



Developing People Through Generous Leadership

Foreword

When the National Lottery Community Fund began to look at generous leadership they asked a group of leaders from across the charity sector to explore and grow the concept. The group had great ideas and explored a number of avenues. One area that deserved more attention was how generous leadership can be demonstrated and developed within organisations, especially through how it manages and develops people. In February 2018, this became the basis of a further project generously funded by the National Lottery Community Fund – Developing People Through Generous Leadership.

We were delighted when asked to take forward this project. Our explorations have culminated in this report and an accompanying webinar.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with the National Lottery Community Fund and to the concept of generous leadership growing and evolving.



Ian Green



1. Introduction

The scope for this project was to pilot a programme to embed the concept of generous leadership into Terrence Higgins Trust's management development offer and recruitment processes, and its HR and organisational development practices.

Outputs fall into two categories:

- definition of what generous leadership means in the context of people management and organisational development; and
- discussion and practical examples of how to build the concept of generous leadership into the:
 - joining process;
 - management development programme;
 - supervisions and review of staff; and
 - exit process for staff.

This report follows that structure with Part One being a literature review and discussion of the concept, including an initial evaluation and potential next steps to be considered; Part Two covers practical examples of the concept being used to shape people management and development processes in the organisation.

Part 1 – definitions and discussion

1. What do we mean by “Generous Leadership”?

The phrase “generous leadership” is made from 2 words which can have a wide range of meanings - separately and together. In the King’s Fund paper Leadership in Context (2011), Turnbull James uses the term “leadership concept” to describe the “embedded unconscious assumptions” that each organisation has about leadership. Concepts of leadership vary between organisations and can change over time. Academic theories of leadership also shift over time, with new ones being developed and old ones being de-bunked, reviewed or reclaimed.

Generosity at work

Generosity too has a range of definitions and can be emotion- and value-laden. There is a danger that generosity is seen in some sense as patronising – either to act as a patron or sponsor; or to give kindness, but in a condescending way. When McCrea and Walker discuss fundraising in The Generosity Network (2013), they state it is all too often seen as asking for help whereas they argue for a “shift from ‘asking for help’ to exploring how all of us can work together in pursuit of a common vision using the unique resources we each have to offer” (2013, page 10). Their approach broadens the discussion away from what a patron can offer and towards a group of people working together to achieve a common goal. Generous leadership, similarly, is a way for people or organisations to work together to create value.

There is an interesting debate about how much “generosity” means “reciprocity”. In Adam Grant’s book Give and Take (2014), he talks about givers, takers and matchers as approaches to reciprocity:

“If you’re a giver at work, you simply strive to be generous in sharing your time, energy, knowledge, skills, ideas, and connections with other people who can benefit from them.”
(Grant, 2014, page 5)

This doesn’t mean that they don’t want to succeed: “Successful givers are every bit as ambitious as takers and matchers. They simply have a different way of pursuing their goals.”
(Grant, 2014, page 10).

He found that givers are among the most successful people – but also they are found among the least successful! The distinction is that when givers succeed, that success spreads and is shared; when takers succeed, it is more often at the expense of someone who loses, “giver success creates value, instead of just claiming it” (Grant, 2014, page 10).

Thus, a giving approach will overall be the most beneficial approach to a sector as a whole.

Grant’s examples suggest generosity is a more risky approach to business. Grant’s description of givers being the most successful and the least successful chimes with Barbara Bonner’s view in Inspiring Generosity (2014), that:

“Generosity is willing to take risks”
(Bonner, 2014, page 2)

Grant's examples also seem to suggest that generosity is more of a long-term investment - by giving in the short term, you are losing something now, but gaining a reciprocal relationship which may pay dividends in the future. This can be difficult for organisations to deliver in times of austerity where shareholders or trustees may be looking more at short-term survival of an organisation, rather than the overall health of a sector. It may be that there needs to be some short term benefit to generosity too if organisations are to be willing to invest.

With this level of risk, there can also be the temptation to begin generously, but to pull back from that over time. For Grant certainly, a coherent and consistent approach to giving is the one that brings benefits as it becomes the way that others view you - your "signature". It has to be committed to the long-term.

