

LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR MANAGERS

An Adlerian Approach

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Adlerian theory—a social model of human behavior—provides an effective framework to improve managerial practices and enhance organizational leadership. Developed by Alfred Adler (1870–1937), founder of the influential school of individual psychology, Adlerian theory promotes principles of social interest, democracy, and encouragement. These principles may guide leaders in building collaborative, productive workforces through participative management, coaching, and employee engagement. Experiential training exercises that integrate Adlerian principles can help managers expand their interpersonal competencies and increase leadership effectiveness.

Since the mid-1970s, organizations have transitioned from autocratic, authoritarian management practices to more collaborative, employee-engagement approaches. The movement away from hierarchical bureaucracy to egalitarian participation evolved from the social, political, and economic pressures of low workplace productivity in the 1960s and 1970s and continued in the 1980s and 1990s, when employee motivation, productivity, and innovation became priority concerns (Branch, Peffer, Ruegg, & Vallario, 2001). Lawler (1996) noted that interest in participative management began to rise in the 1980s with the realization that more effective management practices and employee-relations programs could provide a competitive advantage to public and private sector organizations. The literature reflects recognition among U.S. academicians and managers that high-productivity, high-wage economies require management practices that involve employees in decision making, stimulate

and challenge workers intellectually, and include all levels of staff in profit sharing (Branch et al., 2001).

Managers can create high-productivity workplaces by appealing to employees' sense of workplace community and motivating a shared desire for achieving organizational goals. Goleman's (1998) and Goldsmith's (2004) assertions that managerial success is related not to technical competence but to interpersonal effectiveness might explain why some progressive business organizations include components of counseling theory in managerial training and development programs. Rational emotive theory (Spillane, 1982), Gestalt psychology (Clark, 1988), and Jungian psychology (Bringhurst, 2001) have all been used to influence managerial attitudes and business practices. Recently, Adlerian psychology has been rediscovered as an effective conceptual framework for increasing interpersonal effectiveness in a variety of settings (Manaster, 2003).

A body of literature exists supporting the application of Adlerian concepts to the workplace (Ferguson, 1996; Ferguson, 1999; Ferguson & Page, 2006; Miranda & Goodman, 1996; Nelson, 1999; Page & Ferguson, 2005; Sperry, 1995). However, very little research has addressed the applicability of Adlerian psychology to leadership training and development (Bluckert, 2005; Davison & Gasiorowski, 2006). The purpose of this article is to explore how organizations can use the Adlerian principles of social interest, encouragement, and democracy to train managers on three critical management competencies: participative management, coaching, and engagement. Managers who demonstrate these competencies can enhance their leadership skills and improve organizational performance.

Managerial Effectiveness

The first-line manager is the primary point of contact for creating positive employee relations and developing a participative, collaborative culture. However, as Wren (1994) noted, the first-line manager often plays a conflicting role, pitting organizational goals against employee needs. First-line managers have accountability for “meeting the logic of efficiency . . . with the nonlogic of worker sentiments. The conflict revolve[s] around the premise that it [is] a rare supervisor who possess[es] technical and economic skills as well as human relations skills” (p. 251). Hogan (2002) noted that 60% to 75% of the employees in any organization report the worst or most stressful aspect of their job is the relationship with their immediate supervisor. Unsatisfactory supervisor-employee relationships often result in low employee morale, high absenteeism, rapid turnover rates, insubordination, and industrial sabotage (Hogan, 2002).

Lawler (1996) noted effective managers require an interpersonal skill set that includes group facilitation, counseling, and participative goal setting. Business leaders have become increasingly aware that managers’ interpersonal effectiveness is as important as academic degrees or technical expertise in impacting organizational success. According to Goldsmith (2004), employees’ interpersonal competence becomes more important as they achieve more visible leadership status. Most job candidates are hired based on their technical and functional abilities, but these skills recede into the background as individuals assume more prominent leadership positions. Goldsmith (2004, p. 8) stated:

It’s not enough to be smart. You have to be smart—and something else. At some point, you get the bene-

fit of the doubt on skill issues. For example, we assume our doctors know medicine, so we judge them on their bedside manner. And not many people remember that Jack Welch has a PhD [sic] in chemical engineering. That’s because none of the problems he encountered in his last 30 years at GE were in any way related to his skill at chemical titration or formulating plastics. When he was vying for the CEO job, the attributes holding him back were strictly behavioral: his brashness, his blunt language, his unwillingness to suffer fools.

