

Leadership, Motivation and Change in the Competitive Utility Environment

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Abstract

“But mere management simply isn’t enough anymore. The world is too unpredictable, too volatile, too fast-moving for such an uninspired approach. What’s needed now is something much deeper than old-fashioned business management. What’s needed is *leadership, to help people achieve what they are capable of, to establish a vision for the future, to encourage, to coach and to mentor, and to establish and maintain successful relationships.*” (Dale Carnegie & Asso. (1993), p. 21)

Who would have thought anyone would be talking about leadership, motivation, productivity and competition twenty years ago. We’ve all heard the complaints, “I just passed one of your crews and saw one person in the hole and four on the hill holding up their shovels!” They really didn’t understand the complete nature of the undertaking, nor the physical demands placed on these individuals. But did anyone really bat an eye when confronted with this type of insinuation? The supervisors or managers may have dismissed the statement with the thought: “That’s the way it is and that’s the way it’s always been.”

Today is a new day – one that brings new challenges from downsizing, to strategic planning, to the search for new technologies, and from the many venues of competition. The water and wastewater industries must now adapt to the changes in the new breed of worker, the technology-driven workplace and in the innovative operations of today’s utilities. This industry must do “more with less”, and stay productive in the process. The culture of the water and sewer service environment must be altered to parallel current trends in our industry. To reach these pressing goals, utility managers are charged to lead their companies into the future, and find new ways to motivate employees to be the “best that they can be.”

This paper will discuss the aspects of leadership and how leadership relates to the water and wastewater industries. Given considerable attention, *transformational leadership* will be explored, which focuses on key changes in attitude and commitment that bring about dedication and determination to reach an organization’s goals, objectives and targets, and to get “on board” with strategic planning efforts. (Dessler (2001), p. 179)

Strategic planning and its relationship to leadership will also receive focus. Here lie opportunities for leadership in: planning of business strategies; change management; establishing of a company mission, vision and ethical values; and, strategic objectives and targets. How to achieve higher motivational results will be explored, as a motivated workforce will help yield a “best in class” organization. .

In this paper a recipe for success will be presented – one that involves a transformational leadership approach, as building excitement and tapping into employees’ strengths yields

a positive working environment and improved teamwork. Change management will also be explored to facilitate the many changes in this industry. These concepts, although far from novel, will be approached with innovative and modern perspectives to foster improved leadership in the industry. A new breed of leadership, an innovative approach to motivation, the elevated value of employees and improved change management has become a new priority in today's approach to management.

Leadership

As stated by Dessler (2001), "Leadership is generally defined as influencing others to work willingly toward achieving objectives." (p. 168) Without leadership and the willingness to excel from our associates, a utility will not dramatically improve in moving from the present to the future. One can easily become complacent and condition oneself with simply "putting out fires". Maybe the complacent ones need to stop extinguishing and start priming the pump! Leadership is a decision, one that requires motivation on the manager's part. It is sometimes easier to *expect* motivation from staff members rather than from *everyone* in an organization.

Lead by example...lead the charge. People want to follow someone that they feel confident in seeking direction from, and feel certain that they are leading them and the company in the right direction. They want to follow a visionary and a tactician. They also want someone that is trustworthy, respectful, fair, and epitomizes integrity. The eyes are on the managers, supervisors...leaders!

There are many styles of leadership to say the least. One effective style, *transformational leadership*, focuses on key changes in attitude and commitment that bring about dedication and determination to reach an organization's goals, objectives and targets, and to get "on board" with strategic planning efforts. (Dessler (2001), p. 179) Transformational leaders are charismatic, inspire their co-workers, and foster enthusiasm towards projects and continual improvement. To a certain extent, they become emotionally engaged with their co-workers. This is especially important with subordinates. If these individuals know that you truly care about them and their successes, they will be more likely to follow this type of leader.

