Mid-level Managers

About the Tutorial

A good mid-level manager has the ability to extract the best potential buried within others; the same goes for a great leader as well. In the course of time and with proper guidance, mid-level managers will not only wield skills of a great leader, but other intellectual properties as well. Leaders possess the potential to motivate others and increase the willpower in others to undertake certain objectives.

In this tutorial, we will discuss regarding the roles and responsibilities of Mid-Level Managers in any moderate-to-large company.

Audience

This tutorial is designed for employees who have been assigned responsibilities of mid-level mid-managerial work, which is a tricky place to be in. It is because a mid-manager has the responsibilities of a top mid-manager, but not his levels of authorization.

Prerequisites

Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are expected to have a fundamental idea about the Mid-Level Management in a company. It will be an added advantage, if y0ou know the basics of the organizational structure, hierarchy and the working model of your company.

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1. Mid-Level Management – Introduction

Mid-level managers are the interface between multiple teams and the higher management. A mid-manager has the responsibilities of a top mid-manager, but not his levels of authorization. It is a tricky place to be in.

In the course of this tutorial, you will gradually understand why a good mid-manager should be a good team leader first. To become a true leader, one needs to hone his skills from an initial stage till he has a good hold over the fundamentals of management. Leaders possess the potential to motivate others, and increase the willpower in others to undertake certain objectives.

A good mid-manager should have the ability to extract the best potential buried within others; the same goes for a great leader as well. In the course of time and with proper guidance, mid-managers will not only wield skills of a great leader, but other intellectual properties as well.

Qualities of a Mid-Manager

A good mid-manager must possess the following qualities:

- It is essential for a mid-manager to have a good command over the **basic principles of management**.

- Communication skills are very important in not only motivating their team, but also in training them, planning assignments, hiring resources, coaching new employees and counseling older ones.

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- A good mid-level manager needs to reflect core ethical values that inspire the minds of others, and earns him respect from their subordinates, colleagues, and clients.

Handling dual responsibilities of a mid-level manager and a leader can be overwhelming. After all, it involves working in two roles at the same time:

- As a **team player**, collaborating with the management team.

- As the **team leader**, constantly sharpening skills of the mid-managers' team and improving productivity in long run.

Acting as a mid-manager, it is important to be a team player in a project which involves constant conversation within the teammates about the scope of operation. A mid-level manager has to ensure that proper training has been given to the team, so that they can take the responsibility for the smooth functioning of the customer's operations.

Definition of a Team

A team is defined as "a certain group of people having specific skill-sets working together to achieve a common goal or target". The members of a team should have trust on each other's abilities and respect towards one another.

From a very tender age, many of us might have been very familiar to the term "team". We have been divided into houses in schools during parades, into teams on playgrounds, within our families (adults, children) or among friends. Irrespective of the nature of the selection, mid-managers will always find that members of a team always share some common traits and characteristics.

Similarly, a mid-manager is responsible to study individual members of his team and put them in such job profiles that helps him get good coordination and synchronization among different members of a team. Pooling resources based on their temperament and abilities is the most important job of a mid-level manager.

Depending on the process his teams are working in and based on the levels of interpersonal engagement of his teammates, a mid-level manager needs to manage two teams, which are:

- The Relationship Team

- The Transactional Team

The Relationship Team

The Relationship Team is responsible for the smooth functioning of an organization. This team is based on proper scheduling and constant efforts to find out innovative and effective ways for improvement. A Relationship Team doesn't operate within a specific time table. In fact, it is a team working on a long-term basis for continuous improvement of the organization, which is a never-ending process.

The Transactional Team

Transactional Teams work on projects that have a well-defined and pre-decided beginning and ending point. These projects can be easily identified and have clear objectives. In contrast to a Relationship Team, which has a more holistic approach to work, these teams have a certain

project, which once completed, may result in dispersal of the team members. The time associated with these teams are often short term in nature.

