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MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION ASSIGNMENT 5: LEADERSHIP

A report evaluating the
leadership of a 21st
century leader of an
organisation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction	3
Evaluation.....	4
How Would You Lead Differently?.....	6
Conclusion	7
Recommendations.....	7
About The Author	8
References	9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews an organisation experiencing rapid growth with its leader struggling to lead the team that was not coping with business expansion. The crisis was not identified early enough and the situation deteriorated without a plan to address the problematic expansion. Engaging a leadership consultant, even 18 months earlier, would have allowed the leader to develop skills to keep pace with the growth and expansion of the organisation.

Upon reflection, different decisions would have been made and the outcome much different. The Leader's leadership skills deficiency would have been identified and plan developed, this would have extended to key people within the group and the structure of the team would have been addressed with a positive outcome.

INTRODUCTION

Peter Cox is the founder and director of Leadership Dynamics Pty Ltd, a leadership consultancy business for CEOs, company directors, corporations, businesses and sporting organisations. Peter's aim is to empower people to reach their leadership potential through a structured program, offering one-on-one coaching, leadership development and facilitation for executive teams as well as leadership seminars. The audiences that Peter Cox has presented to have been as large as 45,000 and his clients have included high profile sporting figures such as Michael Maguire, South Sydney Rabbitohs coach. The launch of Leadership Dynamics Pty Ltd in 2002, coincided with the publication of his first book "The Dream Is Everything", which sold 12,000 copies on its release. Peter Cox grew up in one of the toughest areas of Western Sydney. After leaving school, Peter completed his Bachelor of Business majoring in Marketing/Economics at the NSWIT graduating in 1984. In 1988 Peter Cox and his wife, Debbie, started their own sales & marketing business and over the last 26 years have used key leadership principles to continually expand their business. In 2013 Peter was engaged by Buel to lead the business through a crisis period. The Chief Operating Officer was unable to influence his direct reports, to keep up with the rapid expansion the company was experiencing. In hindsight the business owner had misjudged the COO's leadership ability. His leader behaviour was closer in alignment to transactional as opposed too transformational, discussed in (Hargis, 2011, p. 54), this in turn put the COO in opposition to the business owner and the business owner's leadership skills under the microscope. Peter Cox was engaged by the business owner to develop leadership potential and clarity and achieve the business' vision.

The purpose of this assignment is to analyse leadership coaching, in the context of Peter Cox' and Leadership Dynamics methods, within the framework of the theories studied in the Leadership learning material and to determine the effectiveness of these methods in the workplace situation presented. In the first part of the main body of the assignment Peter Cox' key leadership attributes are evaluated within the context of principles chosen from the learning material, following on with the introduction of a workplace situation experienced first-hand, including events leading up to Peter's involvement as leader and how his strategy influenced the situation during and after this period. This involved an assessment of the skills of the Senior management team (including the owner), identify any deficiencies, understand whether it was possible to address the skill deficiencies before changing out the personnel. If addressing the skills deficiencies was possible in the time frame, facilitate the development of leadership skills within the Management team.

As with any experience which relates to your chosen field, It's useful to reflect on the challenges experienced, understand the outcome of decisions made while relating to the event. Where relevant, apply the lessons learnt as identified in the action-observation-reflection (A-O-R) model (Hughes, 2015, p. 45). The spiral of experience depicted in figure 2.1 (Hughes, 2015, p. 46)

acknowledges all three phases of leadership development required for successful leadership development.

EVALUATION

Peter Cox calls himself a 'leadership consultant', in practice he leads leaders. Once engaged, Peter builds a relationship with his client over a series of formal one-on-one meetings. Over a period of three months, meeting once a month, a level of trust is established, and his leadership guidance process begins to unfold.

Peter's leadership style aligns closely with three of the leadership attributes identified in the learning material (Hughes, 2015, p. 222). His initial 3-month consulting period correlates with the attributes: *self-awareness*; *self-regulation* and *motivation*. Table 6.4 (Hughes, 2015, p. 222) compares Ability and Mixed Models of Emotional Intelligence in further detail.

