

Power isn't enough: Study reveals the missing link for effective leadership

September 17 2014

With the National Football League in full damage-control mode, there are many questions about how the NFL's leader handled the Ray Rice case. Was Goodell ignoring the pleas of stakeholders—former NFL players, the media and domestic violence groups—when deciding on a two game penalty? The answer may lie in a study out today by Columbia Business School.

The research, just published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, finds that leaders who fail to take into account their audiences' perspective have a far greater propensity to bungle the issue and conversation. The study shows that the powerful—imagine CEOs, politicians, military commanders, sports commissioners etc.—who are conditioned to see the world from someone else's point of view produce better outcomes.

"Effective leadership is like a successful car ride. To go places, you need gas and acceleration—[power](#) is a psychological accelerator. But you also need a good steering wheel so you don't crash as you speed down the highway—perspective-taking is that psychological steering wheel," said Adam Galinsky, the Vikram S. Pandit Professor of Business Management at Columbia Business School. "When you anchor too heavily onto your own perspective, and don't take into account the viewpoints of others you are bound to crash."

The series of studies explored how those in positions of power might benefit from taking employee's perspectives. Galinsky's line of research

has found that:

- 1) Power diminishes perspective-taking: Although power propels leaders toward their goals, it leads people to anchor too heavily on their own vantage point, insufficiently adjusting to others' perspectives.
- 2) Perspective-taking alone is not enough: People with the propensity to focus on what others are thinking tend to be effective navigators of their social world; however they often lack the agency necessary to assert themselves and make change.
- 3) Power + perspective-taking = an effective leader: When individuals both have power and are turned into good perspective-takers, they a) tend to handle difficult situations more successfully, and with greater respect and fairness and b) facilitate information-sharing, a practice that helps groups make the best possible decisions when faced with complex problems. Galinsky has found that combining power and perspective-taking has synergistic effects, producing superior outcomes to what each one achieved separately.

The Research

The research, titled "[Acceleration With Steering: The Synergistic Benefits of Combining Power and Perspective-Taking](#)," is co-authored by Galinsky, the Vikram S. Pandit Professor of Business Management at Columbia Business School; Joe C. Magee, associate professor of Management and Organizations at NYU Stern School of Business; Diana Rus, assistant professor of Organizational Psychology at the University of Groningen in Netherlands; Naomi B. Rothman, assistant professor at Lehigh University; and Andrew R. Todd assistant professor at The University of Iowa, conducted three experiments.

The first two experiments tested the synergistic benefits of combining

power and perspective-taking when handling a layoff. Participants in the experiments (In Experiment 2 all were students in an executive MBA program), were asked to think about an experience they had with high or low power. They were then subtly led towards perspective-taking by being having to explain to others how they delivered the bad news or by considering words related to perspective-taking.

The researchers found that only when a person both had power and were perspective-takers did they treat employees more candidly and with greater respect.

To explore how the combination of power and perspective-taking affects those in less contentious scenarios, the researchers paired participants up and assigned one the role of boss and the other role of employee. Half of the participants were then led to consider the perspective of their partner. Then the pair had to make a decision that required both parties to share information and work together to solve a problem.

The researchers found that when power was combined with perspective-taking when making a complex decision, participants were able to discover the optimal solution to a nuanced problem.

Provided by Columbia Business School

Citation: Power isn't enough: Study reveals the missing link for effective leadership (2014, September 17) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-power-isnt-reveals-link-effective.html>

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