



HOW MANAGER TOOLKIT TRAITS CHANGED WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study explored and introduced the concept of the Manager Toolkit and its implications on the working environment. The concept is defined as a basic manager useful qualities that employees value the most; specifically, employees would like managers to be endowed with empowerment and empathic qualities above others. Despite management science recognized that a manager plays a crucial role, and should have several qualities; not all managers possess those qualities. The most values are empowerment and empathy and have great consequences in the working environment. Extracting Manager Toolkit from employees' side, study applied the existential-phenomenological approach. An interview on a single location with 10 employees was conducted to delve into the meaning they attach to manager effectiveness qualities. Among manager qualities listed by management science, employees value the most empowerment and empathy. This set the content of Manager Toolkit. These findings show a positive relationship with the working environment. Employees' satisfaction, increase in interpersonal collaboration, and sense of belonging are among the practical implication that Manager Toolkit has on employees' environment. The lack of these two qualities is among the reason for job quitting. Although empowerment and empathy have been recognized, separately, as an important constituent of manager effectiveness, this study evidence that the two qualities combine are greater value as compositing Manager Toolkit.

Keywords: Manager, Toolkit, Skill, Empathy, Empowering



INTRODUCTION

Why are that experienced employees can tell if the incoming manager is good or bad? Employees can along with one manager and despise another? Without having access to the manager's Curriculum Vitae, still, predict the future of the organization? Employees can sense the temperature of the working environment with the incoming manager, and positioned themselves. Employees and stakeholders use a different matrix to judge the incoming manager. In an environment where many stakeholders interact, managers are not only a focal point of unity but also remain the driving element that can change the working atmosphere.

Employees have expectations with the incoming manager, while stakeholders stand to preserve their interests. The conflict of interest puts the manager in an uncomfortable position, even bring stress (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). It suggests also that manager behaviors play a central role in creating a better working environment, and many management theories have emphasized manager capabilities for a better space.

A holistic view of a manager is a symbiosis of interest that pleased all stakeholders. Such research demand more time, and energy to be completed. For a first step, this paper explores the concept of a good manager viewed by employees. We introduce the notion of the toolkit as an asset of basic skills, abilities needed to perform the task of the manager. First, manager understanding of the toolkit differ from employees perceptions, this set a stage for this research. In this paper, the terms' manager and leader are used interchangeably.

Manager Toolkit (MTK)

Management science defines a manager/leader as a person with abilities to plan, control, and manage a certain work in the organization. From this fact, the manager sees himself as imbued with such qualities. A manager sets to give new impulsion to the organization he leads and makes himself fit for the job, ready for the challenge. Scholars have devoted much time studying those characteristics, and how each, in general, helps a manager to accomplish his work. For example, Katz (1955) identified three basic skills that a manager should possess: technical, human, and conceptual skills. In the same line, managers, according to Mintzberg (1980), play three interconnected roles: informational, decisional, and interpersonal.

Arguably, interpersonal skills are vital for managers of all levels, according to Mumford et al. (2007), although technical abilities are more significant for newer and less experienced managers, and conceptual skills matter for more senior-level managers.

When employees interact with their manager, they are exposed to a different facet of their manager; sometimes they deal with the manager's technological abilities, some time with his human abilities, and some time with his conceptual abilities.

Despite the relevancy of managers skills, researchers have paid a little concern to employees to share their view on what do they want to see in a manager; a specially the basic qualities employees would like a manager to possess, particularly for a non-profit organization such as "Training Center for People with Special Needs." Those special basic qualities we coin as "Toolkit."

Understanding of Toolkit

A Toolkit is a set of tools used for a particular purpose (Merriam Webster). In the management field, it includes the full crucial features of managers' efficiency in their work. The term has been used in a different field to express what is most needed. Here we define the toolkit as the fundamental characteristics which a manager should have.

An illustration of MTK

Management science has come to distinguished many leadership styles: charismatic, transformational, transactional, authoritarian, visionary, etc., and each manager may be linked to a specific management style. For instance, a study by Shah and Mulla (2013) of management charisma has come to identified Steve Jobs as a personal-power manager and Bill Gates as a performance-driven manager.

Each name is attached to a particular organization and leadership style.

Smith coined that a good manager does not need to accomplish a work alone, but the one we can associate other to do it better than him. This statement embedded many qualities that a manager should acquire.

Yukl et al. (2002) categorize management practice into 3 categories: task, relationship, and behavioral change, while, Allio (2009) argues that management requires multiple qualities for a better outcome. This makes the stage for the understanding of the working environment of our research.

Training Center For Person With Special Needs

It is a social work of the Catholic Church here in the center of Taiwan. We numbered 8 of them, located in Taichung, Nantou, and Changhua. These centers are complex business units and focus on training people with disabilities. The different stakeholders who interplay in this environment are:

Government: The government is the main stakeholder in the setting of the Training Center for Special Needs, because any center has to comply with governmental laws, and have a certain capacity to apply for a governmental subsidy. Getting a qualification is not an easy thing, and the reassessment is done every five years.

