

# Self-reflection of Leadership Style

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*The University of Melbourne / MGMT90127*

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DATE: *15/04/16*

REVISION: *A*

NAME: *Eirik Monslaup Eikaas*

CHAR. COUNT: *14879*

STUDENTNº: *749244*

WORD COUNT: *2634*

# 1 Introduction

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I will start back in 2010. I had started my first undergrad, in media management. It was not very motivating and I ended up volunteering for a festival in my hometown for a week. The festival was new of the year and was poorly organised, so I quickly rose in responsibility, to the point where I had my own team of volunteers that I managed.

Soon after, I quit my undergrad, moved back home, started to work full time as a web developer and as a lighting technician on the side. I witnessed a lot of different levels of leadership and I actively reflected on what I experienced. From awful clients to poor people management, to admirable performance under financially demanding conditions. Nine months in, I got a call offering me a team leader position at the festival, and I readily accepted.

Under new management, I experienced an environment where everyone contributed beyond their share, and the culture was just phenomenal. I kept at this for three years, and I have this small list of people, mainly from my festival experience, that I am forever grateful; people that have provided me with opportunities to do better, to foster environments, to learn good practice, and that are just people that I want to live up to.

Building on a range of experience, I have accepted that I myself am very pragmatic, that I can be stringent and that I can be demanding. But I have also accepted that I see solutions to problems, where people don't even see the problem and that if I focus my energy to systematically build structures, culture and lead from the front, I can coordinate subordinates and co-workers towards great results.

This essay will look at three experiences that have manifested themselves as waypoints towards how I see myself as a leader; what is important to me, what my values are and my understanding of what works. Coincidentally they are all forms of conflicts. At the end of each experience I will try to tie in theory that surrounds the issue before I conclude the essay with thoughts on three recurring attributes.

## 2 Experience

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### 2.1 Take That Hat of at Blest

While I was working as a full time web developer back in 2012 I had an experience one morning that reiterated the importance of tolerance, diversity, culture and people stepping outside of their position.

As a short version; I was always one of the first one in, usually about one to two hours before the rest of the company, and I started my mornings by sitting with by hat and headset on my head and loud music in my ears. My desk was in a way that meant that I had the entrance of the office in the back.

One of the salesmen had planned for a meeting with a client one morning, and his desk was in the back of the office. The client came, went past me and into a showroom where he sat down.

As I didn't greet the client and tell him where to find my colleague, my colleague later, and still before everyone else arrived, bashed out at me; telling me that I had to take my hat and headset off, that I needed to be present to greet his clients and that I should really rethink my behaviour in the office. He was able to do this because he was part of the board and a senior member of the organization. I think that he acted out of his place by abusing his power and that his actions and temper was uncalled for.

He went back to his desk, and I was left feeling baffled. I ousted the issue to the CEO and to the Creative Director, and in the end of the day, he had to apologize in front of all of the employees. But before that, the CEO and the two salesmen of the business—all members of the board—discussed the issue between themselves in private.

It is not that I can't understand the need for some privacy, but my understanding is that this reiterated grudge and unease for both me and my colleagues. The incident is important to me because of the way the senior staff did not see that the reaction from me and the rest of the staff was grounded in something more than the incident itself; that there existed pre-existing friction due to repeated faults in practice. In a creative agency with about ten employees, everyone need to be on-line, in sync and feeling part of the organization's drive, not just ten fragmented individuals that occasionally are required to collaborate.

In situations like this, I think it is important to come to an agreement that works for everyone. I think it was correct to make him apologize, and that I was free to be in my own bubble at times, understanding that the purpose and level of human interaction in our respective jobs was inherently different. Looking at Rahim's (2001) types and levels of conflicts, what I experienced was an non-realistic conflict treated as of an interpersonal type. Had this issue been looked at closely and tried to understand its origin, I would argue that it should have been looked at as of an intragroup type.

