

## **Dyadic Relationships for Leaders in Facility Management**

### **Abstract**

Several studies during the last decades have made evident positive consequences for an organization if a leader obtains relationships of high quality with the single subordinate. The quality of the single relationship is correlated with job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit and absence from work. Because the facility management industry is work intensive, these connections are of great importance. By help of a case study with 16 cases, an understanding of how leaders practiced relation building and whether different qualities in the individual relationship to the subordinates lead to challenges in the work environment was examined. The method utilized was in-depth interviews. The leaders varied in their efforts to build relationships to their single subordinate. Several of them admitted that they had employees they wanted should quit. A few claimed that they did not want to lose any of their employees. The leaders were afraid of showing that they liked some subordinates better than others.

### **Introduction**

In the production of goods and services one is dependent of the production factors work and capital. The services offered by facility management are mainly created by human hands and only a smaller part by help of technical equipment (capital). Although the use of technical equipment is increasing, the dependency of humans to provide services with the right quality and with the right cost will probably remain long into the future.

It is a fact that humans cannot be handled like machines. Each employee has a unique personality with his or her own resources, experiences, emotions, needs and motivation. The nearest leader is an important person in the life of an employee (Liden, Bauer and Erdogan, 2004). From the first contact a relationship develops between those two. The single relationship or dyad will have different qualities. This paper focuses on these dyadic relationships, how they develop, and the consequences of different qualities in the single relationships. From 2005 to 2009 16 in-depths case studies were carried out via interviews with leaders within facility management about their relationships to their employees. The findings from these cases will be discussed in this paper.

A historical overview of the relationship between the leader and his subordinates in leadership theory is first provided. Next, an account of the “Leader – member – exchange theory” (LMX) and some of the research provoked by this theory is given. Finally, this theory is placed in connection with the cases, and concluding remarks complete the paper.

### **Leadership and relationships**

A century ago in early organizational theory, the view of leadership and the relationship between the leader and the employees was quite authoritative. Fredric Taylor in his Scientific Management recommended to specify each job as much as possible and to have an intimate control of the single worker (Rollinson, 2008). In the bureaucratic theory, Max Weber also gave the nearest leader immense authority over a worker (Mullins, 2008). Much of the same was the case in Henri Fayols’ administrative theory where he did not take into consideration the interactions and the relationships between people in an organization (Rollinson, 2008).

The results of the Hawthorne-experiments presented in the 1930-ies, revealed that in addition to group norms, attention to the social needs of the workers from the surroundings seemed to give greater productivity (Rollinson, 2008). In effective leadership, an organization therefore has to take into consideration the social needs of the workers and the leader has to be less authoritative in the relations to the subordinates.

In the well-known studies about effective leadership at the universities of Ohio and Michigan from the 1940-ies and 1950-ies, it was found that leadership could be divided into two different styles or behaviors: Task-oriented and relations-oriented (Yukl, 2009). Both styles had advantages for the organization. In short; the task-oriented leader emphasizes the quality of the product and the satisfaction of the customer, while the relations-oriented leader focuses on the well-being of the employees.

Research on the consequences of these two styles has not been able to find a clear conclusion about which of the two styles is the most effective (Yukl, 2009), but it is obvious that a relations-oriented style normally should lead to more satisfied and thriving employees. Such a situation has many advantages for an organization, but it is uncertain whether this style leads to better performance.

According to Fiedler (1967), it is the situation in the workplace that determines which of the two styles is the most effective one. He found that in very difficult and very easy situations for leadership, a task-oriented style was the most effective one, while the relations-oriented style was most effective in these middle ground situations between those two extremes. An explanation of these findings may be that in very difficult situations the leader has to be authoritative and take little considerations of the needs and feelings of the employees. In very easy situations the leader's role is of less importance and the employees can work effectively without a good relation to the leader. Fiedler's assumption was that a leader had a predisposition for a certain style that was difficult or impossible to change. A consequence of this view is that a leader is suitable only in the situations that are best for his or her style. From this viewpoint the only possibility if the leader is going to stay in his job, is to try to change the situation.

Contrary to Fiedler, Hersey & Blanchard (1977) presumed that a leader could change their style to be in accordance with the situation. This was called situation-oriented leadership. The situation was described on the basis of the maturity of the subordinates and the degree of ability and self-confidence they had. Subordinates with low maturity demanded for example a high degree of task-oriented leadership. With increasing maturity the leader could increase relations-oriented leadership and act more supportive, consult the subordinates more and provide more praise and attention. Subordinates with high level of maturity are more self-going, and need less of both task-oriented and relations-oriented leadership style.

