

The Style and Practice of Leadership within Law Enforcement

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The style of leadership in the law enforcement agencies is going through a transformational phase. Gone are the days when police leadership was the mere rhetoric of a solitary leader. The current practice of police leadership revolves around virtues such as integrity, wisdom, care for subordinates, organizational commitment, sheer will and commitment to change. It has seen the emergence of a dynamic, dispersed and multifaceted leadership. Police chiefs are slowly adapting a participatory style of leadership and management which encourages collaboration in the decision-making process. The most pronounced leadership approach is the shared leadership. Shared leadership is a top-down approach where the leader diffuses influence and power to colleagues who are below his or her rank for the benefit of achieving organizational or group goals. Furthermore, shared leadership demystifies the concept that power should be concentrated and bestowed only on a solitary leader or a few superiors (Chiu, 2014). As such, positional leaders adopt a downward leverage on subordinates that value the knowledge, capacity and each member's contribution.

Shared leadership has exponential benefits in its approach and practice. Firstly, this approach encourages and appreciates suggestions from all employees in a police unit where each one of them has a fair chance to provide information. The idea that this approach of leadership epitomizes an open culture in a police unit or organization has a long way of welcoming free exchange of ideas. The strength of this mode of communication and culture is that aspects, such as supervision by the individuals in authority are minimal (Gallagher, 2012). Secondly, shared leadership gives other employees in the police agency autonomy over working conditions and situations. The law enforcement officers especially at the unit level, can be involved in the decision-making process concerning domains such as policing, problem-solving, crime

prevention and strategic planning. Thirdly, shared leadership is strong on self-leadership whereby an individual needs to understand himself or herself and his role in impacting the people around him or her (Gallagher, 2012). This approach continually encourages an individual to change and learn more through self-management and self-regulation.

As with any noble idea such as shared leadership, there is a need to address the potential drawbacks. For instance, highly creative individuals are effective when they work by themselves as compared to being involved in group tasks or team members. Furthermore, leadership is more than diffusing power and tasks to subordinates. Therefore, shared leadership is not the ultimate solution to devolved power but a tool that may enable a leader to accomplish his or her tasks. Shared leadership works best in an organizational environment where the employees have the same or almost similar experience, knowledge, information and skills (Peus, Braun, & Schyns, 2016). This reality is not always the case for the majority of employees in an organization and may lead to conflicts about direction and differences in egos such as the question of who has the greatest influence in implementing decisions.

The most effective leadership style that law enforcement leaders should turn attention to in future is the affiliative style. This leadership approach concentrates on the value and trust of employees by the leader, which in turn encourages risk-taking, flexibility and constant innovation (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). The affiliative leader, a police chief, for instance, does not impose unnecessary constraints on law enforcement officers which gives his or her followers the freedom to perform their task in the most effective way. The affiliative approach also recognizes and rewards employees for the well-done work which is particularly valued due to the high-risk nature of law enforcement officers' work. The reason this style of

leadership is the most befitting for the law enforcement agencies in future is that it builds a sense of belonging to the organization.

Visionary leadership may also go a long way in revolutionizing the law enforcement agencies. This approach to leadership is such that a leader inspires his or her followers to move together towards a desired position in the future (Iszatt-White & Saunders, 2014). Visionary leadership is most pronounced when a company or brand is attempting to enter a new market with a product that does not resemble the already available products in the market. In such a case, a visionary leader sets a new direction for employees to follow. He or she does so by allowing them to share the future's perspective and make them understand that they are an integral part of the success of the organization's vision (Iszatt-White & Saunders, 2014). Some of the qualities that a visionary leader has include vivid imagination, strong conviction, empowering relationships and courageous action.

Admittedly, law enforcement in the modern age needs to become more adaptive to change in the increasingly complex environment that presents different challenges. It is fair to argue that collaboration among all units and groups is important if this change is to take place. Shared leadership provides an opportunity for open engagement and a top-down delegation of power from positional leaders. Benefits of this approach include involvement of all employees, autonomy over working conditions, and self-leadership. Furthermore, the law enforcement agency needs to adopt an affiliative approach of leadership in the future that provides a sense of belonging. Aspects of visionary leadership also go a long way in bringing employees to a shared goal.

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