Grant gives suggestions for how to demonstrate the giving approach in networking, collaborating, evaluating and influencing. In each of these domains he gives business-related examples. Whereas many of the examples we see of generosity are of leaders being generous with their own staff, Grant's examples are much broader, including business to business and the relationship of investors to businesses.

In relation to generosity, McCrea and Walker discuss the type of relationship between funder and fundraiser as one that needs to be transparent. For example, for the funder to be able to state what recognition they want, or what their personal motivation is, or what connection they want with the organisation. The organisation also needs to be able to be transparent, e.g., about projects which have not worked out, or ways the organisation's mission and strategy are changing (McCrea and Walker, 2013, page 130).

But, given these examples of generosity and collaboration, the norm still seems to be a competitive one - organisations winning market share from competitors, charities outbidding each other for contracts. As Sonia Sodha states in *The future of 'doing good' in the UK (2017)* for the (then) Big Lottery Fund:

"while we as a sector are good at paying lip service to collaboration, we end up with too many superficial partnerships that are not about organisations genuinely sharing learning and getting better at what they do by working together" (Sodha, 2017, page 19).

She lists a number of factors that contribute to this:

- An ideology of competition and choice, seen in the use of competitive tendering, in some cases with explicit gagging clauses, or at the very least the application of "commercial in confidence" as an approach to the sharing/not sharing of information.
- Contracts for specific activities with unclear or inconsistent approaches to impact and evaluation. This individualised approach then creates the need to sell the benefits of an activity in isolation from activities being delivered by other organisations.
- A passion for an approach which can produce a sense of ownership and identity within an organisation rather than with the sector and beneficiaries of that sector as a whole. (Sodha, 2017, page 19).

She quotes Collaborate's report Supporting social change: a new funding ecology (Kippin, 2015), that funders should act "more as partners within a well-functioning ecosystem of support for others" and that they should "see themselves as partners, recognising that they bring complementary skills and strengths to the table to those working in frontline organisations"

(Sodha, 2017, page 23).

Leading generously

This idea of an ecosystem is fundamental to generous leadership. Dawn Austwick of the National Lottery Community Fund coined the term generous leadership to describe "great leadership... in a thriving civil society. Rather than simply telling a single story, generous leaders seek to be part of a wider movement and to share in that narrative instead". In a blog for Clore Social Leadership she gives examples of this, such as large, high-profile museums working with smaller regional ones to advance skills in the sector and access to their collections. She lists some of the actions that generous leaders take, including: championing the grassroots; being focussed on a mission; listening and collaborating; challenging assumptions; and embracing the complexity that this approach brings.

To reduce a concept as large as "generous leadership" to a few words may be premature, but there are a number of elements that appear to be consistent:

- This is an approach to business which is long-term;
- It can only be present in relationships: two or more parties are required;
- It is to the benefit of something broader than just the organisation and its effects can be seen both within the organisation and in the wider sector;
- It is an approach that can be used at different levels and in different contexts;
- Appears at first glance to conflict with competition;
- Requires an openness about resources that can be shared and gaps that need to be filled;
- Requires a focus on the bigger picture (longer term and broader impact) than just the task at hand.

The National Lottery Community Fund initiated a group of senior charity sector leaders to work on Generous Leadership. At a workshop in 2017, they identified three key commonalities:

- Sharing and openness;
- People at the heart; and
- Values (principles) based.

[Generous Leadership workshop 2-3/03/2017 facilitated by Tank Consulting]

Generous leadership in practice

It is possible to give examples of behaviours and approaches which demonstrate the quality/ethos of generous leadership. The description which the National Lottery Community Fund provides is:

- A concern with the development and success of the 'ecosystem' rather than purely the 'organisation'.
- A willingness to share responsibility and power to achieve the common good.
- Openness with which we share experience, knowledge and skills.
- The drive to build alliances with individuals, groups and communities to achieve shared goals.

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/about/supporting-civil-society>

Traditional tendering creates a number of barriers to generous leadership between organisations. For example, the tender process is usually treated as commercial in confidence with information sharing being minimal. Also, companies are used to competing – bidding against other and possibly using business intelligence to undercut each other. Changing this to a more generous approach to leadership is a cultural shift that will need support and reward for it to be successful.

Definitions and understanding of generous leadership are likely to continue to develop as the approach becomes more common.