During the 3-month period the first leadership attribute that Peter's clients explore is self-discovery. The acknowledgement of self-awareness enables the client to identify the areas requiring change, then identifies ways to affect change. Peter refers to self-awareness as "the biggest gift you can get" (Cox, 2016). Before you can undertake any transformation and begin to learn, you need self-awareness. As a result of self-awareness, the second leadership attribute of self-regulation becomes possible, allowing the third attribute of motivation to drive the client to modify behaviours. (Hughes, 2015, p. 241) These changes in behaviour begin with interpersonal skills, enabling the client to focus on communication and building relationships with others. Figure 7.1 (Hughes, 2015, pp. 243, 244) identifies leadership behaviours, inclusive of skills and competencies and illustrates, overtime leaders can learn which behaviours are more effective and appropriate dependent on the situation. This relates to Peter's earlier statement about the value of self-awareness.

The Path-Goal theory in Table 13.2 (Hughes, 2015, p. 547,) discusses *the four leader behaviours*. Peter describes his personal leader behaviour as *directive*. Peter finds this style effective as it allows him to maintain an arm's length relationship with his client, a successful aspect of his approach in leading as it maintains a respectful space between the leader and the leadership consultant. When asked about the background development of his leadership style, Peter reflects to an earlier time in his career and the influence of his original leader/coach Jim. Jim described Peter's style at that time to be stimulating and agitating. Peter's style has enabled him to help leaders lead better with great results. Such is the case of Michael Maguire, (Maguire, 2015) Head coach of the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club. The club engaged Peter to develop the leadership skills within the club and team. Within 12 months the Rabbitohs won their first grand final in 43 years. The Path-Goal theory considers variables including leader behaviour. The same theory suggests that leaders

can in fact increase effective performance of the followers by applying different leader behaviours. This in affect is what occurred at South Sydney, with the Rabbitohs.

In the text book the authors introduce the idea of 'five bases of power: Expert, Referent, Legitimate, Reward and Coercive. (Hughes, 2015, p. 123). Within this framework, Peter considers himself as Expert and Legitimate. He states: "The number one characteristic of a leader is influence." (Cox, 2016). The learning material relates power to influence stating that power is the key to influence. This being the case it is then important to consider which base of power is best used to influence followers in order to get the desired result. Peter continues: "To lead you need great influence. You cannot lead if no one is following you." (Cox, 2016). He believes that being challenged by another leader nurtures the development of your leadership potential and clarity in your thinking about what you must do to lead and not follow.

Peter's response to the core proposition 'Leadership is a process, not a position' is total agreement. Peter believes to be a great leader (Cox, 2016) "you have to live and breathe leadership" and to understand that it is a continuous process of learning.

Peter's response to the textbook's definition of leadership 'the process of influencing an organised group toward accomplishing its goals' is: "the number one characteristic of a leader is influence, if you cannot influence your team you cannot be an effective leader." (Cox, 2016)

A leader's values are an important part of determining a leader's behaviour. In his article Yukl (Yukl, 2012, p. 77) covers this effectively by concluding that values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, courage and humility will be a more effective leader. Peter's values are the foundation for his life. Peter demonstrates his commitment by having them tattooed on his arm. He refers to his values in the acronym of FLITU which stands for: Family, Loyalty, Integrity, Trust and Unity. If values are important then commitment to upholding the values is critical. Peter adds: "Leadership is a responsibility; people look up to you." (Cox, 2016). Peter's traits are second only to his values in importance and are closely aligned to his values. During the interview he listed them as, Loyalty, Integrity, Trust, Empowerment, Love, Respect and Vision. Peter believes that Leadership is inherent and believes that leaders are born, not made, he also believes that certain skills can be learnt.

Learning from experience: This is an important skill not just for Leadership but for life. Peter's view is "Leadership is about learning from lessons" (Cox, 2016)

Communication: Peter: "more than a skill, an imperative tool to have as a leader to be able communicate your vision and to influence." (Cox, 2016). And a skill that can be easily developed and improved on.

Listening: Peter believes the success of his one on one process is due to the importance of the leader listening and being listened to. He agrees its difficult to learn while you are talking.

Assertiveness: this is what Peter refers to as posture and presence and leading at arms length (maintaining a professional relationship) as it is difficult to Lead effectively when you are too close to your team.

Stress management: The Organization Development Journal (Darling, 2011, p. 16) discusses twelve stress reducing guidelines, 'that can help the leader effectivley reduce or even eliminate stress.' The topic highlights the fact that successful Leaders can manage stress effectively. Peter acknowledges this and believes that activities that address stress management need to be part of your routine and this starts with balance in life outside of work. Peters regimen is fixed and non-negotiable and includes: 4-5 gym sessions per week; 2 games of golf; and daily walking the dog. Every successful leader has a personal routine - without it they can't achieve the results they do.