What I experienced was an outburst and release of tension from what arguably was unfound and added to an already present joint feeling of distrust towards the CEO and the two salesmen. I think West(2012) sums up a superior-subordinate conflict very well in saying that “[t]he

resolution of a win–lose conflict not only may affect the behavior and attitudes of the parties for each other but also may affect organization structure” and that needed to be taken further into consideration.

## 2.2 Marie’s Strawberries and Marte’s 65 Signs

Working at Kollenfestivalen in Holmenkollen in Oslo back in the summer of 2012, I had the responsibility of procuring, producing and installing all signs, menus, sponsor materials and wayfinding information. All of the departments of the production mailed me their requirements, and then I was to produce internal or external estimates, get these approved, and get to work. One of the requests was of 65 pallet trestles from the traffic section, part of the service department, and they were to be used in wayfinding around the arena. On the evening of the day I had put a full team working to produce and finish these, I got a text from the leader of the traffic section, saying that they were no longer needed. I was already swamped with work, so was everyone else. And a whole day of wasted work was a day that I absolutely did not have. I reported the situation to my superior who told me that she would handle it.

The next morning there was a note and a box of strawberries on my desk. The head of the service department had left a note saying that they were going to dismantle the pallet trestles themselves and that she was sorry for the mishap. Both the leader of the traffic section and the head of the service department are good professional friends of mine, and they have both their spot on my aforementioned list.

There are essentially two things that separate this experience from the first one in terms of how a conflict was handled. First of all, all parties were in sync; me, my boss, the head of the service department and the leader of the traffic section all depended on each other to complete their jobs and therefore they all respected each other as members of a larger production and not only by their hierarchical position. Second, the nature of the conflict was different; there was ground for the mishap and there was a clear understanding of who had acted wrong. But at the same time, I give much of the credit to the difference in culture and in relationships. There was friction and tension in both the experiences but the former was due to a lack of understanding while the latter was resolved with understanding.

Ellemers et. al (2011), Carmeli et. al (2015) and Edmondson & Lei (2014) all show the importance of respect in terms of team performance. Ellemers et. al (2011) specifically, show that respect contributes to the feeling of social team identity and that this had an effect on willingness to invest in the team, and under a simplified comparison, I think that the same is apparent in these examples. Respect for each other, each others domains and each others values and value to the organization are all aspects that both are and is held up by the organization's culture. It might

be argued that the latter example was a set of teams while the former was bordered at being a group; although it was a creative agency, there was little collective collaboration, in the creative team just as well as the sales and production teams (Pardey, 2007; Wageman et. al, 2009). Looking at Salas et. al's (2009) five core components of teamwork and three coordinating mechanisms, the difference is due to the level of shared mental models whereas they are weak in the first and strong in the second example.

## 2.3 Contribute or Go Home

Under the last year of my undergrad in Oslo my class were going to execute an promotional event at the Norwegian Embassy in London for a high quality duvet company. In order to be able to execute this production everyone needed to participate to the fullest; for some, it meant spending up to 12 hours at school per day.

For a production that only has make-belief authority and sanctioning options, demanding members to adhere to this participation level can be difficult, and then there are all of the subcultures. Some members put the collective first, and understand that we are all here together, and that we all rely upon each others, but some members, for some reason have a mindset that their interests are more important than others, and cannot see that they fail to contribute (Eikaas 2015).

One day during this production, in the final stages of defining the concept, one badly participating member decided to go home some five or six hours early, for no other reason than selfishness. I put my hand down and blatantly, and loudly told him that we needed him here, that leaving now would leave the rest of us with more work.

To some degree, I saw myself contradict what I had already vowed not to do; to not exert power that wasn't mine. I went out of my way in an effort to put the foot down at unacceptable behaviour. Beyond unacceptable behaviour, me and the other member did not go very well together. I tend to expect very much from everyone. I tend to expect for everyone to want to contribute, to contribute or otherwise remove themselves from a project as I don't have the time to dwell on a lack of participation when everything then would be easier without them. This particular member did not seem very interested in taking part, nor were any part of the production explicitly relying on his contribution—yet at the same time, we could not throw him out, as I very much would have wanted.

