

Unit I:

Personal Leadership Skills

3. Understanding Your Leadership Style

What is your leadership style? Do you use a number of different styles? Your leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people. How well your group accomplishes its goals and maintains itself will be determined by your leadership style.

In the early years of leadership studies, theorists believed that certain character types made great leaders and that people were born with these characteristics. They called this the “trait theory.” However, the theorists found out that it is incredibly difficult to identify one character type as being more successful at leadership than others.

Researchers then studied leaders’ personalities and their behavior patterns as they dealt with groups. Several theories of leadership style were proposed during the 1970s to help leaders match style to situation (Sharpe 2000). Throughout published literature, researchers have grouped the theories into three categories: the autocratic versus democratic leadership, task versus maintenance leadership, and leadership role typologies. A number of leadership experts have developed their own names and roles to describe various leadership styles.

Most recently, a number of leadership researchers have broken new ground by describing leadership styles for the five stages of radical change (Reardon 1998). In today’s fast-paced world, this research explores how individual and group leadership style limitations can be dealt with to ensure radical change success.

Autocratic Versus Democratic Leadership Styles

Leaders carry out their roles in a wide variety of styles, e.g., autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (hands-off). Often, the leadership style depends on the situation, including the life cycle of the organization. The following will give you a brief overview of key styles, including the ones mentioned above.

1. Autocratic Leadership

Characteristics:

- Telling others what to do; dominating team members.
- Using unilateralism to achieve a singular objective.
- Limiting discussion on ideas and new ways of doing things.
- Group does not experience teamwork and workers are not involved in decision making.
- Most people are familiar with this style and easily adopt it.
- Studies show that productivity is highest under this leadership style while the manager is present, but productivity slumps in the absence of the manager.

Effective when . . .

- time is limited and a call arises for urgent leadership.
- individuals/group lack skill and knowledge.
- the group does not know each other.
- a new employee is just learning the job and is in a new environment; the leader is competent and a good coach; the employee is motivated to learn a new skill.

Ineffective when . . .

- developing a strong sense of team is the goal.
- the group members have some degree of skill/knowledge.
- the group wants an element of spontaneity in its work.

2. Democratic Leadership

Characteristics:

- Involving group members in planning and carrying out activities.
- Asking before telling, valuing group discussion and input, empowering.
- Promoting a sense of teamwork, encouraging participation and wise delegation, but never losing sight of responsibilities as a leader.
- A sign of strength employees will respect.
- Studies show that productivity is high under democratic leadership—not as high as in an autocratic situation, but the productivity does not drop when the leader is absent.

Effective when . . .

- the situation allows sufficient time.
- the group members have some degree of skill or knowledge.
- the leader knows the problem well, but wants to create a team where the employees take ownership of the project; the group is motivated and/or a sense of team exists to gain more commitment.
- the employees know their jobs and want to become part of the team.

Ineffective when . . .

- the group is unmotivated.
- group members lack skill and knowledge.
- a high degree of conflict is present.

3. Laissez-Faire Leadership

Characteristics:

- Noninterference in the affairs of others.
- Giving little or no direction to group/individuals and exercising little control over the group.
- Offering opinion only when requested.
- A person does not seem to be in charge.
- Allowing the employees to make the decision.
- This has the lowest level of productivity of all styles of leadership.

Effective when . . .

- a high degree of skill and motivation is shown in your group or when an employee is able to analyze the situation and determine what needs to be done, as well as how to do it.
- a sense of team exists.
- the routine is familiar to participants; by handing over ownership, a leader can empower his group to achieve their goals.
- the situation might call for the leader to be at other places doing other things.

Ineffective when . . .

- a low sense of team/interdependence exists.
- group members have a low degree of skill and knowledge.
- the group expects to be told what to do.

A good leader uses all three styles, depending on what forces are involved between the followers, the leader, and the situation.

Leader Task/Relationship Behavior

More recently “task” and “relationship” behavior have become two important components of leadership styles, particularly in community and volunteer organizations (Sharpe 2000).

Task behavior is oriented toward goals, accomplishments, and organization processes. Leaders believe they get results by consistently keeping people busy and urging them to work.

