

Today's Leader — 'An Endangered Species'

"We must all know the parameters of leadership behavior that exist in various situations and be capable of choosing that behavior which best invests our time and energies"

Ben Tregoe

There is a popular, somewhat apocryphal story that originated in the early sixties about an applicant to Vassar College. In applying for one of the few openings in the freshman class, the individual in question departed from the hackneyed recital of honors, awards and presidencies garnered in high school. Instead, she noted that with the plethora of individuals vying for leadership positions, she was an extremely rare commodity: a first-rate follower. According to the story, she was, of course, rapidly accepted.

The story is interesting because it is so thoroughly part of another decade. Today, it is the leader who is on the endangered species list. Recent public polls show that faith in government officials is at an all-time low. Scandals at the highest

echelons, involving massive bribes and kickbacks, have eroded trust in business leaders. In many places, church attendance and contributions have been in constant decline for the past few years.

If it is difficult to be a follower today, it is probably because it is such an arduous task to find a good leader. In the late seventies, the issue of effective leadership will be especially critical if businesses are to survive. Leadership development is undoubtedly the most crucial issue facing organizational and management development efforts over the next several years.

What are the qualities of a good leader? What is there in common in the make-up of Vince Lombardi, Martin Luther King, Golda Meir, Elliott Estes? I suggest that the pursuit of some common style

among this diverse array of people would be a futile one. They have employed different approaches, possessed different strengths, appealed to different groups. In fact, the worst place in which to look in seeking a successful approach to leadership is in the personality of a successful leader.

Instead, leadership development must address several basic premises. First, no one type of behavior or style is appropriate in every instance. Each situation has variables (which will be discussed in some detail below) which determine those behaviors that are most acceptable in any instance.

Second, time demands on any leader are such that a constant analysis, usually subconscious, is being made as to whether time efficiency or time investment is most

appropriate. For example, the organization pressures its managers to achieve those results for which it has made them responsible. Subordinates, unions and a great deal of popular literature exert pressure to increase participation of others in decisions and plans. The family, private interests and contemporary society's emphasis on leisure time and the quality of life pressure for time away from the job. In any situation, these often conflicting pressures need to be assessed and systematically dealt with.

Third, each leader possesses unique strengths and weaknesses which will impact leadership style. No leader can succeed by employing a style which demands talents that he or she does not possess. Conversely, some subordinates will simply not respond to certain styles no matter how adept the leader is at employing them.

Range of Behavior

Finally, there is a finite but diverse range of behaviors available to any leader. The task for the leader thus becomes one of choosing a behavior that will tend to ensure situational success while making the best use of time available. Our research¹ has shown that the finite range of behaviors available to a leader consists of the following:

A1. The leader makes a decision

(solves a problem, engages in planning) alone, acting solely on the basis of the information available at the time.

All. The leader elicits data from others, but does so without revealing the nature of the concern.

The questions are brief and require specific responses.

CI. The leader elicits data from others in a one-on-one setting. The nature of the concern is revealed and the individual participates in the analysis of the concern, providing additional insight and perspective.

CII. The leader convenes a group of people and conducts the meeting along the guidelines of CI. While the group participates in the analysis of the concern, the leader retains the final decision making prerogative.

GII. The leader convenes a group which participates in the analysis. In this case, the leader grants the decision-making to the group and accedes to the group consensus.

I have previously referred to situation variables which govern

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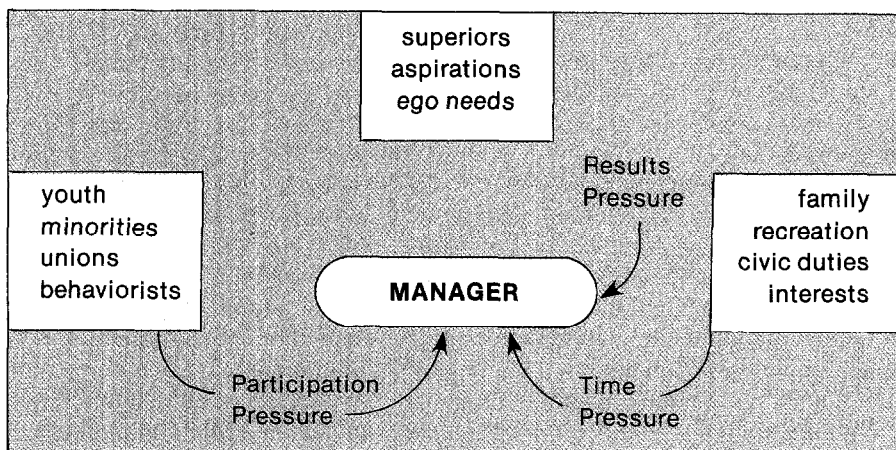
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which behaviors are acceptable in various situations. Those variables deal with two factors: *quality* and *commitment*. By quality, I mean those agents which affect the type of decision or solution called for; by commitment, those agents which affect the degree to which implementors of the solution will acquiesce and support it. Underlying both of these factors is the paramount consideration of time.

