

LEADERSHIP TRIANGLE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Focusing on the various stages to becoming an expert manager, this paper delves into details as to how a manager could equip himself with skills to lead his team effectively. Being able to rationalize and think critically and being able to analyse the strategic environment are some of the pre-requisites of a successful manager. This paper uses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory as its edifice to build a new framework called the 'Leadership Triangle'. This newly created framework called the 'Leadership Triangle' studies every organ of the various stages that constitutes to becoming an expert manager and leader. Stages begin with being a beginner manager to progressing to an advanced manager and then an expert. The framework develops a triangle with the beginner as the starting level of leadership stage and the expert level of leaders being at the apex. For a clearer understanding, this research also briefly discusses the difference between more effective, less effective and efficient manager (Kepner & Tregoe, 1981). To gain a better insight, there is also focus laid on understanding how a good manager must work for his team ensuring his support for his team 24/7 (Townsend, 2007). The above appears paramount to gain that trust, confidence and support from all the members of the team.

The paper finally concludes with discussing the chief areas of difference between a manager and a good leader and further provides a clear insight into how a manager can transform to a good leader by being able to initiate the change and cope with that change. Providing that much-needed motivation, being able to innovate and integrate resources and also communicate clearly the key strategic missions and objectives of the organisation provides a fitting epilogue to this paper.

Keywords: Manager, Expert, Leader, Competent, Leadership Triangle, Communicate, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Strategic Mission and Objectives

1. Introduction

'*Capax Imperii Nisi Imperisat*' meaning he would have gone down capable of ruling if he had not ruled at all. This apothem signals the need to be an effective leader. This paper starts off with a relevant question supporting the above maxim *in principio*-what makes a good leader? Clearly, this timeless question has an answer more complex. Although studies reveal that leadership traits in people appear innate, this paper clearly brings out that this skill called leadership is more acquired than innate. With this idea, another propositum of this paper is pertaining to what could be the essence of a true leader. A simple definition would be that a good leader exhibits his or her ability to find meaning in negative events and learn from even the most trying circumstance. Therefore, possessing skills to conquer adversity, ability to acquire that confidence and valour are a few powerful traits a true leader could hold. Having a self-reflection of who they are, a good leader is able to hone their judgement by questioning their

assumption. In essence, all the above alongside Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework forms the genesis of leadership crucibles based on which the Leadership Triangle - NACE framework is designed.

The proposed NACE Framework expounds that no matter what be the level of managerial expertise, there is a fervent need to have a judicious combination of hardiness, ability to grasp context to survive any blasphemy and hone the actions through epiphany. Quite evidently, this forms a base for that stronger, committed and a more engaged leader. Irrespective of the profession, a leader in making seems to go through this hermeneutic circle of existence to inhabit their own practice and develop their own idiosyncratic identity (Segal, n.d). Research also delineates that learning to be a venerable leader not only involves knowing what we know and can do, but also understanding who we want to mould ourselves to be. When applying this to our NACE framework, a linear progression of a leader from Novice level through to an Expert level does involve putting into effective use the plethora of knowledge gathered through a dozen professional experiences. These experiences clarify what a leader knows, what an expert leader can do and how the leader can succeed in moulding himself / herself into an effective leader. This interrelated chain creates that inevitable hermeneutic circle of professional development. Through the above, this paper also signals the lesser possibility of innate leadership skills.

2. Essential Skills of a Leader and the NACE framework

Moving on, this paper aims to highlight the four essential traits that good leaders normally possess (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). While some believe these qualities to be innate, others believe these qualities get a shine as the leader progresses through to the Expert level from starting off as a Novice.

- A) Ability to engage others: exhibiting an inclusive approach in key decision-making process that promotes a sense of belonging.
- B) A distinctive and compelling voice that helps diffuse any situation
- C) A sense of integrity with a strong focus on values
- D) Adaptive capacity that portrays the capability to transcend any situation, grasp the context and emerge more powerful than before.

Using the above essential traits in the proposed framework, the initial phase of leadership called the 'Novice' is where epiphany sets in. Managing the existing welter of factors through linear progression, the 'Advanced Beginner' clearly appears to have a better grasp of this hotchpotch. Raising up to the level of a 'Competent' leader expounds the ability to persevere through the hardiness. Toughness of an 'Expert' leader is visible through the power of the leader to successfully emerge from any tumultuous circumstance. Recapitulating the Hermeneutic Circle, this mire of circular qualities creates an effective leader.

