

Running Head: Leadership Style and Leadership Motivation

Leadership Style and Leadership Motivation:

An ad-hoc choice of style to meet short-term organizational goals

Jay A. Dewhurst

University of Charleston

### Abstract

This article addresses how an organization's ad-hoc needs motivate the leader to choose a leadership style, such as authoritarian, participative or delegative that may or may not be typical or appropriate for long term needs. These motives, which include a) the motivation to control and limit variables, b) the motivation to expand influence through others, and c) the motivation to expand influence by replicating self, are influenced greatly by temporary changes in an organizations operation and may include emergency situations as well as one-time revenue opportunities. Regardless of the situation, a leaders typical style, motivated by normal circumstances, must be flexible and change according to temporary needs. Scenarios are presented to examine possible situational or ad-hoc style changes and their accompanying challenges.

### An ad-hoc choice of style to meet short-term organizational goals

It is fairly obvious that, individually, leadership style is motivated by myriad variables including organizational mission, personal career goals, cultural issues and a host of others. The choice of leadership style, however, is often developed over many years as conditions of employment, long-term organization goals and business culture changes. It is often overlooked that a fairly static choice of leadership style, while effective over long periods, is less effective on the short term as specific goals and project needs change, and that “leaders have different motives at work at different times”. (Winston) This article argues that short-term leadership style is motivated less by the desired outcomes of the leader as an individual, and more by the conditions the leader deems necessary to accomplish specific, short-term organizational goals. These short-term goals often require the leader to sacrifice personal time, family time and recreation as well as set aside the long term planning and focus of the organization, narrowing the focus, for a limited time, on very specific objectives. Certain projects may require the normally participative leader to delegate most tasks if, for example, geographical distance is an issue. On the other hand, a normally authoritarian leader may need to participate with employees when a project requires more “hands-on” work than what is typical for the organization. The reality is that leaders must be flexible and agile, particularly when handling short-term, high-stress projects, emergencies or other events outside the norm for the organization. Furthermore, this article addresses how an organizations ad-hoc needs motivate the leader to choose a leadership style, such as “authoritarian, participative *and* delegative” (Clark) that may or may not be typical or suitable for long term needs.

#### *Motivation to Control and Limit Variables*

“Organizations may have hundreds or thousands of variables that are vital for success” (Norton, 2001) because of the many organizations, or departments within a larger organization, which require an authoritarian style of leadership. This leadership style, which lends itself best to structured, bureaucratic organizations, is highly effective in large corporations like General Electric, IBM and General Motors. These organizations desire, and often require, control over employees to ensure productivity, accountability and compliance. Laws such as the Sarbanes Oxley Act of 2002<sup>1</sup> have increased the pressure of large, publicly traded firms to exercise control over even minor parts of operations. With employees of these large companies numbering in the tens of thousands or more, control must be exercised in such a way as to limit the variables the company must deal with in daily operations, ensuring full compliance to regulatory agencies and the public alike. This powerful motivation does not allow much flexibility for leaders, requiring them to take a conservative, autocratic approach with their followers.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Sarbanes Oxley Act, go to <http://www.sarbanes-oxley.com/>

### *Motivation to Expand Influence Through Others*

Smaller organizations, or departments within larger organization, have leaders who are highly participative, involving themselves in daily activities inspiring followers, increasing effectiveness and productivity. This style of leadership allows for some degree of control over followers, but is mainly focused on an “all for one, one for all” work environment where the “boss” is seen as non-domineering and “part of the gang” when it comes to the daily grind. It is important to understand that this style of leadership, although less authoritative, is not from a position of weakness, but instead is motivated by the desire of the leader to exercise influence through others in a more participative, mentoring relationship recognizing there is a need “to expand the level of leadership influence” (Cheng, 2005) This motive may result from the leaders own style, or may be precipitated by the kind of work involved. In a more creative environment, for example, the leader may be asked to lead a group who require time for reflection in informal meetings as they bounce ideas off of one another. The leader may participate in this process, ultimately having to decide a direction for the team, but only after team members have an opportunity to have a great deal of input and believe their own ideas are part of the ultimate product.

