

Brief Summary of
Humble Leadership
The Power of Relationships, Openness and Trust

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- New approaches to leadership based more on personal relationships than transactional role relationships
- Employee engagement, improvement of organizational agility, ambidexterity, innovation can flourish when the fundamental relationship between leaders and followers becomes more personalized and cooperative.
- Levels of Relationship - Leader follower relationships can usefully be differentiated along a continuum of levels of relationship that are generally accepted in society
 - **Level Minus 1**
 - *Total impersonal domination and coercion.*
 - **Level 1**
 - *Transactional role and rule-based supervision, service and most forms of professional helping relationships.*
 - *Interactions are routine and there are low levels of personal investment*
 - **Level 2**
 - *Personal, cooperative, trusting relationships as in friendships and effective teams*
 - **Level 3**
 - *Emotionally intimate*
 - *Total mutual commitments*
- Organizations around the world are struggling with increase rate of change, degree of global inter-connectedness, multi culturization and pace of technological advances
- Keeping pace with the world-wide view requires team work and collaboration of all sorts based on higher levels of trust and openness created by more personalized relationships
- Self-centeredness, quid pro quo machinations, political up-manship will be discredited if not punished.
- Leadership in this environment is humbling because it is virtually impossible to accumulate enough knowledge to figure out all the answers.
- We talk team work – but it is the individual stars who get big economic rewards and fame.
- We do not reward groups or hold groups accountable when things go well – we identify the stars. When things go poorly, we look for someone to blame.
- Humble leadership builds on Level 2 personal relationship that depends on fostering openness and build trust.
- It is the responsibility of the leader to develop openness and trust.
- In a Level 2 workgroup Humble Leadership emerges by enabling who ever has pertinent information and expertise to speak up and improve whatever the group is trying to accomplish.
- The process of creating and maintaining a Level 2 relationship requires a learning mindset, cooperative attitude and skills in inter personal and group dynamics.

- *A relationship is a set of mutual expectations about each other's future behavior based on past interactions with one another.*
- Degree of personization is the critical differentiator of levels
- Personization is the process of mutually building a working relationship with a fellow employee, teammate, boss or colleague based on trying to see that person as a whole not just in the role that he/she may occupy in the moment.
- Personization occurs when either party early in the conversation asks for something personal or reveals something personal.
- Personization implies that one or both the parties in the conversation have invested themselves to a considerable degree and have made themselves vulnerable to being ignored or dismissed or disrespected.
- Personization is intrinsically a reciprocal interactive process
- Personizing has nothing to do with being nice, giving employees good jobs and working conditions, generous benefits or flexible working hours. Personization is about building relationships and get the job done and to avoid the indifference manipulation lying and concealing that often arise in work relationships
- It is possible to have closer more open and trusting relationship in the work situation while being quite sensitive to boundaries of privacy and propriety.

Level Minus 1 - Negative Relationships

- This level pertains to the situation where we basically do not treat one another as human at all – e.g. master and slaves, prison guard and prisoners – rarely seen in the organizational context.
- Where Level Minus 1 is accepted, employees typically characterize their work situation as “inhuman” but tolerate it because they feel they have no choice.
- Personization is absent in this relationship because the potential followers will neither understand nor be motivated to do what the appointed leader may want them to do.

Level 1 – Transactional Bureaucratic and “Professional” Relationships

- Level 1 relationships are acknowledged to be impersonal and dispassionate except when something unexpected happens that arouses anxiety and anger, such as being bumped into, or threatened or disrespected – the norm being to uphold and not upset the “social fabric”
- Interactions or conversations are highly routinized exchanges of give and take based on mutual expectations and low levels of personal investment.
- Level 1 relationships is all out how we deal with strangers and casual acquaintances – it assumes social or professional distance.
- We treat each other as fellow humans whom we trust to a certain degree not to harm us and with whom we have polite levels of openness in conversation, but we do not feel the need to “know” each other except in our various roles and statuses.

