

Importance Of Receptiveness

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The Receptiveness Hypothesis is applicable at a number of levels. For example, it applies to organizations in general, and the ability of the organization to respond to the needs of customers, staff and other stakeholders (e.g. politicians, etc). It applies to non-supervisory staff, and their ability to respond to the needs of their managers, customers and co-workers. Here we are going to look at Receptiveness as it applied to managers, leaders and/or supervisors.

Influence Of The Receptive Manager

The Receptive manager tends to succeed by building bonds of respect and trust with those around him/her. Staff respond positively to Receptive managers; they work more diligently, work to help the manager and the organization succeed, and will go the extra mile when necessary. That is because Receptive managers act consistent with the principle that their jobs are to help their staff do their jobs. So, a basic inter-dependence emerges based on behaviours that show concern, respect and trust.

Receptive managers also influence those above them in the hierarchy. Because Receptive managers have the ability to read and act upon the needs of their "bosses", they are perceived as helpful and reliable, or in a simple way, very useful. This allows them to get the "ear" of people above them in the system, and further helps get things done when needed.

Contrast this with the limited influence of the UNReceptive manager. The unReceptive manager is restricted in influence because those around him/her do not respect or trust them to look out for their welfare. Influence is more limited to the use of power coming from the formal position, and fear, a motivational component that is hard to sustain over time. UnReceptive managers tend to be perceived as self-interested, or at best uninterested in the needs of those around them. They also tend to be perceived by those above them as less reliable and less useful due to their focus on empire building, organization protection, and self-interest, rather than getting done what needs to be done.

How Do They Do It?

Receptive managers apply a number of specific skills and abilities to the task. Above all, they appear to be "withit". Withitness has a number of components. First withit managers are able to put aside their concerns to listen to (and appear to listen to) those around them. As a result,

they know what is going on, and know what is both said, and said between the lines. They have the knack of appearing to know what people need even if those needs are not expressed directly.

However, knowing what is going on, and identifying the needs of those around them is not sufficient. The Receptive manager also acts upon that knowledge, attempting to help fulfil the needs of employees, superiors, etc. Receptive managers wield influence to solve problems for those around them, often before even being asked.

Here's an example:

John was responsible for automating an office system in a government department. As happens sometimes, the Management Information Systems people were not keen on their going their own way on the project, despite the fact that they had indicated they could not do it for them in the near future. As a result their cooperation (needed for the project) was patchy. As team leader, John faced a number of roadblocks, despite the fact that their Assistant Deputy Minister wanted to see this project come to fruition. He regularly reported back to his Director, outlining progress and roadblocks. Every time he communicated roadblocks to the Director, they were removed within a short time, despite the fact that he did not request direct action. In addition, the Director advised and counselled him on how to deal with the "systems people" so he could have maximum impact. Despite the roadblocks, the project was completed on time and was very successful, much to the chagrin of some of the systems people, who he thinks were hoping it would fail.

This is a simple story, but one full of meaning. In this situation the Director was able to identify the project leader's needs with respect to the project, listening carefully, and identifying actions he could take to "smooth the path". Not only was the Director able to remove obstacles and fulfil the need of the project leader, but the Director responded on a deeper level, helping to teach the Project Leader methods of becoming more effective, fulfilling yet another need. All of this was assumed to be the proper role of the Director, and was done without expressing all of the needs specifically or explicitly.

We can contrast this with the unReceptiveness of the MIS people. They lectured, they fussed, they predicted dire consequences, rather than offering consistent, Receptive help. They focused not on responding to the needs of their clients, but on some other factors having to do

with control, and their own needs. Eventually, their lack of Receptiveness resulted in the very thing they did not want; loss of control of the project. As a result of this project their overall status in the organization suffered, simply because at both an organization and individual level they were seen as barriers, rather than useful.

Let's look at one more example.

An employee had been working for a government branch for about a year, having moved to the city as a new resident. In a casual conversation, the supervisor noted that the employee wasn't looking at his best, and asked how he was feeling. The employee explained that he hadn't been feeling well lately, and sounded very tired and overwhelmed. The supervisor determined that the staff member didn't have a local family doctor, asked if he would like the supervisor to arrange an appointment, and proceeded to do so immediately. The problem turned out to be a minor one.

In this example we see again the ideas of "withitness" and Receptiveness. The supervisor was able to identify that the staff member was in need of some help, despite the fact that the staff member did not state this explicitly. Note that the supervisor didn't pressure the staff member to go to the doctor, but identified needs, checked them out, and then acted upon them. In this case, help consisted of direct, helpful action.

Conclusion

These two examples are the stuff of loyalty and commitment. They are remembered years and years after the fact, and continue to extend the influence of managers. In this sense Receptiveness is a critical component of management success, because it allows managers and supervisors to get things done, for the benefit of all players.

In the limited space we have, we have attempted to give you a feel of what Receptiveness means. You might want to extend your own understanding by considering some of the following questions.

1. If you are a manager or supervisor, how can you modify your own behaviours so that you become and are perceived as more Receptive by a) your staff, b) your boss and c) your customers?

2. Again, if you are a manager or supervisor what is your definition of the "Receptive employee"? Can you identify your "favourite employees", and consider how they are Receptive to you? Our bet is you will find that your most valued employees are Receptive.
3. If you are non-management, what would you need to do to be perceived as more Receptive by the people around you?

References

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