A mid-level manager delivers results by collectively leading and guiding teams irrespective of their size. In such cases, it is crucial to first have a good understanding of the objectives and the resources of the teams. Be it a Relationship Team or a Transactional Team, the job of a mid-level manager is to lead the individuals towards improvement in their performance and productivity.

From the clients' point of view, they might perceive a mid-level manager to be a part of two teams. The Mid-level managers take dual responsibilities of harnessing talent and managing operations at the same time. They also report to higher authorities and suggest changes to the working model depending on the environment.

Managing Professional and Personal Life Balance

A question that has for a long time invited innumerable rounds of discussions and has perplexed many of the researchers and experts is – "What does the idea of perfect professional-personal balance in the life of a manager look like?". People have a mental image of managers working for the most number of hours in a week, or even on weekends and so on, and truth be told, many such managers exist. However, spending more hours on work does not necessarily make a manager productive.

An efficient manager knows how to balance his personal and personal life by dividing his life into sets of priorities and coming out with a priority list that starts from the most important ones and ends with those priorities that can almost be ignored. Generally, this priority list is arranged in a chronological order.

Again, a single priority list cannot be generalized and presented for all managers as all of them work under different circumstances and scenarios. Excellent leaders value both their personal as well as their personal lives. So, the mid-level managers should find out a sweet spot of balance between professional and personal life and stay accustomed to it. At same time, mid-level managers should always keep in mind that their subordinates also face the same dilemma between their personal and professional lives and they should acknowledge that as well.

Teams tend to have a unique identity of their own and may vary across different sizes with respect to requirement. However, even the most diverse teams will end up having some common factors that can be generalized for all teams. These factors are the driving forces behind teams managing to work with one another, despite having a very different approach to work. The mid-level managers thrive on these similar grounds to use the workplace efficiently in delivering results.

Keeping this in mind, Dr. Bruce Tuckman came up with a theory explaining the process of development of teams when they start working together. He called it the **Four Stages of Team Development**. In 1970, he realized that all teams will have to end working on an assignment one time or the other. It may so happen that the assignment would continue, but the team dismantles to form a new team. Keeping this in mind, he later added a fifth step to it, "Adjourning". According to him, the steps for team development are:

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing
- Adjourning

Forming

This stage includes introduction of team members to one another, learning about their areas of expertise and getting comfortable with their working style. Here, the information shared about the team members focuses mostly on skills acquired, strengths and weaknesses of members.

Storming

It is one of the most difficult stages among five stages. Using the information that the teammates had shared with one another in the Forming Stage; the feedback is collected and shared on the basis of their real behaviour in their workplace or in the vicinity of their work place.

Norming

In this step, all those members of the teams who have already been cleared through various challenges and objectives on their journey to this stage, will be given unique scenarios and they have to come up with new strategies and new ways to tackle challenges. A complete survey is then performed on how and when the challenges were faced and resolved.