Adlerian theory provides a foundation for integrating interpersonal skills development into leadership training by focusing on social behaviors that enhance individuals’ sense of community, empowerment, and motivation.

Adlerian Theory

Developed by Austrian physician Alfred Adler (1870–1937)—a colleague of Sigmund Freud—Adlerian theory is a comprehensive model of human behavior still influential in 21st-century psychology. According to Adlerian theory, individuals are social beings who cannot be understood outside the social contexts that create meaning in their lives. In opposition to the Freudian focus on internal psychodynamics, Adler developed the school of Individual Psychology, which underscores interpersonal relationships. Dewey (1978) summarized the basic principles of Individual Psychology:

1. Individuals are socially embedded and have an innate ability to develop what Adler called *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (community feeling or social interest).
2. Since individuals are embedded in a social situation, social interest is crucial for psychological adjustment.
3. Individuals are self-determining and capable of change.
4. Individuals are goal-directed. Human behavior is purposefully geared toward achieving social significance and belonging.
5. Individuals view the world from their subjective frame of reference. From an Adlerian perspective, objective reality is less important than the subjective meaning people attach to their experience.

Adlerians view individuals as rational, decision-making beings who are capable of demonstrating productive, socially useful behavior. According to Adlerian theory, individuals are capable of changing unproductive behavior patterns and challenging self-limiting assumptions. Manaster and Corsini

(1982) noted the Adlerian position assumes an encouraging and optimistic view of human nature.

Adler maintained that the human community establishes three life tasks for all individuals (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964). These tasks include *work*, which involves making a contribution to society through occupation; *friendship*, which encompasses social relationships; and *love*, which involves making an intimate connection with another human being. Adlerian theory maintains that all people are capable of fulfilling the life tasks and living in a cooperative and socially useful way.

Of the three life tasks, work or productivity is the most fundamental (Dreikurs, 1950; Sweeney, 1981). First, work offers individuals who have not developed friendships or intimacy the opportunity to contribute to the community. Work also provides opportunities for individuals to fulfill basic needs. Roe (1956) stated, "In our society there is no single situation which is potentially so capable of giving some satisfaction at all (Maslovian) levels of basic needs as is the occupation" (p. 31). Finally, work is connected closely with health. Palmore (1969) noted that work satisfaction is the most significant predictor of longevity.

The primacy of work in the Adlerian model suggests that individuals must not only participate in work but must display socially useful behavior in the work environment. The Adlerian constructs of *social interest*, *democracy*, and *encouragement* are particularly relevant to effective workplace interaction, which depends on collaboration, interpersonal support, and social contribution. As key concepts of interpersonal effectiveness, these constructs provide an ideal framework for promoting participative, socially productive managerial behavior.

SOCIAL INTEREST

Central to Adlerian theory is the idea that all people are born with the potential to develop *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964). Literally defined as "a feeling of community," *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* translates more meaningfully as "social interest," or the willingness to cooperate with others for the common good. Adler believed social interest is necessary for positive adjustment, and is both an inborn and learned trait (Manaster & Corsini, 1982). Edgar (1975) noted that psychologically healthy people are able to cooperate with others, consider others' interests, and behave in ways that have general validity. Dreikurs (1950) believed social interest correlated with individuals' success or failure in fulfilling the life tasks and in achieving sound mental health.

According to Adlerian theory, individuals with social interest view work as an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of others. Individuals who extend themselves into the community through work perceive work as an opportunity to affirm themselves, enhance their self-esteem, and express their individuality through productive pursuit (Sweeney, 1981). Individuals with social interest do not view work as a means to an end (for example, receiving a paycheck or gaining social prestige), but as an inherently wholesome end in itself. Managers who understand how to develop employees' social interest are better equipped to mobilize a workforce committed to productivity, service, and the achievement of shared goals.

DEMOCRACY

Advocating ideas considered progressive for the time (Hall & Lindzey, 1978), Adler was one of the first to promote democracy, equality, and reciprocity in human relationships. In Adlerian theory, democracy is not a political system but a prescription for human interaction. Democracy involves social equality, mutually trusting relationships, human dignity, and a sense of human connection. Adler suggested that anything other than true democracy represents an unstable social situation and that people could be taught an alternative to autocracy without abdication of leadership (Pew, 1971).

