

What happens when you measure the leadership style of managers who have been exposed to participative leadership theories?

Human resource development: a foundation for participative leadership

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During the past decade, vast numbers of executives have been schooled in the virtues of participative leadership. Perhaps no other management concept has received so much recent attention in management literature, in company training programs and in the general press. Educators, in particular, have consistently admonished managers to open up their decision-making activities to their subordinates. Youthful critics of big business have also added fuel to the fire, contending that industrial organizations are too closed and undemocratic.¹

The subject of leadership style is one which occupies increasing importance to managers in industrial organizations where the major problem they face as managers according to Peter Drucker, is "the management of the knowledge worker".² Included in this broad category are the accountants, engineers, social workers, nurses, computer experts, teachers, researchers and, the fastest growing

group, the managers. Many theorists have focused upon participative leadership and can be cited for their contribution to this field. Lewin, Lippitt and White³ conducted historical experiments showing the response of children to three distinct leadership styles (autocratic, laissez-faire and democratic). Productivity and creativity were highest in response to the democratic style. Blake and Mouton⁴ developed a model to describe managerial style referred to as the managerial grid. Likert⁵ has classified leadership style into four systems, based upon a series of continuum scales for decision-making, motivation, leadership, goal setting and organization structure. Among all the writers discussing participative leadership, Robert A. Luke, Jr. stated that "The work of Douglas M. McGregor stands out . . . McGregor made two unique contributions to developing a method of inquiry for integration. First, he developed a very readable summary of what social scientists were discovering about the nature of man

and explained how this discovery increases managers' options for accomplishing organizational objectives. Second, he made a standing invitation to managers themselves to engage in the process of experimentation and innovation."⁶ McGregor⁷ is best remembered for his description of contrasting managerial attitudes toward workers. The theory Y attitude views the individual as one who will seek responsibility, will exercise self-control and who is not lazy but actually likes work and the results he can accomplish. This represents a striking departure from the traditional managerial attitude (Theory X) in which the worker is assumed to be one who is lazy, lacking in ambition and unwilling to accept responsibility.

Root of the problem

Many of today's senior managers received their education and early training from traditional management theorists who did not emphasize participation in leadership and decision-making, while contemporary theorists have indicated that traditional, authoritarian management may be counterproductive.

1. Traditional management theories, even when effective, produce organizational atrophy — slow but steady deterioration. Under these systems, business operations may grind to a halt.
2. Using traditional management theories, organizations tend to produce valid information for routine problems, but invalid information for unusual problems whose solution involve risk-taking.⁸

In order to encourage participative leadership, one industrial organization in Philadelphia has conducted management development training involving lectures, reading assignments, team-building, case studies, experiential laboratories and MBO, all of which have focused attention upon modern human resource management founda-

tions. Therefore, the question and problem in need of examination is: will an authoritarian leadership style persist in spite of these training and development efforts?

The purpose of this study was to test the leadership style of a group of managers in an industrial organization who had been exposed to participative leadership theories and training. It was also considered essential to receive data feedback from the subordinates of these managers in order to determine the degree of congruence with the managers' evaluation. It was necessary to determine if these managers had, in fact, adopted the style of management proposed by the theorists they had been exposed to via training and development. This was accomplished by measuring the perceptions of both groups.

Leadership has assumed an increasingly important role in the modern, complex industrial organization. The typical manager is being called upon to direct more people, with the challenge to obtain better results (e.g., higher sales, greater research output, more efficient production, lower costs, more precise records). Modern human resource management theorists have provided us with a vast number of overlapping concepts from classical writers such as Douglas McGregor⁹, Frederick Herzberg¹⁰, Chris Argyris¹¹, Rensis Likert¹², Robert Blake and Jane Mouton¹³, Peter Drucker¹⁴ and Abraham Maslow¹⁵.

An "abbreviated summary of these theories, in general, holds that a) managers should trust their subordinates to be more responsible in the performance of their jobs; b) managers should permit the subordinate to participate in the making of his own job . . ." ¹⁶ With such an impressive list of advocates for a democratic style of management, one might conclude that practitioners would readily accept their recommendations. But have they? James A. Lee reported that "Executives, managers and administrators who have been exposed to modern human resource management theories appear, at least to the theorists,

to have adapted their 'findings' almost not at all."¹⁷ Chris Argyris has stated, "Contrary to popular opinion, business leads all other segments of society in recognizing 'the human side of enterprise' . . . Today, one can find executives in all parts of the globe who have heard of Theory Y and who are genuinely interested in moving beyond pious rhetoric to implement it."¹⁸ These contrasting statements confirm the dilemma facing managers.

