

How Do You Recognize Typical Leadership Behaviour Patterns?

Russel Horwitz - Kwela Blog, June 2008

We all know that people are unique – or are they? In coaching so many leaders in all walks of life over the past years, I have consistently found that at least 60% fall into a relatively small set of work patterns, with the balance not showing any specific trend. Here are my top 5 “stereotypes” and a description of how they show up in 360-degree feedback (feedback that comes from boss, peers and direct reports). I have also alluded to the leadership development goal that would make each of these stereotypes far more effective if achieved. As you read this, consider whether or not you see elements of these stereotypes in the people around you or even yourself:

The 'Firefighter'

This individual is typically very responsive to any crises related to his/her area. Sends and receives many e-mails and is constantly checking the Blackberry. Is typically swamped with meetings. On the other hand, this person spends little time on strategy and rarely drives needed change in the organization. Long term goals tend to languish and are often not met. 360 feedback would likely show:

- High ratings on anything related to tactical, action-orientated work.
- Low ratings on anything related to strategy, vision and change management.
- Low ratings on anything related to delegation.
- Multiple comments relating to strong work ethic.

Possible development goal: focusing on delegation and time management with a view to working more strategically. May also need to become more assertive to extract himself/herself from the day-to-day.

The 'Overly Strategic, But Poor On Execution' Leader

This individual is typically strong on big picture thinking, is often influential and persuasive, but views implementation details and performance monitoring as a nuisance, and as a result tends to keep too much distance between himself/herself and direct reports. 360 feedback would likely show:

- Higher ratings from boss and peers on anything related to strategy and influence.
- Lower ratings from direct reports on anything relating to goal setting, feedback and coaching.
- Possibly low overall ratings from direct reports throughout, if they perceive the person as aloof and out of touch with them.
- Lower ratings on anything related to being organized, reliable, or following through on promises.

Possible development goal: focusing on goal setting, giving feedback and possibly listening/empathy within own team.

The 'Advocate'

The “advocate” is typically an employee who has been with the company for some time, knows the business well, and has a good sense of what needs to happen strategically. Often the technical expert. He/she constantly advocates for change, but struggles to relate well to others and consequently has difficulty influencing the situation. 360 feedback would likely show:

- High ratings on anything related to knowledge of the business, customers and products.
- Low ratings on anything related to relationships (particularly with peers), and comments that may indicate high levels of conflict.
- Low ratings on anything related to influence.
- Comments that describe high levels of passion and caring for the business.

Possible development goal: becoming more influential by balancing strong advocacy skills with a focus on listening and conflict resolution.

The 'DOer'

The “DOer” is typically an individual who was promoted to lead his/her old team. The core work of the team (at which this individual probably excelled at to earn the promotion in the first place), remain in his/her comfort zone, and consequently the individual focuses on carrying out tasks of the group instead of managing the team. Is often the “go-to” person for any issue related to the function of his/her team. The “DOer” can be quite effective when the group is small, but becomes less effective as the group and associated responsibilities grow. 360 feedback would likely show:

- High ratings on anything related to tactical, action-orientated work.
- High ratings on anything related to technical expertise, as well as multiple comments to this effect.
- Lower ratings from boss and peers on anything related to the strategy, vision and direction. The report may also indicate high levels of conflict with these groups due to an over-focus on own time versus broader goals that the boss and peers care about.
- Low ratings on anything related to delegation, and multiple comments to this effect.
- High ratings / positive comments relating to work ethic.

Possible development goal: focusing on delegation / feedback within own team and strengthening relationships with peers.

The “Pleaser”

This individual takes on too much and endures constant stress and personal sacrifice, working late and often on weekends. While everyone appreciates the hard work, the individual gradually becomes resentful / disengaged, or exhibits heightened levels of absenteeism and health problems. 360 feedback would likely show:

- High ratings and many comments on anything related to work ethic.
- Multiple comments warning of burnout and suggesting that the person work on saying “no” (others tend to be concerned about individuals like this).

- High ratings on questions that probe the quality of relationships, or listening behaviour.
- Possible low ratings on items related to achieving results, if the individual promises so much that he/she cannot deliver despite the hard work.
- Low ratings from direct reports on questions that relate to sensitivity to others, if the individual has similar expectations of direct reports with respect to work ethic.

Possible development goal: assertiveness and conflict resolution.

One thing you might notice from my suggested development goals – **we always advocate that people try and find what they need to do more of, versus what they need to do less of.**

Most weaknesses are the flip-side of a strength overdone. People have a much easier time focusing on a balancing behaviour, than they are at trying to do less of something they are good at. If people choose the right development goal, and develop and execute an effective action plan, they will develop greatly as leaders.