

## AN OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP STYLE RESEARCH

Leadership style refers to the manner in which leaders go about the process of leading. One's style is determined by many factors. Personality, social expectations and customs, specific task to be accomplished, and composition of group are all determinants of leadership style.

### A. DEMOCRATIC, AUTOCRATIC & LAISSEZ-FAIRE STYLES

**1. Democratic** leaders tend to include their group members in decision making and problem solving processes. They are usually very flexible and are quick to praise the group as a whole or as individuals.

**2. Autocratic** leaders, however, tend to make decisions on their own without seeking or allowing input from group members. They supervise group member closely and are quick to both praise and punish.

**3. Laissez-faire** leaders perform a minimum of leadership functions and can be considered enabling in nature. An effective laissez-faire leader provides only enough leadership to allow group members to complete their task.

**A 1956 study done by White and Lippitt investigated the effects of the three leadership styles on workers in an industrial setting. Their research yielded the following results:**

a) Productivity - Autocratic leadership yields the greatest quantity of work, followed by democratic, and laissez-faire. However, the quality of work was consistently greater in the democratic group.

b) Discontent - Autocratic groups demonstrated much more direct and indirect discontent. When autocratic leaders left the scene there was a drastic drop in work production. When democratic leaders left, however, only a slight decline was evident.

c) Satisfaction - Members of democratic groups indicated a greater degree of group cohesiveness and satisfaction. Autocratic group members were much more hostile, aggressive and dissatisfied with working conditions.

d) Absenteeism - Members of democratic groups showed the lowest amount of absenteeism, while members of autocratic groups had the highest rate of absenteeism and termination.

e) Dependency - Members of autocratic groups were much more submissive and dependent. Democratic group members were more independent and self sufficient.

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The results of this research clearly show that leadership style can drastically effect the productivity, attitude, happiness, and self reliance of group members.

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### B. DEFENSIVE VS PARTICIPATORY LEADERSHIP STYLES

Two styles that have recently become prominent are defensive and participative leadership. Defensive leadership strongly resembles autocratic leadership style, and participatory leadership is closely related to democratic style. Jack Gibb describes the defensive leader as a strong willed and inflexible person who is task oriented and insensitive to group maintenance. On the other hand, Gibb describes participatory leadership as a style which focuses on group input and group needs

**1. Defensive leadership**, although related to the idea of authoritarian leadership, differs because it serves to defend the leader against his own fears of inadequacy, and against attacks from group members. According to Jack Gibb, the defensive view of leadership assumes people must be led, since they cannot be trusted to function on their own. It is the responsibility of the leader to motivate, to organize, to be creative, to coordinate, and to serve as a model of appropriate behavior. Obviously this view assumes group members cannot motivate, organize, nor coordinate. Group members need someone to set the example, they need someone to emulate. The defensive leader is quick to discipline, but is also capable of rewarding when rewards are appropriate. Leaders are born, not made. According to defensive leadership style, leaders are born not made, therefore, not everyone is capable of becoming an effective leader.

Gibb believes: The authoritarian or defensive view is particularly appropriate to some viable aspects of the culture we live in: to organizational forms inherited from the medieval church and military; to a life of vertical hierarchy, prescribed role responsibilities, and delegated authority; to a highly competitive economic and educational system; to the current dominant values of efficiency, excellence, productivity, task performance, and perfectionism; to the impersonality, alienation, loneliness, impotence, and indifference in our people; to a world of automation, programming, data processing, and engineering; to a forensic, persuasive, public relations, and marketing mode of interpersonal commerce; to a world continually at war, threatened by war, or preparing for war; in short, to a world of machines.