Hersey & Blanchard introduced a new way of thinking of leadership in their theory. Traditionally the subordinates were viewed as a homogeneous group. That is; all were treated in the same way as if they had the same maturity, needs and feelings. These theories are called average leadership theories (Dansereau, 1995). Hersey & Blanchard emphasized that it is essential to treat different individuals differently. They may therefore be given the honor for preparing the way for a more individualized view on effective leadership.

### **Focus on dyadic relations in leadership theory**

According to Mintzberg (Yukl, 2009), it is typical for a leaders' job to have to handle many different tasks during a work day. A leader has often a short time to change from one task to another one, and little time to use on each task. A part of the time the leader has alone for himself working with the computer, with papers or thinking. Another part of the work day is used in contact with people. It may be superior leaders, colleagues, customers, suppliers and subordinates to mention the most ordinary contacts. The amount of time the leader has in contact with his subordinates varies with type of industry and leadership level. A leader on the operational level will probably have more contact with his subordinates than leaders on higher levels. This is also most likely the situation within facility management. Though the contact may vary in

degree, it is of fundamental importance in the development of the relationship between the leader and the single subordinate.

The leaders contact with his subordinates will partly be in meetings where the leader may talk to and listen to all or groups of his subordinates in common, or it may be more informal, individual contact with one of his subordinates. Although talking and listening is substantial in communication, communication also takes place without these factors. The body language is supposed to be a stronger communicator than the words (Mast, 2007). Communication takes place all the time in any form of contact. It is impossible not to communicate (Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson, 1968). For example, communication takes place when a leader meets one of his subordinates in the corridor. The subordinate will automatically interpret the leader's body language and feel accepted or not accepted by the leader.

A more individualized view on effective leadership makes it interesting to direct the focus on the relationships between the single subordinate and his nearest leader. As already mentioned, a relationship between two persons is called a dyad. Each dyad is unique (Yammarino, Dansereau and Kennedy, 2001). A dyad between a subordinate and his nearest leader is a special type of dyad because one part (the leader) has power or authority over the other (the subordinate). In the beginning of the theory development in this field, such dyads were therefore called vertical dyads (Dansereau, 1995). The most prominent theory about dyads is called the "*Leader-member-exchange theory*" (LMX) (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

### **The LMX-theory**

The starting point of the development of the LMX-theory was the realization that the different dyads the leader was involved in with his subordinates had different qualities (Dansereau, 1995; Liden, Bauer and Erdogan, 2004). The interest for the LMX-theory has increased exponentially during the last two decades (Illies, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007). A great deal of research has been carried out to uncover what consequences the LMX-differentiation brought about. To be able to document correlations between the dyad quality and various variables one had to develop measurement scales. Different scales have been used, but the most used has been LMX-7 (Yukl, 2009). In this scale the respondent is asked to indicate the degree of satisfaction with seven aspects of the relationship to the leader. The scale is also adjustable for measuring the quality of the leader's relation to the different subordinates.

Over the last 30 years, the LMX theory has generated a large amount of quantitative research projects. Correlations have been found between the quality of the relationship with the leader and for example job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit and absence from work (Nahrgang, Illies and Morgeson, 2007; Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2004). Another important correlated variable has been labeled organizational citizenship behaviors (Illies, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007). This variable describes the extra effort an employee is willing to do for the organization beyond the job description.

One consequence of different qualities on the dyads may be a forming of an in group and an out group (Dansereau, 1995). The in group consists of the subordinates with a high-quality relation to the leader. On the other hand, the out group consists of subordinates with a low-quality relation to leader. There exists no exact dividing line between the in group and the out group in the LMX theory (Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer and Tetrick, 2008). The members of the in group are a support for the leader; they have high job performance and high organizational commitment (Golden and Veiga, 2008). The leader rewards such behavior by more attention, more interesting jobs, more information and greater possibility for promotion.

The members of the out group have minimal contact with the leader. They get the necessary information for doing the work and only make the necessary effort to keep the job. This picture may not be the full truth. There may be members of the out group who are performing excellently without a high-quality relation to the leader (Huang, Wright, Chiu and Wang, 2008). They may just not be interested in the relationship with the leader because they are independent persons with high competence. The leader may also be more interested in obedient subordinates than independent ones.