Another facet of the problem may be that a manager's perception of his own leadership style could be at variance with the interpretation and perception of his subordinates. After exposure to the benefits espoused for participative leadership, a manager may accept the concept as rational and truly believe he is putting it into practice in his relationships with his subordinate workers. However, if the workers' perception of the manager's style does not reflect the leader's opinion, the benefits involving improved morale and productivity will surely be missed. Therefore, the subordinates' perception of the manager's style must be examined to determine if the manager's self-evaluation is congruent with the attitude of his subordinate. This is significant since leadership style refers to the pattern or constellation of leadership behaviors that characterize a given leader. Because each leader feels most comfortable with a particular style and tends to be relatively consistent in its use, the effectiveness of a specific leader will vary from one situation to another. It is hypothesized that managers who are exposed to modern human resource management theories through a series of training programs including lectures, workshops, case studies and experiential laboratories, will adopt a participative leadership style. This style will be reflected in their own attitude and the perceptions of their subordinates. This is the essence of this examination and undertaking.

Authority is a valuable and necessary aspect of organizational life, but a strictly authoritarian

leadership style is inappropriate in today's organization. When compared with authoritarian leadership, participative leadership expresses greater confidence in the subordinates' willingness and ability to assume responsibility, involves subordinates in decision-making to a greater extent and accepts more fully the notion that management has a responsibility to subordinates as well as to superiors. No manager can perform effectively over an extended period of time without some degree of employee participation.¹⁹

Some management theorists recommend participation as the style that leads to improved, most effective performance and decision-making.

Perhaps the most persistent and thoroughly demonstrated difference between successful and unsuccessful leadership at all . . . levels have to do with the distribution of sharing of the leadership function . . . By and large,

those organizations in which influential acts are widely shared are most effective. The reasons for this are part motivational, having to do with implementation of decisions, and in part non-motivational, having to do with the excellence of decisions.²⁰

This statement agrees with Herzberg and Maslow that participation will have a motivational benefit. But it goes beyond that. It stresses the point that a participative style will also result in improved performance because the decisions resulting from this style are better decisions. This represents an additional benefit to the organization, improved decision-making, which makes the encouragement of participation even more desirable. Massarik and Tannenbaum²¹ enumerate the possible advantages of participation as a managerial device and label them enterprise advantages.

1. A higher rate of output and increased quality of product.

2. A reduction in turnover, absenteeism and tardiness.
3. A reduction in the number of subordinates.
4. Greater ease in the management of subordinates.
5. The improved quality of managerial decisions.

Benefit numbers two and three relate to improved morale and motivation. Benefits one, four and five corroborate Katz's and Kahn's suggestion of improved decisions and resultant improved performance. Massarik and Tannenbaum caution that a participative style should not be considered a panacea and that certain psychological conditions must be present for this style to be effective. The conditions include:

1. The subordinate must be capable of becoming psychologically involved in the participational activities.

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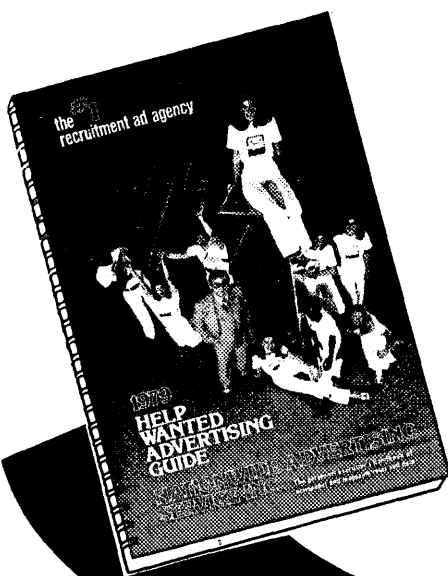
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2. The subordinate must favor participational activity.
3. The subordinate must see the relevance to her personal life pattern of the thing being considered.
4. The subordinate must be able to express himself.²²

Others have presented warnings to the practicing manager against viewing participation as a cure-all. Neroport²³ lists the following warnings:

1. Individual difference must be considered. Greater degrees of freedom and independence in the work situation are not desired equally by all people. To assume that participative management has equal applicability in all situations is as erroneous as a blanket application of authoritarian measures.
2. There are unknowns to be considered concerning the proportion of workers preferring participation in decision-making, as well as other processes of management. Thus, the total organizational situation must be assessed and these various unknowns must be isolated.
3. A change in management ideologies is one of an evolutionary nature. Assumptions rooted in the past are not modified overnight while much time and effort are needed.