Relationship behavior is oriented toward creating the social climate of emotional and psychological support in the relationship with group members. These leaders build teamwork, help members with their problems, and provide psychological support. There is evidence that leaders who are considerate and build strong relationships with their team members are higher performers and are more satisfied with their jobs.

Task and relationship behaviors need not be an either/or style—they can be combined in varying degrees. For example, a leader who exhibits high relationship behavior does not necessarily become less structured.

Identifying Your Leadership Style

Assessing your own strengths and styles can enhance personal leadership skills. The goal of the effective leader is to have leadership flexibility, but this does not mean permissiveness. Good leaders know how to involve people by structuring their ideas toward task accomplishment. An effective leader must also be adept at assessing the situation and choosing the most appropriate leadership role to meet the needs of the situation (Klein 1986).

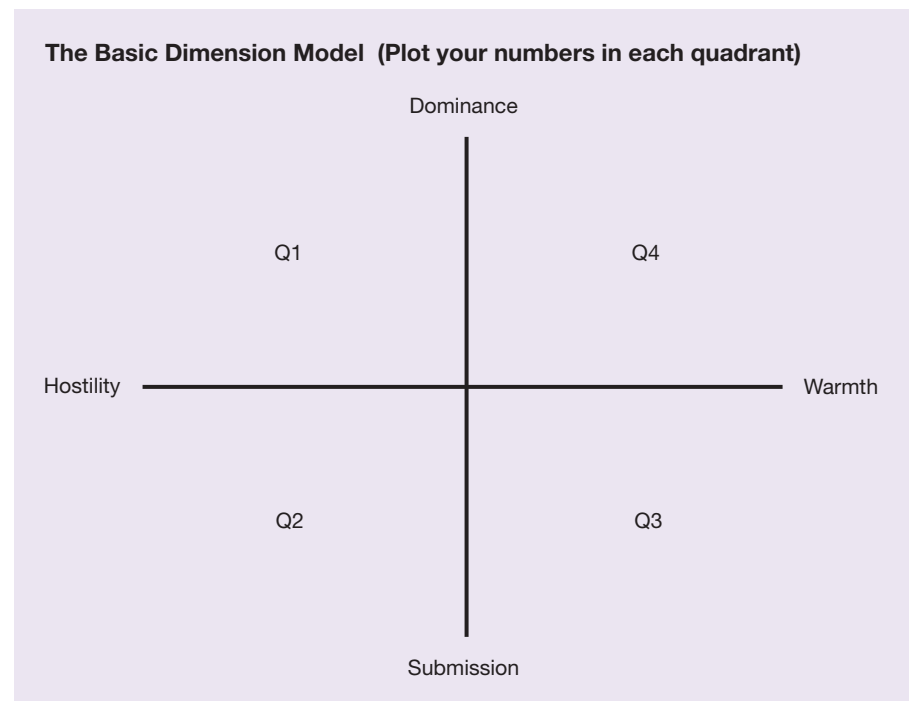
A leader who learns how to involve other people, listens to their ideas, and structures to lead to a common goal will have learned the skills and the advantages of being a flexible activator. Rigid, passive, or unstructured leadership results in organizational problems. The leader who knows when to involve, when to abdicate, and when to control is able to “read” a leadership situation and meet its particular needs (Walker 2002).

The Basic Dimensional Model

The Basic Dimensional Model (Lefton 2003) has been developed to help people identify their leadership style. It is illustrated by two dimensions, which are shown as intersecting lines. Each line is a continuum of behavior. One dimension represents dominance at one end and submission at the other. The second dimension represents hostility at one end and warmth at the other.

Research has shown that four characteristics are most important in explaining how people interact:

- **Dominance:** Defined as exercising control or influence, being assertive, and putting one’s idea forward; also as striving to influence how others think, feel, and behave. Dominant people take charge and move others to act. They are mostly concerned with getting things (tasks) done.
- **Submission:** Defined as following the lead of others. People who are submissive tend to be passive, more reluctant to speak out, and



have little regard or interest in influencing others.

- **Hostility:** Defined as self-centeredness with a lack of regard for others. Hostile behavior is not sensitive to other's needs, feelings, or ideas.
- **Warmth:** Defined as concern for others with an open-minded approach.

