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Title	Leadership Skills for Enhancing Subordinates' Ability to Learn from Experience
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Relation	Section 11 from "Japanese Management in Change : The Impact of Globalization and Market Principles"
Issue Date	2015
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/72159
Type	book part
File Information	Self-archiving_(Matsuo_2015)_Springer.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

N. Kambayashi (Ed.), *Japanese Management in Change* (pp. 159-174),
Tokyo: Japan. Springer. DOI 10.1007/978-4-431-55096-9_11

Chapter 11
Leadership Skills for Enhancing Subordinates' Ability to Learn from Experience[1]

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Abstract
I examined managers' leadership skills for enhancing subordinates' ability to learn from experience. Using data from an open-ended questionnaire given to middle managers (n¼51) at a Japanese manufacturer, I found that excellent managers with capabilities to develop their subordinates have the following leadership skills: they (1) help subordinates understand the meaning of tasks and goals, (2) accept proposals from subordinates, and (3) encourage subordinates to think and complete their tasks by themselves. The results suggest that excellent managers develop their subordinates by facilitating their "sense-making" and "knowing."

Keywords Knowing • Leadership skills • Learning from experience • Sensemaking

11.1 Introduction
Learning from work experience is viewed as a critical factor in personnel growth (Lombardo and Eichinger 2010). Research on this topic has mainly investigated the special characteristics of the experiences that facilitate managers' growth, and these results have been integrated into the concept of developmental challenges (DeRue and Wellman 2009; Dragoni et al. 2009; McCauley et al. 1994; Ohlott 2004). However, not everyone is assured to grow simply by accumulating experiences considered to be "developmental challenges." To acquire knowledge and skills through experience, it is

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[1] The original version of this paper was published in Japanese in the Nagoya Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 14, pp. 257–276, 2014.

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also necessary to have an ability to learn from such experiences. Although Spreitzer et al. (1997) performed experimental studies on the ability to learn from experience, no clear result has yet been found, and there is a lack of any theoretical backing. Thus, research on this topic seems to be stalled.

However, the ability to learn from experience is also related to on-the-job training (OJT) and coaching because these methods have been developed to help others learn from experience. Nonetheless, very few studies have attempted to reinterpret OJT and coaching from the learning experience perspective.

In the present study, I analyzed free-response survey data provided by managers based on the "Model for Learning from Experience" (Matsuo 2011b) to identify the characteristics of training methods that help personnel grow.

11.2 Theoretical Background

11.2.1 Experiential Learning

Experience refers to the interaction between individuals and their external environments (Dewey 1938), as well as events that occur in their daily lives. Work experience refers to events related to individuals' attitudes, desires, and achievements at work (Quinones et al. 1995; Tesluk and Jacobs 1998). According to Kolb (1984), people learn from experience by: (1) having concrete experiences, (2) reflecting on their content, (3) drawing some sort of lesson from them, and (4) applying them to subsequent circumstances.

Previous research in this field has focused on investigating the special characteristics of the specific experiences that help managers grow. For example, McCall et al. (1988) conducted an interview survey of successful managers and found that these managers had learned balanced lessons by accumulating various experiences that could be categorized as issues, other people, and hardships. Subsequent studies have been integrated into the concept of developmental challenges, which refers to experiences that facilitate a manager's growth (DeRue and Wellman 2009; Dragoni et al. 2009; McCauley et al. 1994). The term "developmental challenge" signifies a challenging experience, such as unfamiliar work, the generation of change, a high level of responsibility, and overseas work experience.

11.2.2 Ability to Learn from Experience

However, it is not a given that personnel will automatically grow when they face several challenging experiences. To grow through such experiences, they must also have the

ability to learn from their experiences. Spreitzer et al. (1997) provided dimensions, such as seeking feedback, using feedback, responding positively to diverse cultures, seeking opportunities to learn, and being open to criticism, as necessary factors to allow learning from experience. The ability to learn from experience has also been studied from the perspectives of self-confidence (Brutus et al. 2000), learning orientation (Dragoni et al. 2009), and conviction (Matsuo 2011a). However, compared to research that categorizes experience characteristics, studies on the ability to learn from experience have not made much progress and
have been lacking in terms of theory.

