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ORG 300: Theory of Practice and Leadership  
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FINAL: Week 7 – WEAA Case Study

WEAA, a non-profit, National Public Radio (NPR) affiliated station is licensed and owned by Morgan State University (MSU) in Baltimore, Maryland. The station began operating on January 10, 1977. WEAA, a community-oriented radio station, reached out to its multicultural audience with social, political, and multicultural programs and music. The station was committed to academic excellence and the professional development and training of students interested in careers in broadcasting. The average listener was an affluent, educated, community-active, professional African American between the ages of 25-54. WEAA started as a “refreshing, new African American perspective, playing jazz and R&B and having great talk shows. As the station evolved over the years, they played less and less R&B and more jazz and eventually became a “straight ahead” jazz station, which later evolved again into a blend of contemporary and traditional jazz with some soul and R&B classics and talk shows – closer to the original format.

WEAA was one of twenty-four other radio stations competing in the Baltimore market -- one of the largest radio markets in the United States. WEAA admired WAMU, the leading public radio station for NPR news and information in Washington, D.C. area. While both stations are non-profit, licensed and owned by a higher education institution, there are drastic differences between number of unique listeners and the station’s profit and loss. In 2006, WAMU had about 580,000 unique listeners and generated revenue of \$11.4 million dollars; profiting \$1.1 million dollars, while WEAA had about 90,000 unique listeners, \$563,000 of annual revenue and an annual loss of \$207, 500 in the same year.

In 2006, a new \$21 million dollar building was completed to house various telecommunication related departments including WEAA radio station – a state-of-the art broadcasting facility with modern offices and studios.

Over the years, the radio station changed its format several times; however, they were recognized for being the Jazz Station of the Year in 1999; and named the best radio station in Baltimore in years 2000, 2002, and 2005. However, with fierce competition, the station is operating at a loss. The new state-of-art broadcasting facility is what WEAA needs to catapult them to the next level. First, they need a change agent and someone to help the organization to achieve its full potential. A leader to grow WEAA from a small station to a larger, profitable, highly regarded station like WAMU.

Corine Fiske has ten years of well-round experience in the broadcasting industry. She started her career as a radio personality and entertainment reporter and went where the jobs were to advance her career. She moved to TV reporting and photography for a high ranked 24-hours news station. A couple years later, Corine landed a job with CBS/Fox as a TV reporter and after two years CBS/Fox she was recruited by Time/Warner. By this time, Corine was highly sought after and took an opportunity to help build a broadcast school which included developing TV curriculum for the Connecticut School of Broadcasting (CSB). Corine has a vast amount of industry experience; she's a teacher, entrepreneurial, a change agent, and a subject matter expert in her field.

With that, she joined WEAA in 2006 as the Director of News and Public Affairs. WEAA recruited her to be a change agent and to help the organization to achieve its full potential. Her performance objective was to plan and deliver 15 hours of world class news and community affairs programming every week through a staff of thirty direct reports, twenty-nine of whom were volunteers. With Corine's vast amount of industry experience as a radio and TV personality, a teacher, a visionary with an entrepreneurial spirit and a subject matter expert in her field – she was their ideal candidate to grow WEAA to grow a small station to a larger, profitable, highly regarded station like WAMU. In her new role at WEAA, Corine faces several issues that will require her to rely on her leadership abilities.

Corine faces financial, organizational, departmental, and staffing challenges that will put her leadership skills to a test.

WEAA is operating at a financial loss by an estimated \$207,500 dollars. The station is currently dependent on annual subsidies from the university in estimation of \$350,000 dollars. As a result, the station relies heavily on the volunteer community. Corine Fiske has a staff of thirty direct-reports,

twenty-nine of whom are volunteers. WEAA cannot afford to pay volunteers or hire and pay show producers. The financial constraints of being unable to compensate the volunteers have led to significant staffing challenges.