Performing

By the end of this stage, different team members would have sorted out their interpersonal issues and finally started to perform as a team. They will be doing this with a collective focus on completing the tasks that they are responsible for. They start applying various strategies and tactics to achieve their collective goals and challenges.
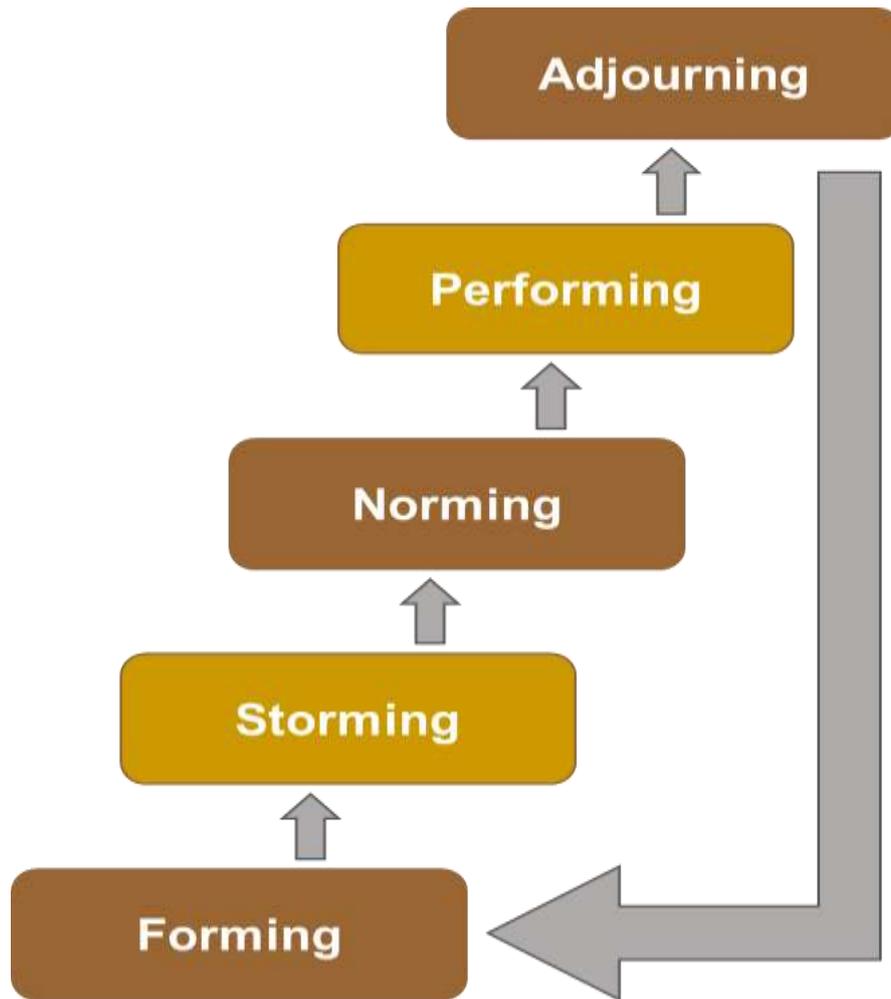
Adjourning

This is the last and final stage of the evolution of a team. Here, the teams will submit their outcomes for reviews and plan their upcoming steps on the basis of the feedback that the management provides. A team may take its next step by applying knowledge acquired from performing tasks with others. The outcomes of these teams are used by others as reference for any such similar work to be done in the future.

As mid-managers have a look at the aforementioned steps, they will see that these five steps can be collectively applied to any kind of team that works on any long-term or short-term assignments. However, the amount of time taken and the intensity of effort implemented may vary from one team to another.

3. Aspects of a Team

The fundamental idea behind the creation of a team is usually quality deliverance within a deadline. **Team Building** is the result of a good strategical planning process. A team should be created with proper strategic planning in order to be able to achieve certain specific goals and targets.

Team Planning

Team planning is one of the crucial steps of team building and involves the initial assessment of a team, its objectives and the team members before its creation. Without adequate team planning, even talented and good performers can't be put together in a team and expected to perform in a collective and mutually supportive manner.

Team Assessment

Team assessment refers to the task of analysing a team's performance, identifying the advantages and drawbacks of each team member and how these members contribute to the collective team effort after they have been put together. It also gives an insight of an individual's contribution in a team effort.

Mission Statement

In order to set a baseline for the team members, mid-level managers should establish a specific mission statement of mid-managerial department or area of work. The mission of any team helps in identifying and conceptualizing the common purpose that binds the team members together as one enterprise.

This mission statement is often shared between members of the team to make them aware of the team's purpose and objectives. Teams operating without a mission are perceived as self-centered, who are resistant in adopting to change with passage of time.

One Mission, Different Goals

People tend to get confused between **Mission** and **Goal**. They think both of them have the same meaning, however this is not always true especially in the case of a team. For example, every team member is given an individual goal, which they have to achieve, so that the collective team mission is accomplished.

