmer R, Wetzels M, & Antiocho M (2009) suggest that transactional leadership is not interested in “engaging” followers. Employees are not encouraged to give their opinion or make decisions, as this lies with the manager using the “command and control” approach. Whilst this may be acceptable to employees who do not desire career progression or job satisfaction, it could be frustrating to the knowledge worker, or those who seek career development, as it is not participative or interested in change, but assumes that followers are motivated by simple rewards such as monetary payments or recognition.

Politis J.D. (2002) points out that transformational leaders aspire to transform people by communicating a vision. The transformational leader aims to treat their followers as individuals, as they tend to seek to discover what values, concerns and development needs they may have. The leader tries to encourage them to reach their full potential and go above and beyond their own expectations. This suggests that the follower becomes motivated and takes ownership of the vision, resulting in an “engaged” and empowered employee.

Although there are two different leadership styles that will benefit people on different levels, I believe that using one leadership style would contribute positively to the quality and retention of an early year’s workforce team. Reflecting on the group discussion, I feel that autocratic did not work for me. The coordinator did not use her knowledge well enough to adapt to different situations and/or people. I believe the best leadership style for the group discussion would have been Situational Leadership style. I say this because every member of the group are individuals and as Cairns D.T., Hollenback J, Preziosi R.C. Snow W.A. (1998) states;

“Situational leadership theory focuses on the interaction of the leader’s behaviour and follower readiness and then measures it to determine leader effectiveness”

As the name suggests situational leadership focuses on the style of leadership that is utilised in different situations. Therefore, leaders should adapt their style to suit the needs of that situation. Also, Cacioppe R. (1997) quotes that situational leadership is;

“being able to apply the right amount of direction and support depending on the situation and the level of competency and motivation of the follower style (directive, supportive or both)”

This suggestion reveals that situational leadership is not just applicable to the knowledge worker, but it can be applied to followers at all levels, which is flexible and easily adaptive. Silverthorne (2000) confirms this as research findings proved situational leadership resulted in lower levels of absence, staff turnover and higher profits, which adds significant value to any organisation making it more effective in today's highly competitive environment. Similar, Crawford C.B. (2005) reveals that 42% of corporate knowledge is held within employee's minds. This suggests that if situational leadership is applied to manage knowledge workers then it would be more effective in utilising their expertise for the benefit of the organisation. Situational leadership style links to Fielder's contingency theory 1967 (Peters, L. H., Hartke, D. D., & Pohlmann, J. T., 1985).

I believe that if the coordinator used the situational leadership style during the group discussion it would have made the meeting more positive and give everyone a chance to show themselves as an individual. The coordinator did not use a way to let the individuals show their knowledge or a high performance/standard of progression within the early years workforce. Relating to Tuckman's 'Understanding the Stages of Team Formation', he developed four stages of progression which are Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. I believe that following these steps within an early years setting/workforce will encourage staff to feel more comfortable with one and another and to feel more efficient, successful and comfortable in their job (Tuckman, B. W., 1965)

Forming; This model recognises group behaviour, for example, a leader cannot treat a new team who have just met to perform instantly as they will feel anxious being new to each other. As a manager, it is important to create a dynamic team by informing the members the purpose of the group. By creating a framework for the team, it helps members of staff to relax and get to know each other.

Storming; This is where team members get to know each other more, and competition between members can occur which can cause conflict. This stage is where the leader will see the dominant and quieter characters at the setting. Some early years settings do not move on from storming which is when the workplace is impacted and does not have a quality workforce team.

Norming; This is where the group bonds or interconnects and gets organised and the leader will know who is good at what. Skills and experience is acknowledged, and the team starts to feel a sense of community. Norming is a stage when the team starts to trust each other, and the strengths and weakness of the team are apparent and utilised.

Performing; At this stage the team can 'stand on its own two feet' The leader oversees, but they can work together to achieve the goal. Certain members may ask for assistance or advice and this is where situational leadership is at its best. The leader delegates and oversees but does not have to 'micro' manage every step and is there when needed, this is known as 'scaffolding'. When a setting reaches this level a produced a high performing team is established which provides the early years settings with a quality and high performing setting/workforce.

To conclude, this essay reveals that each style of leadership does have its drawbacks and benefits. However, there are significant differences within each style. Transactional focuses on performance, the process of exchange, and short-term goals, whilst transformational is a process that aims to change and transform followers by communicating a vision and "engaging" people to the extent where they feel they contribute towards the vision and the long-term goals of the organisation. However, situational leadership is centred on the leader and the style of leadership they apply to any given situation depending on the competence and commitment of the follower. Whatever style of leadership is chosen it needs to suit the organisation's aims and objectives. Early years settings are made up of a diverse workforce, which is why the situational style of leadership may be more appropriate to the workplace. The group discussion is an excellent example of how not to be a leader within an early year's workplace, due to shutting members of staff down and not giving them the opportunity to discuss their ideas will eventually have a negative effect on the members of staff. This essay has proven the importance of applying the correct leadership style to any

organisation especially in today's workforce. Through my knowledge and further research, I believe if leaders follow the correct leadership style it will have a positive impact on the setting which provides them with a quality early years workforce.

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