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15.277 Special Seminar in Communications: Leadership and Personal Effectiveness Coaching
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Simplified Concepts of Cultures

These concepts are meant to help you think about an example or two from your own experiences. You do not have to answer the questions. They are meant to help you identify cultural characteristics of leadership. Review the concepts and the questions and then draw on your own experience to give examples of leadership behavior within a cultural context.

Concepts of Culture:

Dimensions around which shared basic underlying assumptions form.

Concept: Judgments. How we judge other's behavior: Are human beings perfectible or not?

The range is from a rule-based (objective, abstract) set of standards to exception-based (subjective, relational) standards.

Question: How does the leader make decisions about performance? Does the leader accept feedback? Is failure ever acceptable?

Concept: Relationships.

The extent to which an organization emphasizes the importance of the individual versus group and how they assign status to people. Is authority based on traditional lineal authority, moral consensus, law, or charisma? How is conflict resolved and how are decisions made?

Question: Think about a time when the "leader" had to reunite a group that had been experiencing conflict. How did the leader do that?

Concept: Emotions.

How we show our feelings: direct or indirect, controlled versus expressive.

Question: Think about a time when you observed the "leader" speaking about at an event that was of some importance to people and how were feelings conveyed.

Concept: Time.

The degree to which people adhere to or are flexible about their schedules

Structured - Flexible

Single Task – Multi-task

Short-term – Long-term

Question: In scheduling a meeting, or a gathering, how much notice is given? To what extent is the organization driven by its business cycle versus the membership?

Concept: Space. The comfort level a person has for closeness of people, how objects are arranged, and the use of public space. The symbolic meaning of space around the person.

Distant – Close; Organized – Disorganize; Fixed - flexible

Question: How is space allocated to different members of the organization? How is the leader's space viewed within the organization?

Concept: Communication. How people express their thoughts, ideas, and intentions

Direct, or indirect; Formal, or informal; verbal, or non-verbal.

Low context (word-based) - High context (meaning-based)

Question: Who will the leader talk to? How does the leader ask people to speak to them? Is it through others? Directly? In person?

Concept: Thinking. The tendency for people to draw conclusions through analyzing the parts versus viewing the whole.

Question: How does the leader explain strategy or the mission to the whole company/organization?