

Team Meeting Reflection

In this paper, I will be reflecting on my knowledge of leadership, the type of leadership role that was used during the meeting and how it suited the situation. I will be looking at whether there could have been other leadership styles which could have improved the meeting and the outcomes from the meeting. Also, I will be considering, how different leadership styles effect team moral and if there is such thing as a good leader and if so what the criterions are.

Before I started this module, my knowledge of leadership styles and how they affect work environments was limited. I believed that leaders should be role models for the rest of the staff and that they should listen and understand the needs of the staff and pupils. This is something, that from undertaking this module I continue to see as a valuable and successful quality for a leader to display. Before this module, I had little understanding of how different leaders impacted on how schools functioned, as I have only ever had leaders that were democratic and supportive. Currently in my setting, we don't have weekly or monthly whole staff meetings, usually only at the beginning of each new term. When we do have them, I feel confident enough to share my thoughts and ideas as I fell my leader will appreciate everyone's thoughts. I can now see from attending our lectures and reading many items of literature, that different leaders create different environments, which in turn can have a positive or negative affect on how things are run.

Lewin, (cited in Iqbal, 2011) introduced the first three commonly used leadership styles. These are autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. An autocratic leader is that who dictates to their staff and does not value opinions, which may leave staff may feel undervalued as they are not able to have an input into how things are run (Johnston and Nahmad-Williams, 2009). They also do not have their opinions acknowledged, leading to staff who feel undermotivated and undervalued (Iqbal, 2011 and Envy, 2013). A positive aspect of an autocratic leader, Envy (2013) suggests, is that less planning and thought goes into the work day, as the staff are told what to do and how to it. This type of leadership is possible in some situations, but less successful in a school. As each class and staff member works differently, staff need to have the flexibility to accommodate their class and the needs of the children. Being told how to

run a class can be very difficult as throughout time, the staff learn how to best to deal with certain situations and also build up a rapport with the children and other staff in the class. Dewey (1944) explained that democratic leaders share responsibilities and delegate to others that they trust and respect, enabling the quality of settings to be enhanced, as different ideas and suggestions are listened too, respected and acted upon. Democratic leaders encourage information sharing (Woods, 2005) as this enables staff and children feel valued, which in turn creates the confidence for staff to share ideas and supports a team relationship (Envy, 2013). When problems do arise, they are dealt with by listening and understanding all parties, this however, will not satisfy each person and therefore if some disagree, it could possibly be seen as unfair (Rodd, 2013). Laissez-faire leaders are lenient leaders who give the staff the opportunity to decide how to run their settings and give the children more opportunities to choose things as they wish. This can create an environment where there is little structure as each person has more freedom to do as they wish (Lindon et al., 2016), potentially causing a setting with little structure and stability.

According to Education Development Trust (2014), the role of an effective leader is essential to the smooth running of an educational setting and Leithwood et al. (2006) and the National College for School Leadership (no date) suggest, that leadership is the next important aspect following teaching in the learning of pupils in an educational setting. Leithwood et al. (2006) suggests that when a setting is run appropriately, an environment is created in which the children have high quality team and surroundings around them to support their learning and development. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, (2007) also believe that children have enhanced all round development when strong leadership is present in the setting (Hadfield, 2015). Natsiopoulou and Giouroukakis (2010) suggest that a democratic leader is best suited to lead an early year's environment as it is necessary to delegate jobs in order not to become overwhelmed with the amount of work needed to keep everything in order, as having only one person in charge can be too demanding (Jones and Pound, 2008). Although a democratic leader is suggested as the most effective in an early year's setting (Natsiopoulou and Giouroukakis, 2010), this style is not always appropriate and where necessary the leader has to change their leadership style to best suit the situation (Anderson and Anderson, 2001). When there is a situation where things must be done, there may be need for the leader to change their leadership style, for example, will need to be more

autocratic. This could possibly be when a safeguarding issue arises. When this happens, staff would have to deal with the situation exactly as stated in the schools or education setting's safeguarding policy and there is no room for any discussions or deliberating.

Our team leader was a woman and according to Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) women find it easier to become a leader in the early years setting. This could be down to what Kouzes and Posner (1999) describes as being a female dominated workforce and Murray and Clark (2013) also suggest that there are more women in this role as the role is mostly democratic. From knowing this now, it is clear to see that with the high amount of staff being women in early year's, the probability of women being in charge will also be higher. Personal experience has shown me that the number of women working in an early year's setting outweighs men. In 2013, Tomlin stated that over 98% of staff in the early years are female which supports my suggestions.

A few days before our team meeting was held, the leader ensured that everyone invited to the meeting had a copy of the agenda, giving them the opportunity to become familiar with it. Giving the agenda out in advance, as Hardcastle (2011) suggests, gives us staff, the opportunity to read it through and think of any suggestions we may have, and also to think of any questions or issues that could arise from the agenda. Baker (2010) also agrees that the agenda notes must be given out in advance for the meeting attendees to prepare, but also suggests that this is not given out too far in advance as they may go missing or be forgotten about.

