My Journey Toward a Person-Centered Transformation

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Change can occur abruptly, forcing us to adapt to new relationships with coworkers. Taking over as library director after the sudden passing of the previous director was a challenging yet valuable chance for my professional growth. The hardest part of transitioning to my new managerial role to my colleagues was overcoming the awkwardness of redefining my relationship with them. I wanted to build on the excellent work the previous director had begun but also wanted to find my own way to manage the team. A person-centered approach seemed the right one.

FINDING A LEADERSHIP STYLE

Finding my own unique leadership style as a library director was a challenge. I struggled to think of a leadership style that would fit with my personality, the way I work, and the way I interact with others because I never saw myself as a manager or leader. Using the Leadership Orientations questionnaire, I discovered that I am primarily a structural leader, "emphasiz[ing] rationality, analysis, logic, facts, and data" and believing that "well-developed management systems . . . get the job done" (Bolman & Deal, 1988, p. 3). However, the second highest score was the human resource leader, "a facilitator and participative manager

who supports and empowers others" with "coaching, participation, motivation, teamwork, and good interpersonal relations" (Bolman & Deal, 1988, p. 3). These results are accurate as I need structure but also recognize that managing a library involves more than just making sure all services function as intended. It also involves "respect[ing] and valu[ing] the individual worker" (Plas, 1996, p. 3), because without the contributions of all library employees, there would be no library.

PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Creating a participatory work environment is a great way to place the emphasis on the person rather than merely on the results and ensures that everyone feels valued and respected for their contribution to the work. Plas and Lewis (2001) state that "within a person-centered model, it is important to *empower* the worker to make decisions, provide vision, and take action" (p. 41). I followed this model to promote communication and employee participation in decision making. For a manager, "the first challenge is 'to share'" (Haasis, 2013, p. 193), so I tried to make the library's activities transparent, encouraging all team members to contribute their thoughts and ideas. I also tried to create a sense of accountability, promoting awareness of how each role fits within the team and works with other roles (Plas, 1996, p. 86). This means I spend a lot of time writing weekly updates or project summaries, but it is time well spent, as it allows me to think through decisions while allowing the team to participate in, and feel part of, the development of the library. Although I expected some pushback, most of the staff members have appreciated this practice and reciprocated by sharing their project updates and openly requesting and providing feedback.

TRUST

A person-centered approach is crucial for fostering collaboration by "building up relationships and linking to each other, sharing knowledge and learning from each other, [creating] open collaboration and developing common projects" (Haasis, 2013, p. 195). A person-centered practice prioritizes relationships and encourages care and communication,

mutual respect, and honest collaboration while allowing the manager to define clear goals and expectations and provide constructive criticism. To foster stronger team connections, I tried to promote an atmosphere of trust by setting up individual monthly meetings with all staff members. I wanted to prioritize individual concerns without pressuring anyone to speak in staff meetings. I valued the team's perspective as individuals, rather than just as employees. These individual meetings were structured as informal conversations meant to create a safe space for employees to discuss how life and work impact each other without fear of judgment. Individual staff members could decide the content, shape, and location of these meetings, but this specific tactic was not fully effective. Often team members mainly updated me on their daily routines rather than offering honest feedback about the library's situation and openly expressing their concerns. Rather than viewing this as a failure, I need to explore alternative methods to establish relationships and trust with my team, taking into account each person's unique personality. Perhaps I need to learn to trust and be as open with them as I would like them to be with me.

AUTHENTICITY AND VULNERABILITY

When I became a library manager, I had to overcome my preconceptions about my colleagues and their work from when we were peers. To truly value their contributions and acknowledge their successes, I had to reassess our relationships. As Plas (1996) emphasizes, "the first critical step that [has] to be taken [is] to think seriously about, and to work on, the self" (p. 199). Recognizing weaknesses and the resulting vulnerability may contribute to building trust (Martin, 2020). I never wanted to present myself as a perfect manager who already knew what she was doing; I needed my team to know that I am far from perfect, that I can and will make mistakes, and that I am first and foremost part of the team myself, and with the team I am growing and improving.

I realize not everyone is ready for the shift to a person-centered management style that requires changing relational dynamics. Perhaps I need to be more open and trust my staff with my management choices. As a leader I must be receptive to alternative viewpoints to support them

effectively (Marshall et al., 2020). My journey toward a person-centered transformation has just begun. I still have a lot to learn for my own and my team's growth, but I can do that only by supporting the growth of the entire team.

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