Matsuo (2011b) evaluated previous research in this area and proposed a "Model for the Ability to Learn from Experience," consisting of five elements: stretch, reflection, enjoyment, thought, and connection. Stretch refers to aiming for ambitious goals, reflection to reflecting on the content of work, and enjoyment to having a sense of work satisfaction and purpose. Individuals' thoughts are described as their goals and values, as well as their connections, which are their relationships with others that activate these elements.

In this section, the background to Matsuo's (2011b) theoretical model is briefly described. First, the importance of stretch or reaching for ambitious goals and challenging work has been emphasized consistently in experiential learning research, as well as in goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham 2002). Similarly, reflection has been considered a key concept in studies on organizational and workplace learning (Cunliffe 2004; Gray 2007). In addition, studies on intrinsic motivation (Amabile 1988) and flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) indicate that interest in the task itself or task enjoyment facilitates learning. Furthermore, educational psychology and career theory have emphasized factors, such as thought or learning orientation (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Porter et al. 2010), as well as having a developmental network of interpersonal connections, to facilitate individual learning.

11.2.3 OJT

How can we improve employees' ability to learn from experience? One way is to provide guidance from senior colleagues. In this section, a literature review of studies on OJT and coaching investigating the concept of guidance is provided.

OJT refers to workplace-based training, and usually takes the form of one-on-one guidance (Jacobs 2003; Rothwell and Kazanas 2004; van Zolingen et al. 2000). Because direct, on-the-job experiences are believed to substantially influence the development of competency in adults, OJT has the potential to be an effective educational technique,

considering its impact on experiential workplace learning.

The fundamental principles of OJT are: (1) show (demonstrate what learners ought to do), (2) tell (explain what learners ought to do, and why they should do it), (3) do (ask learners to perform tasks), and (4) check (praise learners when they correctly complete the tasks, and provide feedback on areas that need improvement) (Dooley 2001; Rothwell and Kazanas 2004). This teaching technique spread across the United States as the "Training Within Industry" (TWI) program. It was subsequently adopted by Japanese manufacturing industries, starting with Toyota Motor Corporation, and is still being used as the foundation of its lean production system (Usko 2008).

A problem with OJT studies is that they have only focused on a form of guidance where specific skills, used in specific work processes, are transferred from experienced workers to new employees (Kim and Lee 2001). However, in most corporate environments, closed tasks, with clear pre-determined work steps, are decreasing, and open tasks, involving complex tasks with no clearly defined procedures or workflow, are increasing. Thus, successful methods vary according to circumstances (Yelon and Ford 1999). Previous studies on OJT have not sufficiently investigated open tasks. However, managerial coaching research has examined methods to provide efficient open-task guidance.

11.2.4 Coaching

Coaching is typically defined as helping someone to execute a task. It is an activity that occurs frequently, from childhood to adulthood (Hackman and Wageman 2005). Numerous types of coaching exist, but managerial coaching of subordinates is the focus of this section (henceforth, the term "coaching" refers to managerial coaching in this paper).

Coaching refers to managers providing one-on-one feedback to subordinates, aimed at improving their work performance (Heslin et al. 2006), which assists them in acquiring effective daily interaction skills. According to Hamlin et al. (2006), coaching is a required skill that must be incorporated into managers' daily management activities.

Like OJT, coaching is more cost effective than official training and is a suitable educational method for promoting learning and improvements required in all enterprises and workplaces (Liu and Batt 2010). Although few studies exist on how managers should coach, Ellinger et al. (2003) identified eight approaches: (1) using metaphors and analogies to facilitate learning, (2) broadening perspectives by showing the bigger picture, (3) providing constructive feedback, (4) seeking opinions from subordinates about coaching effectiveness, (5) providing resources to facilitate work, (6) encouraging

subordinates to think about problems by asking questions, (7) clarifying what is expected of subordinates and explaining how this fits within organizational goals, and (8) changing perspectives through role playing.