These characteristics are utilized to assist people in identifying their leadership styles, and because the four behaviors fall into four quadrants in the model, there are four types of leaders:

- Q1 = dominant–hostile (Autocratic)
- Q2 = submissive–hostile (Unassertive)
- Q3 = submissive–warm (Easygoing)
- Q4 = dominant–warm (Collaborative)

The Q1 leader uses power and control as a basic managing tool and is more concerned with ends than means. Results matter. The Q2 leader is pessimistic about people and seeks to maintain rather than change. This type of leader acts as a conduit within the hierarchy. The Q3 leader is generally undemanding and dislikes thinking of himself or herself as “the boss.” This type of leader often rewards too easily and has difficulty readily giving negative feedback. The Q4 leader's goal is to obtain optimal productivity from everyone. This type of leader acknowledges people's strengths and weaknesses and builds on the potential of the team.

Leadership Styles: Continuously Changing

The “information age” has led us into a faster-paced society with radical change occurring around us. The key component of successful leadership now and in the next century is proactive and effective responsiveness to change. Leaders who can do these things are referred to as “strategic leaders” (Reardon 1998).

A new set of leadership styles was derived from work on the Leadership Style Inventory (LSI) developed by Rowe, Reardon, and Bennis (1995). The inventory identifies differences in style used by leaders that are based on the following questions: How adaptive are leaders when dealing with the issues they face? How do leaders communicate with, persuade, and energize constituents in the process of change (Reardon 1998)?

The LSI identifies four basic styles: commanding, logical, inspirational, and supportive. It also describes combinations of basic styles called patterns. These patterns help to describe the complexity behind leader behavior and competence for radical change.

1. Commanding leadership style:

- Focus on performance.
- Short-term goal orientation.
- Highly productive and results oriented.
- Learn through own successes and failures.

2. Logical leadership style:

- Insistence on covering all alternatives.
- Long-term goal orientation.
- Use of analysis and questioning.
- Learn by reasoning through things.
- Effective when the goal is strategy development.

3. Inspirational leadership style:

- Development of meaningful visions for the future from focusing on radically new ideas.
- Learn by experimentation.
- High level of concern for assuring cohesiveness of members of the organization.
- Encouragement of others to follow the vision.
- Satisfaction of curiosity by finding radically new solutions.

4. Supportive leadership style:

- Concern with consensus.
- Emphasis on openness.
- Operate more as facilitators than directors.
- Learn by observing outcomes and how others react to decisions.

Reardon, Reardon, and Rowe (1998) have broken new ground by linking these leadership styles with the five phases of radical change, which are planning, enabling, launching, catalyzing, and maintaining. In dealing with change, this model of leadership styles relies heavily on the inspirational leader style for four out of the five change phases. Even though inspirational leaders are needed to encourage change, radical change also requires the logical, supportive, and commanding leadership styles at certain times throughout the process in order to supply a support system.

This new way of looking at leadership styles can explain how leaders are able to see where their own and others' strengths and challenges lie. Knowing what a leader is best suited for and what might be more effective in leading others is critical to achieving success in today's environment of radical change.

Summary

Leadership styles have been extensively researched, but few solid conclusions have been reached. What is clear is that the style a leader adopts depends on their perception of their group. Effective leadership involves assessing the group's style and stage of development and then using a matching leadership style. If the style of the leader and the needs of the group are mismatched, the group will be unproductive. Leaders also need to adapt their style to the urgency of the task to be accomplished.

Leadership styles usually combine some of each behavior in varying amounts, which is needed for leadership to be effective. This means that a leader needs to cultivate a range of supporting styles and become flexible in using them. Not only is this true when working with groups at various stages of group development, but also when moving from one culture to another.

As time changes and issues become more complex, you will need to know how to adapt and become flexible in your leadership style to make things happen in your group or organization. This is critical to being an effective leader in a world that is changing fast.

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One of the most critical needs in Pennsylvania is strong local leadership for the future well-being of communities. This includes leadership for civic and nonprofit organizations, youth, the business community, elected officials, and citizens.

The *Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow* leadership curriculum was developed to help individuals develop and strengthen their personal leadership skills so they can play active and constructive leadership roles in their communities. The program focuses on developing and strengthening personal and interpersonal leadership skills, group and organizational leadership skills, and community leadership skills.

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