Essay 3
Reducing Organizational Miasma

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Leadership Seminar

Nova Southeastern University
December 5, 2006

Introduction

During recent years organizations have implemented expanded equal opportunity statements, begun diversity and inclusion programs, and implemented multitudes of other programs in an attempt to provide a workplace atmosphere that is respectful to all and which supports everyone's complete identity. The intentions of these initiatives are founded in a vision for a harmonious workplace atmosphere; however, as Livers and Caver (2004) discuss, a sole vision and even implemented initiatives may not result in the desired atmosphere. The discussion the authors provide is focused around the inclusion of African Americans into the workplace atmosphere. Even though the organization supports diversity and inclusion, there is a common naivety to the actual atmosphere. This naivety is on the part of the leadership who perceive the vision has become a reality when in actuality, the African American employees feel otherwise. Livers and Caver refer to this as organizational miasma.

In a similar situation to what Livers and Caver describe, organization A is experiencing miasma. Within organization A, there is a false perception that those employees in leadership roles act as leaders. It is suspected that this miasmic situation is due to the hierarchical separation between senior leaders and junior leaders. The senior leaders have made strides to implement an atmosphere that fosters individual leaders and recognizes that each employee has the capability (Armitage, J., Brooks, N., Carlen, M., & Schulz, S., 2006) to be a leader in his or her own way. When the view is from the bottom up, the junior leaders express their challenge to be a leader because they lack formal leadership training, are unsure how they align to the organizational vision, and do not know how to have creative discussions when differences arise. It is important to note that each of the junior leaders desires to be a good leader; therefore, when senior leaders meet with junior leaders, the miasma is not noticed.

Livers and Caver offer suggestions for what individuals, managers, and organizations can do to reduce the effects of miasma. On an individual basis, the core suggestion can be summed up into one message—be proactive. Individuals should not wait to be handed something; rather, if the individual desires something, the individual should proactively go after it. Managers have many more suggestions which could help reduce the miasma. Generally, these suggestions revolve around discovering the perceptions of others and expanding one's knowledge of their situation. For example, it may be years since a senior leader struggled to become a senior leader; therefore, the senior leader may need to reorient to that situation. Another example in which managers can attack miasma is to proactively surface suspected issues. For the managers in organization A, each could approach the junior leaders individually or as a group to discuss leadership. From the junior leaders' perspective they will feel that the manager has noticed their issues and is responding to their needs. At the organization level, the opportunities are much more global. Some opportunities for organization A at the organizational level are to show junior leaders how they fit into the strategic vision and to create an internal network for leader development. Using these suggestions, it is proposed that organization A implement an internal leaders network; work with the junior leaders to link their role to the strategic vision; and create a forum for and demonstrate creative discussions when differences surface.

<div align="center">An Internal Leaders Network</div>

It is not enough for senior leaders to only express their desire for all employees to act as leaders; the organization should also support this desire and offer the means to proliferate leadership (Gant, L., 2004). The formation of an internal leaders network may provide the means to achieving the senior leaders' desire. The junior leaders have already expressed a desire to learn about being a leader. This network could act as the environment in which to conduct

leadership training. Guest speakers or formalized workshops would provide opportunities for learning. Additionally, junior leaders could use the network as a peer network in which brainstorming solutions to challenging situations could occur. And, as a final thought, senior leaders and junior leaders can mix in this network to share experiences for personal and professional development.

<center>Links to Strategic Vision</center>

In an organization such as organization A where there are layers and layers of leaders, it is not surprising to find the leaders who are buried at the deepest level confused or even unaware of the strategic vision. A strategic vision is a desired state of operations with a path and plan attached (Clawson, J., 2006). For an organization to be successful, all employees need to be aware of the vision and strategy in which the vision will become reality. If employees are unaware or confused about this, opportunities for failure may arise. Eicher (2006) discusses some common challenges with achieving a vision and following a strategy. He states that the act of developing visions and strategies has become second-nature for most organizations. The part that organizations struggle with is making the strategy happen. Eicher offers this direction: "to make strategy happen, executives need to work with all levels of the organization to plug the gaps between strategic thinking (knowing) and tactical action (getting), enabling midlevel managers and their direct reports to successfully implement needed change" (p. 31).

Organization A can benefit by acting on Eicher's direction. Because the junior leaders desire to be effective leaders, it is likely they will eagerly work with the senior leaders to implement a strategy. Working together allows for development on all parts. The senior leaders may, through this interaction, discover the strategy is not appropriate for the true operational environment. Having this knowledge firsthand allows the senior leaders to evolve the strategy

quicker than if the knowledge had to be passed upward from the junior leaders. The junior leaders, through this interaction, should begin to recognize how their role and actions are vital to the success of the organization. Also, the interaction should create an atmosphere of comfortable communication between all leaders at every level of the organization. This type of open atmosphere is essential to the third opportunity to reduce miasma for organization A.

<div align="center">Forums for Creative Discussions</div>

Effective communication between parties is often the solution to many workplace issues. There are some issues, like the ones described by Livers and Caver, which are sensitive, and in turn, are difficult to discuss. Livers and Cavers suggest that proactively surfacing these sensitive issues in the proper forum reduces the common challenge. This proactive approach may also support transformational change. Faure (2006) presents this idea as a method to making change efforts work. He relates this to the shared desire by all parties to achieve the vision, rather than a desire to change the norm. So, if creative discussions are conducted as a means of changing the atmosphere, then the proactive approach could expedite the process or provide more assurance for success. One way to conduct creative discussions is explained through Faure's concept of appreciative inquiry (AI). Appreciative inquiry is an "approach to managing change in human systems" (Faure, 2006, p. 23). The purpose of AI is to "[(a)] set a positive tone; [(b)] value the participants; [(c)] create personal connections; [(d)] reduce differences; [and (e)] reduce anxiety" (p.23). Therefore, in an organization that is suffering from miasma around issues which are sensitive, a forum in which AI can be conducted may offer a means to reducing or eliminating the miasma, in addition to setting the stage of successful change.

For organization A, the miasma is about a difference between what the senior leaders desire (and perceive to be supporting) and how the junior leaders react and perform. A proposed

approach to resolving this difference is to conduct a proactive discussion and apply AI. It is suspected that senior leaders are mostly unaware of the challenges the junior leaders state as barriers to success. Because of this naivety, the opportunity exists for any discussion between the senior leaders and junior leaders to become sensitive. This is reason to use an AI approach.

In Faure's (2006) article, he describes an AI implementation as a multi-phase project, some of which occurs in a face-to-face workshop environment. A similar implementation may work for organization A. For the first phase, the senior leaders could proactively engage the issue. In some form of communication, the senior leaders could state they recognize the challenge and are preparing a project to reduce or eliminate the challenge. The second phase is to conduct a variety of AIs with the participants (both senior leaders and junior leaders). A multi-day workshop that addresses the findings from the AIs, creates forums for exploration of leadership, and team building activities is phase three. After the workshop is the final phase, which is a return back to the work environment and application of the techniques everyone came to consensus upon.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Like many organizations, organization A suffers from some miasma. In this situation, the miasma is not about diversity issues; rather it is about junior leader capability. The environment is perceived by senior leaders as one that supports the junior leaders; however, the junior leaders experience a different environment due to a few barriers. Once the miasma is recognized, actions can be taken to reduce or eliminate these barriers. Techniques such as internal networks, linking roles to the strategic vision, and creating a forum for creative discussions may be used to achieve this goal. When appropriately implemented, it is suspected that the desired atmosphere for leadership at all levels will be achieved.

References

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