Gibb then follows with reasons defensive leadership is "fundamentally dissonant" with other characteristics of our society:

...with education for growth, intimacy, authenticity, humanness, and creativity; with the Judeo-Christian ethics of love, honesty, intimacy, faith, cheek-turning, and brotherhood; with a climate for research, inquiry, scholarship, contemplation, and learning; with cooperation, group planning, team building, and various forms of group effort; with new emerging models of industrial organization and manufacturing productivity; ...with the world of ambiguity, feeling, conflict, sorrow, creativity

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and diversity; with many new and exciting developments in education; ...in short, with the world of human beings, with people. Clearly, Gibb believes defensive leadership is a hindrance to our society. Later, research will be presented which substantiates Gibb's view.

**2. Participative leadership** allows people to grow, to learn and to produce on their own. They are able to motivate themselves and need not rely on sources for external motivation. They are capable of setting their own goals and making decisions as to method of goal attainment. They can be trusted to put forth an honest and energetic effort. Participative leaders are most effective when they "help the group to grow, to emerge, and to become more free". The leader serves the group best when he is "a whole person, is direct, real, open, spontaneous, permissive, emotional and highly personal". The effective leader becomes unnecessary and replaceable. "The good leader tends not to lead."

Marshall Sashkin describes participative management as a leadership process in which workers are given opportunities for planning and controlling their own work activities. Sashkin has identified four varieties of worker participation in the work process: 1) goal setting, 2) decision making, 3) problem solving, and 4) change development and implementation.

### C. SUPPORTIVE RESEARCH

**1. Hawthorne** - A study done from the mid 1920's to the mid 1930's at AT&T's Hawthorne Plant has come to be known as the landmark in participative management research. Basically, the study was done to determine how work progress was affected by physical surroundings such as lighting. The experiment initially indicated that production increased when lighting increased. This led the researchers to the preliminary conclusion that light level was directly correlation to work production. However, when light levels were decreased the researchers were puzzled to find that work production remained high. At this point the study group became totally exasperated and stopped the project. A follow-up study, however, indicated that the increased work production generated in the original research was not a result of physical conditions at all, but was, instead, caused by unusual attention given to group workers by a supervisor with personal managerial qualities found in participative leaders. This research has since become known as the "Hawthorne Effect".

**2. Likert** - Rensis Likert, Director of the Michigan Institute, developed a tool for managers to use to determine their leadership style and the productivity level of their work groups. First, the manager is asked to identify the most successful work group of which he is aware. Commonly groups reflecting participative management styles are identified. Next, the manager is asked to pick the least successful work group known. Again, profiles resembling authoritative or defensive management styles are identified.

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Last, the manager is asked to describe their own work group. Almost always profiles reflecting a blend of defensive/participative managerial styles are drawn. As a method of cross checking, Likert then asks workers to describe the managerial style in their group. Workers usually see leadership style in their group as a little more authoritarian as their bosses do.

**3. Coch & French** - A classic study of factory workers was done by Coch and French in 1948 in which production was drastically effective by participative management styles. The factory studied had found it necessary to constantly change both their product and method of manufacturing to remain competitive in their market area. These constant changes stimulated a chronic absenteeism and termination problem within the workers of the company. In turn, the high rate of absenteeism and job turnover made it necessary for managers to often switch workers from one job assignment to another. The overall result had been a drop in job moral which led to a subsequent drop in production quantity as well as quality.

A study was structured by creating four work groups. Three of the work groups were experimental groups. One experimental group was allowed to participate through representation in a fashion similar to the federal government's House of Representatives. The other two experimental groups were allowed full participation in decision making matters. The fourth group was a control group in which no participative changes were made and the normal method of management was carried out. The workers in each group were switched to new job positions.

The study indicated the control group showed a steadily increasing drop in productivity. The group with participation through representation showed an initial drop in productivity with fairly rapid recovery. The two experimental groups with full participation showed no drop in productivity and eventually surpassed the level of production before job changes. Two months after the original study the control group was changed to a fully participative management system. They quickly recovered their prior level of productivity and, like the other groups, went on to new heights. In addition to levels of productivity, the study indicated that numbers of absenteeism and job termination had fallen, and that the level of job satisfaction had increased.