The volunteers at WEAA have little radio or broadcasting experience. Most hosts do not have journalism or radio backgrounds. Volunteer hosts are inexperienced, lack confidence; have never been trained, oriented, or evaluated. Most volunteers do not understand the complex public radio standards. Volunteers are often resistant and put in low work effort. Consequently, the subordinate's development level is lacking in competence and commitment necessary to accomplish given tasks or activities.

WEAA has experienced a significant amount of turnover with general management, stalling growth and development. The membership director position, responsible for leading fund raising had been open for over a year. There is an area of radio broadcasting that requires qualified producers to manage the complete life cycle of every show, but WEAA does not have financial means to put the right leadership infrastructure in place. The changes in management went from having an outgoing general manager to introverted, "hands-off" educators. As a result, there is a lack of accountability or commitment from the top-down, specifically, the university administration.

The lack of leadership support from the university administration and upper management has resulted in unconventional aspects and misalignment of the organization in terms of titles, reporting relationships, and business processes such as directors reporting to directors, people reporting to whomever they want to, tasks allocated in inefficient ways. And, volunteers have little interaction and direction from station management. As a consequence, the subordinate characteristics are in direct alignment with the environment – meaning the staff is resistant to change, disengaged, and lacks motivation. There is a lack of consistency in programming standards and there aren't enough personnel to facilitate the production of solid news. Lack of commitment and agreement on operating policies, procedures, and standards is a serious issue at WEAA, which are currently unclear, ambiguous, and loosely adhered to. At WEAA there was a question of ownership of the intellectual property of the show. An employee, who was the host of the *Women Today* program for the past fourteen years at WEAA, resigned and was determined to take the name and concept of the radio show with her when

she left. Due to the Laissez-Faire management approach at the station any history or documentation about intellectual property rights would be very difficult to find. Therefore, Fiske did not fight the issue. WEAA's Laissez-Faire management approach has inbred this type of behavior throughout; causing deep-seeded organizational and departmental issues at WEAA.

There is an urgent need for Corine to address the issues at WEAA, but she is overwhelmed by her additional duties to write grants, develop curriculum, recruit, train, and manage volunteers. Fiske is working long hours to return phone calls, respond to emails, and deal with impromptu operating priorities. She often turned down opportunities to develop external community relations because she didn't have the time.

Fiske is aware of the turnover, turmoil, and the laissez-fair management approach and realizes that a serious strategy meeting with her boss was imminent and would require her to develop a plan of action and implement it immediately.

Corine Fiske's strategy and plan of action includes three leadership theories: Situational Leadership, Path-Goal Theory, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory. Situational Leadership and Path-Goal Theory focus on the followers, which I believe is required to address subordinate development levels and motivational challenges. Leader-Member Exchange Theory focuses on the leader-follower dynamics with is required to improve interactions between leaders and followers.

The situational approach to leadership is one of the more widely recognized approaches to leadership (Northouse, p. 99). The premise of the theory is that different situations demand different kinds of leadership. In order for Corine to be an effective leader, she will need to adapt her style to the demands of the various situations at WEAA. Situational leadership is considered a prescriptive approach to leadership that suggests how leaders can become effective in many different types of organizational settings involving a wide variety of organizational tasks. This approach tells the leader what they should and should not do in various contexts. For example, if a subordinate is low in competence (i.e., inexperienced radio show hosts at WEAA), situational leadership prescribes a directing style for the leader, in this case for Corine to use (Northouse, p. 105). The leadership style consists of the behavior pattern of a person who attempts to influence others. It includes both a directive (task) behavior and

supportive (relationship) behavior. Directive behaviors help group members accomplish goals by giving directions, establishing goals and methods of evaluation, setting timelines, defining roles and responsibilities, and showing how to accomplish the goals. On the other hand, supportive behaviors help group members to feel comfortable about themselves, their co-workers, and the situation. This behavior supports two-way communication and responses that show emotional support to others. The leadership styles are broken down into four categories of directive and supportive behaviors. The four categories are: S1 is high directive-low supportive, S2 is high directive-high supportive, S3 is low directive-high supportive, and S4 is low directive-low supportive. The situational leadership (SLII) model describes how each of the four leadership styles applies to the subordinates who work at different levels of development.