Transformational leaders maintain a broad vision for the organization – one that embraces innovation and change. They encourage their co-workers through sincere thank-yous, displays of gratitude, and the issuance of rewards. They are quick to share the glory with all who deserve it, and they frequently humble themselves to promote the accomplishments of others.

Transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to foster innovation. They believe in those they work with, and promote their personal and professional development. These leaders empower their staff to make decisions and to initiate changes on certain levels. They do not limit the visions of those that support them. They endorse creativity and pioneering thinking, and support new ideas, methods and processes. According to Dessler (2001), "...transformational leadership tends to be more closely associated with leader effectiveness and employee satisfaction than are transactional styles of leadership such as general or laissez-faire leadership. It therefore seems clear that a

transformational leadership style can be very effective, especially in situations that require managing dramatic change.” (p. 180) These types of leaders assertively and confidently move organizations into the future and into the competitive environment.

Strategic Planning

There has been much discussion of Strategic Planning in the Industry as of late. Primarily this involves long-term planning – something more than a luxury considering our aging infrastructure. This planning can be quite broad in nature, but also can be bitten off in small chunks. What is initially important is that managers and supervisors have the forethought to establish goals at multiple levels and with linked time-frames. Displaying this forethought is contagious, and shows front-line employees that the organization is progressive and employs progressive individuals into the upper echelon and even to its core. Employees want to be a part of this type of organization, and will contribute additional efforts with the appropriate leadership.

So how is this accomplished? It’s all about taking the *time* to do it. Managers and supervisors get so occupied and distracted that they forget about short or long-term planning, and don’t *schedule* time to plan. Contrary to the beliefs of some, it is necessary to schedule meetings with staff members and tap into the strengths of the leaders in the organization. These leaders could be supervisors, mid-level managers, or just individuals that display consistent initiative (And in fact, the good leader will develop these individuals). Leadership is displayed by establishing goals and assigning them to specific individuals. Managers and supervisors don’t have to do everything! A good leader above all delegates to get things accomplished. Some may assume that co-workers cannot do a better job than themselves; however, the manager may be quite surprised.

Create a mission and vision for the future. This involves defining the culture of the organization, what the organization’s primary purpose is, and where the organization envisions itself in the future. Managers and supervisors are the visionaries of the company, and managers and supervisors must accept this responsibility. Establishing the mission and vision can certainly be established at many levels of an organization. Allow managers the flexibility to institute missions appropriate to their responsibilities; however, keep them consistent with the organization’s mission and vision.

