

The Impact of Transformational Leadership Characteristics

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As a member and an employee of a rural electric cooperative, our mission is to serve our members and the community they are part of. One of the greatest benefits of working in the utilities industry and an electric cooperative is the opportunity to see your own work and the impact it has on others; electric cooperatives are well known for their non-profit model, competitive rates, local focus, transparent operations, reliability, economic development, and renewable energy growth. There are challenging times in the industry but also rewarding times too; having a senior management team, specifically a senior manager, that acts, supports their employees, effectively communicates, remains adherent to the safety of their employees, and calm during stressful circumstances makes a difference. I have had the privilege to work with the Vice President of Accounting for Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative for two years now, who has demonstrated great strengths, impacted and inspired others, and has mentored many. In my role as a junior accountant, I report directly to this person on Rural Utilities Service (RUS) requirements, state, and year-end auditing schedules and audits, and maintaining our general ledger account in accordance with policies and procedures, RUS requirements, and generally accepted accounting principles; this has allowed me a close view of their decision-making processes, interactions with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and their approach to supporting their team members during strict deadlines. Based on my observations, comparison to common leadership structures, and analysis, this leader demonstrates similar traits to transformational leadership; some of the key characteristics this leader exhibited include adaptability and flexibility, empathy and emotional intelligence, effective communication, empowerment and delegation, and resilience

Adaptability and Flexibility

This leader excels at pivoting strategy when project requirements and deadlines change unexpectedly. After reading through Module 1 readings, “How to Become a More Effective Leader”

reminded me of this leader and essential leadership skills and qualities that they possess; specifically, their ability to prepare for roadblocks. Everything is “not always going to go according to plan (How to Become a More Effective Leader)” and how this leader demonstrated their anticipation for roadblocks eliminated the anxiousness and doubts that myself and others commonly had around the everchanging utilities industry. This leader has restructured team roles to help prevent burnout rather than forcing us all to follow outdated plans; and empowered us to modify our behaviors “by removing the obstacles that prevent (How to Become a More Effective Leader)” us from working towards change.

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence

The Vice President of Accounting consistently fosters a culture that puts people first. Rather than simply focusing on tasks, this leader checks in on mine as well as my co-worker’s well-being during highly stressful times, by exemplifying genuine care. Empathy is a foundational characteristic of emotional intelligence, which is another big quality of great leaders. This leader understood that in a leadership position, they may become hyper-focused on their own goals, but acknowledged that without their team, “goals cannot be reached (Tracy, B. 2024)” and in “knowing that, it’s important to check on your team and make sure they feel understood (Tracy, B. 2024).” This leader is continuously empathetic to their team members, and their strong, emotional intelligence allows for them to recognize if their employees “are feeling burnt out, and enact in ways to provide support (Tracy, B. 2024).”

Effective Communication

Efficacious communication in leaders starts with transparencies. Part of building trust, “is being transparent (Landry, L. 2018)” and as a leader, “the more open you are about the organization’s goals and challenges, the easier it is for employees to understand their roles (Landry, L. 2018)” and how they contribute to the company’s success. This leader ensures everyone understands the reason behind the cooperative’s goals by holding weekly safety meetings, and monthly check-ins to reduce uncertainty

during stressful demanding times throughout the financial month. Helen Wale's "Leadership Traits" describes leaders as "excellent communicators, able to clearly and concisely explain problems and solutions (Wale, H. 2024)" and that they know when "to talk and when to listen (Wale, H. 2024)." This leader can speak on several different levels, whether it is one-on-one, in front of an audience, during a meeting, via telephone, and email. For example, regardless of how our leader relays a vision, they can actively listen to the feedback and encourage change with a growth mindset.

Empowerment and Delegation

Our leader encourages their team members to be independent, allowing ownership over certain projects; to be able to delegate certain tasks and responsibilities to other members of the team gives this leader the opportunity to build a trusting relationship and align with modern empowerment tactics. For leaders to "stay focused on their vision, they must be able to delegate their tasks (Tracy, B. 2024)" which takes minor responsibilities from the leader, so they can focus on the bigger goal and allows employees the opportunity "to take on bigger responsibilities (Tracy, B. 2024)." This leader demonstrates a strong ability to delegate their tasks to employees, and it gives me and my team members a sense of trust, reliability, and accountability.

Resilience

During major system catastrophes, this leader can remain composed and proactively focuses on a solution rather than assigning blame. This composure allows our leader to eliminate any fear and hesitations that our team has. Our leader understands that "every decision you make won't result in success (Landry, L. 2018)" but that it is their job "as a leader to exercise resiliency (Landry, L. 2018)." A resilient leader continuously assesses and reassesses their leadership approach, commits to their primary objective while exercising flexibility, and maintains belief in the team's mission through managing combined and individual resources. This leader has always taken responsibility for their decisions, while remaining optimistic, and focusing on navigating new courses of action.

Reflection

After reflecting on the traits of my Vice President, I can integrate them into my own role as a junior accountant by practicing adaptive leadership, fostering empathy, improving transparency, delegating tasks, and building resilience. For example, I will document alternative scenarios for upcoming assignments to become more adept to shifting strategies; I will initiate check-ins with my team members during one-on-one meetings to genuinely understand team members' circumstances outside of work to establish trust; I will adopt a clearer and more concise rhythm of communication to ensure information is provided before and during changes; I will challenge myself to delegate key responsibilities that I am confident with and empower my team members to take ownership; and I will challenge myself to pause before responding to any news, positive or negative, to present a smooth and solution-oriented personality to my team members, similar to my vice president's traits and characteristics. Through developing a clear vision by defining and communicating a long-term goal, practicing active listening through building trust, seeking, valuing, and acting on employee input, mentoring others by focusing on individual coaching to help others reach their potential, modeling ethical behavior by acting with authenticity and integrity to build trust, and encouraging taking risks through the promotion of a learn from mistakes environment, I will mirror the traits of transformational leadership and follow through with the necessary skills to establish success for myself and my colleagues.

Conclusion

This leader displays a blended style of transformational leadership. The Vice President of Accounting inspires by encouraging their employees to exceed expectations through supportive mentoring. This leader acts as a role model by embodying high ethical standards and building trust; inspires their team through compelling optimistic vision; challenging their team by encouraging their creativity and promoting their independent thinking; and mentoring each team member by

understanding their individual, unique needs and providing support for personal growth. Through adaptability and flexibility, empathy and emotional intelligence, effective communication, empowerment and delegation, and resilience, this leader has shown the true mission and ethical standards behind Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative and its service to its members and the community. I can exhibit these key characteristics in my areas of influence such as my team, community projects, or personal mentoring by focusing on intentional action, empathy, and consistent communication. As a junior accountant, my goal is to dedicate myself and mirror the leadership traits and skills that I have observed from the vice president to be an inspiration and mentor in the years to come just as they have for me and my team members at Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

References

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