The quality of a relationship develops through exchanges or transactions between the leader and the single subordinate from the first contact (Liden, Bauer and Erdogan, 2004). A request from one part is responded from the other part (Blau, 1964). Whether an exchange leads to a better relationship depends of the form of the initiative and the response. The attitude towards each other and the interpretation of the others communication are decisive. Experiences and established ways of thinking will influence the perception (Uhl Bien, 2006). The first impression and the first period seem to be of special importance (Liden, Bauer and Erdogan, 2004).

In exchanges between the two parts, the norm of reciprocity is central (Jaqueline, Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2004). There will be an expectation that a good deed from one part before or later will be reciprocated from the other part. This is the same thinking as in the concept psychological contract. In this way the parts in the dyad develop expectations to each other. If the expectations are not met, the psychological contract is broken and the quality of the relationship is reduced 8 (Chalk, 2004).

Other factors in the development of a dyad are the human tendency to be attracted to and like some people more than others (Silveira and Hanashiro, 2009). The reason for this tendency may be that the two parts have certain similarities. It may for example be similar personality traits, similar geographic origin, similar culture, similar age, similar political attitudes or similar hobbies (Byrne, 1971). Good-looking people have advantages over others in several ways and their look may get others to want to develop a good relationship with them. Another factor is the so-called “mere-exposure effect. This is the tendency to like the people we socialize with and get to know better” (Nahrgang, Morgeson and Ilies, 2009).

The research that arose from the LMX-theory has disclosed the importance for the leader to develop dyads with high quality with the subordinates. High-quality dyads have a tendency to result in better performance, greater willingness and loyalty, and less absence and intention to quit. Subordinates with a high quality relation to the leader are called an in group. With a closer relationship to the leader, these employees are better informed by the leader, they receive more of the leaders support and positive feedback, get more interesting work tasks and better chances for advancement 10 (Kacmar, Zivnuska and White, 2007).

Dyads with low quality are a challenge for a leader because of the unfortunate consequences for the organization. A division of the labor force in an in group with good relations to the leader, and an out group with bad relation may have an unfavorable influence on the social working environment. The members of the out group may feel that they are treated unfairly compared with the members of the in group (Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski and Chaudhry, 2009). This may result in envy and a bad relation between members of the in group and the out group (Hooper and Martin, 2008). The motivation for the work performance may also be affected. Although the performance of the member of the out group may be bad, the attribution or evaluation the leader does will be affected by attribution errors (Dasborough and Ashkanasy, 2002). The leader will judge the out group more strictly than the in group.

Though such a division of the labor force may create problems, some theorists argue for the advantages for the leader to have an in group (Dansereau, 1995; Hooper and Martin, 2008). It may be nice for the leader to have some employees who the leader can trust, delegate responsibility to, and ask for advice. A membership in an in group or in an out group is not permanent. To keep the members in the in group, the leader has to use time on taking care of the relationship. On the other hand; a leader may also be able to bring a member of the out group over to the in group. Such a transferring requires normally that the leader leave no stone unturned in the relation building.

Huang, Wright, Chiu and Wang (2008), found that leaders and subordinates emphasized different aspects of the relation. The leaders tended to focus on the work related aspects of the relation, whether the subordinate was loyal and committed to the performance of the job. The subordinates were more interested in a friendly and understanding leader who provided opportunities for their development. However, both parts should be interested in a good relationship (Nahrgang, Morgeson and Ilies, 2009).

## **Research questions**

Investigation of the dyadic relationships within facility management was the focus of this research. This industry is work intensive and the relation between an employee and the nearest leader is presumably of great importance for the well-being and the performance of the employees. The relations between the coworkers may be affected by different qualities relations of the coworkers to their nearest leader.

The central questions for the investigation were therefore:

- What efforts is the leader doing to build relations of high quality to the individual subordinate?
- Does the leader have favorites (in group) among the subordinates and does the leader have low quality relations to some of the subordinates (out group)?

## **Method**

Quantitative methods have been the dominant methods in leadership studies, but the number of qualitative studies have been increasing since about 1990 (Bryman, 2004). A lot of quantitative research has also been conducted around dyadic leadership (Schriesheim, Castro and Cogliser, 1999). Also some have been completed within the facility management field (for example Testa, 2002; Kim, Lee and Carlson, 2010). Yukl (2009) called for more qualitative research within this field. A better understanding of the dyadic relations between the leader and the subordinates within the facility management industry drove this study. Qualitative research was the best way of meeting that need.

The method in this research was case studies with depth-interviews. The investigation was conducted during a four-year period. Throughout this period 16 interviews were carried out. Leaders of facility management groups were interviewed at their work place. Each interview lasted about one hour. Informal talks with some subordinates in some of the workplaces were also conducted.

