It Takes More Than a Cow Bell to Lead a Team

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Abstract

Leading an audit team goes beyond performance of the duties outlined in any requirement or training course. Anyone can memorize the steps to begin and to complete an audit, but it takes leadership to capitalize on the strengths of each team member and to interact with the auditee.

Leadership has been written about and studied for many years. Principles and ideas developed by Covey, Senge, Peters, Blanchard, Hersey, Drucker, Yuki and many, many more but they all come down to some basic issues. There is no magic formula. There are theories and models that when applied work in one situation. Some theories and methodologies work better than others depending on the situation. The presentation today looks at leadership from the perspective of the lead auditor, as he/she has to guide the audit process and deal with many personalities from the audit team to the people being interviewed. Each situation is different, each audit team is different, each audit is unique. The basic principles are applied but it takes understanding leadership to have a successful audit. Applying the Situational Leadership model will enable you to be a good and effective leader and capitalize on the strengths of each team member. It is an invaluable asset to add to your communication toolbox. So let’s put our bells on the shelf and put on our learning caps.

Introduction

Some may feel that leading an audit team is a snap because you have the process in place. You operate effectively because you have the rules down pat, the team hangs on your every word in anticipation of another profound statement from you, and you have all the tools you need, including communication tools, to perform successful audits. Just ring the bell and the team takes their respective positions. I don’t think so.

We are going to look at what leadership is, good leader qualities, leadership methodologies, and how we can apply one particular method - situational leadership - to the responsibilities we have as lead auditors.
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What is leadership?

The More Formal Evaluation

Leadership is an influence process. It begins when the first step is taken to attempt to influence the behavior/attitude of an individual or group. When you exit the realm of stating your opinion and enter the arena of interacting with others, you are attempting to influence. There are three basic competencies in influencing: diagnosing - being able to understand and interpret the situation you are attempting to influence; adapting - being able to adapt your behavior and the resources you control to the situation; and communicating - being able to put the message in such a way that people can easily understand and accept it. Each of these competencies is different and requires a different approach.

Applied Evaluation

What do you think of when you think of leadership? One of the first things that comes to my mind is a person with conviction and ability to show the way or to guide an activity or project. It is also being a servant, if you will, by providing whatever is necessary for the audit team to perform a good audit. How many people would you consider to be truly successful leaders? What are some of the characteristics that those people possess or demonstrate? If we apply those characteristics as being necessary to lead an audit, what is the outcome? I'd say that effectiveness is measured by how the audit team feels that they were successful in being able to do their job. Now, how can the lead auditor provide the guidance necessary to give the team that sense of accomplishment? Let's explore the concept of serving to the role of leadership.

Leadership principles are designed to meet needs, satisfy requirements, and carry out the duties connected with an office or duty. A servant, practicing these principles, is a person ardently devoted to another or to a cause, creed, etc. From the inception of the audit schedule to the closing of an audit, there are steps that have to be performed in order to have a product or results. This product (report) is not the result of operating within a vacuum. People are interviewed, documents that are created by people are reviewed, and conclusions are drawn based on objective evidence obtained through people. The key word here is people. How we communicate with them affects the success of the audit. If we are self-serving by only focusing on the end and not at the means to get to the end, then the effectiveness of our work is limited. If we are devoted to giving our best as a lead auditor, then we need to apply ourselves and our time and energy to provide continuous improvement to produce results.
There are some basic processes to be used when leading an audit. Just as there are a variety of scopes and purposes of an audit, there is also more than one method to use when leading people. What works well for one person might not work well with another.

**Marriage of Formal and Applied Leadership Approach**

The word lead has a variety of meanings. One is to show the way. Another is to guide the course or direction by persuasion. Leadership then is the ability to lead, the position or guidance of a leader. This upholds the belief that leadership is an influence process. What is being influenced? The behavior/attitude of an individual or group is what is attempting to be influenced. This can best be done by first recognizing that certain traits increase the likelihood that a leader will be effective and the relative importance of the different traits is dependent upon the leadership situation. Marriage occurs with the influence process being merged with the servant attitude/behavior.

