

Your Gen or Mine?

OPINION PAGE

WE ASKED...

'Informal leadership' refers to the general concept of acting in a leadership capacity without officially being 'appointed' with documented authority as the leader of a particular group. It could readily be argued that informal leaders are actually "better" leaders than formal leaders, because they are able to lead and influence others without an official title or appointment. What do you think? In your experience, does informal leadership help or hinder an organization? Do these leaders tend to resolve issues quickly or blur the lines of authority and contribute to chaos and disorganization?

the Traditional view - Rev. Bruce W.H. Urich, PhD



Pastor, St. John's
Presbyterian Church
& Dean, Florida Christian
University

I have spent my whole life (77 1/3) dealing with informal leadership! In the church, in the civic world, in the academic world; these leaders really influence things and need to be understood and dealt with--or they will surely deal with you!

1. **In the church**, these informal leaders are called "the old bulls" (or "the old cows,") they have the true power and everyone knows it! I remember well the story of the informal leader who wasn't even on the official board; (he didn't have to waste his time going to meetings); his son and son-in-law were on the board and made his opinions crystal clear--and nobody, least of all the pastor, would defy him!

2. **In the civic world**, these informal leaders have power because of wealth, position, marriage, or just plain influence or even force of personality. Like E.F. Hutton, when they spoke--everybody listened!

3. **In the academic world**, these informal leaders are either "lay people" whose political influence or money

contributions are very controlling, or they have academic prestige, either because of years of service, published writings, or just plain personality! Is this all bad? No, it is just a fact of life that a **formal** leader or even worker needs to be very much aware of! When I studied "Small Group Dynamics" in my Master or Educational Psychology program, I learned that to be acted on, a statement needs to be made by the right person, and at the precise moment that it is needed, to be effective.

What does all this mean? Only a fool tries to ignore informal leadership. A wise person learns how to use the system! If you want to be effective (or even keep your job!), figure out the informal leadership structure of any organization that you are part of! You may want to study "genograms" on "Wikipedia" and apply this to your different organizations. If it only saves your job, the time will be well spent--and it should make you more effective and even get you promotions!

December's Topic: Personal Branding

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Bridging the Gap

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...YOU RESPONDED!

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the Baby Boomer Viewpoints

Larry Josefowski



Information Technology Professional

Informal leaders are part of every organization, and it is incumbent on the formal managers and supervisors to take advantage and develop their talent and skills. Informal leaders develop because of natural or technical ability, and their impact on their co-workers can't be diminished. They generally have the very specific skills or the relationships that management

may neither have nor want. Recognizing and maximizing such skills and using them is a sign of a mature leader. Establishing the boundaries is a key element of dealing with informal leaders, and can be done by establishing the rapport and recognizing at some level their status. Their ability, experience, or rapport with their co-workers can get issues resolved or brought to

management's attention more quickly than without this resource.

Negative informal leaders do exist and can be detrimental, but often an honest discussion with the leader can help resolve or establish boundaries, and getting a formerly unhelpful informal leader to actually use their skills in a positive manner is proof of one's leadership skills.

Alejandra Lorenzo



MBA, IT Specialist

In my estimation it depends on the style, confidence, self-esteem and professionalism of the official leader and the unofficial leader. If both leaders tend to lean towards the positive end of the spectrum in these categories then an unofficial leader can be of great benefit to all parties. The unofficial leader can be a bridge and/or conduit between management and workers. This unofficial leader can then broker work related deals informally and

more effectively, while respecting the organizational structure of the company and group dynamics. I believe that unofficial leaders are a valuable asset to an organization and a great way to find and develop future "official" leaders.

Lines get blurred and chaos abounds when both or either leader leans towards the negative side of the spectrum. Then instead of it being about the work it's about the individual. This leads to morale issues and disaffected

workers.

Where I work unofficial leaders are a workplace reality. We are encouraged to take charge of projects and move them forward. At the same, we recognize that our boss is the official leader and that we are responsible for checking with him on pertinent issues.

When unofficial leaders are not allowed and/or encouraged, projects do not get done in a timely manner and morale is non-existent.

Why take on a task when you are not allowed to think? True leadership is learned. A true leader teaches.

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the Generation X points of view

Kevin Finch



Business Continuity Planner

I think it happens in any organization, and I can't think of any organizations where it wouldn't. In times of crisis or when there's little oversight from upper management on a particular issue, it's probably more prevalent. I would guess it's particularly prevalent in technology support areas where you have several specialists working on a

team and each may defer leadership to another for their insight in resolving a given issue. With something like that, it's hard to imagine anything getting done without some sort of informal leadership process taking place; if nobody takes ownership of an issue, it probably won't get resolved.

Justin Watson



Contract Support Manager
London, UK

Is the discussion referring to informal management or leadership? Or even very simply put, is it referring to informal power of an individual?

Informal power can help an organisation however we must not forget that it can also hinder. If a disgruntled employee holds a sufficient level of power they can influence other members of the team or organisation to also have a negative outlook.

Informal leaders can be seen as being "better" leaders because they have no "real" measurables. This relieves some of the pressures of being measured by

actions / decisions, whereas, formal leaders should be measured on their ability to lead.

Do they resolve issues quicker? The advantage of being the informal leader is that they may not follow company procedures however still get results. This may perceive a quick resolution however may be damming in the long-term.

Leaders create the long-term strategy of an organisation with managers guiding it through the complexity of every day business; any informal power must still be managed.

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the Millennial perspectives

Jasmine Fowlkes



Mass Communications & Public Relations, Senior Student, University of South Florida

It is in the situations where we must step up to the plate unexpectedly that we learn the most about ourselves and our leadership abilities. Informal leadership is essential to our growth both as a person and a leader. Informal leadership is beneficial when a person is humble and committed enough to lead without a title in order to solve a problem or serve a greater good. However, informal

leadership can hinder and constrain in situations where leaders are unable to be open-minded to all the ideas presented. In most cases, everyone involved is a leader of some sort, and all their ideas and perspectives should be treated with validity.

Essentially, informal leadership encourages unity, structure and collaborative work amongst all involved. Although this is not

always the case, disorganization and chaos arise when there is a confusion of authority and power. The informal leader should make his or her presence known to the group, but still allow for others to be leaders as well. True leaders understand that there is a time to lead, and time to follow; a time to step up, and a time to take a step back.



Mgmt Information Systems Masters Program, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University

Jisha Puniyani

I have seen informal leadership as being a challenging task. The trust that you need to gain for your purpose is the most difficult aspect. Often, you do not get support and that may tend to demotivate you sometimes.

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