According to the text, (Norhouse, p. 102), development level is the degree to which subordinates have competence and commitment necessary to accomplish a task. It's a way to determine if an employee has mastered the skills to do a specific task and whether the person has developed a positive attitude regarding the task. Employees are at a high development level if they are interested and confident in their work and know how to perform the task. Employees are low development if they have little skill for the task, but believe they have the confidence to complete the task. Employees are classified into four categories: D1, D2, D3, and D4. D1 employees have low competence and high commitment. As an example, followers at the first level of development will require the leader to adopt a high-directive and low-supportive (S1) leadership style, which is considered to be a directive approach. In the case of a D2 follower with some competence but has low commitment, the leader needs to adopt a coaching style of leadership (S2). For D3, highly competent follower that may lack commitment, but seeks insight on some tasks, the leader will want to adopt a supporting style of leadership (S3). Finally, for the D4 follower with high competence and skill and high commitment to get the job done – this follower requires little direction from their leader; thus the leader would consider adopting a delegating style of leadership (S4).

Corine Fiske realizes that situational leadership approach is applicable in almost any type of organization, at any level, for nearly all types of tasks. The employees at WEAA can be described as having low competence or some competence from their schooling and exposure to the radio station with low commitment. Thus, the staff is classified as a developmental level one or two (D1, D2). They

are lacking in experience and competence necessary to accomplish given tasks or activities. Many of the volunteer hosts lack confidence, commitment and motivation because they have never been trained, oriented, or evaluated. Most volunteers lack an understanding of job requirements such as the complex nature of public radio standards. As a leader, Corine will need to adopt two different styles of leadership. For subordinates at the first level of development (D1), she will need to adopt high directive-low supportive leadership style (S1). Where her subordinates are slightly more advanced, Corine will need to adopt a high directive-high supportive leadership style. She will need to focus her communications on goal achievement and giving instructions about what and how to accomplish to their goals. She will need to monitor progress closely. From a coaching perspective, Corine needs to also focus on her subordinates socioemotional needs by giving encouragement and soliciting input and feedback. Corine can use situational leadership improve the aspects of hosts not showing up on time, missing meetings, not communicating, and not completing reports in a timely manner.

The second leadership style that Corine will include as part of her strategy is Path-Goal Theory. In contrast to the situational approach, which suggests that a leader must adapt to development level of subordinates, Path Goal Theory emphasizes the relationship between the leader's style and characteristics of the subordinates and the work setting. Corine will use situational leadership to developed subordinate's competence through directing and coaching based on various situations. However, she will leverage Path Goal Theory to integrate motivational principles, as well as provide clear paths to achieve goals and help subordinates around the obstacles to the goals.

Currently, task characteristics at WEAA are ambiguous with unclear rules and complex requirements such as lack of commitment and agreement on operating policies, procedures, and standards. WEAA has unconventional aspects of the organization in terms of titles, reporting relationships, and business processes (directors reporting to directors, people reporting to whomever they wanted to, tasks allocated in inefficient ways). And, volunteers have little interaction and direction from station management. As a consequence, the subordinate characteristics are in direct alignment with the environment – meaning the staff is resistant to change, disengaged, and lacks motivation. There is a lack of consistency in programming standards and there aren't enough personnel to facilitate the production of solid news. Hosts are not showing up on time, missing meetings, not communicating, and not completing reports in a timely manner.

Given the situation, Fiske needs to primarily provide directive leadership. Corine's subordinates need structure, direction, and guidance. They have a strong need for affiliation. The situation at WEAA is uncertain especially for inexperienced students.