Mission is the final objective of a team and goals are milestones in the journey to achieve the final objective. Mid-level managers should set various goals for each member of the team in order to complete a collective team mission. With properly set goals, the team should collectively move towards the completion of the mission.

The Virtue of Responsibility

Each and every team member is responsible and accountable for various tasks and duties in a team. For successful achievement of the team target, it is very important for team members to take ownership of their responsibilities.

It is also equally important that they learn to work in tandem with members from other departments in order to enhance the team and borrow their expertise. Generally, workers from other functional areas work pretty well on transactional teams.

The Significance of Tracking

Tracking the progress of various team members, as well as the whole team, within a certain time frame helps mid-level managers to access and analyse the productivity and efficiency of the team goals.

This enables the team members to know if there are any defaulters, who did not achieve the goal within the given time and what goals the team is yet to achieve. Progress reports and checkpoints should also be included within a track record.

Being Flexible

It is not necessary for a team to have a permanent team leader. The person playing this role may vary according to need of fulfilling specific targets. As mid-level managers progress through their career, a time will certainly come when they will have to inherit and undertake the responsibilities of a leader.

Because of the unpredictable and inevitable nature of change, mid-managers always consider all possibilities and make various contingency plans. They realize that being rigid with deadlines and other factors will only result in stagnation of the goal.

That is the reason, they are always open to the idea of partnering with outside entities. As this will take the team towards realizing their mission. This can only happen once the team is done with the identification of the internal planning process. As with business, it is mandatory to collaborate with your team members. Long term partnerships are formed in this way.

4. A Team Handshake

A mid-level manager handles responsibilities of multiple teams. Joint goals can be achieved by adopting creative strategies such as **Teaming the Teams**, where team members from multiple teams are put into a new team and asked to work with one another.

The key concepts that managers had applied during the development of their old teams will be equally effective while creating these new, collaborative teams. The creation of such external teams are mostly done to address the needs of the clients, especially in processes where every team needs to give an output of uniform quality. These processes call for equal distribution of expertise, so if a team has two experts in one field, one of them will be put in another team where no such experts are there.

This tactical re-arrangement of the team members is called as **Team Handshake**. This smart step not only saves the company from hiring additional resources, but also adds to the interpersonal skills of different members of teams, which ultimately leads to the success of that team.

A few factors which mid-level managers should consider before selecting handshake teams:

- The political climate of the climate's business.

- Identifying the best people for the Relationship Team.

- Identifying the best people for the Transactional Team.

- Whether there is any backup or replacements for the team members.

- The depth of organization and the level up to which the mid-level managers have access.

- Whether they can access certain internal customer discussions on related topics.

When the client's political environment has been established, mid-level managers should next establish the relational and the transactional teams respectively. They should always keep it in mind that transactional teams cannot be created before the actual beginning of the project.

The reason is that transactional teams don't have any authorization to take any pre-emptive measures. They can only solve any present problems and diminish the scope of future problems, which means they cannot start identifying issues before the project starts.

Identifying the Core Sectors of a Company

One of the initial steps of declaring team members is to discuss the objective with all the departments involved. The strength of relationship between a team and its clients goes hand in hand with the alignment of the project according to the client's concern.

The following are some of the core sectors within the company, which the mid-level managers may seek to collaborate with during the implementation of a project.

Department of Sales	Corporate Executives
Department of Marketing	Operations Department
Purchase Department	IT Department
Legal Advisers	Customer Service Department
Financial Advisers	Research & Development Department
Engineering Department	Corporate Executives

During the creation of cross-functional teams, mid-level managers need to be very cautious to not start up on the wrong foot of establishing a **mid-level manager versus team approach**. In this scenario, a mid-level manager acts as the centre of the whole communication process, the failure of which ends up blocking important passages of communication for different teams. Inter-departmental barriers may arise as a result of this centralized communication process, which can be a very bad symptom for any team.