In addition, Heslin et al. (2006) reviewed the coaching literature to develop a coaching measurement scale, consisting of guidance, facilitation, and inspiration (Table 11.1). Guidance refers to providing constructive feedback and advice to improve performance, facilitation to stimulating creative thinking to solve problems, and inspiration to encouraging employees to grow and undertake new challenges continuously.

Table 11.1 Coaching measures (Heslin et al. 2006, p. 879)

Guidance
Provide guidance regarding performance expectations?
Help you to analyze your performance?
Provide constructive feedback regarding areas for improvement?
Offer useful suggestions regarding how you can improve your performance?
Facilitation
Act as a sounding board for you to develop your ideas?
Facilitate creative thinking to help solve problems?
Encourage you to explore and try out new alternatives?
Inspiration
Express confidence that you can develop and improve?
Encourage you to continuously develop and improve?
Support you in taking on new challenges?

11.2.5 Research Framework

The literature review revealed that research on experiential learning ability is ongoing. In addition, OJT and coaching are aimed at improving employees' workplace performance and achievements. However, methods to help employees improve their experiential learning have not been discussed.

Thus, this study focuses on the three elements proposed by Matsuo (2011b) in the Model for the Ability to Learn from Experience: stretch, reflection, and enjoyment. In addition, leadership skills aimed at increasing experiential learning abilities among subordinates are illustrated.

As demonstrated in Fig. 11.1, managers' approaches towards guiding subordinates are aimed at developing their goals (stretch), reflecting on their performance (reflection), and experiencing a sense of work satisfaction and joy (enjoyment).

11.3 Methodology

From September 2013 to October 2013, a free-response questionnaire survey was conducted at a major manufacturing company (Company A). The survey targeted 30 high-performing section-head managers who were considered extremely effective personnel developers, as well as 25 other managers. The questionnaire was distributed and collected from the personnel department of Company A, and 51 responses were received (29 from the highly competent managers, and 22 from the other managers, a response rate of 92.7 %).

The following questions were included in the questionnaire: (1) When you develop subordinates' goals, which factors do you keep in mind while guiding them? (guidance method related to 'stretching'), (2) When subordinates reflect on their work, which factors do you keep in mind while guiding them? (guidance method related to 'reflection'), and (3) To help subordinates to experience a sense of work satisfaction and joy, which factors do you keep in mind while guiding them? (guidance method related to 'enjoyment').

