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## Demystifying How Leaders Shape Team Culture

*"As leaders, we may not realize the extent of the impact we create through our simple actions."*

Have you ever wondered how leaders shape the culture of their larger teams? I am going to make a serious attempt to demystify the same basis my learnings and experiences. **Culture is a pretty loaded word and encompasses a wide range of things.** To simplify things, let us look at culture as driving specific behaviors in the team.

So, the key question, now, is to understand the way leaders can drive specific behaviors in the team. Obviously, it is manifested through actions, including decision making. Let us deep dive into **what could be the actions that can influence the behaviors of the team.** As I have personally observed, behaviors in a team are primarily driven through the below actions:



### Leadership Action

What leaders **SEE** and what leaders don't **SEE**  
 What leaders **SAY** and what leader don't **SAY**  
 What leaders **HEAR** and what leaders don't **HEAR**

### Impact

Drives **Team Behaviors**  
 Shapes **Team Culture**.. Engagement  
 Defines **Mantra For Team Success**




Let us look at some practical examples of how behaviors are driven through direct actions.

- Team members start focusing on growth if their leader is passionate about driving growth and has rigorous reviews around it.
  - If leaders ask team members to work on non-urgent matters on weekends as a normal practice, it drives those team behaviors wherein work-life integration may not exist.
  - All team members start paying extraordinary attention to operational metrics if their leader starts reviewing the metrics regularly and brutally. The rewards and threat mechanisms play a part in shaping those behaviors.
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- If a leader is fine to promote people in the team who are brilliant individual contributors but extremely bad collaborators, that may trigger non-desired behaviors in the larger team.
  - The line of thinking of leaders while making decisions and communicating the same to their people does influence team behaviors. It indicates what is a priority and what is not.
  - Can you relate to the efforts which go on making PowerPoint presentations! If a leader focuses mainly on content, the team works harder to make the storyline content-rich. On the other hand, teams spend more time on creating visual aesthetics if the leader likes to see 'nice' looking slides. (though it is more preferred and there is no right or wrong)
  - If the leader himself/herself focuses on his/her self-development and demonstrates learning agility, most likely the team starts following it.
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Let us look at some practical examples of how behaviors are driven through indirect actions.

- The leader knows the teams are stretched beyond imagination and does not acknowledge the same or does anything to address it.
- If there are concern areas highlighted by the team, which the leader simply chooses to ignore and does not take any action, the team slowly may start losing their attention/interest in those areas.
- Imagine there is a critical lead who rubs people the wrong way all the time and the leader, though aware does nothing to curb it. It does send a message that such behavior will be tolerated if you are delivering great results.
- There are instances wherein leaders get informed of some great initiatives spearheaded by select employees beyond the normal line of duty. If the leader does not encourage or acknowledge the same, the motivation for employees to contribute over and beyond may get adversely impacted in the short run or long run.
- If there is an unhealthy conflict amongst the leads in a meeting and the leader does not intervene to resolve the issue or stop it, it may fuel more collaboration issues in the future.



I am mostly sure that this should not come as a surprise to anyone. **As leaders, we may not realize the extent of the impact we create through our simple actions. As leaders, I will encourage you to reflect on the below questions.**

■ **Understanding the current list of priorities, you are driving**

- What is that you are measuring your people against?
  - What are the areas you are personally paying attention to?
  - What are the things you are closely monitoring?
  - What are the parameters you will evaluate your direct reportees on?
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■ **Understand the 'how' it is being done?**

- How are you executing these priorities?
  - How much time in a week are you spending your energies on these priorities?
  - What are the behaviors you are rewarding and what are the behaviors you are penalizing?
  - What is your philosophy of selecting and promoting your team members?
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■ **What is the impact of your actions on team culture?**

- How much time is the team focusing on your key priorities?
- What are the behaviors you are seeing in the team?
- Which are the behaviors (team) you are very proud of?
- Which are the behaviors (team) you are not proud of?

■ **Are there any specific behaviors you want to change/drive in your team?**

- Which behaviors do you want to see more of / less of in your team?
  - What are the changes you need to make in your priorities or the way you are driving it?
  - How do you want to communicate and convey to your team?
  - What are the obstacles/challenges do you see?
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To be honest, **there is no clear right and wrong on these matters, as leadership is a personal choice.** Leaders need to make the choice of what is the kind of leader they want to become and follow that choice with actions.

In summary, leaders need to be cognizant that their simple actions or inactions have a great impact on the team's culture, leading to specific behaviors being demonstrated. **The mantra lies in what they see and don't see, what they say, and don't say & what they hear and they don't hear. In fact, a lot of these pointers are applicable across multiple levels in the organization.**

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This article is based on personal learning and perspectives of the author and does not, in any way, reflect any organization's perspective.

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