Complying with the definition of a team, mid-level managers also contribute with the same amount of effort either individually or as a part of the team. Having said that, it still is a bad idea for mid-level managers to think of themselves as a **centrepiece of their team**. Instead, mid-level managers should have the approach of being an ordinary member of the team possessing additional authority, but no extra privileges than others and having the same objectives as everyone else in the team.

Selecting Team Players from Cross–Functional Teams

A cross-functional team comprises of key players from different departments, who may not necessarily come from the upper management, but instead from a laterally-related department. The main objective behind setting up of this type of a team is to work closely on the solution of issues, which may need expertise in various fields. The team members in a cross-functional team need to be:

- Able to represent knowledge with respect to their department.

- Willing to work in or lead a transactional team.

- They should be solution oriented.

After selection of members, all of them are assigned respective tasks according to their field of expertise, so that the entire team achieves the goal collectively. It is also important for team players to discuss functional areas and responsibilities with members of the team.

Furthermore, assigning a specific task to a specific team member makes that particular team member feel special, relevant and important to team. With an increase in the number of team members, who understand their importance in the team, motivation within members also increases.

Influencing the Client's Team

A mid-level manager always tries to find a common denominator between his team and the client's team. This is the best way to have an influence over the client's team. Most of this is generally done during the planning stage itself. It is crucial to convey importance of things that are common between two teams, so that clients are interested in a partnership for a long time.

A true manager always exhibits powers that are generated by sincerity. Other types of leaders may employ sinister methods like **blackmailing**, **intimidating**, **power abuse**, etc. and get quicker results, but these results don't have a long-term durability. That is the reason these managers fail to create trust among their subordinates and are always disliked by their team members. It is not easy being a manager of highly functional units as it is, but making sure that someone does it without using manipulative tactics is an art.

Types of Mid-Level Managers

There are some significant traits and characteristics that are commonly found in some of the most successful managers and mid-level managers that give them a competitive edge over their colleagues in the same profession and job profile.

We can have the following types of mid-managers based on their significant characteristics:

- A Visionary Mid-Level Manager
- Managers with Strategy and Planning Capabilities
- Mid-Level Managers who are Good Mentors
- Honest Mid-Level Managers
- A Communicative and Considerate Manager
- Managing Professional and Personal Life Balance
- Managers who are Innovative Thinkers
- Mid-Level Managers Committed to a Win-Win Mentality

Let us now discuss and understand each of the above mentioned traits or characteristics in detail.

A Visionary Mid-Level Manager

Good managers have the ability to visualize the future and forecasting various possibilities. They train themselves to see the possibilities far beyond themselves. Because of their far-sightedness, their team is united and its capabilities are maximized.

Such leaders always know in advance what they are supposed to do in different circumstances. That's the reason they are rarely caught on the wrong guard and are almost never clueless about a proceeding. The team-mates working under the supervision of such managers benefit from a sense of security that their manager assures them of.

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They get confidence from the fact that whatever may be circumstances, their manager is always there to take care of it. This type of leadership inspires and motivates or members in team to achieve their goals or carry out their responsibilities.

Managers who Strategize

The difference between visualizing and day-dreaming is that visualization leads to an implementable plan. People who visualize start working on putting their vision into reality. However, day-dreamers just keep fantasizing about better times without actually doing anything about it.

Good leaders always think a step in advance when it comes to planning. They always consider consequences, rewards and changes that can be made for strengthening of team. They are receptive yet sceptical about newly proposed strategies and only a sound explanation convinces them about the strategies.

Any strategy without implementation goes in vain. Leaders like to work out a strategy, they have an internal sense of urgency and act spontaneously, when they are presented with opportunities. In spite of their plans being subjected to criticism, good leaders always remain patient enough to stick to plan. This is a result of their confidence in themselves and in the capabilities of their team.

Mid-level managers are responsible for strategical planning for the growth of their teams, so when these managers stumble upon some hurdles, they always know a way to pick themselves up.

