Teaching Notes
Michal Slate, LDSL732, Major Project
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Characteristics of Innovative Leadership
A training seminar for a group of professionals.

- This training seminar addresses these main points:

- What are the characteristics of a person who successfully leads innovation in an organization?

- What key attributes must he or she consistently exhibit for employees, subcontractors, and customers to eagerly participate in the ideation and development of new products, services, or ideas?

- Demonstrate that these characteristics are necessary for all countries and throughout history.

- What practical and actionable advice is recommended to transform their organizations?

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The characteristics required of leaders for successful innovation within an organization are:
Ethical leadership
Approachable leaders
Teachable leaders
Inspirational leaders

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These characteristics create a culture of ethical innovation that inspires open communication, creativity, and a desire to improve the surrounding world.
The reputation of ethical purpose, vision, and impact from an organization attracts buy-in.
Employees naturally want to follow leaders they can trust and believe in the purpose of what they are doing.
All who do business with such leaders enjoy working with them, feel as if they are being treated right, want to reciprocate, and will tell others about the positive experience.
Customers will do business with an organization they trust, whom they know treats their employees well, and who strives to improve for the benefit of all.

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Ethical:
A leader who has the long game in mind will set stability within an organization. Incentives for performance should be long-term oriented. A leader who is rewarded with stock-based compensation for example instead of cash-based would show others that they are for the success of the overall organization.
Employees of such leaders should also be rewarded for process-based performance and input that inspires teamwork compared to individual bonuses that would inspire individualism and or unhealthy competition.
See: Making Innovation Work, Chapter 7: Incentives and Rewards, and the Innovation Rules

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Approachable:
Leaders can be intimidating to their employees without meaning to. A leader has the power to impact your life negatively and therefore some employees will naturally fear them.
Think of how some people are afraid of dogs. A dog can bite; however, once a fearful person recognizes that the dog is friendly, the fear goes away. A leader must show employees that they are approachable by establishing a friendly relationship before attempting to get anything from them. As a salesperson should work to be a problem solver to a customer before attempting to sell a solution, the leader must know what is important to the follower before they will inspire buy-in.
See: Thinkertoys, Chapter 26

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Teachable:
Inspiring creativity within a team is asking the team to teach you as the leader. The first step is to remove the preconceptions.
Allow employees to share random thoughts and ideas without barriers. Games that will inspire creativity are word associations or random focus points meant to bring creative ideas to the surface. By reducing preconceptions around problem-solving, the employees can bring creative ideas to the leadership.
Use activities and games to show the team how teachable the leadership can be as well as how valuable innovation and creativity are to problem-solving.
See Thinkertoys: Chapter 34

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Inspirational: An organization that inspires this type of innovation is likened to a religion. The people will believe intensely in what they are doing. The leaders and employees will show a strong commitment to the organization with energy and zeal. This is an exciting company to do business with so customers will enjoy the experiences they have here and will naturally invite others to join in on the fun. (See: Making Innovation Work, Chapter 9).

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Leadership in Time:
Ethical, Approachable, Teachable, and Inspirational are not just effective, but all are required characteristics to inspire effective innovation regardless of time.
These characteristics must be used together for effective innovation in any time period; however, the time period must be considered for the innovation to be implemented.
Buy-in from customers comes when they know they have a problem that needs solving. The technology might be there, but the customer still needs to understand its use for it. The barrier to entry must be low enough as in the example of the cell phone. Computers, the internet, and phone lines were already being used so there was a logical need and desire for the cell phone. See: (The Myths of Innovation, Chp. 8).
A leader's ability to learn and be approached goes hand in hand with the ease of adoption for buy-in. Ethical and inspirational characteristics bring the best component which creates a sweet spot for innovation to be explored. See: (The Myths of Innovation, Chp.8).
Discussion:
Who can give an example of a time period in history where these characteristics were needed in leadership? Perhaps an example where they were not needed?