The meeting began by our leader welcoming us all and thanking us for our time in attending the meeting. According to Combs et al. (2013), saying thank you can display to the recipient, in this case the other staff, how grateful they are for the input and suggestions that are brought to the meeting, creating a welcoming feeling for all and starting the meeting off on a positive note. The leader then continued by introducing the first item of our agenda, which contained information that was factual and highlighted things that had to be done as opposed to things that could be suggested. Even though throughout our meeting, our leader was democratic, during this item, she adopted a more autocratic role, as we were informed of the things that were expected of us, the leader soon switched back to democratic as ideas and suggestions were needed on how we thought things could help this situation. Being able to switch

leadership styles is something that a successful leader should be able to do as previously suggested by Anderson and Anderson (2001). Where necessary, we were told what was expected of us, but then we were given the chance to decide what ways would be best for us to achieve this. There were opportunities to suggest the best ways in which to communicate with the families in question and the meeting came to an agreement on the best possible solution, which in this case was a home-school book and to communicate regularly with the family. As the meeting progressed, our leader ensured that there were opportunities throughout for each person to provide opinions and suggestions. After each item on the agenda was read out, our leader would give us the opportunity to discuss and decide ways between ourselves what methods we would like to use to solve the problems and issues raised, calling on past ideas and how things worked in other schools. We were asked if we had any opinions which made me feel valued and Murray and Clark (2013) suggests this is a quality of a successful leader, ensuring the staff feel valued, promoting their confidence to voice their opinions. I felt comfortable making my suggestions and felt that my suggestions were taken on board and could be used to improve the setting. When staff feel undervalued this affects their desire to contribute to meetings as Bush and Middlewood (2005) explains. The less valued a person feels, the less likely they are to want to contribute as they may feel like they will be shut down. This was never apparent throughout our meeting to me. The leader always took onboard everyone's ideas, which in turn promoted an environment where everyone worked together creating changes to improve the setting and how things are carried out (Aubrey, 2011). I felt encouraged to share my ideas I felt like they were valued. Bennis (2007: 3) believes that leadership is 'always, in some sense, a matter of values'. From this I believe that no matter how a leader is taught, if they do not have the values and personality traits of leader, then this could hinder the positive effects of a leader. During our meeting, my leader displayed values true to herself, such as care and compassion for the staff and the children. Kouzes and Posner (2003) agrees that level of care shown by leaders develop from personality traits rather than something they have been taught in the training they received. Target et al. (2000) reports that the highest qualified leaders in the early years, are in the education setting, rather than the care setting, this is something that the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) (2017) has observed, and knowing what a crucial part in the child's future the early

years is, and how successful leaders impact the quality of the setting, they have vowed to ensure to raise the quality of the workforce across all areas of the early years. Dinenage (DfES, 2017: 4) acknowledges that 'An effective workforce drives high quality provision, which is critical to children's outcomes...' and therefore, they have planned to invest over £1 billion to the early years by 2020. Creating a higher quality, successful setting will hopefully enable employers to reduce the turnaround of staff. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) also agrees that staff are more likely to stay in a setting if they feel appreciated and are supported in their personal development.

Hallett (2013) believes that having a leader that is confident and successful can lead to a strong workforce, which leads to a higher quality setting. When each member of my team had suggestions on how things would work in their class, we were supported to it carry it out as we wished. It was never the case that the same idea had to be ruled out throughout the setting. If I wanted to do something specific in my class, then my leader had the confidence to let me do it my way, never doubting my decisions.

Carlton et al. (2015) suggests that leaders should always lead by example, showing staff that they are willing to do the same that is expected of me. As the meeting was progressing, the leader delegated most things that were on the agenda and only kept a small role for herself. As stated previously is it necessary to delegate (Dewey, 1944), but also to show the team that you are willing to step up and do the same as expected of other staff (Carlton et al. 2015). During our meeting, our leader remained mostly democratic, which showed the ability to be a team player, by encouraging everyone to have an opinion and this is something that Sutcliffe, (2013) suggests makes a successful leader in a school environment. If the style of the leadership was different from this, for example an autocratic style, then this may have made us feel that we were not trusted to have any suggestions, and this would have had a negative affect on the willingness to try other people's suggestions. Throughout the meeting, the leader freely accepted the changes that were suggested by both myself and the other staff, showing flexibility and the ability to adapt to new situations (Clark, 2012). Having the ability to identify the team's strengths and weaknesses, enabled the leader to ask the relevant staff to carry out the work which followed the meeting, which supports delegation (Ricketts and Ricketts, 2011). The leader asked each team member if they were willing to take on the role to ensure the relevant jobs were completed. This would ensure that the right person oversaw the right job. I was asked to take on a role which

I am familiar with, which portrays that I am capable of completing the job, however, according to MacRae and Furnham (2014) this limits personal development, as having the same person deal with the same topics, limits their professional development by not encouraging them to step out of their comfort zone.

Throughout the meeting, the leader continued to have control over the meeting and continued to bring it back to the topics on the agenda. There were a few small debates through the meeting, in which some staff had different ideas, but the leader continued to have control over the meeting and supported each person's opinion when they had made suggestions. When there were disagreements, it was always dealt with democratically and by respecting everyone's opinions and thoughts by enabling staff to give their points of view and by letting them deal with their situation as they wished. When items on the agenda were reached where people had different ideas, these were all heard and then as a team, we decided which we thought would work best and what we thought would not work. There are many factors that contribute to being a good leader, but on the whole, a good leader appears to be someone that understand their staff and children and have a passion to improve the setting. From carrying out this meeting and attending the lectures I now have a much wider view on how leadership affects every part of a team. How a leader should model how they wish their staff to act and how to deal with situations. I also understand the need of delegation and how easy it is to become overwhelmed with the amount of work involved with leading an early year's setting.

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