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Which power techniques do you use to manage staff?

Wednesday, January 31, 2018 16:49



Coercive leaders threaten their followers and cause fear in order to gain obedience. FILE PHOTO | NMG

Mammals crave power to dominate over others in their species. Fierce rivalries breakout between males in social groups amongst great apes, antelopes, lions or among females in elephant herds as salient examples. Power comes with real benefits to the leader including better food, access to mates, and psychological status.

Humans also yearn for power. Sometimes people desire power because they feel that they best possess skills to help a population group, organisation, or community towards a better future.

Other times humans seek power out of fear of others and want to protect themselves and their community. Unfortunately, on other occasions, people hanker for power for selfish gain.

The loathed and selfish King Henry VIII of England infamously debated the pressing issue of his early 16th century era: is it better for a king to be loved or feared. Henry opted for the former before murderously shifting to the latter. He lived in the time of Niccolò Machiavelli whose then radical views on tough leadership emboldened princes and pirates alike.

Power involves the ability to affect change or control other individuals and comes in five different forms. Henry and Machiavelli advocated for coercive power. Coercive leaders threaten their followers and cause fear in order to gain obedience. Coercion often can be seen in tyrannical CEOs and multi-decade dictators.

Next, leaders may utilise reward power. Leaders who give out gifts, handouts, promises, raises, and promotions to gain followers and allegiance exercise reward power. A cunning sadistic leader uses both coercive and reward powers simultaneously to give favours to allies and punish dissidents. The Gambia's disgraced former President Yahya Jammeh implemented the combination.

However, many leaders enjoy rewarding their followers, community, or staff and do so for good honest reasons.

Either way, the ability to provide rewards increases one's power and gain followers. Equity Bank CEO James Mwangi's widely known philanthropy increases the power we Kenyans hold of him in our minds.

Leaders can also use legitimate power. When an executive utilises the official trappings of his or her office to hire or fire, promote or demote, purchase or sell, transfer or move, expand or constrict, then he or she exercises legitimate power.

Following the rise of the Republicans in 18th century France and the overthrow and death of the monarch, many people stepped forward for decades all over the world claiming to be remaining remnants of the French royal family.

Despite the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the dozens of claimants, none of them held any legitimate power to rule France.

Further, leaders can utilise referent techniques to gain power. Bosses whose followers genuinely like them benefit from referent power. Leaders can employ humour, kindness, friendliness, and sympathy to garnish referent power from their followers. Politically, President Uhuru Kenyatta, former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, French President Emmanuel Macron, Russian President Vladimir Putin, South Korean President Moon Jae-in, and former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont hold strong referent power popularity among voter segments.

Other world leaders are not so fortunate. US President Donald Trump, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, South African President Jacob Zuma, and Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto crave referent power but have lost much of it and instead cling mostly to legitimate power.

Finally, expert knowledge and display of intelligence and understanding brings another kind of power. Followers desire admire a leader who thinks broadly, deeply, and cleverly to in effect know what he or she is doing. Former President Mwai Kibaki demonstrated strong expert power during his time in office. Comcraft CEO Dr Manu Chandaria displays expert power as seen through his numerous public lectures.

Both reward and legitimate powers can lead to compliance by employees and followers but does not lead to affection. Only expert and referent powers lead staff and followers to hold attitudes of commitment towards the leader.

In summary, what is your motivation to lead? Do you desire to manage your department due to altruistic reasons or purely selfish motives? Which power techniques do you utilise to manage your employees? Harsh leadership does not work as well as consistency, friendliness, and displays of intelligence.

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