Introduction

It is an old Chinese story. The blind men touched an elephant. “It is something like a fan,” said a man who touched the ear. “It’s like a pillar,” “it’s like a wall,” and “it’s like a hose,” said the other men who touched the leg, the belly and the nose of the elephant, respectively.

It is always clear that displaying leadership is the important prerequisite for the success of our work. Nevertheless, although we may be clear in our mind that leadership is always indispensable, we are likely to be hard put to provide an answer to the question of what exactly leadership means. Someone says that leadership means simply issuing orders or the “shut up and do as I say” approach. The others discuss the interrelationship among participation, creativity and leadership. Leadership is an abstract concept, and the problem lies in how to put it down in concrete terms and actually put it into effect.

In the present affluent society, we can say that leadership appears to be different from the “shut up and do as I say” approach (Kondo, 2000a). We know that there certainly was a time in the past when this approach was effective. The Taylor system that proved so successful in establishing a mass-production system at the beginning of the twentieth century was a case in point. We should note, however, that a precondition for this system was the employment of poor and low-skilled immigrant workers, and this is the very reason why the piecework payment system was such an effective tool.

It is seen in the Taylor system that planning and execution are separated: the planning is the job of the managers and engineers, and the execution of established standards is the job of workers. This separation of planning and execution brought two serious adverse effects (Juran, 1973). First, it fails to make full use of the capabilities of skillful workers charged with carrying out the work in manufacturing processes, and especially with improving the process. And second, it diminishes their sense of responsibility for its successful execution. (The sense of responsibility that is being discussed here is not the after-the-fact type responsibility, but it is the before-the-fact type responsibility, which is defined as the strong desire to...
achieve, by some means or other, the aims of the work assigned.)

Today, a century later, the social climate has changed entirely. As people's educational levels and lifestyles have improved, the value of money in relation to work, and consequently the effectiveness of the piecework payment system have declined remarkably and rapidly. Money is effective for getting rid of human dissatisfaction elements, but it has no effect on providing human satisfaction elements. If we believe that work is nothing more than earning money, it often leads to an increase in the absenteeism of workers. At the same time, people are exercising their individuality more and more, and worker participation in industries has become a powerful social trend.

The leadership that we are considering here is the type we need in times when more and more workers desire to participate in their jobs, enjoy their daily work and achieve the aims of their assigned work in this way. The main topics being discussed in this article are indispensable for displaying leadership and achieving their common aims. They are the right job for the person; mandatory aims and optional methods approach; common aims and “dream”; special features of quality; fostering creative ability; cooperation and competition and so forth. Their mutual relationship is also discussed.

Right job for the person

Nishibori (1971) pointed out 30 years ago the importance of providing the right job for the person rather than the more usual right person for the job. What he emphasized was that it is important to improve and create suitable working environments that permit people to exercise their capabilities to the full, rather than simply allocating them to existing workplaces. This is the first important job of managers and leaders. Put in another way, it is unreasonable for us to expect workers to fully display their creativity, if we set up working environments that make it difficult or even impossible for them to do so, no matter how much care we take in assigning them to their workplaces.

Let us take a look at the method of working under the Taylor system which was described before. The premise in those days was that the workers were of low ability and did not have the necessary skills to plan their work and establish standards. Under such conditions, much of their creativity was ignored and could not be exercised. Many workers became increasingly bored and disenchanted with their standardized, subdivided and monotonous tasks along with the improvement of their living standards. As their wages rose, many of them chose to take more time off to enjoy themselves rather than earning more money.

Mandatory aims, optional methods approach

Taking an example in the manufacturing process, the work standards usually include the following three items (Kondo, 2000b):

1. the aims of the work: in the manufacturing process, they correspond to the quality standards for the products that the process must create,
2. constraints on carrying out the work: they consist of restrictions that must be observed in performing the work. The most important ones are those designated to ensure worker safety and preserve the quality created in upstream processes, and
3. the means and methods to be employed in carrying out the work.

Of these three items, item 1 must always be achieved, and item 2 must be scrupulously obeyed by whoever is responsible for doing the work. Also, it is obvious that the fewer the restrictions listed under item 2, the greater the degree of ease in performing the work. We should therefore consider these restrictive conditions very carefully and take bold steps to eliminate as many of the useless and harmful ones as possible.

But must item 3 be obeyed in the same way as item 2 regardless of who is responsible for the work? As mentioned in the first section, establishing and enforcing prescribed means and methods and thus separating planning and execution may fail to make full use of the capabilities of workers and diminish their sense of responsibility. It may encourage workers to avoid responsibility for failure and claim that the failure was not their fault because they followed the stipulated methods. This must be strenuously guarded against. The sense of responsibility, or the strong desire to achieve the aims of the assigned work by some means or other, is realized under the following two conditions:
(1) the aim of the work must be clearly stated;
(2) the people must be given as great a degree of freedom as possible in the means and methods by which they can achieve the aims.