Level 2 – Relationships that acknowledge the whole person

- The essence of Level 2 is that we see the other person not as a person who must be kept “professionally distant” but being seen as a whole person with whom we can develop a more personal relationship around shared goals and experiences
- Level 2 covers all forms of friendship and close acquaintanceship but for the purpose of evolving the managerial culture, it is limited to work relationships.
- Personization can happen very rapidly if we choose to ask something personal about ourselves.
- By opening the door to personization, both parties can treat each other as whole persons rather than as roles.
- Level 2 is all about “I want to get you know better so that we can trust each other to get our jobs done better”
- As a manager, if you personize, you will minimize “subordination” in order to emphasize collaboration, joint responsibility and willingness to help direct reports to succeed.
- A Level 2 relationship is not automatic – relationships are developed and negotiated through many interactions in which personizing efforts are made and responded to and succeed or fail.
- This kind of relationship implies a deeper level of trusts and openness in terms of
 - Making and honoring commitments and promises to each other
 - Agreeing not to undermine / harm each other
 - Agreeing not to lie to each other or withhold information relevant to the task.
- The level of work relationship should ultimately reflect the nature of the work to be done. The more the work requires collaboration, open communication and trust in each other’s commitment, the more it will require Level 2 personalized relationships.
- Level 2 is not about being nice or getting to like each other, though that may be an incidental benefit or may make it easier to achieve the goal. Level 2 is critical to provide each member psychological safety, to open bidirectional communication, build trust and thereby, accomplish the task faster and better.
- Evolving the managerial culture from Level 1 to Level 2 is the defining task of Humble Leadership

Level 3

- Level 3 relationships are “intimate” and “close” relationships that go beyond the more casual Level 2
- This level is more emotionally charged, amplifies the trust and openness of Level 2 but also actively support each other as needed and actively display emotional loving behavior towards one another.
- Level 2 implies support and avoiding harming each other. Level 3 implies actively seeking ways of helping and enhancing each other.
- We deepen our relationship through successive cycles of revealing more and more of our personal even private feelings, reactions and observations and we calibrate each other’s levels of acceptance by the reciprocation of their own revelation.
- It is generally assumed that we want to avoid Level 3 in organizational life because it can become fraternization, nepotism, and inappropriate favoritism each of which is considered in managerial culture to be an impediment to getting work done, if not outright corrupt.

- The distinction between Level 2 and Level 3 is essentially a matter of degree, and the boundary may vary as a function of the task – the boundaries will be situational, individual, shared and dynamic.
- The challenge for Humble leadership is to build Level 2 trust and openness by becoming more personal, either in what is asked about or in what is revealed, while at the same time, avoiding both the formality of Level 1 professional distance and the violations of privacy that might be perceived as Level 3 intimacy.
- A defining skill of Humble Leadership is the ability to manage this balance between being too formal at one extreme and being too intimate at the other extreme.

Humble Leadership and the future

- How will Humble Leadership evolve and impact our lives in the next few decades
 - Context over content – More about context and process less about content and expertise
 - Cultural homogeneity – cope with tribalism and build relationships unbound by unconscious biases.
 - Distributed power – challenge individual abuse of power
 - Mass customization – Help groups become more agile, adaptive and collaborative
 - Dynamic organizational design – reconsider how to organize relationships and workgroups in a global mobile world.
 - Virtual presence – applicable in globally distributed teams where team members are virtual.
- Humble leaders are there to “read the room” both the situation and the people involved and then the direction to something new and better given volatile circumstances and to strengthen Level 2 relationships that ensure completion information required to enable the flexibility to never stop adopting.

Building Level 2 relationships

- Humble Leadership requires a certain kind of mindset and attitudes towards working with others and skills in working with groups
- The Learning process in each of these consist of
 - Some focused reading and reflecting
 - Home work at your desk designing work relationships
 - Enhancement of behavioral skills through field work and experiential learning

Summary

Humble Leadership is about evolving from Level 1 transactional culture to personalized Level 2 culture

