Stage One – Call to Action

The public service leadership challenge that is of interest to me is the idea of information overload today. What this means is that so much information is available that it is impossible to keep up with and process the importance of the information that is being received. This includes emails, twitters, internet sites, social media, surveillance cameras, instant messages, and more. This information overload can even lead to a less productive workplace. According to businessdictionary.com information overload is “Stress induced by reception of more information than is necessary to make a decision (or that can be understood and digested in the time available) and by attempts to deal with it with outdated time management practices.”

Information changes every minute and with technological advances, there are so many ways to find out about this information, research it, and utilize it, that one person cannot possibly do that. Also, it is very difficult for one person to keep up with technology that will even allow him or her to understand and take in all the information. Because of this information overload, it is increasingly difficult to understand all the information and make decisions based on it.

Especially in the public service leadership area, this is doubly important. A leader in public service must think of the many groups’ opinions and arguments in order to make a decision that is based on facts and equity.

This challenge makes it important that leaders understand it clearly and work to make the workplace productive with this kind of stress and ever increasing technological demands. If information overload occurs, it can lead to stress, lack of productive time, scattered processes
and more. A leader may find that his workplace group is unable to focus and gather appropriate information to make decisions. This is why at many levels of public service, a leader will have a cabinet or advising group that can present information on many different levels and on many different points of view for the leader to consider. One person cannot keep up with information or be expert in all areas, especially with all the information available now through technology. According to the IBM Center for Business Decisions, the possibility of making poor decisions based on information overload just makes careful evidence based decision all the more important. This is the challenge of public service leadership and the issue information overload: to use technology and information to make informed, systematic decisions and reduce the clutter and stress of overload.

**Stage 2 – Concept Application**

I think that one of the key leadership concepts that can apply to the idea of information overload is the idea of working with groups. Reducing the stress of information overload is important if your group or team is going to work effectively. Groups must be organized and willing to work for the common goal. To avoid information overload, a leader can assign different group members different types of information feeds to keep track of when considering an issue. There should be a systematic way that each group member will analyze and present the information. Then at selected times in a day, week or whenever appropriate, the members will get together and share information. This sharing will also include good communication in order to assimilate the information and form it into a cohesive piece of information that can be analyzed. In this way, the problems associated with information overload can be reduced. Also, it is a proven fact that groups that work well together require a high level of collaboration and
effective communication. Leaders must be willing to give power to others and work as a team; this is the most effective way to have a cohesive team.

The second leadership concept that can apply effectively to the problem of information overload is the leadership concept of setting the tone. If, as a leader, you set a tone of communication, cooperation, collaboration, and calm, then the rest of your team will work without so much stress. The team will not find themselves being scattered and unfocused by information overload. As a leader, you can also avoid having one person take over with too much information he or she might have gathered that will overload the rest of the team. If as a leader, a person sets a tone of collaboration, communication, and the importance of team, then the problems associated with information overload can be minimized. When conflict or crisis occurs when information overload is affecting the team, then as a leader a person should set the tone of examining the information in a rational way without overreacting. In this way of examining the information, the clutter of information that is not important can be eliminated and the focus reestablished. Teams must understand purpose and goal before gathering information.

Stage 3 – Plan of Action

As with any challenge in the public sector for leaders, a challenge must also be looked at for solutions. The challenge forces leaders to consider how to overcome this challenge. I believe as a leader my strengths of focusing a group by including that feel like they are outside of the power circle, solving conflict, and setting the tone for the group. I believe I can easily delegate jobs and help include all people of the team. If there is conflict or someone who wants to control more of the information being discussed, I have the leadership skills to diffuse this situation and include all parts of the team. Being a rational leader and understanding the overload that people face with all the information streaming in is an important first step. Also
understanding that this information overload will only get worse, not better, is important to continue to have the workplace be one of collaboration and communication.

The steps that I would realistically take to meet this leadership challenge would include several things. The first thing that I would try and do in my workplace would be to regularly focus the purpose of whatever information is needed. By making sure there is a clear focus and reason for whatever information is requested, not every single piece of information would be examined, but only the information that is the most pertinent to the purpose, problem, and goal that is on the table. I would make sure to plan with the group to focus information gathering and set a time frame for when this should be accomplished. Setting clear goals and time frames is important, as well as thinking about the problem in the context of the constituents that are being considered. This focus will only help keep the group less stressed and calmer.

The next step that I would realistically take to meet this leadership challenge would be to delegate tasks to different people. This would avoid everyone looking at and researching problems. If areas of study are delegated, eventually the group would be brought together to share and collaborate to form a cohesive view of an issue. By delegating and then coming together as a group to share and formulate, there would be added benefits besides sharing the work load. This type of collaboration would serve to include the whole group, make everyone feel valued, and reduce the stress of a project that might occur if it was placed on one person. Also, this kind of delegation and cooperation improves group productivity and cohesiveness. This type of delegation also allows different viewpoints to be raised and discussed, which again is important to problem solving, by looking at all views of the issue.

The last step I would realistically take to meet this leadership challenge of information overload would be to implement a training system for the group. This training would include
flow charts to best implement strategies and task completion as well as technology training. The technology training would allow people to understand how to use the information that comes in most efficiently and to store it without excess clutter. People need to understand how to use information and how to get rid of information that is not important. This kind of training will help everyone’s work load and stress level.

According to Joseph Ruff (2002), information overload is only increasing. The technology that allows information to flood in is improving every day. So, in order to ensure that an organization is successful, information overload must be understood and steps must be taken to work with the information available in a systematic and filtered way. Otherwise, an organization will find its workers just that – overloaded.
Bibliography


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