Provided that the first of these conditions is satisfied, the more freedom people have in the means and methods they can adopt, the stronger their sense of responsibility toward their work will become; the two are positively correlated. We know that under such conditions people doing the work will often display great creativity in a positive way. Utilizing people’s creativity in their work is indispensable for motivation. What we have been discussing so far can be described as the “mandatory aims, optional methods” standpoint. It is essential for creating a sense of responsibility and achieving the aims of the work.

The common aims and “dream”

We have discussed the “mandatory aims, optional methods” standpoint. In this context, let us think again about what we mean by the aims of work. For example, the goal of a company is frequently said to be the pursuit of profit. However, from the “mandatory aims, optional methods” standpoint, what kinds of means and methods may this company use in order to pursue profit? What was meant above is not, of course, giving people absolute freedom in the means and methods, but giving them as much freedom as possible. Naturally, there are several restrictions, legal and ethical ones being of particular importance.

A company’s basic business philosophy is of fundamental importance, since it underpins the enterprise’s annual and long-term policies and provides its employees with a standard by which to measure their behaviors. Okusa (1985) cited the contention by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset that human beings take absolutely no pleasure in simply “existing” in the world, but they take pleasure in “existing well” in the world. He also pointed out that, if the words “human beings” are replaced by the word “company” in this statement, it tells us that companies that “exist well” in the world make some form of essential contribution to society by acting in individual and unique ways, and this is important for keeping the company alive.

In the future, especially in the affluent society, it will become of even greater importance for every company to work out a basic business philosophy that can be accepted and bought into by all its employees, is regarded as an attractive feature by its customers, and forms the basis of goals shared by its entire workforce. We call it “common aims.”

Human beings participate in society in groups such as families, communities, sports clubs, companies, and so forth. Regardless of their sizes, each of these has its own “raison d’être,” and it is extremely desirable for its aims to be accepted by all its members. For this to take place, the group’s activities must be useful to all its members and beneficial to society. Moreover, these activities must not be merely simple, mechanical, and repetitive, but must be rich in variety and must help us exercise our creative abilities. People entrusted with carrying them out must regard them as being worthwhile. They should be “appealing,” “attractive,” “helpful” and “adventurous.” Such activities bring out human qualities and stimulate our desire to work. It may be appropriate to express them as “dream” (Kondo, 2001). Of course, our dream is of individual character and different among us. Guiding negotiating agreement without giving in is the important job of leaders.

Special features of quality

Among the important management indicators, quality, cost and productivity, the human history of quality is far longer than the other two and only quality is the common concern between manufacturer and customer. From these special features of quality, it can be said that quality is more of human nature. From this, the appeal of quality improvement is more easily empathized and accepted by the workforce than cost reduction and productivity increase. We use the term quality culture, not cost or productivity culture. Improving quality by creative methods can lead to cost reduction and productivity rise, and the converse is not necessarily true (Kondo, 1993). Creativity can change a win-lose relationship to a win-win relationship.

When people were poor, it is certainly true that work and money were tightly linked; people must have money to provide their
basic needs such as food and clothing. Money is effective for getting rid of human dissatisfaction. However, it has no effect on providing our positive satisfaction. It is known that the character of human needs changes from extrinsic and material ones of human dissatisfaction elements to intrinsic and spiritual ones of human satisfaction elements. As already explained, monetary compensation is only effective for eliminating human dissatisfaction, but our “dream” cannot be bought with money.

**Fostering creative abilities**

We have discussed so far the creativity aspect of human work. Clearly, our desire to work is closely connected to creativity and is inseparable from it. The following is the important steps that form the basis for making our work more creative (Kondo, 1999):

1. **When giving work instructions, clearly indicate the true aims of the work.** The importance of this injunction has already been discussed. For the people charged with carrying out the work, the true aims of the work are whatever must be achieved, come what may, by whoever is responsible. These aims must consist of more than the mere pursuit of profit. They must be attractive, adventurous and acceptable to everyone involved. They must be the common aims that are worthwhile, well understood and win the support of people involved.

2. **Give people a strong sense of responsibility towards their work.** Feeling a keen sense of “before-the-fact” type responsibility stimulates the creation of good ideas for achieving the aims of the assigned work. As described earlier in the third section, it is important to satisfy the following two conditions:
   - clearly indicating the true aims of the work; and
   - giving as great a degree of freedom as possible in the means and methods. The latter condition means that people are free to devise and utilize as many and various ways of doing the work as they can, provided that they stay within the constraints on carrying out the work. It is also important to examine the existing constraints, judge whether they are really necessary, and boldly remove unnecessary or harmful ones.