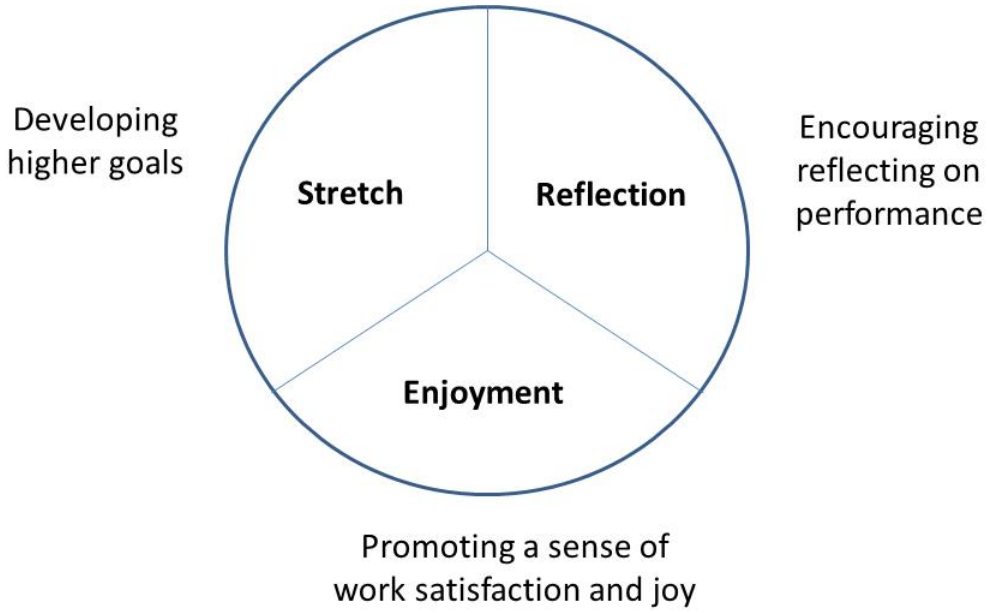


Fig. 11.1 Research framework

The survey data were analyzed using the following steps: (1) the data from competent managers and other managers were analyzed separately, (2) if the respondent described multiple methods for the respective elements of stretch, reflection, and

enjoyment, these were separated into individual leadership skills, and then each method was categorized into method groups containing similar content, and (3) the responses from competent managers were compared to those of other managers, and the similarities and differences were summarized.

11.4 Results

11.4.1 Leadership Skills for Stretch

Table 11.2 indicates the managerial leadership skills to develop ambitious goals for subordinates. The methods described by both competent managers and other managers were the setting of short- and medium-term growth targets, setting goals that match the subordinates' potential and ambitions, and allotting work that subordinates could accomplish on their own by trying hard.

The leadership skills described by competent managers included the following: explaining the meaning of the goals in a convincing manner, setting goals in stages to make subordinates aware of the process, and supporting subordinates in accomplishing tasks according to their abilities.

Concrete examples of leadership skills to explain the meaning of the goals in a convincing manner:

- Explaining the need for the goals in a manner that satisfies subordinates and allows adequate time for discussion.
- Goals should not be imposed from above. Instead, it is essential that subordinates design their own goals and are satisfied with them.
- Although explaining why goal stretching for work duties is important, it is also necessary to discuss how subordinates' goals relate to the company's goals, as well as linkages with personal growth.

The following responses were received concerning guidance to set goals in stages to make subordinates aware of the process:

- Regardless of how ambitious the goals are, it is important to inform subordinates that if they divide the path leading to the goal into individual processes, and implement the plan for each, it is possible to reach the goals, and thus to reduce anxiety.
- If goals are too challenging, it will be difficult for subordinates to find motivation to achieve them. I thus determined milestones and controlled their progress in a manner

that allowed them to achieve their goals in stages.

- By demonstrating goals in the form of milestones from the beginning, subordinates are able to see how their level improves, one step at a time.
- By setting up the process to achieve goals in concrete terms, we can come to a mutually agreement on whether the goals are realistic. Based on this, I inform my subordinates of my expectations, provide advice, and then we develop ambitious goals together.

Finally, the following responses were received concerning guidance to support subordinates in accomplishing tasks according to their own abilities:

- Providing indirect support with advice, and supporting them without making the goals and duties easier, even if subordinates appear to be struggling with them.
- It is not enough to set goals. I also provide necessary support, such as illustrating specific actions required to achieve them, as well as providing additional resources.
- If it is necessary to ease subordinates' anxieties to sustain and increase their motivation, it is essential to provide support based on daily changes, for example, offering hints for solving issues or helping them draw up a recovery plan.

Table 11.2 Leadership skills for stretch

Competent Managers	Other Managers
Setting short- and medium-term growth targets	
Setting goals that match the subordinate's potential and ambitions	
Allotting work that the subordinate can accomplish by trying hard	
Explaining the meaning of the goals in a convincing manner	No mention
Setting goals in stages to make subordinates aware of the process	No mention
Supporting subordinates in accomplishing tasks according to their abilities	A few mentions

To summarize, competent managers do not simply stretch goals but also support subordinates in achieving ambitious goals. In concrete terms, managers explained the meanings of ambitious goals in a manner that ensured subordinates' satisfaction with them, they illustrated the processes or stages involved in achieving the goals, and also provided support when required to help subordinates achieve their goals.

11.4.2 Leadership Skills for Reflection

Table 11.3 indicates the leadership skills used to encourage subordinates to reflect on their work. Both the competent managers and the other managers described the following methods: reflecting while keeping your goals in mind; reflecting objectively, concretely, and quantitatively; providing feedback on positive results first; and reflecting on failures and thinking about how to prevent them from recurring.