Managers are by no means universally successful in their attempts to use participative methods. In fact, for managers who are authoritarian because of deep-seated personality characteristics and, therefore, likely to be inept in their use of participative methods, a rapid shift to a high level of participation could be disastrous. Certain conditions must be present for participative management to be optimally effective.

1. *Adequate time.* Since participation ordinarily requires more time than authoritarian decision-making, participative methods work best in situations where a manager is able to

anticipate problems and plan ahead.

2. *Psychological preparation of subordinates.* Optimal participation requires that subordinates be psychologically prepared to contribute intelligently. They must have access to information which may typically be withheld from them; they must believe that there is some personal benefit to be derived from participation and must not be too threatened by possible negative repercussions from it (for example, pressure from peers).
3. *Psychological preparation of management.* Management must be convinced that participative leadership will pay off in terms of their own success. They must be psychologically prepared to deal with feelings, attitudes and ideas from which an authoritarian leader may be relatively insulated. Only if they are highly motivated to change to participative methods will managers be willing to tolerate the frustrations involved in participative leadership.
4. *Belief in participative methods.* Managers who aspire to be successful using participative methods must have an in-depth belief that their subordinates have a contribution to make. Insincere or token attempts at participative leadership on the part of persons who see participation only as a gimmick or manipulative technique will ordinarily be seen for what they are and consequently be resented and resisted by subordinates. Since participative management is based on an optimistic view of human nature, the manager who believes that people are inherently lazy and prefer to avoid responsibility is not likely to succeed with a participative style.
5. *Dual accountability.* Managers who employ participative methods must be willing to accept the idea that they have a responsibility and a form of accountability to subordinates as well as superiors. Participative leadership implies the existence of a partnership of sorts and a

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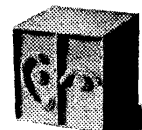
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mutual respect that cannot be taken lightly when a conflict arises between the organization and a manager's subordinates. Managers must at times be their subordinates' advocate and representative to higher level management as well as the transmitter of commands from above.

The "Personal Analysis of Leadership Styles" questionnaire which has been adopted from M. Scott Myers²⁴ was utilized to study the problem. The questionnaire was administered to 157 employees in the sales organization of the agricultural division of a major chemical corporation. The 157 employees included 11 district sales managers and 146 sales representa-

tives in the United States and Eastern Canada, since this represents the geographic boundaries of the company's operating division which is included in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 paired statements relating to typical management decision-making areas. The decision-making areas include the functional areas traditionally assigned to the task of management; e.g., planning, organization, directing and control.

The hypothesis of this study stated that if managers are exposed to modern human resources management theories through a series of training programs, they will adopt a participative leadership style. Further, this style will be reflected

in their own attitudes and the perceptions of their subordinates.

As noted earlier, the participants in the primary study group had participated in a wide variety of training programs through which they had been exposed to modern management theories. The hypothesis was tested by evaluating the attitudes of these previously trained managers, using the instrument described.

A summary of the total Traditional Management Values and Participative Leadership Values scored by each district sales manager and the average scores assigned by the sales representatives to the managers is presented in Table 1.

On the total score measure, the district sales managers perceive themselves as Participative Leadership (PLV) oriented. Their scores ranged from 69 to 94 on this scale and from six to 31 on the Traditional Management Values (TMV) scale. The most TMV oriented managers are still well into the PLV range. The average salesmen rating for these two district sales managers are identical — 22 on the TMV scale and 78 on the PLV scale. This indicates that the subordinates of these two managers perceive their style as more participative than the managers' personal perceptions. It is also noteworthy that these two managers represent the newest and the most experienced in terms of tenure in the job and show a marked difference in age (34 years compared to 58 years of age).