Although the learning material discusses coaching in the context of the leader coaching the team, the aim of this assignment is to discuss the situation in which the leader is coached. Topic 1 (Understanding leadership and ways to develop leadership, Part 2: Leader development through experience and education, page 5,) refers to 'the practice of leadership as a continual learning process'. In the text book (Hughes, 2015, p. 44) Morgan McCall, in his summary describes in the last of his seven general points 'Learning to be a better leader is a lifelong pursuit with many twists and turns.' This is where Peter provides ongoing support for leaders through leadership consultancy.

HOW WOULD YOU LEAD DIFFERENTLY?

As previously described, Peter builds his leadership process over a 3-month period which had the company not been in a critical situation would have worked satisfactorily. But the company needed to fast track this process. We commenced the process without enough time to see it through. I also believe that Peter did not have enough information about the business to assess the actual state of play in the business, e.g. its financial position and team structure, in order to see the full picture and the urgency of the situation.

In order for the process to be effective I would lead differently by condensing of the 3-month period into 1-month and increasing the frequency of meetings. I would focus more on the leadership of the organisation by focusing on the leaders within the organisation. I would take time to understand the issues associated with leaders and leadership behaviours and the effects they have on the rest of the organisation. I would furnish Peter with the appropriate information to

enable Peter to have a clear understanding of the situation. I would initiate a plan for growth and development for the leaders, allowing them to develop and initiate a similar plan for the growth and development for the key people in the executive team

In summary a fast tracked consultancy and a detailed business report could have motivated leadership decisions that would have left the business in a healthier position.

CONCLUSION

The business owner was first introduced to Peter in 2013 through a friend and colleague. Peter came highly recommended and challenged the business owner's thoughts and views from the very start. It was the business owners first experience with a leadership coach. The process was straight forward and gave the business owner an opportunity to step back from the business and look at his own skills. After the first session the business owner decided to extend the leadership coaching to the key members of the team. The process identified areas of improvement not just for himself but for the member of the team who coached. The business owner was the only person, besides Peter who was privy to this information. It would have been unsettling as it no doubt confirmed some of the concerns the business owner had.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assignment topic is both interesting and informative. It challenges myths and identifies principles that are an imperative part of any leader's journey. All that said, the topic and text book appear to assume leaders are, in most cases well equipped to carry out the duties. It doesn't take into account leaders that may find themselves in positions of power and influence and need to develop quickly. In reality, for many organisations, business leaders find themselves experiencing leadership at this senior level for the first time and undergo 'a baptism of fire'. In these situations, it takes an extraordinary amount of focus, tolerance and patience to navigate through.

Successful leaders don't lead alone, they draw from their own experience, experience within the team and empower people around them to lead, and some of them do this with the help of a Leadership coach.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stephen Ashworth was born in Perth and grew up in the coastal pearling town of Broome in the Kimberley region of WA. Stephen's interest in business began in primary school when he started his first enterprise growing and selling chillies to the local fish and chip shop. He learnt an important lesson in due diligence early on in his chilli business when he took the shop owner's word that it was a good idea to change from imperial to metric and that there is no difference in the weight! Not put off by this rookie error, Stephen's passion for business thrives on the highs and lows; the challenges and the opportunities found in business.

Always looking to develop his business experience and knowledge, Stephen sought mentorship from Peter Cox in 2011 whilst heading a rapidly growing Sydney-based business. Peter guided the development of Stephen's leadership style and encouraged him to complete an MBA in order to tie in his practical business experience with evidence-based learning. The time spent with Peter left a lasting impression and as part of his MBA Stephen wrote a paper on Peter Cox and Leadership. Completing the MBA has given Stephen the confidence and knowledge to lead a successful business transformation project in Perth over the past 12 months and has made him a robust and self-reliant businessperson. He is now working on a Masters Research project on sustainable scaling-up in business.

Stephen is committed to personal and professional development. As president of Toastmasters Fremantle, he strives to deliver presentations effectively at all levels of business and to be at the top of his business leadership game. He is a keen runner having completed two marathons, two half marathons and one ultra-marathon. Stephen lives in Fremantle, WA with his partner Clare and daughters Matilda and Lola.

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