Building Creative, Mutual, and Actively Supportive Relationships and Developing Theories of Mind
An Initial Inquiry

Introduction

Virtually nothing happens in any group or organization outside of the context of a human relationship. The heart of the definitions of leadership and management consist in practicing the arts of getting things accomplished through others. Implicitly and explicitly, leaders are recruited and promoted for their ability to build strong working relationships with others and to find, recruit, and select others with the same knowledge, ability, skill, experience, and personal characteristics.

Despite the centrality of these competencies, there is no contemporary textbook on leadership that spends a significant amount of time on how individuals in these positions can accomplish this most important and ongoing task. In order to understand the essentials of relationship development, we can turn to current psychodynamic theory. One of its major branches has emphasized the central importance of humans having early and sustained experiences inside of secure human relationships and the capacity to engage in their development and maintenance in reflective ways. Dennett (1989) and Fonagy (2005), and Kilburg (2006) have provided detailed treatments of many of these essentials.

One key to being able to create effective relationships involved the ability to build accurate mental and emotional maps of the people with whom we engage. The terms used in this literature are “Theories of Mind” and Theories of Mind of Others.” Research and theory suggest that infants begin formulating primitive understandings of the intentions of others and deliberately interacting with them based on such patterns in the first year of life (Dennett, 1989; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2005; Klein, 1999, 2003). While these exchanges remain devoid of words to describe them, they are visible and repeatable in scientific studies.

How then can leaders become more effective at building theories of their own minds and those of the others on whom they most depend? Extensive arrays of the interpersonal skills they are expected to have are well documented in the literature and in virtually every multi-rater assessment instrument (Bolton, 1986; Hargie, 2006; Kilburg, 2000, 2012; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2011). Crucial to building theories of mind are the abilities to be both curious about and empathize oneself and others. The easiest way to do so is to develop the ability to inquire systematically about oneself and others. Kilburg, (2006, 2012) provided detailed lists of questions that can be used as part of such a process. What follows is a brief overview of questions and topics leaders can explore on their own to continue to construct their theory of their own mind and to engage key colleagues in a mutual effort to create a deeper understanding of their minds.
Questions and Topics to Help Formulate a Theory of Mind (TOM and TOMO – Theory of Mind of Others).

1. What are your primary dimensions of diversity?
   a. Age
   b. Race
   c. Ethnicity
   d. Physical Capacities
   e. Gender
   f. Sexual Orientation

2. What are your secondary dimensions of diversity?
   a. Work background
   b. Geographical location and history of moves
   c. Marital status
   d. Military experience
   e. Religion/beliefs
   f. Education
   g. Parental status
   h. Income

3. What other significant dimensions of diversity are relevant to you and your working relationships?
   a. Hot buttons and triggers to injury, anger, frustration, anxiety, and conflict?
   b. Major personality characteristics
      i. Extraversion-Introversion
      ii. Openness to experience
      iii. Agreeableness
      iv. Conscientiousness
      v. Neuroticism
   c. Intelligences
      i. Linguistic
      ii. Musical
      iii. Logical-Mathematical
      iv. Spatial
      v. Bodily-Kinesthetic
      vi. Personal
   d. Preferred types of thinking/styles
   e. Components of emotional intelligence
   f. Virtues – courage, temperance, justice, reverence, wisdom, etc.
   g. Vices – cowardice, intemperance, psychopathy/unjust, irreverent, stupidity
   h. Interpersonal games preferred (See Berne, 19)
   i. Preferred leadership style
      i. Visionary
      ii. Charismatic
      iii. Transformational
      iv. Transactional
      v. Autocratic
      vi. Democratic
      vii. Laissez-faire
      viii. Servant
      ix. Exploitative
      x. Authentic
   j. Preferred conflict style
      i. Avoiding
      ii. Accommodating
      iii. Compromising
      iv. Competing
      v. Collaborating
   k. What are your/his-her politics?
      i. Who wants what, who gets what, why and how?
   l. What are your major likes?
   m. What are your major dislikes?
   n. Who are hero’s to you?
   o. Who are villains to you?
p. Who are/were your best teachers, mentors, role models coaches? Why?
q. Who are/were your worst teachers, mentors, role models coaches? Why?

4. My best interpersonal skills are:
   a. Communications
   b. Problem solving
   c. Decision making
   d. Influencing
   e. Managing Conflict
   f. Creating intimacy
   g. Exploring and managing dimensions of diversity

5. My, his/her best leadership and management skills are:
   a. Business Acumen
   b. Functional Technical Skills
   c. Technical Learning
   d. Decision Quality
   e. Intellectual Horsepower
   f. Learning on the Fly
   g. Problem Solving
   h. Dealing with Ambiguity
   i. Creativity
   j. Innovation Management
   k. Perspective
   l. Strategic Agility
   m. Timely Decision Making
   n. Priority Setting
   o. Organizing
   p. Planning
   q. Time Management
   r. Delegation
   s. Developing Direct Reports and Others
   t. Informing
   u. Managing and Measuring Work
   v. Process Management
   w. Managing Through Systems
   x. Total Work Systems
   y. Command Skills
   z. Conflict Management
   aa. Confronting Direct Reports
   bb. Managerial Courage Other than Direct Reports
   cc. Standing Alone
   dd. Hiring and Staffing
   ee. Sizing Up People
   ff. Action Oriented
   gg. Perseverance
   hh. Drive for Results
   ii. Organizational Savvy
   jj. Political Savvy
   kk. Presentation Skills
   ll. Written Communications
   mm. Career Ambition
   nn. Comfort Around Higher Management
   oo. Approachability
   pp. Interpersonal Savvy
   qq. Caring About Direct Reports
   rr. Compassion
   ss. Boss Relationships
   tt. Customer Focus
   uu. Managing Diversity
   vv. Fairness to Direct Reports
   ww. Peer Relationships
   xx. Understanding Others (Groups)
   yy. Motivating Others
   zz. Negotiating
   aaa. Building Effective Teams
   bbb. Managing Vision and Purpose
   ccc. Ethics and Values
   ddd. Integrity and Trust
   eee. Composure
   fff. Humor
   ggg. Patience
   hhh. Personal Disclosure
   iii. Dealing with Paradox
   jjj. Self-Development
   kkk. Self-Knowledge
   lll. Work/Life Balance
6. How would you summarize and describe your theory of mind about this person?

References


