LEADERSHIP STYLES BY W.F. LONGU

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the most enigmatic concepts in our times. The importance accorded to it by both organizers and clients of various social institutions, agencies and programmes is such that success and failure are largely, though not exclusively, attributed to it. The centrality of leadership roles in any organization or programme makes it an interesting subject for discussion and study, and indeed a serious concern for those interested in effective programme management and implementation. This paper focuses on one aspect of leadership, namely, leadership styles. These are examined against two themes: power and change. Leaders have power - actual or potential, formal or informal - in the contexts they operate, and this power can and does influence the direction of change of a given agency, organization or programme. Since the underlying theme of this seminar is essentially that of change, it is useful to relate the power of leadership to change. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part deals with definitional perspectives, the second with the description of the styles, and the last with explorations on how to use the styles effectively in various contexts.

DEFINITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Leadership has various textbook and social definitions, and what is needed here is an operational definition to facilitate our discussion. Hersey and Blanchard (1972) have defined leadership as "the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation" (p.68). This definition is too broad and misleading, because not everyone who influences others is a leader, let alone vested with leadership powers. A leader influences the activities of subordinates towards achieving goals defined by an organization or programme agency. Such influence emanates from several sources, one of which is behaviour of the leader, or the style. Leadership style is the way in which the leader behaves in carrying out leadership roles. According to Vardaman (1973) leadership style is "the way (or ways) the manager operates, that is, his <u>modus operandi</u>. Stated differently, the manager's

leadership style is his procedure (or procedures) for making manifest his orientation or basic beliefs" (p.35). Vardaman distinguishes leadership styles from what he terms leadership orientations. Leadership orientation refers to the leader's "basic ideology, that is, his philosophy or way of thinking relative to his managerial activities" (p.14). Although not necessarily connected leadership styles(actions) are often partially determined or influenced by leadership orientation (assumptions, outlooks, beliefs, attitudes, etc). Leaders are not always aware of their orientations; often they say one thing (explicit orientation) but are inclined to doing another (implicit orientation).

According to Blake and Mouton, leadership style is a product of five factors: (a) the leader's personality, (b) the organization's practices or requirements, (c) the specific day-to-day situation, (d) the manager's values, and (e) chance (i.e. limited experience and learning opportunities) (1964; pp.13 - 14). Of course there are other factors not included on the above list; the point to note here is that leadership styles are not innate characteristics but products of the interaction between the leader and his/her environment.

BASIC TYPOLOGIES OF LEADERSHIP STYLES

It is perhaps useful to begin by classifying leadership orientations. Milton, Entrekin and Stening (1984) identify two major types of leadership orientation - the production orientation and people oriention. The former refers to the inclination of the leader toward task processes, that is, the output system of the agency or organization. The production orientation assumes that:-

1. Output is the essential reason for the organization's existence.
2. Organizational needs goals are primary,
3. Satisfaction of organizational demands results in satisfaction of human needs,
4. Rationality is basic,

5. Man is essentially rational, and
6. Successful production requires expert controlled direction (Vardaman, 1973, p.19).

The people-oriented orientation emphasizes leadership skills in working with and through other people. It focuses on the satisfaction of member wants and needs as a basic strategy to organizational effectiveness. It is usually associated with participative management, democrafic leadership, employee-centred supervision, member management, or human relations. Vardaman lists the following assumptions underlying this orientation:

1. Membership satisfaction is the essential reason for the organization's existence,
2. Membership goals are primary,
3. Satisfaction of membership needs results in satisfactory organizational output;
4. Rationality has definite limitations,
5. Man is essentially nonrational, and
6. Successful production requires adequate member commitment (Vardaman, 1973, pp.21 - 22).

Generally, it is assumed that the production - orientation encourages authoritarian leadership styles, while the people orientation encourages democratic styles of leadership. It is to these that we must now turn.

There are several schemes used to classify leadership styles. Only two schemes are employed here, and these are based on the themes of power and change. When examined against the theme of power, leadership styles are described in accordance with the leader behaviour with regard to how he or she uses authority and power when dealing with subordinates. There are three basic leadership styles associated with the theme of power: the authoritarian, democratic (participative, persuasive) and laissez faire styles (White and Lippitt, 1960). The term authoritarian is an English deriverative from the Greek root: authentes, meaning "one who does things himself". The authoritative style, then is one that emanates from and is guided by a single person. It is imperative or commanding, for the leader tells

his subordinates what ought to be done. According to Lungu:

> The authoritarian style is autocratic, and permits no significant degree of participation by subordinates in decision making. There is a low level of trust for juniors and, by implication, little room is left for discretionery judgement at the lower levels of the bureaucracy (Lungu, 1982, p.347).

The democratic style (Greek: demōs = people, krāt, = rule) is somewhat relaxed, and under it subordinates are involved in decision making. The democratic leader works with people and invites their participation, or consults them before major decisions are taken. Subvariants of this style are the persuasive style (Latin: persuadere = to urge through, to convince, or persuade) and the consultative style. The leader with these substyles is basically concerned with getting acceptance or approval from subordinates for his/her plans or programmes.