3. **Allow time for the creation of ideas.** When the true aims of work are communicated to the people involved and they are given as much freedom as possible in how they achieve the aims, and when ways are found to prevent them from making good excuses for not achieving the aims as well, people will feel a strong desire to somehow or other solve the problems and achieve the aims. When they feel a strong sense of responsibility, they will ponder the problems deeply for prolonged periods. As a result of this mulling-over process, they will get back to the root of the problems, and this will lead to flashes of inspiration and the emergence of new ideas.

   An ancient Chinese proverb, “on the horse, on the pillow and on the stool,” points out the kind of occasions on which we become relaxed and detached in this way, so that ideas are more likely and easily to occur to us. It tells us that this kind of time occurs when we are horse riding, sleeping and in the toilet. Of course, our ideas come most readily at different times for different individuals, and it is important to give people the opportunities they need to be creative.

4. **Nurture ideas and bring them to fruition.** However excellent an idea created in this way may be, like a new-born baby, it is easy to extinguish it by examining it critically with the idea of picking it to pieces or stepping on it. However, to decide whether the ideas are really good or to make them into something really useful, we must allow them to grow to a certain extent. There is also absolutely no objection to allowing an idea to change from its original form into a better one during this nurturing stage.

   It is rather usual, however, that people are more concerned with blocking new ideas than they are with encouraging their development. Bringing a new idea to maturity always requires someone to champion it. In most cases, those in positions of authority are the only ones
who can do this. In other words, leaders and managers should not go around throwing cold water on new ideas but should become their patrons and encourage their growth.

By taking these steps 1 to 4, we can turn our work into a creative activity. In addition, when people feel a strong sense of responsibility for their work, generate excellent ideas and turn these ideas into reality in this way, they will feel a real sense of achievement and self-confidence. This is an extremely valuable experience from the motivation standpoint.

**Cooperation and competition**

One of the outstanding features of TQM activities is characterized by the involvement and participation of all employees in order to permit close teamwork among people from different positions, departments and activities. An important precondition for teamwork to occur is that all the members of the group fully understand and accept the group’s common aims. In addition, it is often better for the group’s members to have slightly different standpoints and outlooks. It is because this difference makes it easier for

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**Figure 1** The line-up of leadership

- **merely simple, mechanical and repetitive work**
- **worthwhile, beneficial to society acceptable to members**
- **appealing, attractive helpful adventurous**
- **quality**
- **displaying tenacity and patience guiding, developing and encouraging**
- **setting and removing restrictive conditions**
- **comparison**
- **participation**
- **encouraging fair competition**
- **elevation of abilities**
- **teamwork**
- **cooperation among people with different character**
- **leadership is always indispensable, but what is it?**
- **separation of planning from, execution (Taylor system)**
- **“right place, right person”**
- **mandatory aim, option methods**
- **strong sense of responsibility**
- **“dream”**
- **negotiating agreement**
- **before-the-fact type of responsibility**
- **Leadership**
good creative ideas to surface among the members. Nishibori (1971) emphasized the importance of cooperation of this kind among people with different characters: it is extremely important in bringing out a group’s capabilities and exercising them to the fullest.

We know that our sense of competition is usually stronger than we think and is very difficult to suppress. If it is forcibly restrained from above or outside, the people involved will feel a vague sense of dissatisfaction and unfulfilled desire. What we can and must do is not to stop competition but to abolish unfair competition that contravenes the rules.

The participants in this kind of competition must focus on competing with one another to develop their ideas and skills in a positive way, rather than trying to block their opponents’ efforts or squash their creative ideas. In other words, we need the type of competition in which the participants seek to win by developing their abilities rather than holding them back.

This kind of fair competition is also frequently seen among group members trying to work together as a group or team aiming at achieving the common aims. It can be said competition and cooperation are the two faces of the same coin. The antithesis of competition is not harmony, but cooperation. Harmony is often the result of a compromise among the parties and members involved. Cooperation is more active and positive than harmony, and it can help to achieve far greater things than we ever could have working individually. Although cooperation and competition may be antonyms, what was discussed here is that the actual relationship between the two is not so simple, and competition can actually be an important aspect of cooperation and can act as a powerful motivation factor.

**Conclusion**

In this article, some of the important elements of leadership were described and discussed. The separation of planning from execution was shown to be a different activity from leadership. Then the construction, or line-up, of these important elements should be considered in order to understand the whole image or structure of leadership. If not, we will be in a similar situation to that of the blind men touching only a part of the elephant. In other words, the clarification of mutual relationship of these elements is important and should be made.

It is thought that a relation diagram approach is helpful. Figure 1 is an example of this trail. It is shown that separation of planning from execution is a different thing. It is also understood that this approach does not show the sufficient conditions for leadership, but it is merely an example of a group of necessary conditions. Also, it is often emphasized that the personality of leaders, is an important element for successful leadership. However, considerations on this topic were not conducted in the present article.

**References**


**Commentary**

*The human face of leadership*