Directive leadership will provide guidance, psychological structure and task clarity where there is none today. Directive leadership will also clarify the path to the goal, making it less ambiguous. Authoritarian and dogmatic subordinates will benefit because they feel more comfortable when the leaders provides a greater sense of certainty in a work setting. As subordinate's perception of their own ability to perform a specific task their competence goes up, and the need for Corine's directive leadership goes down.

In addition, Corine can employ supportive leadership, participative leadership, and achievement-oriented behaviors as needed to ensure subordinates' motivational needs are met. She can shift leadership behavior as the needs of her subordinates change. And, use path-goal theory as a road map to provide the direction she needs to improve satisfaction and performance improvement. Corine will be directive when tasks are complex and give support when tasks are redundant and dull. She will be participative when subordinates need control, and achievement-oriented when subordinates need to excel.

The third leadership style Corine will include as part of her strategy is Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory. According to the text, (Northouse, pp. 161-184), LMX Theory is comprised of the following concepts: vertical dyads, in-group and out-group, and personality and subordinate initiative as predictors of group status. A dyadic relationship is between leaders and followers. I consider the dyadic relationship the glue that holds two pieces of paper together and creates a single sheet of paper – a synergy of sorts. The vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory focuses on the vertical linkages formed between leaders and followers. Each relationship with a subordinate is viewed as a single work unit in a series of separate vertical dyads (relationships). The two general types of linkages are in-groups and out-group. In an organization, the in-group takes on extra roles and goes above and beyond. The out-group, on the other hand, does only what is expected as per their defined roles and responsibilities – no more, no less, but they are a solid and dependable performer. Leader-member dyads based on expanded roles are called the in-group, and those based on formal job descriptions are called the out-group. It is believed

that subordinates become in-group members based on how well they get along with the leader and whether they are willing to expand their role and responsibilities. Subordinates who maintain only formal hierarchical relationship with the leader become the out-group members. Typically, in-group members receive extra influence, opportunities, perks, and rewards; while out-group members receive standard benefits.

LMX Theory works in two ways: it describes leadership and prescribes leadership. Prescriptively, Corine will need to create special relationship with ALL subordinates. Leadership making promotes positive working partnerships in which the leader tries to build effective dyads with all employees in the work unit. There are three phases to leadership making which include: (1) the stranger phase, (2) the acquaintance phase and (3) mature partnership phase.

During the stranger phase, the interaction between the leader-subordinate is rule-bound, relying heavily on contractual relationships. The leader-follower relates to each other within the prescribed organizational hierarchy. The relationship is lower-quality exchanges, similar to the out-group. The subordinate is compliant, subservient and is more concerned with oneself rather than the good of group. One example of leader-follower stranger phase is a new employee that has been hired or brought in as a volunteer from outside of the university.

The acquaintance phase begins with an offer by the leader or the subordinate for career-oriented social exchanges. This is a testing period for both the leader and follower to determine if the subordinate is willing to take on more responsibilities and if the leader is willing to extend opportunities that will challenge and grow the subordinate. The interaction has shifted away from one-way to mixed interaction and new ways of relating to each other.

The mature partnership phase is marked by high-quality leader-member exchanges. People who have progressed to this stage in their relationships experience a high-degree of mutual trust, respect, and obligation towards each other.

Leadership making model recommends that leaders look for the good in everyone, and try to build trust and respect with all of their direct reports. In Corine's case, she hasn't created high-quality



exchanges from the top-down from the university administration to her subordinates. Corine's plan of action will include leadership making to create equality and positive energy among the entire team, communicating more effectively and more frequently, and plans to build trust. Fiske needs to develop fluid working relationships, empathize with the volunteers and the expectations put on them by management, and communicate more frequently with the staff. "People need to hear voice, we need to hear her praise when we're on track, and we need to her to let us know when we're off track", according to an associate at WEAA.