This does probably go back to the fact that most, or all of my job experiences surround very hectic and stressing environments, as well as maybe a more binary understanding of what being a team member entails. Although I adhere to tall standards, doesn't mean that I don't sometimes slack off, that I don't participate, contribute or am attentive enough, but I want to, and I get frustrated when I don't, just as I would get frustrated if I were on the other side of the table.

Pardey (2007) opens one of his chapters with "Everyone is different." He goes on to say that "effective leadership depends on a contract between leaders and their followers, in which each person is offered something personal and specific to their needs in return for their commitment to follow the leader." In the above example, and excluding all other variables, the incentives did not entice the member enough to justify the effort. My main stand is that if he doesn't want to put in the effort, then neither does he want to be there, and then we don't really get anything in return for him being there. Depending on my need for him, I might handle it rather cynically and just categorically work around him, which I know wouldn't be the most considerate way, but in the heat of the moment I would rather care about getting things done than to mend his hurt feelings, or considering Porter et. al (2006); I would rather consider accomplishing the production's goals than re-establishing his intrinsic motivation. I am not saying this is the best or the most efficient approach—but I think occasions may call for it.

### <sup>3</sup> The Takeaways

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When it comes to organizations, how they work and how to lead them, there is nothing that interests me more than the culture; with an overarching culture at the top and fragmenting down by the way of diversity, department, social groups, personality. To me, leadership is the force that nudges people, that creates, supports and defuse culture from behind, while at the same time exemplify from the front. One of the main reasons for starting the course was the fact that I wanted to better understand the dynamics of how people interact within organizations. I wanted to better understand how to lead the people and not only manage the organization (Pardey, 2007, pp.5-9).

My leadership style depend on inclusion, on seeing, understanding and acting in accordance with the culture or subset of culture that I manage—or towards the culture it should be. I see effective culture as the cornerstone of all of my good experiences, and as the faultline in my bad experiences.

### 3.1 Rationality

I am also one for binary, pragmatic and rational decisions. I take my standpoint, stand by it and would like to think that only good rationale can overthrow it, although I know that I am subject to a good amount of bias whether I like it or not. I tend to think that this pragmatism is the same that drives my self-efficacy and the same that can't interpret the shades and levels of efficacy of others.

My leadership style has the advantage of being decisive and bound, but the disadvantage of being too stringent, non-relational and at various occasions autocratic. I have for the longest time observed this as by best strength and my worst weakness.

### 3.2 Acknowledgement

Although I might be demanding, I find it very important to observe the effort contributed by whoever I lead, and to ensure that their effort is acknowledged and appraised. Although it should be considered elementary, it was first when leading large sets of volunteer teams that I understood how much better a well-appraised team performed.

My leadership style draws a lot from my experience with leading volunteer teams—where I don't know a single soul beyond their name and the importance of appraisal is one of them.

### 3.3 Final thoughts

I have a clear understanding of how I act, I have a clear understanding of what I consider important and my strengths. What I don't have is a good understanding of how to better my weaknesses. I would like to think that my lack in people management skills—beyond introversion—is a matter of lacking experience, and I guess the only way to do better is to do more.

I will leave you with my big five and MBTI results;

Open to experience	77.5%	Introvert
Conscientious	80.0%	iNtuition
Extroversion	30.0%	Thinking
Agreeableness	42.5%	Judgment
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### 3 The Takeaways

When it comes to organizations, how they work and how to lead them, there is nothing that interests me more than the culture; with an overarching culture at the top and fragmenting down by the way of diversity, department, social groups, personality. To me, leadership is the force that nudges people, that creates, supports and defuse culture from behind, while at the same time exemplify from the front. One of the main reasons for starting the course was the fact that I wanted to better understand the dynamics of how people interact within organizations. I wanted to better understand how to lead the people and not only manage the organization (Pardey, 2007, pp.5-9).

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