The competent managers indicated the following guidance method characteristics: carefully listening to subordinates, encouraging them to think by asking questions, and linking the results of the reflection to the next step.

Some concrete examples of these leadership skills were also provided. The following responses were received concerning carefully listening to subordinates:

- I first arrange meetings to listen to my subordinates. I only share my opinions after I have asked them to share their thoughts, and to describe how much progress they think they have made towards achieving their goals. While guiding them, I focus on their realizations and try to help them to reflect objectively on their work.
- First, I allow them to express their opinions freely (good points, bad points, problems, etc.). I subsequently explain the areas I, myself, need to improve on, and explain in a straightforward manner the areas in which I want them to improve.
- I emphasize listening to my subordinates regarding their work, and watching over them in the workplace.

Table 11.3 Leadership skills for reflection

Competent Managers	Other Managers
Reflect while keeping your goals in mind	
Reflect objectively, concretely, and quantitatively	
Provide feedback on positive results first	
Reflect on failures and think about how to prevent them from recurring	
Listen to the subordinate carefully	No mention
Make the subordinate think by asking questions	A few mentions
Link the results of the reflection to the next step	No mention

Examples of guidance related to encouraging subordinates to think by asking questions included:

- Superiors should not point out subordinates' mistakes. Rather, they should ask

questions to make them recognize areas that need improvement.

- When discussing something with a subordinate, I continuously ask “why” to encourage them to reflect on their work.
- I ask them to compare the work goals with their accomplishments, and to analyze and evaluate their own work by asking questions, such as why they think they were able, or unable, to complete a task, as well as the causes. I then discuss their answers with them and provide feedback from both a superior’s and objective perspective on what they were able to achieve, what they were unable to achieve, and how to overcome the problems related to the latter.

Finally, the following responses were received related to guidance to link the results of reflection to the next step.

- I encourage subordinates to reflect deeply, and avoid anxiety by emphasizing that reflection is a constructive activity aimed at making improvements in the future, and not to reproach them.
- I reflect on work with my subordinates and explain the results as well as the path leading to them. During this process, I encourage them to reflect upon areas where there is scope for improvement while considering future tasks.
- Do not be preoccupied with failure or success. Evaluate a phenomenon and its outcome accurately, and share your findings with colleagues without hesitation.
- I provide instructions to create and revise work manuals based on the reflections.

To summarize, competent managers emphasize subordinate-initiated reflection and develop links to future work. In concrete terms, they first listen to their subordinates carefully, ask questions to encourage deeper reflection among them, and ensure that the results be applied to future tasks. Although these are considered basic coaching elements, differences in managerial guidance skills are likely to emerge and thus determine whether they are able to implement them in the workplace.

11.4.3 Leadership Skills for Enjoyment

Table 11.4 illustrates leadership skills to assist subordinates in experiencing a sense of work satisfaction and joy. Both competent managers and other managers mentioned the following methods: allowing employees to experience a sense of work satisfaction by assigning more challenging work to them, allowing them to experience a sense of achievement by providing opportunities to announce their results, praising the positive

aspects of their performance, and praising small acts on various occasions.

Competent managers described the following guidance method characteristics: listening to subordinates' opinions and incorporating them, conveying the purpose of tasks to subordinates and encouraging them to think, and allowing subordinates to produce results by thinking for themselves. Concrete guidance method examples were also shared. The following responses were received for listening to subordinates' opinions and incorporating them:

- Get to know the employees' values and ways of thinking better by not talking exclusively about work but also about aspects of their private lives in meetings.
- Listen carefully to what they want to do, and assign that type of work to them. The basic rule to facilitate a sense of satisfaction, joy, and a sense of achievement is to conduct experiments that will lead to a better workplace, based on improvements initiated from within the group.
- I try to listen to suggestions and feedback from my subordinates carefully, and encourage spontaneous, creative actions by having them think about tasks together.
- I incorporate all suggestions from my subordinates that appear correct.