In general the volunteers are viewed as out-group members doing only what is expected of them and often times less than expected. The volunteers have little experience, they never been trained, oriented, or evaluated. They often do not show on time, missing meetings, not communicating, and not completely reports in a timely manner. Prescriptively, according to LMX Theory, Fiske needs to take the opportunity to invest in the volunteers by providing training, coaching, and the right tools to do the job, as well as build high quality exchanges with the volunteers by nurturing the relationships. In exchange, Fiske will begin to earn the trust and respect of the volunteers.

Corine Fiske's leadership strategy and plan of action to employ Situation Leadership, Path-Goal Theory, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory will help subordinates to:

- (1) Accomplish goals and improve development level of competence over time; thereby improving confidence, motivation, and commitment to accomplish given tasks or activities required – with the goal to move the subordinates from one development level to high supportive-low directive (S3, D3) when the subordinates reach both a high degree of competence and commitment to the get the job done. At that point, they will have the skill to do the job and the motivation to get the job done.
- (2) Understand what is expected of them. Corine will develop clear, concise unambiguous standards, policies, and procedures, job roles, reporting relationships, and requirements as well as provide clear direction, and guidance, and structure, which will improve satisfaction and performance development and productivity, as well as improve consistency in programming standards to facilitate the production of solid broadcasting.

- (3) Adopt change, become more engaged, and more aligned with the overall WEAA strategy by creating equality and positive energy among the entire team, communicating more effectively and more frequently, which will build trust and credibility where it was once lost.

In addition, Corine's plan of action should also include components of "The Fifth Discipline, the art and practice of the learning organization" by Peter M. Senge. In a learning organization, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models -- they are responsible for learning.

Design work for leaders goes beyond designing an organization's policies, procedures, strategies, and systems. Design as a leader is about being proactive and integrating learning disciplines to include vision, values, purpose, systems thinking and mental models. Fiske will design a learning process where the subordinates at WEAA can deal productively with critical issues they face, and develop their mastery in the learning disciplines.

As a steward, the leader sees the organization as a vehicle for bringing learning and change into society. As a steward, Fiske will build a learning organization that enables people to balance continuity with creativity; integrating conceptualizing the "big picture".

"Leader as teacher" is not about "teaching" people how to achieve their vision. It is about fostering learning, for everyone. Such leaders help people throughout the organization develop systemic understandings. Leaders as teachers have a sense of purpose and genuine vision and the ability to help people understand the systemic forces that shape change.

Corine Fiske will take on the responsibility as a leader at WEAA to foster learning for everyone, to develop a holistic learning and understanding of the organization to help foster and shape change.

Corine as a designer, steward, and teacher will establish a purpose, vision, and a direction at WEAA that energizes the organization and fosters creativity while influencing positive change. This

approach to leadership will be the catalyst to help to put the right leadership infrastructure in place at WEAA that does not exist today.

Corine's plan of action requires an approach that includes a vision, business and leadership strategy to address the financial, organizational, departmental, and staffing challenges at WEAA. Typically, benefit realization such as Return on Investment (ROI) is not realized until after a plan has been fully implemented. Therefore, Corine cannot quantify the financial improvement as a result of the organizational, departmental, and staffing improvements until the plan is in place long enough for her to re-assess the environment. However, Corine communicates in her plan that she feels confident WEAA will realize financial return on investment within one year; relinquishing the need to rely on subsidies from the university.

The plan of action cannot occur in a vacuum. With Corine's boss' support, they must both review the plan with the university administration to ensure they are directionally correct and if so, require their championship and support to execute the plan immediately. In my opinion, the foundation and success of an organization requires more than effective leaders and leadership styles – it requires building positive relationships, trust and credibility, which will inevitably contribute to organizational effectiveness from the top-down. With this solid plan, Corine is well on her way to grow WEAA from a small station to a larger, profitable, highly regarded station like WAMU.