### *Motivation to Expand Influence by Replicating Self*

Unlike the participative and authoritarian styles of leadership, the leader using a delegative style allows for a free-reign or laissez-faire operation where employees are autonomous and are asked to “run with the ball” once projects or duties are delegated. This style of leadership works well when a leader is simply not able to participate in daily activities either by lack of knowledge in a particular field, or due to geographical distance. Regardless of the cause, the delegative leader is motivated by the need to be replicated, putting followers in positions of some authority and influence over daily activities. The delegative leader is more vulnerable to poor employee decisions and performance, but is in position to expand their personal influence, ultimately raising the effectiveness of their leadership. The desired goal is to foster followers who will make decisions similar to the ones their leader would make given similar variables. It must be stressed, however, that delegative leader must have keen sense when hiring individuals as only certain personality types perform well under this leadership style.

### *Motivation and Ad-hoc Leadership Styles*

Regardless of the preferred leadership style employed in an organization, it is unlikely that one style will fit all circumstances. This is definitely the case when temporary situations occur outside the norm for an organization. There are times when emergencies occur such as natural disasters, major epidemics, etc, but the more likely case is when a short term assignment requires a major shift in the way things are normally accomplished. For the purposes of illustration, three hypothetical firms are presented. These firms represent scenarios often encountered where a major shift in leadership style is required.

*Scenario 1: Anthem Steel*

Anthem Steel is a large steel producer based in Wheeling West Virginia. Anthem is highly autocratic, having had major tensions over the years as employees unionized, becoming members of the United Steel Workers Union. Due to these conditions as well as the issues of safety, management has instituted a highly structured environment where every job and duty has written policies that must be strictly adhered to. This autocratic style is the norm for the steel industry and is accepted as such by the steelworkers employed by Anthem. However, the union contract negotiations have not gone well and the workers have decided to walk out on strike. Management is presented with the possibility of having to shut down all operations, which could be catastrophic for the company. Management has decided to scale back production, but keep the plant running while negotiations continue. Ninety percent of management, including foremen and office personnel alike, will be required to work on the floor of the plant, as they are non-union employees and are not involved in the strike.

This situation is not uncommon in unionized companies. Having mostly white-collar workers work these blue-collar jobs presents management with many challenges. The lack of training and experience requires office personnel to work temporarily for an experience foremen who seemingly were beneath them in the company hierarchy. Additionally, many of the office personnel are college educated and are not used to the working conditions of the floor operation.

In this situation, management must make a major shift in leadership style to avoid catastrophic injuries as well as a general walkout from the white collar employees. An autocratic leadership style, in this case, would be disaster as management must instill in these temporary employees a sense of camaraderie as they stand together against the formidable union. At the same time, however, safety is of grave importance and employees must be protected from personal injury. To accomplish their goal, management should employ a highly participative leadership style; insuring employees feel they are all "in this together". The CEO/ CFO etc, although mired in negotiations, should participate, at times, to reinforce this camaraderie. More important is upper managements focus on the well being of the temporary employees. Safety being utmost concern, productivity must take secondary in order for foremen to closely monitor operations.

Once a new union contract is agreed to, it is necessary for the temporary workers to allow normal operations to continue. This begins during the walkout, not after, as poor attitudes toward unionized workers during the walkout will have lasting effects on the company. Management should be careful not to demonize the union, getting caught up in hyperbole that will ultimately cause tension between union and non-union employees.

*Scenario 2: Accion Oil production*

Accion Oil Production manages 75 oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico serving several oil companies. As with most oil platform workers, employees are tough and independent, and work extremely long hours in tough conditions. The typical platform Accion manages has 20 employees working two twelve hour shifts for twenty one straight days, taking twenty one days shore leave while another crew mans the platform. Management of the platform is performed on shore through computer connections, making leadership on the platform very participatory, as everyone is part of the work crew to some degree. This leadership style works well as platform workers pride themselves in hard work and performance and require very little management on daily activities.