Some of the traits and skills found most frequently to be characteristic of successful leaders are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAITS</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptable to situations</td>
<td>Clever (intelligent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alert to social environment</td>
<td>Conceptually skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious and achievement-oriented</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Diplomatically tactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Fluent in speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>Knowledgeable about group task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependable (desire to influence others)</td>
<td>Organized (administrative ability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic (high activity level)</td>
<td>Persuasive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>Socially skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant of stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to assume responsibility</td>
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Gary Yukl believes that there are three negative traits that hinder a person from reaching leadership potential as well as hindering the group from accomplishing its goals. These are the perception of being uninformed, of being nonparticipants, or of being extremely rigid.
Research suggests that leadership is a dynamic process that varies from situation to situation. The effectiveness of a particular leadership style is contingent upon the situation in which it is utilized. A good leader has knowledge and knows how to use many leadership styles as each is appropriate to a particular situation. If this belief is the premise then, leader behavior rather than leadership traits emphasizes the situation approach to leadership.

Let's look at the influencing process closer. There are many leadership models that zone in on one aspect of influence. For example, Stages of Personal Growth addresses a person's willingness and ability to work. The Managerial Grid focuses on attitude. The Maturity-Immaturity Continuum focuses on behavior. Maslow's Hierarchy goes through the stages of human needs. Johari’s Window deals with disclosure to obtain feedback. The Situational Leadership model is called a behavioral modification model. It is the idea that a leader should help followers grow in readiness as far as they are able and willing to go. This takes a leader with developed skills of being able to identify where people are on a scale of being task or relationship behavior.

**Situational Leadership**

Situational Leadership is based on an interplay among the amount of guidance and direction (task behavior) a leader gives, the amount of socioemotional support (relationship behavior) a leader provides and the readiness level that followers exhibit in performing a specific task or function. The emphasis is on the behavior of a leader in relation to followers. Followers are vital because they actually determine whatever personal power the leader may have. They accept or reject the leader. This gets us back to the idea that there is no one best way to influence people, it is situational depending on the readiness level of the people the leader is attempting to influence.

The development of followers should be done by adjusting leadership behavior through the four styles along the leadership curve as shown on the model. Keep in mind that the willingness and ability are the Follower Model and the Leader Model is relationship/task related activities. Situation Leadership encompasses the Follower and Leader Model. The Leader Model shows the maturity levels. The four stages/phases of Situational Leadership are as follows:

- **S1** - Provide specific instructions and closely supervise performance. The leader makes the decisions. (High task/low relationship)
- **S2** - Explain decisions and provide opportunity for clarification. Leader makes the decisions with dialogue and or explanation. (High Task/high relationship)
• S3 - Share ideas and facilitate in decision making. Share decision making or decisions are made by the follower with encouragement from leader. (Low task, high relationship)
• S4 - Turn over responsibility for decisions and implementation. The follower makes the decisions. (Low task, low relationship)

These four aspects are described in Figure 1.

At each point of each stage, the leader must decide whether the follower is capable or has potential to move to the next stage. The leader changes his style to remain effective and successful. Moving too fast can damage morale of the team, especially if you have to move back a step because of not seeing success. Moving ahead is positive, but moving back is perceived as negative. It is critical to analyze all aspects of the situation. The right mix will eliminate problems with the team as well as with customers.

The process is a circle in that it is unique with each situation and each person. There is a time to tell and direct and there is a time to only guide. The goal is to have balance as a leader. How do you achieve the balance? By putting yourself in a serving position - look at each situation and person - don’t impose one rigid approach to everyone and everything.
### Leadership Styles

#### Effective Leader Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP BEHAVIOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(HIGH)</td>
<td>(HIGH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Relationship and Low Task</td>
<td>High Task and High Relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S4</th>
<th>Low Relationship and Low Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turn over responsibility for decisions and implementation</td>
<td>Provide specific instructions and closely supervise performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Adapted from Paul Hersey, *Situational Selling* (Escondido, Calif.: Center for Leadership Studies, 1985, p. 20.)

Figure 1
Conclusion

- Look at individuals on the audit team. Look at individuals in the audited organization. Evaluate the best approach to communicate with each person.

- Not all individuals have the same experience level. Capitalize on the strengths of each.

- Look at the potential of individuals and guide accordingly.

- Remember that one size does not fit all.

Most importantly, be alive and stay alive with the process and the people. Be enthusiastic about the success that will be felt at the closing of an audit.

It takes more than a cowbell to lead an audit. It takes a different bell for different people. And, it takes many sounds and shapes to create a melodious sound. So start collecting those bells and put them in your toolbox.

References


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