The work places were situated not far from the researcher's university and the interview objects had leadership responsibility within different types of facility management. Five were responsible for housekeeping, four were leaders for food production, three were responsible for cleaning, one for catering, one for the reception, one for a post department and one for requisite. There was a mix of private and official institutions. The number of employees differed from 230 to four. Eight had more than 20 employees, three had less than 10.

During the interviews, notes were taken. Shortly after the interview notes were transferred to a computer and passed by mail to the interview objects for correction and acceptance. (The very first interviews were not sent for correction.)

## **Relationships in dyads from cases**

Because of the great impact of the first impression and the first time of the employment (Zajonc, 1980; Liden, Bauer and Erdogan, 2004), it is significant for the leader to emphasize the contact with a new employee in the start if a good relation is to develop. The newly employed will automatically consider whether the leader accept him or not. It was usual that the leaders were central both in the job interview and in the introduction of the new employee. The leaders earmarked time for the new employee the first day for an orientation. Although the follow up often were delegated, some leaders had a follow up meeting after some time. One leader used to tell the new employee: "If you have any problems, my door is always open for you".

To develop a relation, it is essential that the leader make some efforts to get to know the new employee (Ramsey, 2003). The leader should for example learn and remember name, origin, family, living place and interests of the newcomer. Not the least the leader should use the name. From the cases the impression that this ideal might be a challenge for a leader with a busy work day, many subordinates or geographically scattered work places was observed. A special challenge exists in a multicultural work force with less language qualifications. This is sometimes the situation in the facility management industry in Norway. Communication difficulties may be an obstacle in developing dyadic relations. It is therefore a danger that

subordinates with little language qualifications end up in an out group. Some leaders had tackled this problem by appointing multicultural section managers who had a better background for such communication.

Some of the leaders practiced managing by walking around and used this as an opportunity to develop the dyadic relationships by addressing individuals and for example asking: "How are you today?" or "Is everything going well?" It also was an opportunity to touch minor job problems or private problems that had been taken up earlier. The leader could for example follow up problems mentioned earlier simply by asking: "How did it go at the dentist?"

Of course this might be time consuming and difficult to practice for a leader. One leader of cleaning at a state department was not willing to practice management by walking around because she was afraid workers would regard it as a control arrangement. She sensed that these workers liked to control their own duties without interference from others. She therefore used an errand to visit and try to build better relations to these subordinates. Then she had a specific reason to come.

Scarcity of time may be a problem for a leader regarding building high quality individual relationships in dyads. A solution might be to be conscious about the moments the leader meets an employee. An example is a leader of cleaning at a hospital who had responsibility for more than 200 subordinates. During the interview, the researcher accompanied her through some corridors in the hospital on the way to one of her section leaders. On the way we met some of her subordinates who worked alone with cleaning in the corridors. She said hello to each of them some steps before we reached them, and said some encouraging words while we passed without stopping. Each worker really looked encouraged after this short moment of attention. By doing this she was effectively building relationships, it was observed.

Although words are important, building of relationships may also take place without uttering a word. A leader is always communicating, "We cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson, 1968). Whether a leader has a positive attitude towards a subordinate may be sensed by the subordinate in a bypassing in a corridor. The perception of the leaders attitude is of course a result of interpretation and is influenced by some sources of error, for example; mood, earlier experiences with other leaders or simply misunderstanding. One of the leaders emphasized to have eye contact with all of his subordinates every morning. To be seen is a deep human need. If an employee feels overlooked, it will be difficult for the leader to build a relationship with high quality.

Each subordinate is unique with regard to background and personality. In building dyads with relationships of high quality, the leader must get to know the single subordinate. It demands to show interest by asking and listening. One of the leaders reported that she was somewhat afraid of asking the subordinates about their private life. She did not want to look curious. Instead she went for natural disclosure of private matters. The lunch time is such an opportunity.

The leaders interviewed used to eat lunch together with their subordinates. In Norway there normally is a short psychological distance between the leader and the subordinates. During the lunch time the leader may be more of a buddy and not a boss. Some may not find it advantageous. Nevertheless it gives a possibility to build relationships in a more informal way. To take part in the conversation the leader had to be interested in what interested the subordinates. One of the leaders started to look at some reality series on TV only because of that it was a recurring subject in the lunch time.