Prior to introducing the proposed NACE framework, as earlier mentioned in this paper, Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs is being discussed in depth for a sound understanding of how the suggested Leadership Triangle has evolved.

3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Whilst using Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2017), studies reveal how a few organisations not only focus on the daily functioning of the business operations, but also pay fair attention to the wellbeing of its employees and customers, who form the stakeholders of an organisation. With leadership skills being considered an acquired skill by others, studies make it apparent that although a leader is expected to be sharp and tough, this term 'tough' seems to be thought of as a misfit under certain circumstances (Meyerson, 1996), especially if a leader needs

to promote safety, security and self-esteem among the team. More than vesting the authority, an encompassing attitude appears to make a leader more complete; this ability to fulfil the highest needs constitutes the apex entity of self-actualisation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Delving deeper into the other entities used in Maslow's hierarchy framework, the safety, belongingness and self-esteem factors coupled with physiological factors play a fair share in a leader being effective in mastering the much-required team work and the art of thinking together. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is best described using the following diagram(McLeod, 2017)



Having a basic understanding of what the above hierarchy framework entails, the first four levels are being considered deficiency needs (D-Needs) and the apex level of self-actualisation is termed growth or being needs (B-Needs). While deficiency needs arise due to deprivation, it has the unique capacity to motivate people to strive harder for them to achieve their basic needs which in turn help people to attain the fulfilment of their highest needs or growth. Growth clearly, does not emanate from a lack of something, but is that inner desire of a person to grow to the next level.

Using a similar framework as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the proposed Leadership Triangle or NACE framework is diagrammatically shown below for a quick introduction. The framework is explained in depth in its relevant section.

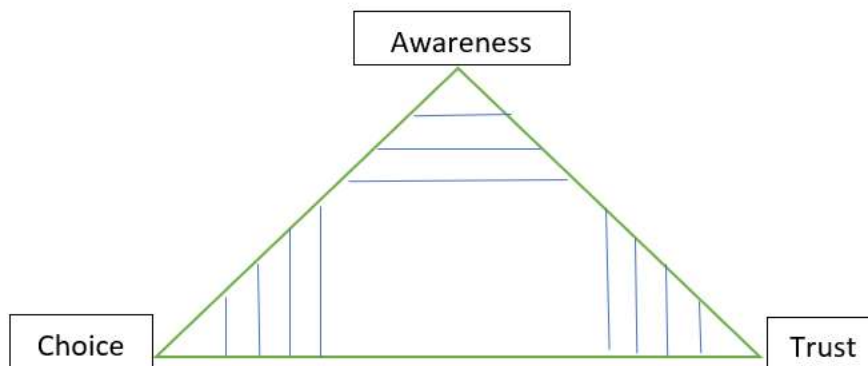


It is evident from various research that teams that have been formed because of long time working together agree to disagree and are appreciative of each other's thinking. Applying this tenet to the NACE framework, an Expert and a fairly Competent leader uses more of a collaborative approach and an inclusive method of teamwork to involve members in the decision-making process to have them motivated. A Novice and an Advanced beginner could still be considered a tenderfoot in involving and motivating the team. Addressing the entities 'esteem' and 'belonging' as mentioned by Maslow, Expert leaders through an honest, open communication build a venerable position for themselves and a positive impact of belonging to both team and organisation. Thus, irrespective of the stage in leadership, suggestion through this paper is that an effective leader is more genuine.

This paper focuses primarily on self-actualisation, which is at the apex in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, expounds that to achieve the fulfilment of needs and attain the desired growth, learning and change play a mammoth role. Both of these are inextricably intertwined along with the first four levels or the D-needs mentioned in the hierarchy of needs. Learning and change does involve choice and self-initialisation of change that eventually paves the way for self-actualisation. To make this self-actualisation very fulfilling, there appears to be 3 principles that are discussed later in this paper such as: 1) awareness, 2) Choice and 3) trust, with each of these being sagaciously interrelated.