Mid-Level Managers who are Good Mentors

A mid-manager doesn't just manage his team; he also coaches and mentors his team members. Mid-level managers, just like successful and inspirational leaders, always motivate and encourage their team members. Because of their attitude towards work their team develops a sense of loyalty and trust towards one another.

Leaders have trust and belief in the potential possessed by others in their team. In fact, many leaders are often flexible enough to give enough opportunities to their team members to pursue their goal in their own way, instead of enforcing their own views and beliefs on their team.

A true leader is humble enough to give the credit to his team for their achievements rather than taking all credits and accolades for himself. He understands that the more a team manager takes care of team, the more celebrated by the members he is.

Mid-level managers should always keep in mind that the role of a mentor is always deeply integrated with the responsibilities of a leader. It is high time for mid-level managers to step into the shoes of motivators and mentors and be a reassuring force for their teams.

Honest Mid-Level Managers

The foundation of ethical leadership is based on honesty. If the manager is honest, the members of his teams will inherit honesty and truthfulness from him. A leader's honesty is symbolic to his/her inner strength and integrity. Some people scoff at the age-old saying "Honesty is the best policy", however the absence of honesty is a serious flaw in the character of a person, especially, if that person is a working professional.

Dishonesty is the shield of an insecure person. Such people can never lead, because with honest, comes accountability for their actions. Telling truth is just a part of being honest; it is also about being non-corrupt, straightforward and being a stickler for commitment and punctuality. Even only one dishonest step or a false statement could result in losing trust of staff forever.

Honesty also refers to sharing of information with team without any manipulation, bias or perjury. Furthermore, if information is not shared properly, the members of team may tend to get demotivated and may question leadership of leader.

A Communicative and Considerate Manager

A team will be more open to sharing their thoughts with the mid-level managers, if the managers lead by openly expressing their vision, plans for the future and their expectations from the team. If they think that their teammates need to know something which may affect their team, they should communicate it without trying to conceal any information.

If important and pressing matters are not expressed, uncertainty will build up fear in the minds of the team members and that will make things worse and difficult for mid-level managers to handle. So, the mid-level managers should be able to create a close bond of trust between them and the teams, which will help in making the teams more efficient.

Managers who are Innovative Thinkers

Mid-level managers who are innovative thinkers always consider adopting newer and innovative ways and motivate their team members to follow the same path.

They know that well-calculated risks have many times brought in a lot of productivity and progress. Therefore, such mid-level managers are receptive to new ideas from their staff and always study the trends followed by their competitors to get new ideas.

A slightly different approach towards creativity, which is followed in many companies nowadays, is to not only encourage new ideas, but also to encourage disagreement and skepticism. A confident leader always sportively accepts difference in opinions between the team members.

Mid-level managers should build a team that contains members who have high performance capabilities. A confident mid-manager should challenge his teammates to question his decisions and find mistakes in them.

Mid-Level Managers Committed to a Win-Win Mentality

Looking backwards is not the same as looking back, though. A person looking back is someone trying to study his past failures and learn from them. In contrast, a person who looks backwards is someone who is always unsure and unconfident of his own steps. They take a decision and immediately regret it, or want to revert it as they don't feel sure of it.

Leaders never look backwards, as they are consistently focused on winning. Leaders do not waste their time on looking out for someone to put the blame of their failure on. They take responsibility of their decisions and lead from the front. Excellence and quality are two key attributes that leaders possess. Good leaders never look forward to suppressing people, silencing their opinions or intimidate them. On the contrary, they always motivate and encourage people, and try to sharpen their skills so that their productivity increases.

A good leader is not the one who always manages his followers to obey his orders, but someone who also allows members of his team to openly share their doubts and apprehensions. They always give their followers the opportunity to question their suggestions and decisions. Good leaders at first challenge their subordinates, but once they are convinced of the action-plan, they always trust their subordinates' decisions. They are capable of seeing through people's mental

and emotional states and identify capabilities and shortcomings within members of their respective teams. Good leaders are capable enough to attract compatible competencies using their flair and their positive energy. Their teams are inspired by their positive attributes and they get motivated by it and this usually helps during difficult situations.

