

## "A Small and Potentially Specious Database..."

In their Feb. 1982 article, Blake and Mouton set out to demonstrate that the "One Best Style" approach is more valid than "Situational Leadership Theory." None of us purports to "know" which of these theories is more accurate. Indeed, we have worked in situations where presenting variables suggested either might be more appropriate. We say this because we do not believe we are "invested" in one approach. What we do share in common, however, is a strong sense that Blake and Mouton's article draws striking conclusions based on irrelevant, incomplete and/or erroneous data. The balance of this letter details our objections.

- Blake and Mouton write that when 50 managers completed the Hersey and Blanchard instrument with a 9.9 option added, most managers selected this as being the most appropriate choice. They conclude this demonstrates that there is "One Best Style." In fact, all this study "proves" is that when given this instrument, managers chose that alternative more often than others. It does not in fact prove that these managers are "correct." By way of analogy, given the choice, many Americans would choose to drive at 65 miles an hour. Would this "prove" that 65 mph was the one best speed? Obviously not. The safe speed to drive is a function of many variables. We do not, therefore, suggest that "Situational Leadership Theory" is the most appropriate theory. We simply question the methodology that Blake and Mouton use to "prove" their point.

- Blake and Mouton do not address the possibility that some or all of these 50 managers had previous management training which *taught* them that 9.9 or a similar approach *was* the one best way. If this were the case, these managers might have simply provided the "book solution" based upon their previous training.

- Blake and Mouton graphically displayed the results they acquired in this experiment. The statistic they use is Chi-Square. This ordinal level statistic is not particularly rigorous for behavioral science research. Interval measurement techniques such

as analysis of variance and linear regression exemplify harder approaches. Had Blake and Mouton employed these two and taken other variables into account (e.g., educational level of the respondents, reading difficulty of the first four versus the fifth alternative, etc.) they might have come to the same conclusion. They might, however, have come to a strikingly different set of conclusions.

- Blake and Mouton suggest that regrouping representative leadership research published since World War II yields conclusive evidence of the superiority of the 9.9 (i.e., "One Best Style") method. They make a broad generalization, yet do not cite all the research or even suggest they have reviewed all the relevant research. In fact, their major citation (i.e., Fleishman) is, in large measure, a secondary source. How are we to know whether their work is based upon a comprehensive or a "selective" review of the literature?

- The authors also suggest as further proof of their position that Likert's conclusion is correct—that the closer a work group's leadership is to System Four (an approximation of the 9.9 orientation) the higher the group's productivity. The questions we ask are as follows—as compared to what? (Anything is *usually* better than nothing.) In what environments? Once again Blake and Mouton provide sparse evidence for us to draw meaningful conclusions.

- Blake and Mouton suggest that evidence from Grid Organizational Development provides further support for that thesis. In one illustration they suggest that profits rose dramatically as a result of a Grid OD intervention. They use this to apply additional support for the "One Best Method" theory. All this research suggests is that a Grid approach is better than no treatment whatsoever.

- The authors state that two independent investigations demonstrate that managers who advance higher on the career ladder are more likely than others to solve production problems with and through people based on a 9.9 orientation. Research published by Graves (1976), however, "proves" the contrary. I suggest this for two reasons: first, once again, Blake and Mouton have failed to cover all the research

including research that does not support their view. Second, most behavioral scientists would agree that no single piece of research "proves" anything.

- Finally, the authors suggest that when included in comparative research, they *find* that the 9.9 orientation is the most effective way of leading. The only thing these research studies demonstrate is that people *perceive* 9.9 to be the most effective way to lead. These are two dramatically different statements.

In summary, we object to the methods by which Blake and Mouton reached their conclusions. We further object to the *Training and Development Journal* publishing an article which develops conclusions of such magnitude based on such a small and potentially specious database.

—Craig Dreilinger, PhD  
Licensed Psychologist

William E. LeClere,  
Organizational and Managerial  
Consultant

Dr. T. Bruce Robinson  
Director of Career Development for  
the International Trade Administration,  
Department of Commerce

Judy Springer, President  
The Athena Corp.

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## An Obvious Reaction to Loss of Market Share...

I am incensed that our Society seems to offer Blake & Mouton a free platform to advertise and/or defend their product. They appear virtually at every ASTD National Conference and all too frequently in the *Journal*!

Their article in the February 1982 *Journal* is obvious commercialism under the guise of research and should offend training professionals everywhere. The *Journal* should not become a marketing forum for purveyors and academes. The article is defensive in nature—an obvious reaction to some loss of market share vis a vis Situational Leadership.

Beyond the commercialism of the



article lie some other problems:

- Who are these "experienced managers" and "third parties" that participated in the research?

- The wording of the "fifth alternative" added onto the LEAD instrument goes unmentioned.

- The creditability of their conclusions automatically becomes suspect if mental health MDs and PhDs support their findings. True, these people are trained to interpret behavioral science theories but they are not trained to judge what is effective on the shop floor or in corporate offices.

—*Paxton W. Riddle*  
Manager of Personnel  
Corporate Staff  
Aeroquip Corp.

## Leaders Must Engage in a Variety of Styles...

The Managerial Grid is a perspective of how leaders think and feel. Situational Leadership is a perspective of how leaders behave relative to their followers. The Grid approach seems to look at leaders in a vacuum, isolated from their follower(s), in which case the way a leader thinks and feels, or his or her concerns, are measured in an attempt to predict effectiveness in all situations. Nine, nine is then proclaimed to be the most effective style. The problem is that 9,9 is not a style. It is not a way of behaving. It is a predisposition to behavior. It is just what the authors have labeled it—a concern for production and a concern for people. Who can argue with that as an appropriate leader attitude?