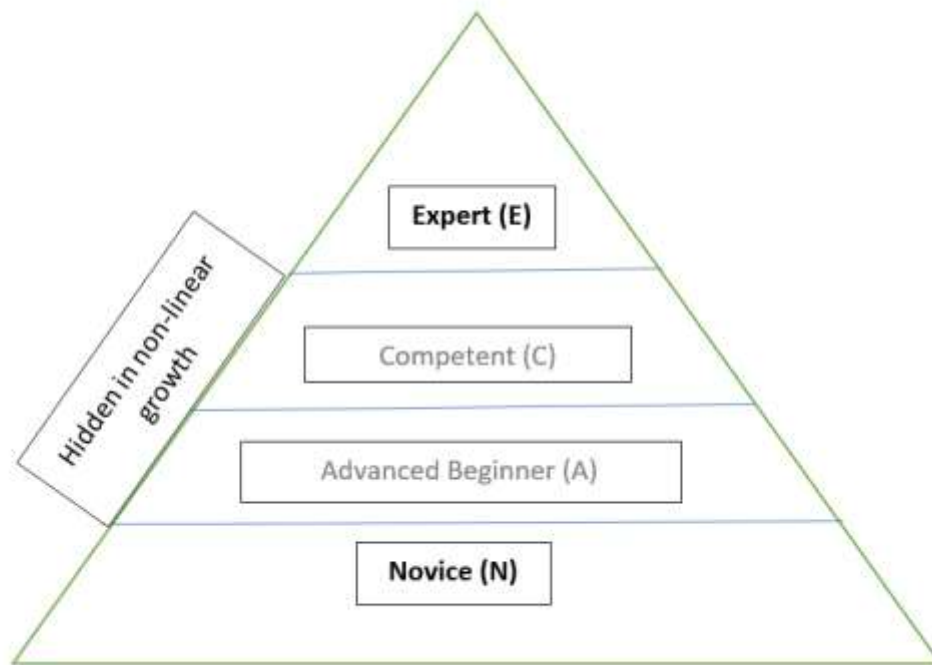
4. The Leader Triangle- NACE Framework

Using the above-mentioned principles in the NACE framework, evidently, as a leader progresses linearly from being a Novice through to an Expert, having that awareness and clarity about the current situation seems paramount. The next principle 'choice' denotes this linear progression as a matter of choice for the respective individual and finally the principle of 'trust' in our own inner resource is yet another major component that contributes towards the fulfilment of needs or self-actualisation. When represented diagrammatically(Gallwey, n.d),



Before progressing to becoming an Expert leader, this paper aims to discuss the NACE framework that has been diagrammatically shown in the earlier part of this paper. Recapitulating the diagram, clearly, the linear progression from being a Novice through to an Expert leader is explicitly brought out. Studies also indicate that in some instances, the progression in leadership is non-linear(Dall' Alba, n.d). A non-linear growth is represented in the following diagram as shown below and is designed for this framework.

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The above diagram expounds how a novice leader transforms to becoming an expert when a situation demands, however, the novice still goes through the hidden stages of both advanced beginner and a competent leader to gain experience in his decision-making powers before actually reaching the Expert Level. Albeit, the non-linear progression that may presumably happen, the leader still completes the entire journey covering all the hidden stages of growth systematically.

This paper assumes a linear progression in the stages of leadership for ease and convenience and goes further into discussing the four different types of questions that leaders ask everyday namely (Kepner & Tregoe, 1981):

- 1) What is going on?
- 2) Why did this happen?
- 3) Which course of action need to be taken?
- 4) What lies ahead?

When observed closely, these questions find answers in the following four areas such as: seeking clarifications to know what is actually going on, critical and effective thinking to understand why a thing has happened, choice or course of action that is less reactive and finally, the ability to assess the problem such that an appropriate decision could be made as an effective solution for now and the foreseeable future.

It is apparent that irrespective of whether it is an expert or a novice leader, the above patterns of thinking are universally applicable to all stages of leadership. Solutions to questions such as the above, seem to help managers deal with complexity, find suitable solutions and make rational decisions by better anticipating the concerns that may arise from time to time. As against a novice or an advanced beginner, who may possibly be an amateur in effective decision-making process, it becomes an incumbent strength with a competent and expert leader. Most certainly, an expert or a competent leader is well placed to forecast any future problems that may arise within the organisation forecasting, making key strategic decisions and succinctly communicating the cause and effect of the decision-making to the rest of the organisation.

Effectively, this clear communication of the key strategic moves is less profound with novice leaders. It may be observed that the epiphany of skills gains prominence as leaders' progress both in a linear and non-linear manner from being a novice through to becoming an expert manager. Quite evidently, when elevated to a position of either a competent or expert leader, a holistic progression involves the competency to be able to lead the organisation as a team, communicate clearly and master the art of thinking together as one unit.