Responses on guidance to convey the purpose of the task and make subordinates think included:

- Encourage employees to do their best by once again making them aware of the purpose of their current task within the bigger process to achieve their medium and long-term goals.
- I attempt to cultivate a sense of satisfaction among employees by highlighting the novel aspects of their work, and making them realize that they are the leaders.
- I continuously tell my subordinates that they should treasure the value of their existence, responsibilities, and pride themselves for being able to contribute to society as product developers.
- I attempt to motivate employees by explaining to inexperienced team members the meaning and joy related to the products they have worked on in the world.

Finally, the following responses were received concerning allowing subordinates to produce results by thinking for themselves.

- I attempt to guide them to produce results by thinking for themselves, even if it takes a

little longer.

- I make a conscious effort to help them come up with answers on their own by asking them questions.
- I do not give them the answer; instead, I guide them to allow them to figure out the answer for themselves. For example, I tell them whether data are usable, but let them do the analysis on their own. After we discuss the overall image and policies, I let them develop the plan themselves.
- I ask them to execute the work and think for themselves.

Table 11.4 Leadership skills for enjoyment

Competent Managers	Other Managers
Making the subordinates feel a sense of satisfaction by giving them a higher level of work	
Making them feel a sense of achievement by providing opportunities to announce the results	
Praising the positive aspects of the performance	
Praising small acts on various occasions	
Listening to the subordinates' opinions and incorporating them	No mention
Conveying the purpose of task and encouraging subordinates to think	No mention
Allowing subordinates to produce results by thinking for themselves	A few mentions

To summarize, to facilitate work enjoyment, competent managers not only praise employees but also help them develop a sense of work satisfaction and joy. In concrete terms, they help their subordinates feel satisfied and pleased with their work by listening to their opinions, conveying the significance of their work, the value and purpose of tasks, and encouraging them to produce results by thinking for themselves. These results revealed that intrinsic leadership skills like these, which encourage subordinates to consider and realize the meaning of their work by themselves, are more effective subordinate development methods than extrinsic methods such as assigning challenging tasks and providing positive feedback, which were common responses provided by both types of managers.

11.5 Discussions

11.5.1 Findings

In this study, I have examined leadership skills to facilitate personnel growth based on the Model for Ability to Learn from Experience. The leadership skills for personnel

development preferred by successful managers are summarized in Fig. 11.2. These methods include: (1) stretch—explaining the purpose of the goals and helping subordinates achieve ambitious goals according to their own abilities while stage-by-stage stretching the goals; (2) reflection—carefully listening to subordinates and encouraging them to think by asking questions and guiding them to apply the results of their reflection to future tasks; and 3) enjoyment— incorporating subordinates' opinions and encouraging them to consider the meaning of their work and produce results according to their own abilities.

Leadership skills such as encouraging subordinates to understand the meaning of their work and goals and encouraging them to think and produce results on their own form part of both the stretch and enjoyment elements. This indicates that guiding subordinates to achieve higher goals and helping them to experience work satisfaction and joy are closely related to each other. Taking on new challenges could thus be linked with being satisfied with one's work, which, in turn, encourages people to take on new challenges.