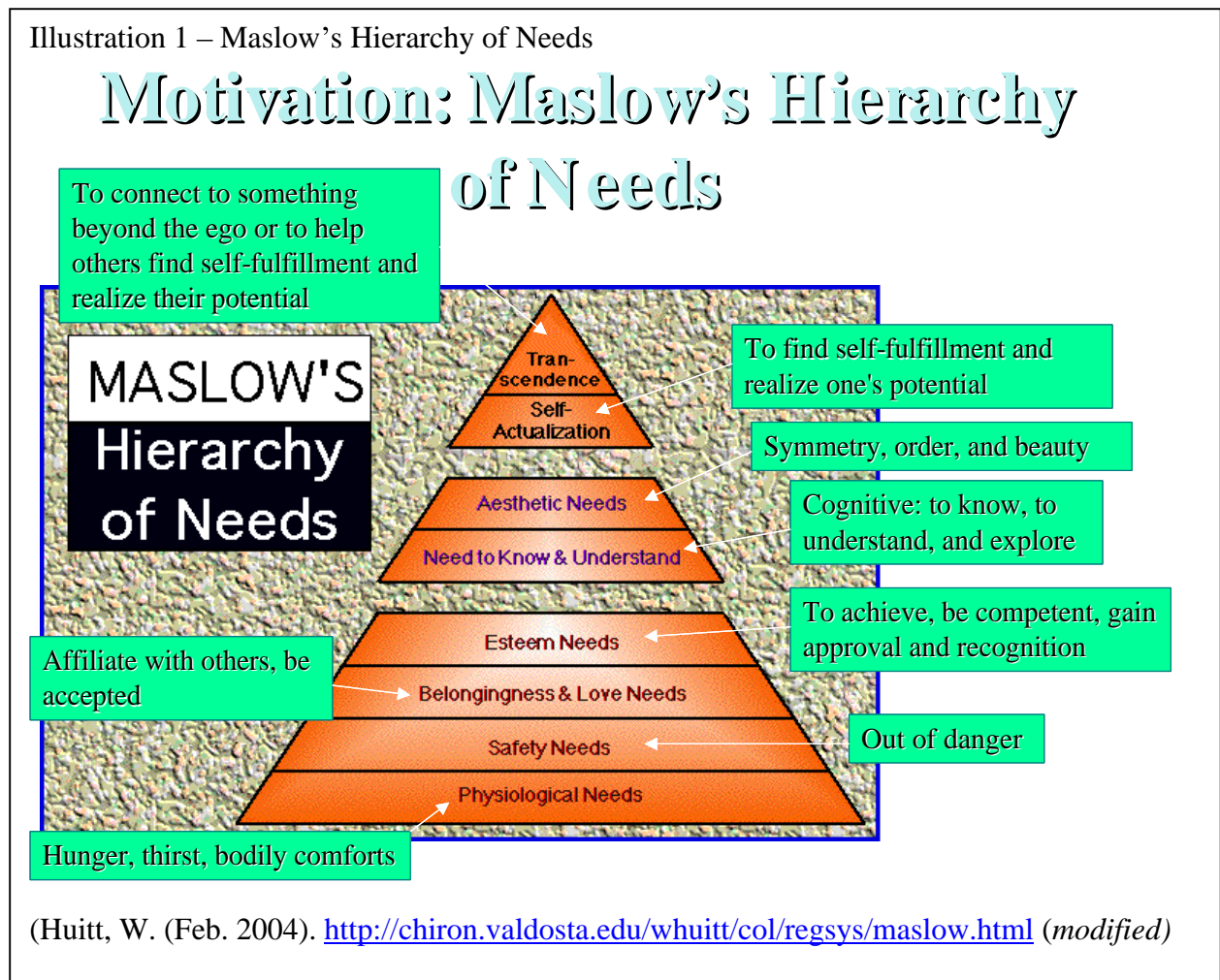
The most important follow-up to establishing a mission and vision involves using the mission and vision as a foundation for building other plans upon, and communicating the organization’s plans to the employees. Communication must be done regularly with a detailed explanation of how plans *flow* and *feed* off one another. This type of communication will convey the structure and intent of the plans. Also, communications will express that these initiatives are valuable to the employees and company, and will encourage further motivation and efforts from the staff.

Motivation

There are many ways to motivate employees, using both positive and negative means. In past days it was somewhat ‘acceptable’ to order employees to accomplish their tasks in an indifferent or disrespectful manner. In today’s competitive workplace the atmosphere

is much different than it was in the past. We now experience reduced loyalty and increased expectations; therefore, we no longer can approach achieving productivity from this perspective.

There exist many different personality types.. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator ® there exists 16 different personalities. Visit <http://www.knowyourtype.com/mbti.html> for more information. Taking this into consideration, there are a varied number of methods for motivating people. One of the most widely used resources for understanding motivation comes from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, as depicted in *Illustration 1*. Most individuals work to meet their *physiological needs* of food, water, health, etc., which is the first level, and then move to the next hierarchal stage (stage 2) being *safety needs* or security. The third level is *belongingness and acceptance needs*, and the fourth is *esteem needs* and desires.



With regard to the fifth level, an individual is entering the 'growth' or cognitive needs stages of motivation, where the individual wants to *know, understand* and explore. This is where real productivity begins. The sixth level is the *aesthetic needs* level where the individual's surroundings become important to them. The seventh level is the *self-actualization* level, which is where the individual searches for and finds self-fulfillment,

and realizes and uses the potential they possess. The highest level, and maybe the most important level to a manager, is the *self-transcendence* level, where an individual pushes past the ego and wishes to aid others in finding their potential.

