

Democratic and transformational styles of leadership



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In times of tough economic situation businesses face today, it is essential to stay as effective as one can be. In order to be an effective leader, besides other things, one must know or learn how to manage stress not only in the work place, but also outside work. Our generation is set in a very challenging and vivid environment. People are being thrown at with various demands everywhere. Stress can be defined as “ the unconscious preparation to fight or flee a person experiences when faced with any demand (Nelson & Quick, 2006)”. Stress is an inevitable part of our everyday life. We cannot get rid of it for sure, but we can reduce stress to acceptable levels, or to the amount it can be helpful. If not managed successfully, stress can cause health problems, both physical and emotional.

To create a stress reducing program, I have chosen the democratic leadership style and the autocratic style.

Democratic leader initiates collaboration, delegates power, interacts with its employees and cares about their decisions. This style is the best when the outcome is not known, and the emphasis is on the quality of the job.

Manager likes to communicate with its employees, takes into consideration employee's opinions, and invites them to share ideas, allowing employees to take part in leading. Feed back in this style is highly recommended and expected, the manger builds on feedback (Oates, (n. d.).

Autocratic or commanding leader is the opposite of the previous one. Such a leader does not ask for opinions of its employees, but sets strict rules and regulations that ought to be followed. This style is used when the direction and the outcome are clear, and the team must follow certain rules or steps.

Most decisions here are made by the manager himself, without discussing with his employees, so the communication is often only one-way. There is hardly any power delegating to the followers and the leader maintains the authority. Feedback to the leader is uncommon and not tolerated, can be perceived as an unacceptable criticism (Oates, (n. d.).

Democratic style stress reducing program:

There are more traits in this style that help reduce stress compared to the other one.

Democratic style creates a positive work environment, where employees are given responsibilities, and are empowered to do certain tasks on their own, offering challenge which is the type of stress that is good. If the employees feel good in the company, enjoy the job and experiencing healthy stress.

Another stress reducing trait of this style is that it provides room for communication and feedback, which is very important. If a leader communicates with his employees, he knows their needs and their problems, and can help them sort these out. Giving positive feedback to an employee is a great motivator and can also increase productivity, since positive appraisals to employees are very valued, and also boost confidence, which helps to reduce stress.

Democratic style provides plenty possibilities for creative thinking. The shared decision making process invites for ideas of all members, therefore if the employees have a great idea, they are free to share it and even if it is not such a great idea, they know they will not be punished.

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Employees will be under lower stress if they are free to use their initiative, and they are being supported with their initiatives and even given credit for it. The use of the two-way communication creates no room for grapevine, therefore there is less tension in the work place, consequently leading to less stressful situations.

Employees led by democratic leader are less likely to switch jobs, because they feel more appreciated, feel more involved and by giving more responsibilities, they dedicate themselves to the company for a longer period of time, because they are not experiencing distress, but rather eustress.

Some of the stressful situations that may arise under democratic leadership are the lengthy and boring decision making. For some employees, the long and shared decision making can be stressful. Therefore in order to reduce stress in such situation, more involvement from the leader would be required, to move from one point to another.

There are leaders that pretend to be democratic leaders, who just want their employees to think they care about them, but such actions can cause a lot of stress and dissatisfaction among employees. Leaders should not just pretend to listen to their employees, but really listen to them and try to implement their ideas.

Democratic style may create stress in a type of employees that want to have rules, that want to be directed and that do not want to participate in the decision making process. In such a situation, the worker should be either explained the importance of this style, and how important his ideas could be.

If the employee cannot put up with such an approach, maybe it will be best to transfer him to a department with more direct rules (Oates, (n. d.)).

In a democratic environment, in order to create a good stress, eustress, the leader may assign somebody with a role of devil's advocate, who will question every decision, making it even more inspiring for others to participate.

Democratic Program:

Democratic leader agrees on a meeting with his employees, where they will be discussing stress issues inside and outside the workplace. The meeting will not be held by the leader, but the leader will inspire his employees to freely share their ideas. He can encourage them by sharing his concerns or problems first.

Democratic leader does not force employees to participate. If there are individuals that want to share their personal problems confidentially, he will have them come to his office and have a private talk.

The important step during these meetings is to identify the causes of stress at the workplace. Some of the common causes can be the fear of layoffs, increased demands, and pressure from manager to meet expectations.

On the next meeting, team can come up with some team building activities, that will reduce the potential tension among the employees, and they will learn the roles they have in teams. Members can suggest some sport activities that the team can do together after work, because it reduces stress, and builds good relationships.

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Next task for the team to discuss would be the time management, and how could they improve. If people are running out of time, the pressure is on and the stress increases rapidly. Even democratic manager should create a balanced schedule. The team should plan regular breaks during work time. If the members experience lack of time, they could agree to come to work a little bit earlier to get ahead of time.

Task management is very important in teams with democratic leader, since the decision making process takes longer. The tasks should be prioritized; some activities must get a high priority and others low. If the team seems to be lost in a project, manager should split it up not to lose focus on the objectives (Stress at work, 2010).

1st email message to general staff:

Subject: Launch of the new stress reduction program

Message: Dear members of the team,

Due to fact we have all experienced the increased level of stress throughout past weeks, I would like to meet with you to discuss specific problems. I would like to kindly ask every one of you to think about the major issue that bothers you the most, and come up with suggestions for improvement. The program of the first meeting will mostly consist of the brainstorming the ideas, and solutions to them.

Looking forward to meeting you,

Your democratic leader.