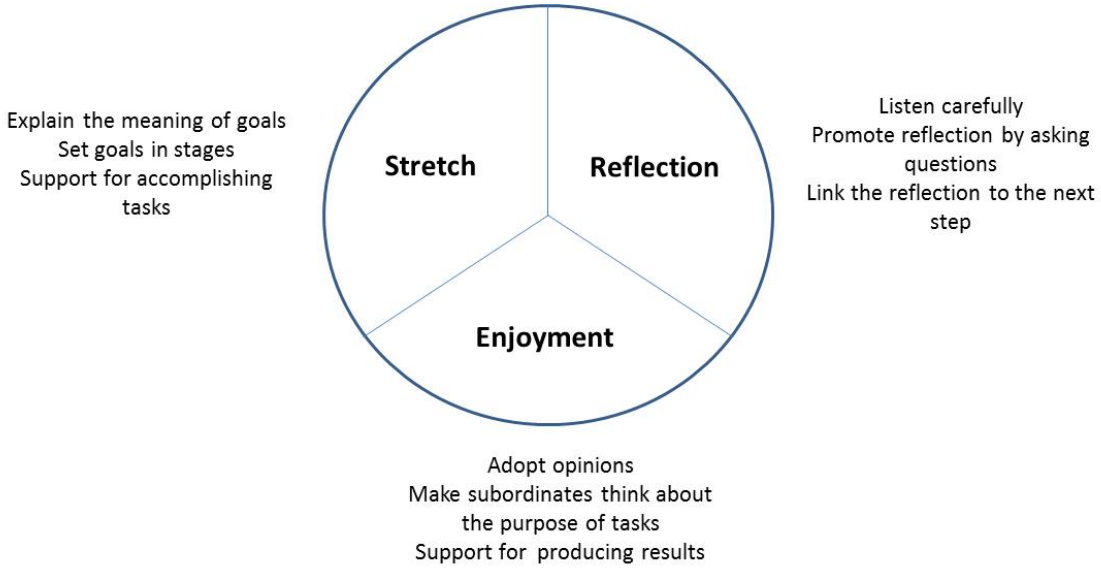


Fig. 11.2 Leadership skills to facilitate personnel growth

The leadership skills illustrated in Fig. 11.2 can also be rearranged according to content similarity, as indicated in Fig. 11.3. Managers who are highly capable of developing personnel: (1) ensured that subordinates understood the purpose of their tasks and goals, (2) valued the opinions of their subordinates, (3) supported them to execute their tasks by encouraging independent thought, and (4) encouraged them to

accomplish tasks and produce results according to their own abilities. These results indicate that guidance that emphasizes subordinate independence or selfreliance enhances the ability to learn from experience. In addition, the managers who fell short in providing subordinates with adequate explanations concerning the purpose of their goals and tasks, and were unable to understand their interests and values sufficiently, were unable to provide support to promote subordinates' self-reflection and self-fulfillment.