In discussing Maslow's theory, Huffman asserts (2004), "...each individual's own lower needs must be at least partially met before higher needs can influence behavior..." (p. 425) This complicates the supervisor or manager's task of motivating their employees, as the manager must understand at what hierarchical level each individual employee rests, and realize what stimuli should be used to motivate that individual. To aid the reader in this effort, included is a *Motivational Matrix* (attachment "A"), which breaks down this potentially complicated discussion into a usable format. This matrix can easily be applied through a casual interview, or through observation. A good starting point would be as part of an employee's recurring performance evaluation. Here is a good time to "take the pulse" of the individual and see where their needs are in their professional development.

Motivation is an integral part of managing changes in an organization. What we as managers and supervisors want are employees that are continually growing, developing and working towards new goals and objectives, both individually and corporately. Understanding at what stage an individual is can aid managers in establishing goals for each individual, and/or for a group. Motivated employees will embrace change and see it as an opportunity.

Tapping into Strengths

It is hard to argue that people have different skills and abilities, and hold various abilities to apply those skills to their jobs. Managers sometimes want to mold co-workers to conform to expected behavioral tendencies in the workplace. Managers need to understand that this approach is unrealistic, again due to the many personalities that exist. Managers also too frequently focus on employee inabilities versus strengths. Even performance appraisals are designed to contradict the focusing on strengths. They only provide opportunities to focus on weaknesses. "You cannot learn very much about excellence from studying failure." (Buckingham & Coffman (1999), p. 157)

Managers tend to spend too much time trying to change people rather than "tapping into" a person's interests and strengths. According to Buckingham & Coffman (1999),

"People don't change that much.
Don't waste time trying to put in what was left out.
Try to draw out what was left in.
That is hard enough." (p. 57)

To facilitate improved productivity and a progressive organizational approach, managers need to know their employees well, and know what makes them "tick". Managers must be acutely aware of where their greatest assets reside and capitalize upon them. This involves observation and strategy in itself. Learn what interests each team member and assign goals appropriately. Match their interests with their assets – improved productivity and morale from these individuals will be realized. People want to be

challenged and want to enjoy the challenge. “[Managers] try to help each person become *more and more* of who he [she] already is.” (Buckingham & Coffman (1999), p. 57) Therefore, focus less time on what is wrong and more time developing what is right with individuals.

Change Management

“We must reexamine every relationship, every element of doing business, every process, every procedure. The only plausible criterion for success is: ‘Are you changing enough, rapidly enough, to successfully confront the future?’” (Peters (1988), p. 466) Obviously strategic planning initiates significant change in the organizational environment. And inherently, most individuals are somewhat resistant to change. It is the manager’s responsibility to turn the sometimes negative atmosphere of change into a positive one – one that leads into future opportunity for the employee as well as the organization. This is change management. Employees need to know the reasons for the changes, the urgency associated with the changes, and the expected timelines. They need a clear picture of where they are going, and how long it will take them to get there; therefore, there needs to be a significant emphasis on information sharing and communication.

Table 2 – Change Management Tools and Methods

Method	Use when	Advantages	Disadvantages
Education & communication	People lack information or have inaccurate information	Creates willingness to help with the change	Can be very time consuming
Participation & involvement	Other people have important information and/or power to resist	Adds information to change planning; builds commitment to the change	Can be very time consuming
Facilitation & support	Resistance traces to resource or adjustment problems	Satisfies directly specific resource or adjustment needs	Can be time consuming; can be expensive
Negotiation & agreement	A person or group will "lose" something because of the change	Helps avoid major resistance	Can be expensive; can cause others to seek similar "deals"
Manipulation & cooptation	Other methods don't work or are too expensive	Can be quick and inexpensive	Can create future problems if people sense manipulation
Explicit & implicit coercion	Speed important and change agent has power	Quick; overpowers resistance	Risky if people get "mad"

