The role of the leader has long been established within the healthy workplace. Do you want to cultivate and establish a productive, satisfying work environment within your organization? Look to your leaders, as culture change requires the support of management, as suggested recently in Harvard Business Review by Katzenbach, Steffen, and Kronley (2012). Does your organization need policy and structures that promote work flexibility as a way to maintain or improve employee productivity? Upper-level leaders are partially responsible for that, as well. What about developing your workforce to be successful in the future, which will be fraught with changes and challenges? Once again, that responsibility falls on the shoulders of leaders.

The importance of leadership is understood, but how often do employees or leaders stop and actually think about what makes a good leader? The beliefs regarding the knowledge, skills, and abilities (or even traits) of good leaders has changed over the years and still continues to evolve today. Some of the first notions concerning leadership revolved around the belief that leaders were born, not made; that leaders have certain innate traits that other individuals just simply do not possess. This paradigm shifted as research and theory progressed, and today the prevailing idea is that anyone can be a leader, so long as they exhibit behaviors that are commonly accepted to describe leadership.

Yet, most current theories of leadership fall underneath this new framework, and each theory describes its own unique set of behaviors that are thoughts to most effectively describe a leader. For example, under transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) leaders are best recognized as individuals who influence and motivate their followers by garnering trust and providing inspiration, whereas with servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977), leaders are characterized as individuals who share power and help to develop their followers as much as possible.

However, consultants and researchers alike have become critical of many of the current conceptualizations of leadership for two main reasons. First, these types of behaviors are not representative of the full spectrum of behaviors a leader must possess. Second, these behaviors may not be exclusive to leaders, but instead may be more pertinent to managers. Leaders are those who change and move the organization forwards, whereas managers are those who maintain stability within the organization; both are necessary for an effective organization (House & Aditya, 1997; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002).

In response to the current trends in leadership research, an alternative framework was offered by Gill (2006). Gill’s approach to leadership includes a wider spectrum of leader behaviors, as well as taking into account the impact that both subordinates and the environment have on the leadership process. Additionally, such behaviors are more accurate descriptors of true leadership behaviors, as opposed to behaviors which more closely resemble managerial behaviors. Therefore, these behaviors may be important to include in future leadership development courses in your organization.

Gill’s (2006) leadership perspective includes five facets of leadership: identifying a vision and mission, creating a strategy, creating shared values among the group, empowering followers, and influencing, motivating, and inspiring followers. Each of the competencies in Gill’s (2006) framework is an important element of effective leadership. The first three competencies in the framework are considered to be the framework upon which the final two competencies operate upon.
Vision and Mission
In Gill’s (2006) framework, identifying a vision and mission involves “defining and communicating a meaningful vision” and creating a mission “through which the organization will pursue” this vision (p. 91). In a psychologically healthy workplace, creation of a vision and mission are oftentimes the galvanizing forces that can unite and motivate a diverse set of employees. Creating a vision and mission is an essential leader behavior because it is necessary for leaders to identify a direction in which employees should act or work (Zaccaro & Banks, 2001). Additionally, groups of employees who focus their energies toward one direction or vision may be higher performers than groups of employees who do not focus their energies towards one direction or vision (Senge, 2006).

Strategy
According to Gill (2006), leaders are central figures not just in developing strategy that supports the organization’s vision and mission, but also in gaining employee commitment and ensuring that strategy is properly implemented and integrated into the system. Leaders often find themselves in positions that require strategic decision making (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). In addition, leaders who have effective strategies for reaching long-term goals have been found to be more effective and have higher-performing followers than leaders who do not operate strategically (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Through the lens of a psychologically healthy workplace, leaders need to understand the big picture and develop effective strategies for developing and implementing psychologically healthy workplace initiatives.

Shared Values
Creating shared values among the group involves “identifying, displaying, and reinforcing” the values that follow the mission and vision (Gill, 2006, p. 91). Creating and reinforcing shared values among the group is essential to maintaining a cohesive group (Anderson & West, 1998). Group cohesion is essential for groups whose employees must work together to achieve a common goal. In addition, having shared values among the group is directly related to higher performance of the group (Souba, Mauger, & Day, 2007). Implementing psychologically healthy workplace initiatives such as employee recognition may be used as a way to improve shared values among a group or throughout the organization.

Empowerment
Empowering followers involves ensuring that followers are able to complete their job tasks, including the provision of sufficient resources and/or knowledge to complete those tasks (Gill, 2006). Employee empowerment, as proposed by the Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program, is an essential task for employers, following under the practice of employee involvement. Giving employees sufficient organizational resources to complete job tasks and offering them sufficient levels of autonomy are both required to achieve effective performance (Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005).

Influencing, Motivating, and Inspiring
Finally, influencing, motivating, and inspiring involves ensuring that followers want to complete their job tasks (Gill, 2006). Motivating followers to have the desire to complete their work is another essential component of leadership, as follower motivation influences the effectiveness of the group (Van Knippenberg, 2000). Further, employee work engagement (a very closely related concept) increases organizational performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). This essential leader behavior also ties into the components of the Psychologically Healthy Workplace framework. Creating an engaging work environment – through the development of a psychologically healthy workplace – may be an effective way to stimulate motivation among...
employees.

Summary
Such a perspective on leadership provides a more comprehensive view of the role of the leader and serves as a great tool for fostering and developing leadership, which promotes the underpinnings of a psychologically healthy workplace. An organization will find it difficult to create a psychologically healthy workplace without effective leadership. A survey based in Gill’s (2006) work has recently been developed by researchers at Saint Louis University, and is freely available for use in assessing individual leader attributes in all competency areas.

“…fostering and developing leadership promotes the underpinnings of a psychologically healthy workplace”

References