From Level 1 Culture	To Level 2 Culture
The person in charge needs to be in control, even if that puts constraints on autonomy, creativity and may stifle engagement and commitment	The person in charge needs to be a convener/director who encourages autonomy and creativity, even if that limits control of the details but may build enthusiasm and commitment.
Focus on getting the organization design and structure right	Focus on creating viable and effective relationships and group processes between the structural elements. In other words, focus on the catalysts needed to make the structure work
Work is accomplished by individuals doing their assigned jobs properly	Work is accomplished by groups who learn together to perform as an ensemble in which everyone is inspired to contribute wherever they can.
Work is accomplished by following plans, procedures, instructions and rules of engagement	Work adapts to leverage collective tacit knowledge based on practice, situational awareness and experimentation
To innovate, seek out ways to disrupt in order to change markets and work processes	To innovate, seek out ways to better understand customers and stakeholders and look for places to offer adaptations and build resiliency
Every task/project needs an individual in charge who is accountable for success	Every task/project needs a convener/director whose function is to build synergy and make the group accountable for its success
Status and authority derive from position and expertise	Influence and here and now authority derive from “ad-hoc designed” roles and the new and better behavior that is triggered in the work group
Leaders establish a strong direction, hold on to it, and show no signs of wavering, in order to maintain control, consistency and commitment	Humble leaders embrace ambiguity and work to shrink distance between opposing sides, to achieve shared commitment build on openness and trust
Meetings should be efficient(short) and well planned, with clear agendas and preassigned preparation	Meeting vary in length and congruence with the complexity of the issues to be resolve and the roles and relevance of group members in attendance
Meetings need to stick to the agenda and disregard side issues	Meetings need to be periodically stop the agenda to reflect on the decision process (goal alignment, participation levels, consensus testing)
Innovation is through a liner sequence of rejecting old processes, brainstorming, ideating, beta testing and controlled offline evaluation	Innovation is through iteration, thinking while working, allowing new ideas to come from anywhere at any time, and improvising processes in line and in the here and now

Get it done, fast and get it done in whatever way that works	Get it done in a way that builds agility, repeatability, and learning capacity for the next challenge
Make every effort to be heard, to speak up in meetings and demonstrate your value	Make every effort to listen and “see” others before professing and arguing for yourself
New ideas come from creative individuals and should be evaluated by critical discussion and interrogation to ensure validity	New ideas that are possibly worth pursuing are co-created by building on what any individuals might propose in a cooperative rather than confrontational manner
Build a network for personal advantage	Build agile, flexible relationships (learning groups) within and across networks
Reflecting is inward about oneself	Reflecting is outward about others
Spend your work time getting things done right	Spend time reflecting on whether you are doing the right things
Maintain professional distance	Encourage openness and trust

- **Reading**

- The Human side of Enterprise by Douglas McGregor
- Sense making in organizations – Karl Weick
- Presentation of self in every day live – Erving Goffman
- Fifth Discipline – Peter Senge
- Theory U – Otto Sharmer
- Dialogue – the Art of thinking together – Bill Issacs
- Teaming – Amy Edmondson
- Trasforming relationships for high performance – Jody Gitel
- Yes no the mess – Frank Bennett
- Reinventing Organizations – Frederick Laloux

- **Homework at your desk**

- Analyze your current work relationships and network from a relational point of view to get a sense of what different levels mean in your organization and where you might wish to do some more personizing
- Analyze current relationships via role mapping – with peers, superiors, management, subordinates etc.
- For all Level 2 relationships – write down what enabled you to get to Level 2 – writing down actual behaviors and identifying common behaviors etc.

- **Exercise** - Designing your work relationships and preparing for changes in the level

- Think of a person with whom you want to build a Level 2 relationship and prepare a list of what you can do, ask, reveal etc. to start the process
- Try to access or become mindful of unconscious biases within you towards the other person
- Access your ignorance – a know nothing state
- Mobilize your curiosity and develop the right attitude and motivation
- I want to get to know you as a whole person as quickly as possible

- I want to know your story – I want to be curious
- Anticipate what Personalization would look like in action – what skills need to be honed or developed
- **Exercise - Enhancement of behavior skills**
 - Personalization by asking or revealing
 - Start by personalizing – by asking / revealing by trusting your intuition
 - Tell something personal
 - Watch to see whether the person is interested in hearing you
 - The ideal conversation will have you both asking and revealing
 - Body language is important
- **Exercise – Empathy walk – a real challenge, tough to do and eye opening**
 - Find a partner, friend or work colleague
 - Identify similarities in terms background, experience, occupation, social status etc.
 - Strike up a conversation
 - Spend some time to get to know the other person
 - Discuss what have you learnt of relationship building

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