Although democracy is not new as a social construct, it has gained increasing relevance in the workplace as economic pressures have diminished employer–employee loyalty. Adlerian theory recognizes that democracy as a social structure is predicated on humans' inherent value and autonomy. As a leadership principle, democracy maximizes individual power without unduly compromising others' freedom. Democratic managers are especially effective in promoting the "feeling of community" (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) essential to building an organizational culture of shared purpose and mutual support.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement is another Adlerian construct particularly relevant to effective managerial behavior. Encouragement focuses on effort, commitment, and dedication to the task rather than focusing solely on the finished product. Dinkmeyer and McKay (1989) noted managers who encourage employees emphasize individuals' strengths and assets rather than mistakes. These managers assure employees of their value and competence and help them build self-confidence. In Adlerian theory, encouragement is one of the primary approaches for mobilizing others to purposeful action. Encouragement conveys positive expecta-

tions that reinforce individuals' desire to use their abilities for the common good.

As a motivating factor, encouragement differs significantly from praise. Praise is an external reward for meeting others' expectations. Encouragement, on the other hand, helps individuals rely on their own internal locus of evaluation. More empowering than praise, encouragement acknowledges an individual's autonomy within the social context and is particularly powerful in developing the egalitarian foundation for a democratic, participative organizational culture.

The Adlerian constructs of social interest, democracy, and encouragement have particular relevance to managerial training and development. Managers who can generate social interest, establish and maintain democratic relationships, and encourage employees' creativity and competence will be more likely to unite and motivate staff toward achieving organizational success. Leadership training programs that promote social interest, democracy, and encouragement can increase participants' effectiveness in demonstrating critical management competencies.

Critical Management Competencies

The first-line manager is typically responsible for overseeing one or more direct reports and ensuring these individuals meet productivity metrics. Achieving results through others requires a specific skill set aimed at balancing human needs and production concerns. Three critical management competencies—*participative management*, *coaching*, and *employee engagement*—represent a significant part of the first-line manager's accountability. Leadership training that integrates Adlerian principles can help managers develop and operationalize these critical competencies.

PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

Participative management is based on the recognition that command-and-control models of human interaction are ineffective in achieving shared goals. The participative management philosophy assumes that organizational decision-making processes must have the input—aligned with the responsibility and accountability—of all stakeholders (Holland, 1995). Unlike traditional, autocratic methods, participative management invites all organizational members to contribute.

Participative management values change over stability, empowerment over control, collaboration over competition, and diversity over uniformity. A half-century of research has shown that participative management positively affects employee job

satisfaction (Bernstein, 1993; Daley, 1986; Drucker, 1974; Likert, 1967; Seijts & Crim, 2006). The literature has also shown that low job satisfaction results in absenteeism, lack of commitment, and employee attrition (Barling, Wade, & Fullagar, 1990; Brooke & Price, 1989; Carsten & Spector, 1987; Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Managers educated in participative management typically create satisfied, committed employees (Soonhee, 2002). Training on the participative management competency can help participants differentiate between autocratic and participative styles and can teach participants how to use democracy to create relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Adlerian theory offers ground rules for democratic behavior (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982). Individual psychology contends that groups need leadership and cannot function without trust and faith. Managers can be trained to use principles of individual psychology to create a spirit of cooperation as opposed to the competitiveness inherent in many business organizations.

An Adlerian approach to leadership training would educate managers in the four basic skills needed in a democratic society: responsibility, cooperation, courage, and self-esteem (Dreikurs et al., 1982). Responsibility involves making decisions and accepting the outcomes of those decisions. Cooperation involves engaging and inspiring individuals to work together to achieve a common goal. Courage involves willingness to take known risks, and self-esteem is a positive view of self and the ability to succeed. Adler noted when individuals experience inferiority, they are pulled by the striving for superiority to overcompensate for real or perceived weakness (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964). In business organizations, managers may attempt to gain significance by competing or crafting maladaptive ways to obtain power and recognition (Nelson, 1999). Training in the principles of social interest, democracy, and encouragement can assist managers in developing the leadership skills to foster collaborative and participative workplaces.

