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Recent Research by Matt Palmquist

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Photograph by Ryan McVay

Recent Research

On leading teams effectively, building successful brands, managing telecommuters, and more.

by Matt Palmquist

Strong Connections, Less Conflict

Title: Unlocking the Influence of Leadership Network Structures on Team Conflict and Viability (Subscription or fee required.)

Authors: Prasad Balkundi (balkundi@buffalo.edu), Zoe Barsness (zib@u.washington.edu), and Judd H. Michael (jhm104@psu.edu)

Publisher: *Small Group Research*, vol. 40, no. 3

Date Published: June 2009

Whether it is project management, engineering, or business development, in today's corporate environment, more and more work is done in teams. But conflicts among team members can have disruptive effects in the organization that go far beyond the team itself. Team leaders — who set the agenda, ensure performance, and reward or reprimand members — often bear the brunt of these negative effects, regardless of whether they caused them. Ramifications can include decreased performance, widespread distractions, and staff turnover. Since team leaders are often chosen

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by their superiors, there is no guarantee that subordinates will automatically respect a leader or turn to him or her for advice.

The authors of this paper examined how a leader's social relationships with his or her team members can create or prevent conflict within the team. To do this, they followed 19 workplace teams with a total of 231 employees in two different construction plants, where team leaders oversee safety, quality control, and promotions and demotions of their subordinates.

The authors found that teams with the least conflict are led by people who have earned respect over time and who are approached by numerous subordinates — both on and off the job — for work-related guidance. The ability of these leaders to manage from the center of the team and to encourage team members to collaborate with one another boosts cohesion and morale and cuts down on turnover. In contrast, leaders who control information by sharing knowledge with only some of their subordinates or who pass information from one individual to another without fostering collaboration, thus keeping team members separated from one

another, lead groups with higher levels of conflict and lower long-term viability.

The results show that when subordinates turn to a leader for advice, his or her influence is strengthened, and credibility enhanced, among team members. Leaders who have informal relationships with their subordinates but are also respected as authority figures can better pass on work-related information and build consensus among team members. A leader with a fragmented team and sporadic communication with team members is what the authors call a “brokerage” leader. Although brokers can effectively communicate and transfer information from one subgroup to another, they are not as capable of building consensus, because they are viewed as go-betweens rather than as authority figures. Absent a leader with the authority necessary to build consensus and garner respect, conflict develops and teams are less likely to thrive.

Bottom Line: Given the prevalence of teams in organizations and the importance placed on leaders, the authors of this study contend that leaders need to capitalize on their

informal social ties to boost team performance, reduce turnover, and keep subordinates happy.

Ads That Penetrate Consumers' Heads and Hearts

Title: Do All Advertising Appeals Influence Consumer Purchase Decision? An Exploratory Study (Subscription or fee required.)

Author: Sanjeev Verma (sanjeev@nitie.edu)

Publisher: *Global Business Review*, vol. 10, no. 1

Date Published: January/June 2009

Every day, through billboards, television, and the Internet, consumers are bombarded with a wide variety of advertisements. From emotional appeals — fear, humor, warmth, irritation, sexual arousal — to rational arguments about saving money or energy, advertising strategies are designed to influence an individual's purchasing decisions in both the short and long terms. The author of this paper conducted a yearlong study of nearly 1,200 consumers across different demographic groups in India to better

Compelling telecommuters to stick to a conventional work schedule did not have a negative impact on their work–life balance.

understand the components of an effective ad.

Using a five-point questionnaire, the author asked participants — 60 percent of whom were age 25 or younger — for their response to advertisements about soft drinks. The study found that among all rational appeals, the concept of “refreshment” had the biggest effect on purchase decisions. Participants paid far less heed to other rational appeals, such as nutritional information. Emotional appeals such as “thrill,” “affection,” “pride,” and “fear” were attractive, but only “thrill” and “pride” actually persuaded consumers to buy the soft drink. Although the study supports the idea that not all advertising appeals are equal, the author stopped short of studying why some ads are more effective than others.

Bottom Line: Consumers process only the most useful and appealing information presented in advertisements. Marketers are urged to test both emotional and rational advertising appeals to figure out which ones will attract and maintain consumers’ interest and to closely evaluate how ads impact consumers’ purchase decisions.

Managing Telecommuters

Title: Supervisory Approaches and Paradoxes in Managing Telecommuting Implementation (Subscription or fee required.)

Authors: Brenda A. Lautsch (blautsch@sfu.ca), Ellen Ernst Kossek (kossek@msu.edu), and Susan C. Eaton

Publisher: *Human Relations*, vol. 62, no. 6

Date: June 2009

Many factors have contributed to the increased popularity of telecommuting: the Internet’s emergence, the desire of eco-friendly companies to minimize work commutes, and a growing realization among managers that productive employees require a healthy work–life balance. In 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 15 percent of employees were working from home at least once a week, which raises important questions for supervisors: How should telecommuting employees best be managed? How often should they be contacted? What should their work schedule be?