But, when the would-be leader leaves the classroom and is thrust into the real work world, another very significant element comes into play—the followers. Some followers know how to do the task, others don't. Some are committed to the organization's goals, others are not. Some want to participate, others don't. Some need the leader's feedback and approval, others have internalized those things and provide their own.

In fact, no matter how leaders

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think and feel, no matter how concerned they are for people or production, they may have to engage in a variety of styles (behaviors) to be effective.

In their February 1982 article, Blake & Mouton conclude that if you ignore their research and (divine?) "principles" and favor "Situationalism" in teaching leadership, you are not a training and development "professional."

Shame on them! Many of us who teach leadership think we do so professionally. We teach that some people will be more "ready" than others to follow. We teach that to be effective, a leader must be ready to change styles (behavior) in response to that readiness or maturity. We teach people to observe behaviors and respond to behaviors.

I tread lightly when entering the realm of what goes on inside others' heads. I am uneasy making "principles" of concerns, what people think, the way they feel and other value laden approaches.

I leave that to others who feel qualified. To do less would be unprofessional.

—*Ebert Steele*  
Supervisor  
Management Development  
Monsanto Chemical  
Intermediates Co.

## It Can't Be Done!

As expected, the surge of interest in the "circle movement" has brought a raft of intellectual doomsdayers out of the woodwork. Their cry of apparent exasperation, "It won't work here..." should be examined with objectivity, an important ingredient so often neglected by these projectionists of pessimism.

Examples of organizations that have lost their enchantment for QCs are becoming easier to find. Considering the wide range of interest, and the fact that the word "circle" has taken on new meaning in organizational jargon, the percentage of disenchanteds is quite low.

Observation of the doomsdayers and the disenchanteds reveals two distinctly different tracks. The former have little to no practical experience, have an axe to grind (laced with prejudice) or just simply need something to write or talk about.

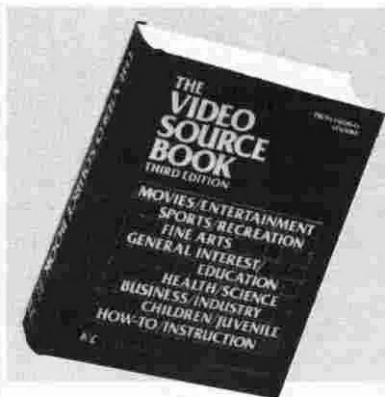
On the other hand, the disenchanteds have varying degrees of experience. With little exception, some

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basic guidelines were broken or some common sense actions were not taken. Listed below, while not all-inclusive, are the most common ingredients for *unsuccessful* "circle" programs:

- Lack or absence of middle management support—first line supervisors and up;
  - Inadequate training—from members to leaders, to facilitators, and yes, management;
  - The American need for measurable results now or yesterday rather than the long-term commitment;
  - The lack of on-the-job and in-house training for the facilitator and leaders;
  - Implementing a "circle" system in a non-participative environment;
- It's been said, "Nothing is for sure except death, taxes and change." Participative forms of management are inevitable parts of that change.

—Larry L. Nelson  
President  
*Measurable Performance Systems*

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## Working Together as a Team...

I was delighted to read your "Page Four" commentary in the February issue. In 1976 I attended a seminar on women managers; when I returned to our company (United Telephone of Texas, Inc.) I wanted to share what I had learned. I felt, however, that if women were going to be educated on "how to" succeed in business, that men *must* also be involved.

I began to develop a course, "A Manager is A Manager," geared to help both male and female managers become more successful managers through teamwork. One of our instructors (Bill Stansbury) and I presented our first course in May. We considered it important that the course be team taught by a male and a female.

The course content included: Transactional Analysis, Sexual Harassment, Successful Managerial Characteristics, Stereotypes, Assertiveness, Understanding Yourself and Others and Teamwork.

This course is made up of two parts. Part I is a two-day session, then students return to their positions and have the opportunity to "practice" what they learned. Part II is a continuing reinforcement of the training. The reinforcement session is critical because we focus on changing behavior and attitudes. This cannot be accomplished through one seminar.

You said that company presidents, personnel directors and management development managers have an opportunity to deal with a "real" operating need. This is critical, because only through a positive action attitude from top management will these seminars take place.

Many women still need "for women only" seminars to help them channel their efforts in the right direction. Once they are educated, they need to be part of the team. This can only be accomplished through men and women working together.

Education is the key to open the teamwork "door" through which the employee, company and customer all benefit.

—Jean Watson  
Training Director  
United Telephone Co.  
of Texas

## "Management Training for Women—Create a Positive Environment!"

Regarding your February "Page Four" commentary on "Women in Management—Separate but Equal!" research has repeatedly demonstrated that effective management includes an equal measure of technical competency and the ability to manage people. Successful men perfect their people management abilities because they have access to informal learning experiences. They interact with male leadership through the complex infrastructures of business, social and political activities specifically designed to conduct the business of the male subculture. The women, and men, who are excluded from these relationships are at a disadvantage because they have not experienced the informal dynamics of the system—the matrix that builds trust and understanding.

The most effective management programs for women are designed to replicate the behavioral experiences of successful professional managers. Whereas these activities would be redundant for most men, they are a vital link between the technical competency and managerial ability for professional women. Women function as true corporate peers when they understand and function appropriately in the corporate subculture.

Mark Silber's interest in a "microsociety," where female and male managers will be concerned with the "real" operating need is possible when we share a common reality about the organizational and subcultural systems that currently exclude women.

Meanwhile, we need not create an either/or model of management training for women, but a dual system designed to create a positive environment with a shared understanding of the managerial subculture. Training programs that include simulations and experiences appropriate to the work environment have proven to be a valuable resource for successful career managers. They should continue.

—Alice Armstrong  
Executive Director  
Institute for Managerial  
and Professional Women

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