Accion has been notified that a major hurricane is likely to hit the gulf within the next six days. Operations on the platform must be shut down and the rig must be protected against the high winds predicted. To accomplish this shutdown, the on-shore crew must be called back to assist. Time is critical as they must be shutdown in time for them to exit the platform and get to safety on-shore.

This scenario requires emergency procedures to be put into place. As time is so critical, there is little room for error. In this scenario, a highly autocratic leadership style is likely to be most effective. The autocratic style, although not desirable for the normal operation, can be employed on a very short term basis with great effect. In emergency situations stress is very high, but adrenaline assists employees in rising to the task. Even considering the number of work hours required with the opposite crew, employees will understand the need for hard driving action and leadership in this situation.

Management should consider sending high level leaders in the organization to be at each platform, reinforcing the urgency of the situation. Once the storm passes, crews will easily adjust back to normal routines. Management should, however, pay tribute to the employees during and after the emergency to help instill a sense of pride in the emergency operation.

### *Scenario 3: Consolidated Consulting Services*

The last firm, Consolidated Consulting Services (CCS) is a small national consulting firm focusing primarily on custom IT solutions. CCS employees 250 consultants who work from their home-based offices, reporting to the corporate headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio. Consultants live in 40 different states and rarely work in teams of more than two or three on-site at any one time. CCS finds a delegative style of leadership necessary for nearly all levels of the company. Geographical separation makes structured, autocratic leadership implausible and participative leadership equally unlikely as employees and supervisors rarely, if ever, work together in close proximity. CCS has been presented an opportunity to consult on a short-term project with the US government that will require fifty consultants on site for 6 weeks, with time extensions carrying substantial financial penalties. This major, yet temporary, change in the "norm" for the consultants will not allow the employees autonomy as time constraints are considerable and working conditions require several consultants working together. Upper management is faced with temporarily changing the way the company normally operates. Furthermore, even though a new style of leadership is needed temporarily, managers do not want to change permanently and want consultants to feel respected and continue to be autonomous in the future.

Under this scenario, not at all uncommon for mid-size firms, presents leadership with a dilemma. The culture of CCS not only allows, but encouraged independence in employees. In fact, many employees consider themselves self-employed and took the job due for the independent working conditions. This independence will be needed after the 6 week contract, therefore management must be very careful not to become too autocratic, while exercising some control of employee activities to ensure that the job comes in on time and is a financial success.

Under this scenario, CCS should consider a hybrid method of leadership that is highly participative, while having some autocratic features. The corporate leaders of the consultants should present themselves as part of the team and work closely on the project. By doing so, team members will understand the necessity for the change in style. Additionally, it is important for employees at all levels to have a buy-in of the temporary situation. If these normally independent employees are given an opportunity to solve this temporary dilemma prior to beginning work, it is likely they will agree that a change is necessary. With a buy-in, it is less likely management will have a backlash once the job begins. Even with this buy-in and participation by upper management, an certain amount of an autocratic style will be necessary. While independence works well in the daily operation of CCS, it allows too much flexibility in work schedules, processes etc for this particular occasion. Therefore, management will need to exercise some control over daily activities for the duration of this job. It is imperative that management does not seem unwilling to exercise this control as independent employees will sense this and be less likely to respond.

### Conclusion

Under each of these scenarios, a major shift in leadership style was necessary and effective. Although companies will face unexpected challenges, emergency situations or one-time opportunities; ad-hoc leadership style can keep the organization on solid footing, propelling it to another level of performance. Whether an organization finds an authoritative, participative or delegative leadership style most effective, temporary changes require flexibility and careful consideration and should be considered as part of contingency planning, allowing foresight to examine possible negative outcomes. Effective leaders will recognize the motivation of style may change with temporary circumstances and should be adjust to meet the short and long-term needs of the organization.

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