(Schermerhorn, J. R., Hunt, J. G. & Osborn, R. N. (2002), Organizational Behavior, p. 66)

Motivation has been thoroughly discussed thus far, and now is the time to apply motivational strategies to facilitate change and change management. People need to understand the problems necessitating change, and be able to become part of the solutions. These key individuals become “change agents”. According to Covey (1989), “You involve people in the problem, immerse them in it, so that they soak it in and feel it

is their problem and they tend to become an important part of the solution.” (p. 280) Change agents should be on-board and willing to lead the organization towards continual improvement. These individuals are to think of themselves as owners and entrepreneurs, and “the more the merrier”. They also need support from management, both emotional and physical (resources). Without this support, frustration and negativity creep in. Periods of irritation and disappointments are inevitable, and there will be those that will not be supportive of change. Managers may need to negotiate at this point, or a firm hand may be required to display the seriousness of meeting the objectives and targets. Further information on change management is included in Table 2.

To maintain the momentum of change, an organization should strategically establish “quick wins”, which are short benchmarks towards the final goal. As these benchmarks are attained, celebrate these wins and recognize those associated with reaching the established goals. This will spread like wildfire throughout the organization, yielding higher-level successes. This recognition can be monetary, awards, plaques, public recognition, etc., and will be effective if the recipients honestly deserve the accolades.

Conclusion

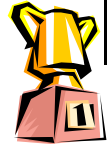
Today’s water and wastewater industries are being operated more as a business, to include a higher emphasis on leadership and planning, new approaches to motivation and employee value, and sensitivity to change management. These new approaches have ushered in the need for changes in every aspect of the business, from operations to administration. Leadership is now needed to manage these new innovative processes, and manage the instability that change brings. A new culture is evolving, one that puts a greater emphasis on the need for strategic thinking. The changes that are being witnessed also need to be integrated so that sustainability is achieved. All of this is desirable to supply the life-preserving services that the water and wastewater professionals provide to our communities, making the services affordable to our customers. This sustainability will ensure that this industry remains one of the cornerstones of our society.

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"Cultivate to Motivate"

Motivation Matrix



Management Tool for Improving Associate Motivation

Purpose: Various aspects of job responsibilities motivate individuals differently. Being aware of and understanding what motivates our associates can aid us in getting the most out of that individual. Additionally, this can be used to keep associates more interested and engaged in their jobs, which will lead to increased productivity.

	Category	Work Atmosphere	Self Esteem	Respect	Personal & Professional Growth	Social	Status
	Sub-Category	Working conditions	Need for Achievement	Recognition	Advancement Opportunities	Relationships w/ Peers	Need for Responsibility
Stability / Security in job	Creative Expression	Personal Competency Improvement	Growth Opportunities	Relationships w/ Subordinates	Empowerment		
Quality of Supervision	Self Expression	Prestige / Position	Growth and Development	Relationships w/ Co-workers	Authority		
Fairness / Equity	External Approvals	Problem-solving	Salary Increases	Affiliation needs	Power		
Communication Effectiveness	High Proficiency	Job Content	Empowerment	Part of Team	Delegation Ability		
Policy Appropriateness / Effectiveness	Accomplishments	Job Satisfaction	Education / Training	Social Events	Position		
Associate Name							
John Doe							

Directions: Fill in associates name in the far left column. Put a check mark or a priority number (1,2 or 3) in the categories that seem to motivate that individual associate the most. Revisit past experiences for determination & request feedback from associate for accuracy. Focus on the applicable categories for future motivation initiatives & strategies. **Options:** Write sub-categories in the spaces to further narrow down motivational areas.

Notes: Keep confidential. Reevaluate associates periodically to identify changes in motivational areas. All sub-categories may not apply.

Revision Date: Jan. 5, 2005

File Name / Path:

Attachment "A"