These factors lead to the development of seven variables. The first three deal with quality:

1. **Rational Quality** — Does it make a difference which course of action is adopted, or will any alternative produce the same degree of success?

2. **Adequacy of Information** — Does the leader have adequate information to make a quality decision alone?

3. **Structure of the Situation** — If there is data missing, does the leader know what it is and how to get it?

The next four deal with commitment:

4. **Commitment Requirement** — Is commitment by others to the solution critical to effective implementation?

5. **Commitment Without Participation** — Will the implementors commit to a decision made by the leader without their active participation?

6. **Goal Congruence** — Is there agreement on objectives between the subordinates and the organization?

7. **Conflict over Alternatives** — Is there likely to be conflict over alternative solutions among subordinates?

The value of these variables is that they can be combined to formulate guidelines which eliminate types of behavior which will not lead to situational success. For example, if we were to combine variables 1 and 2 we could postulate:

If there is a high-quality requirement and the leader does

not have adequate information with which to make the decision, eliminate AI behavior.

The rationale in this situation is that since it does make a difference which course of action is chosen and the leader has insufficient data, success would be seriously endangered by choosing a "leader alone" mode of behavior. Another example, this time combining variables 1 and 6:

If there is a high-quality requirement and goal congruence does not exist, eliminate GII behavior.

The rationale is that since it does make a difference which course of action is chosen and subordinates have objectives different from those of the organization . . . situational success is endangered by choosing a behavior which affords the group the final decision.

By combining variables in this manner we can develop a comprehensive set of guidelines to eliminate behaviors which are inappropriate. But what of the time factor which has been emphasized above?

Using the first example, if that were the only guideline that was applied to our situation, we would be left with an acceptable range of behaviors of AII through GII. That behavior that is least participative — in this case, AII — will always be the most time efficient. That behavior that is most participative — here, GII — will always require the largest time investment (and will always be the most developmental for subordinates). Hence, once the leader has identified the acceptable range of behaviors in a given situation, he or she can then determine which is optimal in the use of time. A leader has the flexibility to opt for time efficiency, subordinate development or something between the two. The key determinant is the amount of time that the leader can afford and is willing to invest.

In my opinion, any approach to leadership must consider these op-

tions. And this brings me back to some of the dangers I see in attitudes toward leadership.

No one style or behavior will ever provide success in all situations The highly autocratic manager who prefers to act alone will not be successful when an AI style is chosen if there is insufficient data present. Similarly, participation for participation's sake is costly and often a direct impediment to leader effectiveness.

A classic example of this last point was illustrated recently. During a leadership presentation upon which this article is based, a participant announced that he had solved a particularly frustrating problem. His organization had been engaged in a "hell-bent-for-leather" participation program,

assigning decisions previously reserved for upper management to select employee committees. The committees were experiencing an extremely poor 15 per cent acceptance rate on recommendations. The cause, he now realized, was that the committees had a high percentage of young people who did not share most of the organization's objectives. Consequently, the recommendations were not at all consistent with the direction in which top executives felt the organization should be moving, and they were shelved. And that will continue as long as decisions are turned over to a group — GII — without any consideration of the goal congruence variable. The result will consistently be wasted time, alienation and frustration.