It may be recalled from the early part of this paper that though the members of a team may be appreciative of each other's ideas, they are sometimes bereft of the thought of thinking together. The ability of an expert manager is to be able to groom the workplace and ensure an *ad idem* thought process which in turn calls for expertise in leadership and communication. When an expert manager succeeds in formulating a common approach in decision-making, the very idea of team-building is more evenly poised. This forms the genesis of a balanced team with critically evaluated decisions. The lack of a culminating point in the decision-making process makes a position of leadership challenging.

Marrying Maslow's theory with the proposed NACE framework, a novice leader progressing up the ladder in a linear fashion to becoming a competent and then an expert in leadership style is assumed to have had a good grasp of all the entities as stated in the hierarchy of needs framework namely, physiological, safety, belonging, self-esteem. Having fulfilled all the needs, the expert now sits in the position of having achieved a self-actualisation. Going through all the stages of leadership and all the entities mentioned in Maslow's hierarchy of needs signals the attainment of explorative and inquisitive mind for a continuous improvement or 'Kaizen'(Choudhary, n.d.). This overall fulfilment is what leads to the final step called 'self-actualisation' In Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework.

Taking a closer look at each of these stages, we observe the following:

- A) Novice: A beginner leader who has either progressed in a linear or a non-linear way may or may not have the experience in thinking critically and rationally to be able to foresee the future. They may or may not make sound or long-sighted decisions encompassing team's ideas.
- B) Advanced beginner: Experiencing a linear growth from the previous stage of novice, this stage portrays more experience in understanding the team's concerns and operations. An advanced beginner is better equipped with information to make informed decisions.
- C) Competent: Progression to a more experienced level of a leader is where the leader is able to achieve team cohesiveness and amalgamation of ideas; further, the leader is in a position to make informed and rational decisions. From an angle of experience, a competent leader has an operational efficiency closer to that of a manager.
- D) Expert: Although progression to this level could be either linear or non-linear, an expert manager is known to have the experience, motivation, spontaneity in thought and action, concern for the welfare of his team (that highlights the first four levels or the D-needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory), This implies that it provides an opportunity to his team to have physiological, safety, security, self-esteem all of which contribute towards achieving self-actualisation as mentioned in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is evident that the apex entity of self-actualisation is holistic rather than being piecemeal.

Through this paper, it is made evident that irrespective of the kind of progression a leader makes, that is, a linear progression (from being a novice, crossing the various stages organically through to becoming an expert), or a non-linear progression (wherein, a novice leader progresses straight to becoming an expert leader), a novice leader is definitely regarded as a learner in bringing about cohesion and key strategic decision-making process. While a novice leader is still in the experimental or learning phase of leadership, an advanced beginner is

clearly better placed to begin with an effective practice of people management, conflict management and the enormous ability to handle any situation comparably easily. To maintain a sense of belonging and esteem amongst the staff, rather than a stressful work environment, a more balanced approach and capability to pull the team along is very important. An advanced beginner through to an expert leader seems to be better capable of looking into the future and foreseeing issues and making proactive decisions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in a dynamic work environment, a novice leader would gain as much experience when grabbing opportunities one after another to gather the required experience of being able to forecast strategic issues and in making key strategic decisions. By the way of preparing for the next level of leadership, leaders in both novice and advanced beginner stages are expected to learn the capabilities to manage dually their team reporting to them and their senior leadership team above them. To achieve this, clearly, a transparent way of working with less murkiness and obscurity seems handy. With this handy rich experience, a competent leader is thought of to be well-equipped in making some key decisions that seem comparable to the level of an expert. Having the capacity to coach the team, both competent and expert leaders are believed to be more groomed in their role as an effective leader.

From all the above, an expert leader is found to have the following traits that assist with effectively leading the organisation, namely,

- 1) Being self-aware and being better placed to anticipate disruptions, able to see the distant future of the organisation and handle any situation with courage and confidence.
- 2) Having sound management experience that helps with better empowering of their employees. As mentioned in the earlier parts of this paper, an experienced leader seems more equipped with the tact of maintaining team cohesiveness and getting the team actively involved in key decision making. With every team having diverse ideas, it becomes important to have good ideas contributing towards the key decision-making process. Clearly, this is one area of learning for a novice manager.
- 3) A good leader is able to elicit answers from his team and appears well able to coach his team by understanding their needs, empowering the team to contribute better which builds up their belonging and esteem. Quite obviously, empowering the staff with better capacity to participate in the organisation's activities provides for a multi-dimensional view towards the solution to a problem. This capability is seen as one of the key assets that an expert manager carries along and it is one of those key traits that both novice and advanced beginners master as they progress either in a linear or non-linear way.

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