The authors of this study surveyed telecommuters, office work-

ers, and managers at two large organizations and came up with surprising answers. Although frequent contact with telecommuters is beneficial, managers who monitor telecommuters more closely or with higher levels of scrutiny than other office workers may appear to distrust the telecommuters, reducing their productivity. Past research indicated that telecommuters have fewer work–family conflicts than office workers. The authors found that supervisors who use the same management style to oversee both telecommuters and office workers reduce tension and resentment between the two groups, resulting in a sharp decrease in work–life conflicts for office workers and erasing the differences between the level of such conflict in telecommuters’ and office workers’ lives.

The study also found that compelling telecommuters to stick to a conventional work schedule did not have a negative impact on their work–life balance, and that managers who don’t define telecommuters’ work schedules can find themselves mediating conflicts between those working in the office and those working at home. Encouraging telecommuters to sepa-

rate work and family time at home can have a positive impact, the authors found, because it provides them with much-needed structure, but it can also have a negative effect on team relations. Telecommuters who may have previously been willing to work during odd hours and to help others on the team meet deadlines are less willing to do so when they separate work and family time during the work day.

Bottom Line: With more people able and eligible to work from home, the way companies implement telecommuting policies will determine whether these employees are more productive and experience less work–family conflict.

A Five-step Guide to Building Successful Brands

Title: Towards the Holy Grail of Defining “Brand” (Subscription or fee required.)

Author: Leslie de Chernatony (l.dechernatony@bham.ac.uk)

Publisher: *Marketing Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1

Date Published: May 2009

How does a new brand become successful? The author of this paper, after conducting in-depth interviews with marketers in the consumer products and services sector, argues that the perception of a successful brand — among employees, shareholders, and managers within different departments — undergoes a five-stage evolution. Understanding how the meaning of a brand changes over time is crucial to ensuring its success.

The first stage is differentiation, when the brand is rolled out, hopefully attracting attention and standing out from the competition. To achieve this, a brand must be linked to a unique advantage in the minds of consumers and not merely try to win over converts with superficial elements such as logos, colors, or designs. Next is positioning, during which time marketers must clearly identify why the brand is better than similar products on the market and explain why consumers and employees alike need this new product in their lives. The third stage, personality, involves how the brand’s message is communicated internally and externally; ideally, employees should be living examples of their brand. (Think of the

“geniuses” at the Apple store or a hardworking UPS driver.) Following this is a lofty phase, known as vision, in which management strives to convince consumers of the brand’s high-minded values — specifically, how it can contribute to social, environmental, or economic well-being. With values incorporated — for instance, by contributing a percentage of a product’s sales to protecting national parks — employees become more committed to the product and consumers feel better about their purchases.

The final stage, added value, is the pinnacle for successful brands. Like a customized computer, phone, or car, the brand is seen as a product that consistently improves an individual’s life, enhancing self-identity. At the highest level, this can include inviting customers to become co-creators of the brand’s value; as prime examples, the author cites the Nike and Lego Web sites, which offer interactive tools that let people personalize their products by choosing their own designs, colors, or styles. When a community of respect builds around the brand, everyone — manager, employee, customer, shareholder — takes equal delight in participation.

Companies that understand the challenges women face in the workplace will be in a better position to keep top female talent.

Bottom Line: To build a successful brand, managers should follow this five-stage evolutionary process. Taking an idea for a new or different product to the stage where customers consider it an important part of their lives requires differentiation, positioning, personality, vision, and added value.

The Effects of Corporate Gender Bias

Title: Women Entrepreneurs: Jumping the Corporate Ship and Gaining New Wings (Subscription or fee required.)

Authors: Nicola Patterson (nicola.patterson@unn.ac.uk) and Sharon Mavin (sharon.mavin@northumbria.ac.uk)

Publisher: *International Small Business Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2

Date Published: April 2009

More and more professional women are leaving their jobs in favor of self-employment; the United Kingdom, for instance, saw 22.2 percent of women exit the corporate workplace between 1990 and 2000, and 32.6 percent exit between 2001 and 2005. To understand why more

women are leaving the workplace, the authors looked at four who chose self-employment after departing established corporate careers.

Gender issues played a significant role in each woman's decision to leave the corporate world. All of the women had reached middle or senior management positions. And although each cited domestic circumstances — from raising children to longer commutes caused by office relocations — as factors in their decision to leave, three of the women complained that their former organizations had leadership structures and cultures dominated by men who made it difficult for women to get ahead. One woman, a senior manager, described being “actively blocked” by the men in her organization and not taken seriously. Another was the only female in her organization without an administrative title; after being passed over several times for promotion, she took her case to a tribunal and won.

Companies face significant organizational costs when they lose key talent. Increased turnover leads to a loss of institutional knowledge and can cripple a company's competitive advantage. The authors of

this study argue that companies that focus on reducing gender bias and that understand and acknowledge the challenges women face in the workplace will be in a better position to keep top female talent moving into executive positions, instead of out the door.

Bottom Line: More women are leaving the corporate workplace, and some of the reasons for this transition are gender-related barriers at companies; factors related to female employees' families, households, and children; and a desire to be their own boss. +

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