To get to know others may require that the leader is willing to be somewhat open about his or her private life. One of the interview objects had a quite authoritative outlook. He felt that some of the employees respected him too much and seemed to be somewhat afraid of him. This situation did not create good relationships. He tried to remedy this problem by telling incidences where he turned out to be an ordinary human being with failures. For example, one morning he told: "This morning I had a big quarrel with my wife". Another interview object however had an opposite viewpoint. As a leader she wanted to keep a certain distance to the subordinates and be careful about disclosing anything from her private life.

Subordinates with private problems will be affected by these problems in the work situation. Consequences may be unsatisfactory performance of the tasks and poor cooperation with the coworkers. A disclosure of the problems to the nearest leader may relieve the burden and sometimes the leader may give assistance towards a solution of the problem. A listening and supporting leader will most likely obtain a closer and a better relationship to one such subordinate. One of the leaders had experienced this. Some days after a conversation with a subordinate with a private problem she told him: "It was a relief to have that talk with you".

In some problematic situations for an employee the leader may not just listen but also act. One interview object, a maintenance manager at a cultural institution, emphasized involvement in the private life of the subordinates. Most of them were immigrants from South Asia. When one of the employees lost a baby shortly after the birth, she personally arranged the funeral for this family. She felt as a kind of mother for her subordinates and spent time on them both in the work day and in her leisure time. Nevertheless she proclaimed: "I believe that my employer should be glad for all the time I have used on my subordinates". In this way she developed strong personal relationships.

This way of building high quality relationships to the subordinates is a kind of servant leadership. A chef at an institutional kitchen also practiced this kind of leadership behavior when he alone arranged and produced most of the food for a Christmas dinner before Christmas every year for more than 30 employees. Servant leadership behavior may influence the relationships between the leader and the single subordinate. It may also bring about reciprocity. The subordinates may become more loyal to their leader.

The building of relations to all the subordinates is a challenging work task for a leader and comes in addition to all the other tasks a leader has. Through research it is documented (Dansereau, 1995) that a leader will have different qualities in the dyadic relations to the subordinates. A consequence might be that the labor force is divided into an in group and an out group. A normal response from the leader to this difficulty was that they had some subordinates they liked better than the others. It was subordinates who did a good job, were willing to do an extra effort (for example by working overtime) and were loyal to the leader. This description corresponds to an in group.

It was also normal that the leaders admitted they had a few subordinates they did not like and wanted should quit. The usual description of these subordinates was that they did an unsatisfactory job, often were absent, created problems in the work environment and were unreliable. These subordinates belonged to an out group in the work place.

Though it was normal to have what may be called an in group and an out group, some of the leaders asserted they did not have such a division of the labor force. One of them said: "I like all of my subordinates and I do not want to lose a single of them". The explanation for this attitude might be that they had invested a lot of their own resources in developing relationships with each subordinate.

None of the interview objects would admit that they treated their subordinates differently even though they liked someone better and disliked others. They were afraid that the subordinates should sense that the leader had different preference towards them. One of them expressed: "Justice is worth gold". A feeling of unfair treatment among the subordinates would affect the working environment badly. One of the leaders told for example that he tried to change seatmates when eating lunch to avoid an opinion that he had favorites among the subordinates.

### **Concluding remarks**

The importance of labor in facility management requires that the leaders have a focus on the dyadic relations to their subordinates. Dyadic relationships of high quality give advantages for the organization like better performance, greater loyalty, less absence and less intention to quit. For the individual subordinate a relation of high quality to the nearest leader means better work conditions like more interesting tasks, better information, positive feedback, a feeling of security and of being accepted.

These advantages should give the leader good reasons to give higher priority to building dyadic relationships. Because many leaders in facility management most likely feel a shortage of time in their work tasks, the relation building has to be effectively done. Small doses of positive attention may be important. To show interest by asking short question and take a little time to listen, may be of great value for an employee.

For many leaders it may not be possible to avoid a division of the labor force in an in group and an out group. It is not easy and perhaps not recommendable to like workers with bad performance and much absence who create problems. An easy solution for the leader may be that these subordinates quit. A more demanding solution may be that the leader takes the single relation to these subordinates more seriously and try to find out what lies behind the unwanted behavior and also try to find out what can be done. Good leadership will be to get a member from the out group over to the in group.

Dyadic leadership and the relation between the leader and the individual worker is in my opinion a corner stone in leadership and in new leadership theories like transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership and coaching leadership. Currently it looks like there is a need for calling more attention to the individual worker. Therefore, there exists a need for more qualitative and quantitative research about this topic within facility management.

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