Family in needs: families with a special child require special education and training centers that can offer such help. Aside from general needs, they are also specific needs, since each person is a special case. Each family will seek first the fulfillment of its needs, with its requirement.

Neighborhood: The neighborhood is a significant stakeholder. If they do not welcome the establishment of such a center, you have to move to another place, because the establishment of such a center has an impact on the neighborhood housing.

Employees/teachers: they are the frontline workers who carry out the day-by-day activity. They have to comply with Governmental laws, bear with families' whims, and provide training for each individual with disabilities.

The Manager: He is the person in charge of organizing, planning, controlling the daily management of the center; he is the one who has to face different stakeholders. This set him in a difficult position of dealing with everyone and trying to please everyone while keeping alive the vision and mission of the center.

Employee processing good manager

How do employees process if their manager is good? After defining MTK as the necessary and useful qualities that may contribute to his effectiveness, the psychological research on factors that might determine how employees evaluate managers is discussed.

Research overview

Management science has focused on studying manager capabilities for the organization. Most researchers were passionate about management skills. Mintzberg (1973) investigating on manager has described 10 roles. Drucker (2008) summarizes a manager's job as to sets objectives, organize, motivate, measure, and develop people.

Despite abroad recognition that a manager encompasses many characteristics, little is known about how employees process to see a good manager.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research required us to employ the phenomenological view, where the context gives birth to individual experience (Thomson et al. 1989). This study focuses on

experience from employees' perspectives, attempting to recognize the meaning as it emerges. This technique was more suitable to extract and validate the manager toolkit.

For a better approach to the subject, we employ the onsite interview technique with all the 10 employees since it minimizes respondent error, facilitates immediacy, and to due share environment, we can capture the psychological and emotional moments of truth (Nancarrow et al. 2001). We interview them individually, but at different times. Their name was modified for the sake of privacy.

Table 1 Sampling profile

Name	Gender	Years old	Years of service
Monica	(F)	58	28
Francisca	(F)	56	15
John	(M)	26	5
Clarisse	(F)	36	12
Jenny	(F)	55	20
Peter	(M)	58	10
Angela	(F)	42	17
Chantal	(F)	39	7
Mary	(F)	26	8
Theresa	(F)	38	11

A straightforward question was posed to informants: "What qualities are required for you to be a good manager?" We continue to ask them why after they have listed what they consider essential. Following that, we ask the final question: "What will you keep among these characteristics?"

RESULTS

Here we highlight some of the views shared by the informants about the most needed characteristic that a manager should possess.

Monica shared deeply her feeling describing the one quality a manager should possess. Being a senior employee, she has worked with 5 managers in this organization, and she describes this: "I was dealing with a difficult case. One child in my class, and my manager came not only to help but together find a way to ease that child." I was deeply touched, she continues. Monica sharing can be simply defined as manager empathy towards her worker.

Another shared about her inner feeling in the organization. Clarisse: "I will not forget the day I was scolded by my manager just to please a capricious parent. My manager knew that it was not my fault, but to please that parent she put the all burden on me. I was so sad, and thought even to quit my job." Her sharing encompasses two feelings, first being crushed by the power of the manager and the lack of empathy. Since the manager is the one who decides to concede with a parent rather than her worker. The second is the lack of empathy. The manager failed to understand the feeling of her work and creating an uncomfortable situation in the organization. Such as why do I have to put more energy when I know that my manager will not recognize my effort? Such feeling has pushed many employees to leave their organization.

Peter said: "I felt trusted by my manager when he asked me to represent the organization." And he continued: "Empowering has helped me to build my self-confidence. My manager trusts me, my organization believes that I can do this work, and I went on, and ready to give more." Peter sharing highlights the power that empowering can create, especially unwrapping the energy embodied in each individual.

Theresa expressed her sadness in this word: "I felt ashamed when my manager says openly that she cannot trust me. Even though I do not deserve her trust, but she should not say it in from of my co-workers. I will not forget that event because it hurt me deeply." Empowerment requires a certain level of trust, and scholars believe that not every employee can get the delegation of power. But still, the manager has to keep a certain degree of trust toward his workers.

Angela believes that empowering has benefited her the most: "My manager always encourages me to take risks, and that is very helpful for me to expand my creativity."

Jenny has come to realize the human side of her manager: "Once, I was dealing with a difficult case, and I went my manager with my view, and proposal. She rebukes and imposes her solution. After applying what she says, the outcome was a total failure. I still remember when she came back to present her apology and ask me to proceed with my first proposal. That day I realized that manager is also a human and can have the wrong approach, and I still have a role to play in this organization." This scene describes the powerful moment of a manager recognizing her mistake. We then classify this event under empathy.