7. Pronouncing Leadership

As mid-level managers are expected to have a clear understanding on how to develop a team, it is very crucial for the higher management to hone qualities of efficient leadership in them, which will make mid-level managers guide their teams as a great leader.

Nobody is a Born Leader

Many discussions and arguments are often carried out about leaders. But a person is not just born with leadership qualities; it is not that easy. Every now and then, some people are greatly affected by circumstances and they do grow up and develop into a leader at a very early age, but it is a very rare occurrence. There are very few people who are born with natural traits of a leader, but if this talent is not fostered and forged, this talent will diminish eventually. In order to become a leader, a person needs to be forged and sharpened with skill and experience. It is the same in a family as it is with an organization.

Management should start understanding that a 'pure born leader' is a myth and when they say it, mid-level managers will also start to believe that leadership performance is determined by confidence, skill-set and self-esteem. Those who wish to achieve goals in their lives and have ability to diminish their weaknesses have immense potential to become a true leader.

And as the saying goes – "Hard work always beats talent". Similarly, a world-hardened leader with ample worldly experience is always better than a mere talented one, because globally leaders have the potential and ability to grow consistently and go up to next level in hierarchy.

Categories of Power

A leader can generally exhibit these three categories of power:

- Intimidation-Oriented Power

- Gain-Oriented Power

- Sincerity-Oriented Power

Intimidation-Oriented Power

Leaders who are interested in gaining complete control over their teams usually employ intimidation-oriented power. Their subordinates always live under the cloud of insecurity that they might lose out an opportunity of growth, if they don't follow their leader.

One of the most common fear-generating tactics that manipulative managers employ, is subjecting their team-members to a losing sense of belonging within team. Because of this, the consequences of 'not obeying their leader' intimidates team members.

Team members are afraid of sharing their opinions with the seniors fearing a catastrophic backlash to their careers.

Gain-Oriented Power

Leaders who implement gain-oriented power are also interested in gaining control over the team. However, they employ much subtler methods of achieving this. They believe in the "You scratch my back; I scratch yours" philosophy of getting along with their teammates.

It means that if their team members do something considerably important for their managers, then the managers will also consider their hard work and efforts and end up doing something for them in return. In short, it's the same old "Exchange of favours", albeit in a professional environment.

Just like a fear generating leader, these type of leaders leverages the information obtained from the team members against one another and exploit specific areas, like the employees' emotional desire, career growth, elevated status, etc. to make them do things that they might be previously assigned or instructed not to do.

Sincerity-Oriented Power

These are the leaders who generate their power through their sincere dealings with people and take decisions keeping merit in mind. Sincere managers are liked and respected by most members of a team as their decisions are based on objective and transparent data as opposed to other types of managers, who have backdoor dealing with people.

These leaders inspire their teammates to be committed towards their job. Because of their open and clear nature of leadership and a clear vision towards goal-completion they get a lot of productivity from their team mates, unlike managers with other styles of power implementation, who manipulate employees and practice biased performance reviews of their subordinates.

Sincerity-oriented leaders are successful in building a long-term bond with people they work with and are faster at gaining trust of their teams. These leaders are focused towards service are trustworthy and earn a great amount of respect from not only the members within team their team, but also from those in other teams.

Conclusion

In this tutorial, we have explained that a good mid-level manager must be a good team leader. Good mid-level managers ask themselves after achieving a goal, whether there is anything more in the shape of a larger goal that they can achieve.

Mid-level managers feel they are one step closer to achieving a goal whenever they surpass a barrier. They perceive any obstacle or hurdle as a challenge in their path of gaining new knowledge, which they then use to eventually reach their goal. Whenever an obstacle comes up, mid-level managers tend to use their creativity, adaptability, and imagination to go find a way out.