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2nd email to the general staff, after the first meeting:

Subject: First meeting reactions

Message: Thank you all for your active participation, I am delighted with the number of the solutions we came up with. If there is anything else you would like to add, or consult with me, do not hesitate to contact me.

Looking forward to our next meeting.

Autocratic style stress reducing program:

Working with this commanding type of leader may create more stressful situations, compared to the democratic style, however, there are situations where this type can be less stressful.

In some cases, it can be less stressful for an autocratic leader, since he is in charge of all the decisions, and knows he controls his own fate. On the other side, if there is too much for the leader to bear, he can be over stressed with too many decisions for him to make, so delegating power could take away some stress.

If the employees prefer to be supervised and are poorly motivated, or have low interest in improving quality, autocratic style would be more productive than the team that is not commanded.

Commanding style may reduce stress by improved logistics or time management. One leader can better keep deadlines and spot problems on projects that require certain schedule and complicated operations. In such

cases long decision making would not be appropriate. Since there is only one to make decisions, snap decisions can be made immediately, which can on side reduce stress in the team, but may certainly put more stress on the leader, because the success or the failure of the project depends purely on his decision.

If employees are not being listened to and are only supposed to follow the directions of the leader, there is room for stress to be created. Therefore, even autocratic leaders should be more open to the two-way communication, and providing also positive feedback to their employees. Autocratic leaders should lessen the pressure that is put on their employees, and appraise them for their work.

Autocratic style seems to be unpopular among employees, sometimes being compared to as having no leadership skills, just commanding people. Therefore such leaders should provide some of their soft skills and try to listen to their employees more. By only giving orders, the confidence of employees will not be increased, so the productivity will be lower, and people will be under more stress.

By delegating power to the employees, the manager reduces stress that is put on them, and shares the stress load with his team members. In some companies, autocratic leaders may experience huge loads of stress, while being responsible for everything. Empowering employees also improves the productivity, because employees can work on something they are responsible for, and if managed well, experience appraisal, which reduces stress.

For the generation Y people that are naturally motivated by work, and work because they like the job, they can be discouraged by the autocratic leader, therefore should be given more flexibility in order to reduce their stress. For such people being ordered is the worst thing, because they lose motivation and the productivity as well. If the team is mainly consisting of such people, the leader should not imply strict rules, but rather involve employees in the decision making and leave room for them to be challenged, because that is what motivates them the most.

In case employees get used to such commanding style, they can become dependent on their leader, and without him, not being able to work. In such teams, productivity decreases rapidly and individual contribution is not present (Oates, (n. d.).

While commanding style may work on short term projects, in long term ones it can cause substantial stress among the employees.

Autocratic program:

Autocratic leader would probably call the meeting himself and have the topics already prepared.

Commanding leader needs to improve his communication. Employees do not like to be ordered at all times, they prefer being informed to reduce their uncertainty. The two-way communication is essential in a stress reducing environment, meaning the exchange of thoughts and feelings.

Autocratic manager should learn how to consult their employees, and involve them in decision making, which will go hand in hand with higher motivation.
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The workload should also be consulted, whether they are able to perform all the tasks assigned.

Autocratic leader needs to work on his emotional intelligence. This includes self-awareness, as the ability to show emotions, self-management, controlling yourself under all circumstances. Be socially aware, trying to understand his employees. Autocratic leaders need to build good relationships at work, because without it, the employees will either work under stress, or will be leaving the team very often.

Next step could be to provide rewards and incentives for employees. Everybody needs to feel appraised for good work. Employees should not only be punished and criticized for bad work, but most importantly to be rewarded for good results.

Even though task management in most cases of commanding leadership is done well, some leaders put too much on their shoulders, putting themselves under stress. Instead, they should delegate more power to their employees, which will be happy they are included in the task, and the manager will experience less stress.

Relationship management is something autocratic leaders don't do, but is essential for the working environment. Manager should be able to inspire their employees not only by direct orders, but also by other means.

Relationship building can be improved by many teambuilding activities: playing sports, going out together, find common interest with members of the team and interact more.

Autocratic manager can reduce stress by breaking some of his bad habits. Commanding types tend to be perfectionist, which in reality cannot work. Nothing can ever be perfect; therefore managers should try to resist perfectionism. Setting up unrealistic goals that are unattainable can be very stressful, for everyone concerned.

Humour is a great way how to release tension at work. Manager should not take all things seriously, sometimes looking at the problem from the other side is the best we can do (Stress at work, 2010).

1st email message to general staff:

Subject: Launch of the new stress reduction program

Message: Dear employees,

I would like to inform you that there will be a meeting concerning the latest issues regarding stress. I have come up with some suggestions that might improve current situation. I expect all of you to be present on the meeting.

Best regards,

Your Autocratic boss.

2nd email to the general staff, after the first meeting:

Subject: Update on the first meeting

Message: I would like to thank you for coming to the meeting, I think the suggested solutions will work, and I strongly encourage you to start applying those. We will be meeting shortly to push the changes further.

Talk to you soon.

Conclusion:

Every single leadership style has its drawbacks and positive sides. If manager can identify the benefits and reduce the negatives of his leadership style, everyone involved will benefit. Positive working environment, improved motivation along with the balanced work/life can reduce the impacts of stress employees and leaders are put through. In times of economic crises, where the demands are higher than ever, learning how to cope with stress is a necessity. Leaders should learn to listen to the needs of their subordinates, communicate effectively and lead efficiently.