The laissez-faire style, also known as the "coordinative" style (Latin: Coordinare = to set in equal rank or level) assumes status equality. The leader gives complete freedom to his/her subordinates, confining himself/herself to the role of providing information and acting as a resource person. It assumes that followers are independent, capable, and willing to work in an egalitarian environment:

> This means that members have psychological autonomy - that they are willing to speak their minds, that they have requisite expertise (or can get it) but that they are also receptive to others' ideas - indeed, that they consciously solicit inputs from other members. Stated differently, members of a coordinatively functioning unit are essentially able to think and act on their own, have important specialist resources, and are desirous of getting the best product from pooling their ideas with other members of similar bent (Vardaman, 1973, p.55).

The next theme is that of change or development. Styles are clasified according to the leader's behaviour with regard to change or development: innovator, developer, delegator, and maintainer (St. John, 1977). The innovator (or innovative style), also known as a headstarter or curtain-raiser (Lungu, 1980) is essentially one who innovates or creates. The innovator is full

of new ideas and attempts to inject them into the organization or programme he or she leads. A logical sequence to this style is that of the developer. The developer is good at consolidating programmes and developing long-range plans and policy for the future.

The orientation of the delegator is similar in several respects to that of the democrat, except that in the developmental context, the delegator assigns responsibility to various sections of the organization or institution. The delegator is a negotiator, because he has to act as a middle-person for the various semi-automous units of the organization. Finally, there is the maintainer. The main attribute of the maintainer is strong adherence to the statusquo. There is emphasis on existing rules and regulations, and preserving current standards and values of the organization.

Generally leaders have elements of all these styles, but the tend to manifest more attributes of one or two styles than others. It must be noted that the styles in and of themselves are not normatively good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, and effective or ineffective. They can only be evaluated within the contexts in which they are manifested.

RELATING LEADERSHIP STYLES TO SITUATIONS

Every leadership style can be appropriate or effective, depending on the situation in which it is exercised. Below are some of the contexts in which specific leadership styles can be effectively used.

The Authoritarian Style:

This style is best used when it is leader-centred, that is when the organizational culture: policies, traditions, and practices are "look-to-the boss" for directives. Generally, subordinates will tend to be dependent or manifest strong dependency needs, and the leader is expected to address these needs. It is also useful for enforcing decisions and procedures that are already authoritatively determined. Finally, the authoritiative style is appropriate during the times of emergencies, because other styles are inappropriate.

The Democratic Style:

This styles corresponds well with organizational cultures that are marked by relatively participative thrust, remot relatively independent subordinates, and when decisions are tentatively made and complex. The democratic leader may also wish to persuade subordinates who are reluctant, or when some decisions are being reviewed, or when complaints abound in the organization. It assumes that both the leader and subordinates are ready to participate, or shoulder the responsibility of democratic governance.

The Laissez-faire style:

The coordinative style is used when subordinates are very independent, competent, and responsible. This is particularly true of professional organizations and universities where leaders are coordinators among equals. It is also appropriate when the tasks are interdisciplinary (i.e. involving experts in various fields), and for exploring or searching issues. Leadership is in the group or organization, and the leader is a resource person.

The Innovative/Creative Style:

This is best used when organizations or programmes are new, relatively small, informal and flexible. Alternatively, it is appropriate in situations characterised by stagnation, retardation or underdevelopment. However, innovators or creators should not overstay in one programme or situation, for they easily lose interest. They prefer the challenge of innovation or creation, and unless innovative opportunities exist, they soon become bored and ineffective as leaders.

The Developer:

The developer is a logical successor of the innovator. He/she is not strong at initiating programmes, but developing those that are already in existence. These operate well in new organizations, and those that have evidenced some stagnation. Such leaders are required to consolidate shaky programmes, but once these are well established and challenges for further programme development diminish, they lose the stamina.

The Delegator:

The delegator is required to assign various responsibilities to sub-units and sub-programmes that have been consolidated by developers. The main role of delegators is that of power-brokers between various units of the organizations. The delegator is an effective leader in situations when authority is decentralized, and when an organization is stable, mature and financially sound.

The Maintainer:

The maintainer is required to lead situation that have grown unstable, when programme survival is threatened, or when chaos has crept into the organization. He/She is required to safeguard the statusquo, to uphold the standards and the image of the programme or institution.

Interfaces among Styles:

In practice it is difficult to match each style with the appropriate context because styles are rarely found in the ideal state, and contexts are often a mixture of elements that defy neat classification. Where possible the main leadership traits can be identified and matched with corresponding situations. However, a more realistic approach would be to place leaders with different styles in various positions of the organization. Each organization has several leadership positions at various levels. These could be balanced in terms of styles so that they complement each other. One possible shortcoming with this approach is that differences in styles may generate conflict among leaders; but it is also important to recognize that differences have potential for creativity and development when they are accepted in a complementary fashion. Many programmes or organizations have diverse leadership needs, and no one style can realistically meet these needs at one single time. A complementary admixture of styles is, therefore, a more reasonable approach.

CONCLUSION

This paper has briefly discussed the concept of leadership style and a few of its categories. There are more leadership styles than can be discussed here. However, the little exposure we have had here suggests that styles have a great impact on the exercise of leadership generally. All organizations and programmes associated with them have leadership positions and roles. If we are to improve leadership effectiveness in many of these organizations we must seriously seek to match leadership styles with situations.

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