The average of the district sales managers' response on the Traditional Management Values scale is 20.4, compared to the sales representatives' average for all districts of 27.3. The average district sales managers' value for Participative Leadership was 79.6, while the sales representatives rated the managers at 72.7 on this scale. The district sales managers' Traditional Management Values scores ranged from six to 31, while the average sales representatives' perceptions for this same measure ranged from 22 to 33. The district managers' Participative Leadership Values ranged

Table 1
Summary of Total Responses

	Traditional Management Values (TMV)	Participative Leadership Values (PLV)
District Manager I	25	75
Salesmen (N=2)	33	67
District Manager II	18	82
Salesmen (N=16)	23	77
District Manager III	24	76
Salesmen (N=16)	33	67
District Manager IV	21	79
Salesmen (N=10)	33	67
District Manager V	28	72
Salesmen (N=18)	30	70
District Manager VI	17	83
Salesmen (N=12)	30	70
District Manager VII	7	93
Salesmen (N=10)	26	74
District Manager VIII	31	69
Salesmen (N=12)	22	78
District Manager IX	6	94
Salesmen (N=24)	24	76
District Manager X	31	68
Salesmen (N=6)	22	78
District Manager XI	16	84
Salesmen (N=20)	24	76
Total District Managers	224	876
Average	20.4	79.6
Total Salesmen	300	800
Average (N=146)	27.3	72.7

from 69 to 94 and the sales representatives' range for these values was from 67 to 78.

The two district sales managers who scored highest on the PLV scale demonstrated an interesting contrast to the ratings scored for them by their sales representatives. District sales manager IX rated himself as six on the TMV scale and 94 on the reciprocal PLV scale. His sales representatives rated him at 24 and 76 for the same values, still a PLV orientation but to a lesser degree on the sales representative rating than on the managers' personal rating. Similarly, district sales manager VII rated his style as seven for the TMV value and 93 for the PLV value. The average total score recorded by his subordinates for district sales manager VII was 26 and 74. Again, while the sales representatives supported the direction of the manager's perception (PLV philosophy), they perceived him as less participative than the manager sees himself.

The highest degree of congruence between a manager's perception of his leadership style and the perception of his subordinates appeared in district V, where the district sales manager scored 72 on the PLV scale and the average sales representative response was 70. It is noteworthy that this particular manager scored as a high TMV style manager when measured by a similar instrument approximately five years ago. It would appear that he perceived a change in his leadership style and this is supported by the perception of his subordinates.

The average rating of the 11 district sales managers was 20 on the TMV scale and 80 on the PLV scale. Their subordinates perceived them as slightly less participative, recording an average score of 27 on the TMV scale and 73 on the PLV scale. The data is consistent and congruent for each district sales manager and for the aggregate group. The managers perceived themselves as Participative Leadership oriented and this is supported by the perceptions of their subordinates. The highest degree of contrast occurred in the districts where

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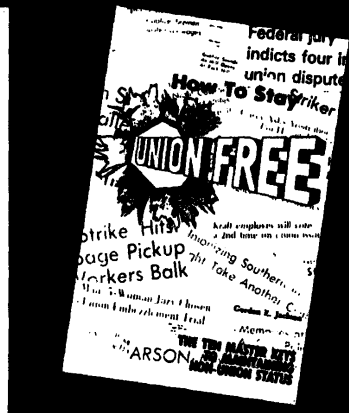
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the manager perceived himself as extremely participative as a leader (93 and 94 rating on a scale of 100). The basic questionnaire appears to have face validity since the traditional decision-making areas of management e.g. planning, organization, directing and control are emphasized. There was the possibility that the respondents were cognizant of the purpose of the questionnaire and guided their responses to support the development program of which they were a part of. While this notion is tenable it is not practical. The program focused away from traditional management systems and focused upon participative leadership styles. The variance demonstrated in Table 1 was too great to postulate that no basic behavior change occurred since the respondents did select a participative leadership style on the instrument and did utilize this style as well on the job as reported by their subordinates.

In addition to validating the hy-

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pothesis, the data supported Argyris²⁵ comments that "Today, one can find executives in all parts of the globe who have heard of participative leadership and who are genuinely interested in moving beyond pious rhetoric to implement it." Conversely, the findings are in conflict with Lee's statement that "Executives, managers and administrators who have been exposed to modern human resource management theories appear, at least to the theorists, to have adapted their 'findings' almost not at all."

It would appear to be significant for managers to pursue the following in light of the results of this experience.

1. The manager would make himself and his subordinate managers cognizant of the benefits suggested for a participative style of leadership. The literature references cited in this article offer significant evidence that the benefits are real.
2. A program of manager training, utilizing workshops, seminars, reading assignments, lectures and experiential laboratories should be instituted in order to create awareness of modern human resource management theories and the adoption of a participative leadership style.
3. Managers should measure the leadership style of their subordinate managers and provide feedback to these managers in order to create an awareness of the style they are currently using.
4. If a manager embarks upon a program to encourage participation as a desirable leadership style, he should recognize that participation is not a panacea and that certain cautions should be recognized. A number of these cautions have been examined in this study. □

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