

Lessons Learned Week 8

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Wow, It's another late evening of trying to compose my thoughts and reflect back on what has transpired this week. This week contained a lot to digest, especially when comparing leadership theories and models. For me I was drawn to two distinct theories, Theory Z developed by William Ouchi and the Contingency Theory by Fred E. Fiedler.

Theory Z

In the 1970's, William Ouchi took the Theory X, Theory Y concept to the next level. After studying Japanese-style management, he developed Theory Z based on assumptions concerning worker motivation, attitudes towards work, and worker loyalty. Based on his assumptions, Theory Z assumes workers are motivated by their strong sense of commitment to their work, that employees crave opportunity for advancement, and that workers gain loyalty as a result of a lifetime of employment (Braden, 2000, p. 1).

The Chapter 4 presentation asked the question: "Is Theory Z still relevant today?" The uniqueness of this concept is that it seems to differ from the U.S. workforce. I've worked most of my adult life and have only met a few workers with the same level of personal commitment as it seems the entire Japanese workforce has every day. Based on my firsthand experience, I would say it is still relevant, but not likely to occur. Generation X members, those born between 1964 and 1981 have experienced a great deal of economic turmoil and therefore hang on to whatever position they can, to make up for the losses experienced on Wall Street. Today, millennials seek what the employer can do for them. Contrary to Theory Z, their source of motivation and attitude stems from their dedication to themselves, and not to any specific employer.

Contingency Theory

Contingency leadership theories attempt to explain the appropriate leadership style based on the leader, followers, and situation (Lussier Ph.D. & Achua D.B.A., 2013, p. 472). For me, Fiedler added a dimension to leadership I had not thought of before. Before this week, it was about leadership potential, ability, personal traits, and motivation, but now, we have a theory that adds the situation variable. As a leader, it is important that I understand what I'm capable of, as well as what motivates and drives my team. The lesson learned is that each situation is key to how I lead. Am I dealing with simply a task situation? Perhaps it's a situation where environmental forces are at work?

Assessments taken this week have indicated that I'm pretty much a middle-of-the-road when it comes to whether I'm more task relationship oriented, or more relationship oriented. By understanding these personal traits, I can now apply the appropriate relationship based on situations rather than personal preference. This added dimension will help ensure success in a variety of project situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to know who you are, what you can do, what drives you, what drives your workforce, and how to apply each of these understandings to projects and their unique situations. This multi-variable environment requires knowledge and understanding to survive and succeed.

References

Braden, P. A. (2000). *Participative Management Series: Theory Z - William Ouchi* [Lecture notes]. Retrieved from http://www.redbead.com/docs/theory_z_management.pdf

Lussier Ph.D., R. N., & Achua D.B.A., C. F. (2013). *Leadership: Theory, Application, & Skill Development* (5th ed.). Mason, OH: South-Western.