Participative Management Exercise

An adaptation of Pfeiffer and Jones' (1972) exercise can be used to train managers in participative management. Participants are divided into two groups, and both groups are given straws and straight pins. The training facilitator asks one person from each group to volunteer to observe group processes. The facilitator selects two individuals to play the role of managers who will guide their groups in building a structure from the pins and straws. The facilitator invites these individuals to step outside the training room to discuss their roles. The facilitator instructs

the first manager to use an autocratic style to manage the group in building the structure—to tell the group what they will build, to micro-manage employees in completing the structure, to refuse to participate in completing the task, to provide frequent criticism, and to withhold praise and encouragement. The manager is instructed not to tell the group of these instructions, but to simply play the part.

The facilitator instructs the second manager to demonstrate a participative style in managing the group in building the structure—to ask employees what they want to build, to develop a rapport with the group, to gain group input on how to complete the structure, to encourage and praise frequently, and to actively participate in completing the task. Again, the facilitator tells the manager not to tell the group of these instructions, but simply to play the role.

The facilitator and two group leaders re-enter the training room, and the facilitator tells the groups they have 15 minutes to build a structure out of pins and straws, and their manager will guide them. The two managers assume their roles as directed.

At the end of the 15 minutes, the two groups assemble to examine each group's finished structure. Participants discuss the quality of the finished product and the group's experience working for an autocratic versus a participative leader. Observers share their observations of how the manager inspired or failed to inspire morale, teamwork, and commitment to achieving the task. Typically employees in the participative group produce a higher-quality structure and demonstrate increased morale, teamwork, and engagement in the task.

The goal of the exercise is not only to stimulate participants cognitively by raising awareness about the difference between autocratic and participative decision making, but to impact participants experientially by evoking awareness of how different management styles influence employees' feelings about themselves, the organization, and their work. By negating or invalidating the participants' natural tendency toward *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, the training reinforces the disempowering effects of autocratic leadership. By contrasting autocratic and participative management, the exercise reinforces the positive potential inherent in group processes driven by social interest.

COACHING

Though it is often difficult to confront a problematic employee or situation, business managers have the responsibility to address such issues with tact, professionalism, and immediacy.

Coaching is a core management competency and includes observing, teaching, prompting, guiding, and encouraging others. The International Coach Federation (2004, para. 1), an association that trains and accredits individual coaches, stated:

Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performance and enhance the quality of their lives. Coaches are trained to listen, to observe and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.

The International Coach Federation's definition of coaching aligns with Adlerian principles. Since coaching is an integral part of a manager's supervisory accountability, organizations would profit from integrating Adlerian principles in training managers on the coaching competency. According to Page and Ferguson (2005), a coaching model based on Adlerian theory would encourage managers to identify and focus on organizational strengths and capitalize on these strengths. Unlike traditional models that rely on consultants to diagnose and solve problems, leadership training using an Adlerian, strength-based approach would teach managers how to use encouragement to engage and inspire employees to achieve organizational goals. Adler was one of the first to realize that encouragement fosters self-confidence and an internal locus of control (Ferguson, 1996). Managers who encourage employees using good-faith coaching create cultures of accountability and collaboration rather than cultures of faultfinding and blame. Organizations that capitalize on strengths rather than merely remedying shortcomings are more likely to maximize their potential for success (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Coaching Exercise

The following exercise can be used to illustrate the importance of effective coaching. A small group of participants (the *seekers*) is sent outside the training room while the remaining participants (the *knowers*) decide on an object in the room that they want the seekers to find. The seekers return to the room and try to find the unknown object. The knowers may only give negative feedback—for example: “No, that's not where the object is” or “You are not even close!” The knowers may not give any

encouragement whatsoever. With only negative feedback to guide them, the seekers are likely to search aimlessly for the unknown object. After 20 to 30 minutes, they will likely give up, discouraged, demoralized, and frustrated. The exercise is then repeated with a different group of seekers and a different unknown object. This time, the knowers may only give positive feedback and encouragement, such as “Good—you are on the right track” or “Yes—you are getting warmer!” Within minutes or even seconds, the seekers are likely to find the object.