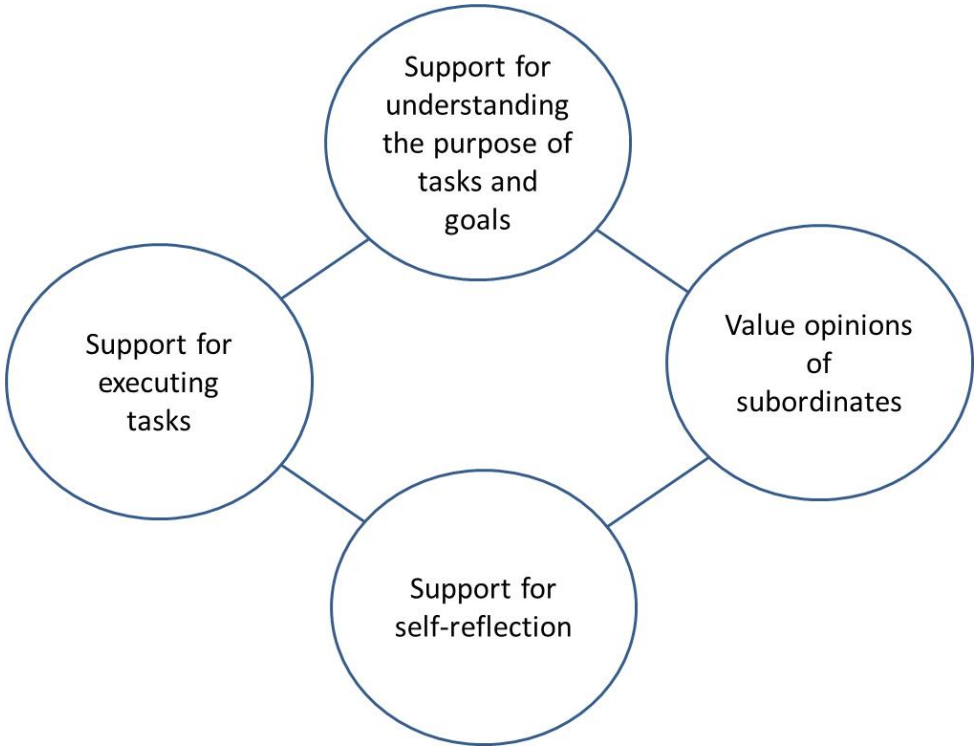


Fig. 11.3 Characteristics of leadership skills to facilitate personnel growth

11.5.2 Theoretical Implications

First, facilitating sense-making (Weick et al. 2005), which means attaching meaning to goals and tasks, plays a vital role in developing human resources. Although the three coaching dimensions of guidance, facilitation, and inspiration identified in the literature (Heslin et al. 2006) include support for self-fulfillment and self-reflection, they do not include leadership skills to encourage subordinates to consider the purpose of goals and tasks. Thus, this research fills this gap in the literature by highlighting the importance of facilitating sense-making in guidance.

Sense-making, concerning the features of goals and tasks, stimulates the desire to take on new challenges, and to experience work satisfaction and happiness. While

supporting sense-making in their subordinates, it is essential that managers also understand their interests and values, and respect them. Thus, supporting subordinates in understanding their goals and tasks, and respecting their interests and values are closely related.

Second, this study emphasizes the importance of "knowing" when developing personnel. Cook and Brown (1999) referred to knowing as "the creation of knowledge through an interaction with the real world." They emphasized that knowledge is not transferred from one person to another. Instead, we create new knowledge using our own powers while we use other people or writings as knowledge tools. The self-reflection and self-knowledge methods illustrated in this study are leadership skills for subordinates to facilitate knowing or the creation of new knowledge using their own capabilities.

In addition to encouraging knowing, managers who were more effective at personnel development divided goals into stages. Burton et al. (1984) argued that an effective way to assist people in acquiring complex skills is to create a learning environment, based on increasingly complex micro worlds (ICMs). Competent managers thus create ICMs by setting goals and dividing them into stages to make the work process more manageable.

Third, this study demonstrated that similarities exist between facilitating stretch to take on new challenges and assisting enjoyment to ensure that subordinates experience work satisfaction and joy. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) pointed out that people who are engaged in appropriately challenging work are able to become engrossed in and enjoy it. Therefore, stretch and enjoyment leadership skills should be viewed as being interconnected.

11.5.3 Practical Implications

First, several managers assigned problems of appropriate difficulty, based on subordinates' characteristics, to stretch goals, but they failed to adequately explain the meaning of goals and help subordinates achieve them. In addition to communicating the reason for setting ambitious goals, it is also necessary to support subordinates with distinct measures to achieve their goals, according to their own abilities, such as dividing goals into stages to more effectively manage the work process.

Second, many managers do not listen carefully enough to subordinates. They also do not adequately encourage them to think by asking questions, or encourage them to apply the results of their reflection to future tasks, which are basic aspects of facilitating reflection. There is a need to shift from superior-driven to subordinate driven reflection.

Third, to increase enjoyment, it is inadequate to assign meaningful work alone; managers should provide a platform to announce results, and praise subordinates in various ways. In addition, managers should help subordinates accomplish their work based on their own abilities and help them understand the purpose of the work assigned to them. Even if a superior thinks that a subordinate has been assigned meaningful work, subordinates might not agree. Therefore, it is essential that superiors infuse subordinates' work with a sense of joy by actively conveying the meaning of their work to them and encouraging them to think about it.

11.5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations and further research is required. First, because this study was based on a survey of managers within a particular company, managers from various companies need to be surveyed in future studies. Second, it is challenging to interpret differences between competent managers and other managers using a free-description survey. Clearer results might have been obtained if the leadership skills were analyzed quantitatively to clarify certain factors that this study was unable to address. Third, it is also important to conduct surveys in diverse types of enterprises and jobs to determine variability in leadership skills specific to particular tasks. This approach might clarify the unique aspects of the ability-to learn- from-experience approach compared to leadership skills suggested in previous studies on coaching.

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