Using Primary Data

(Assessment 2)

EDTC 803

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It seems like we have all had one of those hard days at work. The kind where everything seems to go wrong. The wrong deadline was communicated to you and now you are working late – again; coworkers gossip about how some have preferential treatment over others; and another new hire just announced her resignation this time only after three months on the job. Fewer of us are likely to have experienced the opposite. Your boss publically congratulates you for putting in that extra effort on an important project; coworkers work collaboratively and chip in and take some of the work load off of one with a sick family member; your department celebrates a coworker leaving in order to go back to school to further her career. It is often easy to know when leadership is good and when leadership is bad, but what makes a capable of leader? Many books on leadership, including Leadership, Theory and Practice (Northouse, 2013), present theories which focus on key traits or characteristics that are important for good leaders. This paper examines interviews with ten successful Chief Executive Officers in an effort to identify trends and themes tying them together.

The ten most recent interviews of CEOs from the Lifehacker’s How I Work series (<http://lifehacker.com/tag/how-i-work>) were chosen. Companies ranged in from the Fortune 500 Company, Intuit, to the much smaller Birchbox. An a priori method of coding was used with initial codes including sleep habits, relaxation, productivity habits, work environment, and life advice. These initial codes were chosen based upon my personal interest in self-reported behaviors and habits of highly successful business leaders.

Results

Across the ten interviews, participants were asked about their sleep habits, the first category examined. The nine that responded provided information on their quality of sleep (generally poor) or the relative time of the day they rose (morning vs. late). Two CEOs, Emmanuel Schalitz and Jason Fried, had more focused answers and directly discussed the importance of sleep and how it is important to one’s health (Orin, 3/22/2017) and that it is a debt one cannot repay (Orin, 12/28/2016).

Relaxation was the next category investigated. The interviewer asked the executives about activities they undertook in an effort to help them relax. Answers to these questions were further broken down into smaller categories based on similarities. Many took advantage of physical exercise such as Luis von Ahn who ‘work(s) out for exactly 16 minutes every day’ (Orin, 2/8/2017). Katia Beauchamb engaged in social activities, the second sub-category, such as cooking and spending time with family (Orin, date), as did 70% of those interviewed. Another subset of coded responses making up approximately 25% of the total, involved some sort of separation from those around them, such as ‘walking and listening to podcasts’ as stated by Lauren McGoodwin (Orin, 12/15/2015).

A third quality addressed in the interview process was that of productivity apps and to-do lists. Responses to these questions were coded as a more general productive category with fifty-one total responses with all executives responding. The responses to these questions were further coded as belonging to technology, non-technology, or behavior subcategories. As expected, many of the respondents took advantage of existing productivity tools such as Evernote and the Google suite of products. Some products were created by the CEOs themselves and include Basecamp and Doist. In this technology driven economy, it was interesting to see 37% of the responses fall within a behavior sub-category which included keeping emails organized and making time management a priority. Ten percent of the responses involved non-technical tools such as a pen and paper to maintain to do lists.

Next, the environment in which one works was reviewed with twenty-two responses collected across the ten interviews. Of these responses, seven addressed ways in which the CEOs worked to remove distraction from their work environment. These included working in silence as described by Brad Smith (Orin, 4/12/2017) or by using noise cancelling headphones and listening to electronic music as described by Amir Salihefendic (Orin, 2/15/2017).

“Make sure you pay your bills” (Orin, date for smith) was a piece of advice that was classified as behavior, a subcategory that made up 44% of the advice given. Emotional advise such as ‘follow what makes your heart beat fastest’ given by Anant (Orin, date), was the next most popular type of advice and accounted for 25% of the responses. Smith provided developmental advice when he suggested that one ‘should look for purpose driven companies’. This sub-category accounted for 19% of the total. Finally, a null category contained a single response made by Watson (Orin, date).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations to this study. The first two are related to size. Both the number of interviews and the number of questions asked limited the ability to identify additional trends. In the future, an additional set of interviews could be included in the study. The small question set also focused heavily on productivity tools leading them away from an overall discussion of generalized productivity habits.

Additionally, the participants were asked to self-identify traits they thought were important in themselves. It is unknown if the responses were truthful or provided in a way that they thought would please the audience. Interviews with coworkers and family members could be done to verify answers.

Finally, the interview focused mainly on the interviewee as an individual and not as a member of a larger organization. Future interviews could include more organizational level questioning as a way to identify more generalized trends.

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