Workshop 2: Inspire a Shared Vision

Leadership Theory: Style Approach

True leaders inspire others to succeed. The Style approach to leadership focuses on what leaders do rather than who leaders are. Please fill take the leadership assessment and read the excerpt on the Style Approach before the next workshop.
LEADERSHIP INSTRUMENT

Researchers and practitioners alike have used many different instruments to assess the styles of leaders. The two most commonly used measures have been the LBDQ (Stogdill, 1963) and the Leadership Grid (Blake & McCanse, 1991). Both of these measures provide information about the degree to which a leader acts task directed or people directed. The LBDQ was designed primarily for research and has been used extensively since the 1960s. The Leadership Grid was designed primarily for training and development; it continues to be used today for training managers and supervisors in the leadership process.

To assist you in developing a better understanding of how leadership style is measured and what your own style might be, a leadership style questionnaire is included in this section. This questionnaire is made up of 20 items that assess two orientations: task and relationship. By scoring the style questionnaire, you can obtain a general profile of your leadership behavior.

Style Questionnaire

Instructions: Read each item carefully and think about how often you (or the person you are evaluating) engage in the described behavior. Indicate your response to each item by circling one of the five numbers to the right of each item.

Key: 1 = Never 2 = Seldom 3 = Occasionally 4 = Often 5 = Always

1. Tells group members what they are supposed to do. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Acts friendly with members of the group. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Sets standards of performance for group members. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Helps others in the group feel comfortable. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Makes suggestions about how to solve problems. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Responds favorably to suggestions made by others. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Makes his or her perspective clear to others. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Treats others fairly. 1 2 3 4 5
9. Develops a plan of action for the group. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Behaves in a predictable manner toward group members. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Defines role responsibilities for each group member. 1 2 3 4 5
12. Communicates actively with group members. 1 2 3 4 5
13. Clarifies his or her own role within the group. 1 2 3 4 5
14. Shows concern for the well-being of others. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Provides a plan for how the work is to be done. 1 2 3 4 5
16. Shows flexibility in making decisions. 1 2 3 4 5
17. Provides criteria for what is expected of the group. 1 2 3 4 5
18. Discloses thoughts and feelings to group members. 1 2 3 4 5
19. Encourages group members to do high-quality work. 1 2 3 4 5
20. Helps group members get along with each other. 1 2 3 4 5

Scoring

The style questionnaire is designed to measure two major types of leadership behaviors: task and relationship. Score the questionnaire by doing the following: First, sum the responses on the odd-numbered items. This is your task score. Second, sum the responses on the even-numbered items. This is your relationship score.

Total scores: Task __________________ Relationship _____________
Scoring Interpretation

45–50 Very high range
40–44 High range
35–39 Moderately high range
30–34 Moderately low range
25–29 Low range
10–24 Very low range

The score you receive for task refers to the degree to which you help others by defining their roles and letting them know what is expected of them. This factor describes your tendencies to be task directed toward others when you are in a leadership position. The score you receive for relationship is a measure of the degree to which you try to make subordinates feel comfortable with themselves, each other, and the group itself. It represents a measure of how people oriented you are.

Your results on the style questionnaire give you data about your task orientation and people orientation. What do your scores suggest about your leadership style? Are you more likely to lead with an emphasis on task or with an emphasis on relationship? As you interpret your responses to the style questionnaire, ask yourself if there are ways you could change your style to shift the emphasis you give to tasks and relationships. To gain more information about your style, you may want to have four or five of your coworkers fill out the questionnaire based on their perceptions of you as a leader. This will give you additional data to compare and contrast to your own scores about yourself.

SUMMARY

The style approach is strikingly different from the trait and skills approaches to leadership because the style approach focuses on what leaders do rather than who leaders are. It suggests that leaders engage in two primary types of behaviors: task behaviors and relationship behaviors. How leaders combine these two types of behaviors to influence others is the central focus of the style approach.

The style approach originated from three different lines of research: the Ohio State studies, the University of Michigan studies, and the work of Blake and Mouton on the Managerial Grid.

Researchers at Ohio State developed a leadership questionnaire called the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), which identified initiation of structure and consideration as the core leadership behaviors. The Michigan studies provided similar findings but called the leader behaviors production orientation and employee orientation.

Using the Ohio State and Michigan studies as a basis, much research has been carried out to find the best way for leaders to combine task and relationship behaviors. The goal has been to find a universal set of leadership behaviors capable of explaining leadership effectiveness in every situation. The results from these efforts have not been conclusive, however. Researchers have had difficulty identifying one best style of leadership.

Blake and Mouton developed a practical model for training managers that described leadership behaviors along a grid with two axes: concern for results and concern for people. How leaders combine these orientations results in five major leadership styles: authority–compliance (9,1), country-club management (1,9), impoverished management (1,1), middle-of-the-road management (5,5), and team management (9,9).

The style approach has several strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, it has broadened the scope of leadership research to include the study of the behaviors of leaders rather than only their personal traits or characteristics. Second, it is a reliable approach because it is supported by a wide range of studies. Third, the style approach is valuable because it underscores the importance of the two core dimensions of leadership behavior: task and relationship. Fourth, it has heuristic value in that it provides us with a broad conceptual map that is useful in gaining an
understanding of our own leadership behaviors. On the negative side, researchers have not been able to associate the behaviors of leaders (task and relationship) with outcomes such as morale, job satisfaction, and productivity. In addition, researchers from the style approach have not been able to identify a universal set of leadership behaviors that would consistently result in effective leadership. Last, the style approach implies but fails to support fully the idea that the most effective leadership style is a high–high style (i.e., high task and high relationship).

Overall, the style approach is not a refined theory that provides a neatly organized set of prescriptions for effective leadership behavior. Rather, the style approach provides a valuable framework for assessing leadership in a broad way as assessing behavior with task and relationship dimensions. Finally, the style approach reminds leaders that their impact on others occurs along both dimensions.

Visit the Student Study Site at www.sagepub.com/northouse6e for web quizzes, leadership questionnaires, and media links represented by the icons.

REFERENCES