Another danger is in the mistaken belief that leadership methods which worked in the past will be effective in the future. I would suggest that they are not even effective in the present. Warren Bennis in *The Unconscious Conspiracy: Why Leaders Can't Lead* writes:

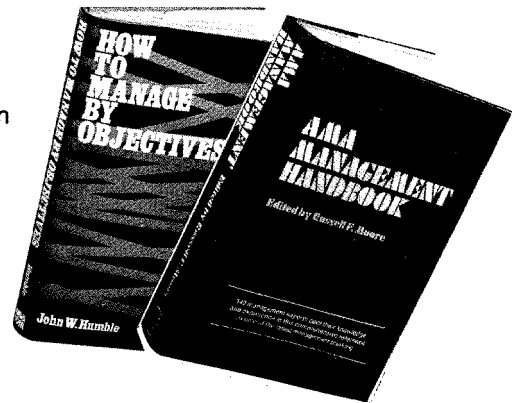
There are now 7.5 million young people in college. They form a truly vast, new intelligentsia Suddenly, in America, the intelligentsia has become a major segment of the population. Its representatives are now spreading from the campus into government, business, and the professions. When this critical intelligentsia formed a tiny percentage of the population, it was perfectly proper to think that those who went to work for

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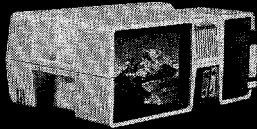
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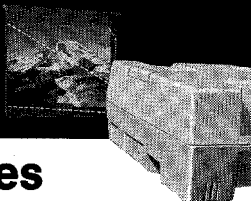
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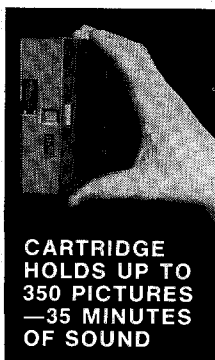


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TRW and GE would be absorbed into the organization. But today there are simply too many.

He goes on to raise a point with which I strongly agree: this powerful and well-educated group will continue to push for more self-actualization, more participation in organizational decisions. To refuse them this access will be to lose, and then fail to attract, the best and the brightest young people available.

Visceral, "shoot-from-the-hip" styles that worked when a manager knew as much about subordinates' jobs as the subordinates themselves will no longer provide a high degree of success. A manager is responsible for too many diverse content fields today, from finance to inventory to EEO requirements. It would be like expecting a baseball manager to be proficient at every position for which there are players in order to be successful. Such content mastery is impossible. The baseball and the business manager will both win more often by mastering a process of leadership which enables them to best utilize their respective content specialists.

A primary goal, then, is to determine when participation is necessary, who ought to be involved and what the extent of that involvement should be. The systematic examination of the variables described above is the most efficacious method I know of to make these determinations rapidly and accurately.²

A few years ago, *Time* magazine ran a letter to the editor which attempted to analyze leadership behavior in the highest office in the land. "Presidents," wrote the correspondent, "run the country the way in which they are used to running things. Nixon runs it like a business, Johnson ran it like a cattle ranch, Kennedy ran it like Harvard and Eisenhower ran it like the army. Truman was the last

great president. He ran the country the way it ought to be run . . . like a stubborn Missouri mule."

These observations are both right and wrong. They are wrong in that the old "give 'em hell, Harry" leadership style is too one-dimensional to be successful in all instances in today's world. But they are right in that we all tend to approach leadership by emulating successes we have seen elsewhere, despite the facts that the situation is new and the variables probably different.

My contention is that to resolve the leadership crisis that faces us today in the training and development profession we need to emulate a modern-day Proteus. We must all know the parameters of leadership behavior that exist in various situations and be capable of choosing that behavior which best invests our time and energies.

REFERENCES

1. A statistical basis and analysis of the research appears in *Leadership and Decision Making* by Dr. Victor H. Vroom and Dr. Philip W. Yetton, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.
2. The validity of this approach is most recently demonstrated in the 1976 edition of *Organizational Dynamics*. In "Can Leaders Learn to Lead" Dr. Vroom shows that leaders who choose a behavior within the acceptable range tend to be successful (by their own standards) about twice as often as when behavior is chosen outside of that range.

Ben Tregoe is cofounder and chairman, Kepner-Tregoe, Inc., Princeton, N.J. This international organization specializes in the field of management decision-making: developing fundamental ideas and working with executives of well-known corporations to translate these ideas into practical application. Clients with whom this firm has a continuing relationship include: Ford, General Electric, General Motors, IBM, Monsanto, NASA. He is coauthor of *The Rational Manager*, with Charles H. Kepner, Ph.D. published by the McGraw-Hill Book Co. in 1965.