Each one has his/her own experience as a manager, but the common ground is that they are more moved by a particular experience. The interview outcome set the pace for the emergence of the two characteristics: empathy and empowerment.

Among the 10 that were interviewed, 5 voted first empowering, and second empathy as the most needed characteristic that manager should possess; another put empathy first and empowering second.

INFERENCES

The above results suggest that two concepts emerge from the existential-phenomenology as the most valuable by employees. We then analyze each of them.

Empowering

Empowering has been identified by scholars as one of the major motifs that promote organization effectiveness (Kanter, 1989; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Empowering has been asserted as a set of practices consisting of delegating responsibilities to employees to increase their decision-making, sharing information and it is always situational (Leach et al. 2003; Sharma and Kirkman 2015).

The critical thing is that manager empowerment impulses new energy in the working environments. Trust emerges as a result, and employees are motivated to give the best output. Conversely, the manager who lacks empowerment abilities will refrain employees capabilities, even open the way for leaving the organization.

Empowerment fosters not only self-development but also helps employees to enjoy their work. The same observation has been testifying by Spreitzer et al. (1997). We have also noticed that empowerment enhances employees' inter-collaboration and creativity (Cf. Angela). Scholars (Ahearne et al., 2005; Zhang and Bartol, 2010) have shown the link between empowerment and creativity. These also justify our findings.

Hill and Bartol (2010) examining the role of empowering leadership have come to conclude his importance to team collaboration. This assertion confirms also the outcome of our interview. (Cf. Peter).

The results also suggest that a manager who empowers his employees creates a high level of motivational autonomy, sharing from Angela and Peter. This also corroborates with the research done by Cordery et al. (2010) and Humborstad and Kuvaas (2013). Nonetheless, a good manager is still a critical component of empowering an organization (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Sims and Manz, 1984).

Empathy

Another factor that employees would like to see in their manager is empathy. Among the qualities that a manager should possess, empathy seems to have predominance. Polychroniou (2009) refers to it as the capacity of understanding the feeling; provide emotional support to people, when needed. Scholars have come to point out the necessity of empathy for a manager (Goleman et al., 2002; Mostovicz et al., 2009).

In our finding, we have to note the employees feeling when the experience manager empathy; interview with Monica, Clarisse, and Jenny. The feelings were stronger during the interview, as the tone changed when sharing that specific moment.

Studying some great leaders of the twentieth century, such as John Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Schilling (2010) noted that empathy is at the foundation of their achievement.

Managers today need to develop a certain degree of empathy (Tom McDonald, 2008). Somogyi et al., (2013) summarize by saying empathy is the essence of managerial practice; it is the effort of understanding others for the sake of understanding.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have viewed empathy as a moral virtue for individuals and the organization. From this perspective, empathy favors connecting people in the organization (Dutton et al., 2006). Our finding confirms this assertion, especially in the interview with Monica. The negative feeling of not experiencing manager empathy gives the sense of exclusion, not being part of the organization; interview with Theresa.

At the individual level, empathy shows the human characteristic of moral behavior (Park and Peterson, 2008). The reaction of her manager (interview with Jenny), after the failure of her proposed solution to a case, shows the human side seeking good behavior is a tangible case of moral virtue.

Scholars have emphasized the relevancy of empathy for managers (Cameron, 2011; Choi, 2006; Day, 2001; Humphrey, 2002). Because the empathetic manager creates an environment where employees feel and experience a sense of belonging. It increases the collaboration among the workers and impacts the working environment.

DISCUSSION

We postulated from the existential-phenomenological perspective that empowerment and empathy should constitute a manager toolkit. The result from the lengthy interview with employees at the Training Center for Special Need demonstrated that managers who encompass empowerment and empathy will impact positively his /her employees and the working environment as well.

These findings illustrate also fundamental characteristics for better development of the working environment.

Past research has single down either empowerment or empathy as a necessary quality that a manager should develop. Our findings support the presence of both: empowerment and empathy, as toolkit components of impacting workers' behavior and environment.

This study introduces the notion of the toolkit as the necessary characteristics that a manager should possess or develop. It does not mean others characteristics, such as planning, controlling, communicating are not needed. But employees will favor more a manager who bestows empowering over the one who communicates well, or a manager who manifests empathy over an intelligent one.

In summary, we believe that introducing the toolkit concept with empowerment and empathy as the necessary elements will have a great potential to improve the manager's capability of changing the working environment. Separately empathy and empowerment have benefited the management science by enhancing job satisfaction, trust, mutual collaboration, commitment just to mention these few. A manager can change the working environment by combining the two characteristics in a toolkit because employees value empowerment and empathy on an individual and organizational level. Future research can investigate whether empowerment and empathy are causal effects related, are they inclusive or exclusive?

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