What research tells us about participative leaders

Thursday, March 15, 2018 11:20

Participatory decision-making makes employees to feel part of an organisation. FILE PHOTO | NMG

Some employees get shocked when their department makes an announcement. They perhaps never knew that any inclination that a major change was in the pipeline. Ever worked for someone who makes all office decisions themselves without including your feedback? Ever experienced a boss who seemingly did not factor you or your opinion into changes that impacted your job?
Many employees in Kenya crave a boss who includes them in important workplace decisions. Staff desire to feel included, listened to, and not only incorporate their input in verdicts but actually make some or most of the decisions on their own.

Charles Manz and Henry Sims’ groundbreaking research found that participative leaders differ from other types of leaders because they delegate decision authority to their employees. Participative leaders foster shared leadership development within workplace teams.

The United States International University of Africa in collaboration with Durham University, Global Communities, and USAid, surveyed 19 agricultural co-operatives in 12 Kenyan counties in order to ascertain, among other goals, the impact that participative leaders have on desirable organisational and community outcomes.

The research team expected to find positive relationships when a co-operative has a participative management committee and senior managers then members would hold more favourable attitudes and behaviour in the organisation as well as in their communities because they would feel more empowered and included.

However, the direct effects of participative leadership only relates significantly with members’ level of activity in the co-operative and perceived voice which entails whether members feel that they can speak up and have their opinions heard by the leaders. In short, when leaders allow members or staff to make decisions, then they get involved and feel heard.

Surprisingly, participative leadership held no impact on members’ satisfaction level, member commitment to the co-operative, or member involvement in their community through political, social, or psychological empowerment.

So if leaders act more participative in the organisation, it only provides partial effects.

Interestingly though, participative leadership relates strongly and significantly with members’ trust in their co-operatives. When cooperative members also trusted the cooperative and its leaders, then the powerful effects of participative leadership proved much different on the outcomes.

Read next week in Business Talk in the Business Daily to discover how leaders can use participative techniques along with employee or member trust to unlock meaningful organisational results.

Now narrowing down to your own specific workplaces as readers, social scientist Julia Hoch details leadership assessments in her research. In order to assess whether you work with a participative manager, respond to each of the four below statements by assigning a 1) strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) somewhat disagree, 4) neither agree nor disagree, 5) somewhat agree, 6) agree, or 7) strongly agree:

My manager decides on my performance goals together with me. My manager and I work together to decide what my performance goals should be. My manager and I sit down together
and reach agreement on my performance goals. My manager works with me to develop my performance goals.

Now, please total each of your four responses to come up with an overall number. Then divide by four to arrive at your average answer. If your average response exceeds five, then congratulations! You work with a participative manager who actively involves you in decisions that affect your work life. In the event your average answer fell between a four and five, then you survive with mediocre manager involvement. If your average response lies between three and four, you subsist with dismal ability to influence decisions that your managers makes in the office that impacts you.

Finally, in the even that your response average falls below three, you then struggle in a harsh environment with a leader who lacks basic leadership skills to involve you in decisions. Inasmuch, you might consider seeking alternative employment where your opinion and involvement matters more.

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