2. Context

There is an interesting range of contexts used in the writing about generous leadership. In some cases, it is seen as a quality to be used with staff, either direct members of staff or others within an organisation:

“As a leader, giving people the gift of not just our appreciation for good work, but our genuine admiration for their talents, is generosity of spirit at its pinnacle.” International Fire Chiefs Association, 24/09/2015

<https://www.iafc.org/on-scene/on-scene-article/leading-with-generosity> Accessed 27/07/2018

In other cases, it is about an approach to business more widely. Environments in which it is possible to see generous leadership taking place can involve any stakeholder including:

- Self
- Peers
- Colleagues
- Beneficiaries
- Suppliers
- Similar organisations
- Competitors
- Clients
- Public

The timescales include:

- Immediate
- Short-term
- Long-term

The occurrences take place in, for example:

- Transactional work
- Communications – from conferences to blogs
- Fundraising
- Tendering
- Negotiating
- Contract management
- Client management
- Training and development
- Recruitment of new staff
- Working with beneficiaries
- Commissioning new services and suppliers
- Working with sector organisations
- Working with professional bodies

3. How do we demonstrate generous leadership?

Generous leadership is an ethos more than a list of items to be ticked off. But a list of items can be a useful place to start when looking for evidence of generous leadership in the operations of an organisation. Below are examples from writers on the subject.

Barbara Bonner proposes a list of 20 qualities and states that there are at least another 20 for future consideration. In her list, the generous leader:

1. is open to all ideas of colleagues
2. gives the credit away, understanding the value of creating a sense of shared success and community
3. does not tolerate an organizational culture of blaming
4. fosters cultures of gratitude and appreciation
5. demonstrates kindness and care
6. celebrates small successes knowing that a generous culture of celebration renews mission and fosters community
7. has the trait of humility
8. trusts one's colleagues
9. is patient
10. creates and fosters a work environment conducive to energy and inspiration
11. does not promote exhaustion
12. puts the welfare of employees first
13. does not hold grudges
14. forgives
15. discourages gossip in the organisation
16. mentors
17. values feedback
18. doesn't talk about "their" organisation, they believe they are part of the organisation
19. listens
20. re-charges their own batteries

(abbreviated from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/barbara-bonner/20-qualities-of-the-gener_b_6178960.html)

Adam Grant gives a list of actions to be taken, based primarily on things that successful givers do:

1. Test your giver quotient – Grant gives links to questionnaires which can help assess how much, and in what contexts, you offer help to others.
2. Run a reciprocity ring – a group that meets regularly to ask for help and offer it. Such groups may develop from other types of group, for example, action learning sets (Reg Revans, 2011), or Working Out Loud groups (John Stepper, 2015). Key is that all participants both offer and ask for help.
3. Help other people craft their jobs – or craft yours to incorporate more giving. For example, look for ways to build it into the job descriptions for your team. And for yourself, look at how you can develop your own networks, both offering and getting help.
4. Start a “love machine” – a peer recognition scheme.
5. Embrace the five-minute favour – find quick and easy actions that can help others.
6. Practice powerless communication (for example, by listening more than talking), but still be an advocate for others.
7. Join a community of givers – a site that support the recycling of office equipment, crowd funding, etc.
8. Undertake a personal generosity experiment, e.g., by performing one random act of kindness every day for a month.
9. Help fund a project, either personally or corporately.
10. Seek help more often.

(Grant, 2014, pages 301-309)

4. Generous leadership and people management processes

The examples in this paper will focus on people management processes. These are ways to introduce the culture of generous leadership to an organisation so that it becomes an everyday way of working for all staff, thus underpinning their work internally and externally.

Examples given here will include:

- recruitment;
- management development;
- managing performance;
- exiting staff.

We at Terrence Higgins Trust are now on our generous leadership journey. Now, all managers attend training which includes a session of generous leadership. This has proven popular with managers who are now feeling more confident to discuss and use the concept with their staff and stakeholders.

Generous leadership has an impact in a wider context, for example, tendering processes, joint working, commissioning. All these depend on staff understanding what generous leadership means and how to action it. Beginning with staff policies is a useful first stage in raising awareness of this way of working and we recognise we are only just starting on this journey.

We look forward to continuing to work with the National Lottery Community Fund and others and we will continue to share our story on our website at:

<https://www.tht.org.uk/our-work/about-our-charity>.