Whereas the negative feedback leaves open a wide range of options for continued failure, the positive feedback continually steers the seekers toward the desired goal. The exercise illustrates that encouragement is a more effective method of coaching than simply pointing out errors. Ideally, effective coaching integrates constructive criticism with instruction, demonstration, and encouragement to help individuals achieve their target outcomes. However, the element of encouragement is particularly critical to building the self-confidence and autonomy needed to develop both individual competence and participative, democratic skills essential to leading a synergistic and collaborative culture.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

As the economy improves, organizations will increase their focus on employee retention issues (Schiemann, 2006). The baby boomer exodus and projected labor shortage will also increase employers' focus on retaining employees. Retaining critical talent is a core business imperative, and this important initiative requires a highly engaged workforce. Seijts and Crim (2006) suggested engaged employees are attached to, inspired by, and committed to their work. Engaged employees are emotionally connected to their organizations and are willing to invest discretionary effort to ensure the organization's success. Crabtree (2005) found that engaged employees are more productive, generate more profit, practice safety, develop stronger customer relationships, and have longer tenure with the company than disengaged employees. Engaged workers also create more innovative business processes and customer service programs.

Creating an engaged workforce is a critical management competency. Crabtree (2005) noted only 29% of U.S. employees are actively engaged in their work; the remainder are either not engaged or actively disengaged. Many factors influence employee engagement, but a manager's ability to effectively lead others is a key engagement driver (Crabtree, 2005; Schiemann, 2006; Seijts & Crim, 2006). According to Crabtree (2005), ac-

tively engaged individuals are satisfied with their management while disengaged workers are dissatisfied. Organizational leaders, therefore, should make engaging employees a core component of their training and development strategy. Managers can engage employees by demonstrating respect, rewarding and recognizing achievements, collaborating to achieve outcomes, and allowing employees to see how their contributions add value to the organization (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

Engagement Exercise

The following exercise allows managers to integrate the Adlerian principles of social interest, democracy, and encouragement to cultivate employee engagement. The exercise requires participants to role-play while completing an assigned task as a group. One person plays the manager while the others play employees who represent varying (predetermined) levels of engagement—for example, actively engaged (enthusiastic about the task), somewhat engaged (moderately interested in the task), not engaged (neutral), somewhat disengaged (lacking interest in the task), and actively disengaged (disruptive to the group). The group's varying levels of engagement should reflect the approximate distribution of engagement levels in the general workforce. Crabtree (2005) estimated approximately one third of U.S. employees are engaged, slightly over half of U.S. employees are not engaged, and the rest are divided at the opposite ends of the continuum (either highly engaged or actively disengaged).

In the exercise, the manager is not told in advance which engagement levels the role-playing employees represent. The manager's challenge is to engage all the employees in a group task such as creating a mural using several sheets of flip-chart paper and colored markers; building a structure using blocks or cards; or assembling a jigsaw puzzle. Unbeknown to the manager, each role-playing employee will be instructed to become *engaged* in the group task only if the manager demonstrates certain motivating behaviors—for example, praising the employee, offering the employee encouragement, assigning the employee a prestigious role within the task, asking the employee to share his or her opinion on the process, etc. The employees will be instructed to demonstrate varying levels of resistance to the manager's motivating behavior—for example, some will jump to the task after being asked once, while others will repeatedly fail to respond to the manager's motivating efforts and may even refuse to participate in the group task.

The exercise will likely be frustrating for those participants playing the manager role because the managers do not have

the same level of disciplinary authority over the role-playing employees as real-life managers would have. For example, the role-playing employees are freer to resist the manager's team-building efforts without suffering negative career consequences than real-life employees would be. Still, the exercise exemplifies the challenges inherent in creating a unified, engaged workforce, and stimulates managers to examine the effectiveness of their motivational techniques. The expected outcome is that managers will become more cognizant of the motivating power of behaviors that demonstrate social interest, democracy, and encouragement, and will be more competent in eliciting these behaviors from their group members as well.

Conclusion

The Adlerian principles of social interest, democracy, and encouragement provide an effective framework for training managers on participative management, coaching, and employee-engagement competencies. Training programs that integrate Adlerian principles into skill-building exercises can help managers enhance their leadership potential by promoting a cognitive awareness and experiential grasp of effective social behaviors. Translating Adlerian theory into action through collaborative and motivational practices, managers can develop an organizational culture strengthened by the mutually respectful interplay of individual engagement and empowering leadership.

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