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Leadership in Culture:
Ethical, Approachable, Teachable, and Inspirational are not just effective, but all are required characteristics to inspire effective innovation regardless of culture.
In the 1200s, China most likely invented firearms; however, they wouldn't use them in battle because they were not socially accepted. The Asian culture at this time encouraged innovation by learning and exploring ideas with leaders and teams; however, the ethical and inspirational influence would keep this innovation from being used to its potential. (The Myths of Innovation, Chp. 8).
NASA flew a 300 million dollar orbiter from Earth on a mission to orbit Mars on September 23, 1999. This was a result of creative innovation that was no doubt fueled by inspirational leadership; however, the math was off due to a miscalculation from the metric system and the orbiter was destroyed when it flew too low into the wrong orbit. See The Myths of Innovation Chp. 8).
A recent event caused major disruption across all cultures worldwide.
Covid 19.
Leaders who demonstrated conviction, adaptability, and charisma were successful in reducing expected turnover compared to less charismatic leaders (Yue, 2021).
Discussion:
Who can give an example of a culture or country where these characteristics were needed in leadership? Perhaps an example where they are not needed?
How about socialism vs capitalism?

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3 Practical Steps
Job assignments with room for creativity
Inspire feedback from all team members
The mission must be bigger than the company

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Practical Step 1: Job assignments with room for creativity
Be careful not to ask for perfection from employees when assigning tasks. Fears, uncertainties, and doubts are the most harmful to a positive creative attitude (according to Thinkertoys chapter 1).
The most creative innovators in your organization will do well with thinking freedom. Imagine giving a job assignment to Stephen Hawking or Mozart. How much structure would they need? Creating space for creative thinking can be organized into a team activity; however, be careful not to structure things too tightly. Imagine the same Stephen Hawking, Mozart or Da Vinci at an all-day company retreat. (See The Myths of Innovation, Chp 7).
Discussion:
How could you provide the needed result in a way that leaves room for creativity in the solution-generating process?

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Practical Step 2: Inspire feedback from all team members
Really inspire feedback from all team members. No one should be left out as you may be surprised what creativity is sparked in an environment of diverse minds.
Ensure that you are getting honest, authentic feedback as well.
As a leader it is important to know where your employees are in terms of maturity and ability. A good shepherd knows the condition of his flock (Leman & Pentak, 2004).
Have reasonable expectations and provide support for those individuals who may not be able to engage at the required level (See Kuyper, p34. 2011).
Be curious as a leader. Each individual brings something unique to the conversation. Something such as a generational difference could be discounted and shouldn't be since there is great value in generational differences when it comes to perspective (See Bălan et al,. 2019).
One activity suggested is to have each team member write down the name of someone they see as a role model, preferably someone famous from history. Then ask each team member to explain how that person might solve the problem before you or what their feedback would be regarding the task at hand. (See Thinkertoys: Chapter 34).
Assuming all characteristics are in place, there must also be context and culture as well as follower receptivity (See Northouse, (2022) Chapter 10, Case 10.3).
What other ideas do you have for inspiring feedback from all team members?

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Practical Step 3: The mission must be bigger than the company
We talked about being an inspiring leader and how important that is. We talked about zeal, energy and commitment. These traits often come from a strong belief in the mission of an

organization. To change the world for the better or change history in a way that inspires a generation are core characteristics of a mission statement that fuels followers.

A mission statement doesn't have to be complicated but it does have to be believable and genuine. The leaders must not only know the mission but be the mission in a way that employees and customers feel they are in the presence of something much bigger than just a company.

The founder of TOMS shoes understood the value of sharing a cause while selling a product. He used the mission of providing shoes to those in need, sold that mission on social media and then recommended people buy his product to help fund this mission (Roncha & Raddclyffe, 2016)..

Brilliant.

The founder of a non-profit: Pencils of Promise is also inspiring as his story brings a personal touch while inspiring those who are excited to make a big difference in a small way. Just a single pencil can bring a smile to a child who doesn't have one. According to LinkedIn, (2022): "Pencils of Promise was founded with $25 by Adam Braun, using what he describes as a "For Purpose" approach blending non-profit idealism with for-profit business principles".

Do you have any other examples of companies that have a product you feel inspired to buy?

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Final Questions:
●Where do convictions come from? Are they the same as ethics?
●What makes a leader approachable? If a leader struggles in this area, how could they start small in opening up with their teams?
●Harry S. Truman is quoted saying: "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers." Do you think this is true? Is being teachable a requirement for good leadership?
●We discussed inspiration and charisma rather interchangeably; however, they can and do stand alone in many circumstances. Give an example of an inspirational leader who had little to no charisma. Give an example of a leader who was charismatic but not inspirational.

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