What's My

Leadership
Style?

Style series™

How personality drives behavior

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Leadership
Style?

An Excerpt from the
Facilitator Guide
Second Edition

HRDQ®

Background Information

You may want to jump-start your discussion of *What's My Leadership Style?* by providing examples of different leadership styles. In general, examples bring concepts alive more quickly than theory and increase participants' confidence that their individual styles have some natural pluses.

Athletic coaches provide examples of the entire range of leadership styles. Consider Vince Lombardi, who led the Green Bay Packers to two Super Bowl wins. Lombardi is famous for saying, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." Compare his competitive, no-nonsense style with the animated style of Tommy Lasorda. After winning two World Series titles with the LA Dodgers in the 1980s, Lasorda came out of retirement to lead the 2000 US Olympic baseball team to a gold medal. If called upon to imagine Lasorda, sports fans are likely to picture him gesturing rapidly as he stirs up team spirit.

But fans are unlikely to picture Phil Jackson gesturing in such an animated way. They are more likely to imagine Jackson drawing and studying detailed diagrams while keeping his emotions out of view. Yet the comparatively reserved Jackson, who recently led the LA Lakers to three NBA titles after coaching the Chicago Bulls to six NBA championships, is every bit as successful as Lasorda. Finally, consider Joe Torre in action. Rather than picturing Torre poring over diagrams, fans are more likely to imagine him offering a team member a reassuring word or a pat on the arm. While Torre's style is different from Lombardi's, Jackson's or Lasorda's, it is just as effective. After all, Torre has led the New York Yankees to four World Series wins.

Four team leaders, four different ways of influencing others. Is one way better than the others? Stress to participants that all four leadership styles can prove effective.

Once you have captured participants' interest by providing examples and soliciting examples from them, you will be ready to move into a theoretical discussion. You may choose to build a theory of leadership style block-by-block, beginning with leadership, and then proceeding to style.

Leadership

More than two thousand years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato attempted to define leadership. Fast forward to the twentieth century, and theorists were still searching for a definition. In fact, during the past century, three major schools of thought developed.

Trait Era: Turn of the Twentieth Century to the Mid-1940s

Leaders are born.

Certain people are born with personality traits that make them great leaders — or so claimed American psychologist William James in writing about the "great men" of history, men such as Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar (1880). Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle made much the same point in *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1907). The reigning belief during this era was that heredity justifies the status quo. Those men who hold political, social, and industrial power do so because they are born with the personality traits of leaders. "These special characteristics were presumed to push them toward leadership regardless of the context" (Nahavandi, 1999).

However, by mid-twentieth century, this view was overturned. Researchers had conducted numerous studies in which they gathered data on personality traits, trying to identify those traits that were consistently associated with effective leadership. Their findings turned out to be weak or inconsistent. As a result, some researchers began to look for other ways to account for effective leadership.

Behavioral Era: Late 1930s through the 1950s

People can learn to become leaders.

Rather than trying to identify the personality *traits* associated with effective leadership, researchers sought to identify effective leadership *behaviors*. Instead of asking, "What are leaders like?" they began to ask, "What do leaders *do*?" (Hemphill & Coons, 1957). A behavioral approach provided obvious advantages when it came to training leaders during World War II. Whereas personality traits are either inborn or formed very early in life, specific behaviors can be learned through training. Today the behavioral approach continues to provide advantages for training people to become effective leaders within organizations.

Some of the most famous findings on leadership behavior came out of the Ohio State Studies (Hemphill & Coons, 1957). These studies established task- and relationship-based behaviors as key to effective leadership. According to these studies, the goal of task-related behaviors is the timely completion of tasks. The goal of relationship-based behaviors is to maintain group cohesiveness. These behaviors include asking for everyone's input and providing praise for individual contributions — when praise is genuinely due.

Behavioral research led to the successful identification of different categories of leadership behavior. Yet the research had not yet provided a complete picture of effective leadership.

Situational Era: Early 1960s to the Present Day

It all depends on context.

As early as the 1930s, researchers had been calling for a more comprehensive approach to leadership, an approach that would take situation as well as behavior into account. Fred Fiedler was one of the first researchers to investigate a situational approach in depth (1967). Fiedler demonstrated that, to be most effective, leaders need to adapt their characteristic behaviors to different situations. When a leader matches his or her behavioral style to a situation, then he or she will be most effective. When a leader does not create a match between style and situation, then he or she will not be effective in that situation. In other words, effective leadership depends upon, or is contingent upon, the situation. Today the contingency view continues to dominate leadership theory.

Style

We are what we repeatedly do.

— Aristotle

As a bridge into the topic of style, you may want to ask participants to predict how a co-worker would behave in a given situation. For example, participants could be asked to predict the way a co-worker would behave if he or she were put in charge of a project. Perhaps the co-worker would leap into action in order to set an example for others. Or perhaps he or she would first outline a procedure for others to follow. Participants' predictions are likely to prove accurate because they have become familiar with certain patterns in the other person's behavior. These patterns represent the other person's behavioral style.

Studies of personality style date back at least as far as 1914 when Swiss psychologist Carl Jung first published his famous study, *Psychological Types*. Since then, many other researchers have examined style (e.g., Bolton & Bolton, 1984, and Merril & Reid, 1981). They agree on one point: While each individual is unique, certain commonalities can be used to describe and assess everyone's personality style. In fact, many researchers describe style in terms of two dimensions, although the choice of dimensions tends to vary from one researcher to another.

The dimensions used throughout all of HRDQ's style assessments are *assertiveness* and *expressiveness* (Alessandra and Hunsaker, 1980). Assertiveness measures the degree to which a person tries to influence other people's thoughts and actions. Expressiveness measures the degree to which a person displays his or her emotions when interacting with others.
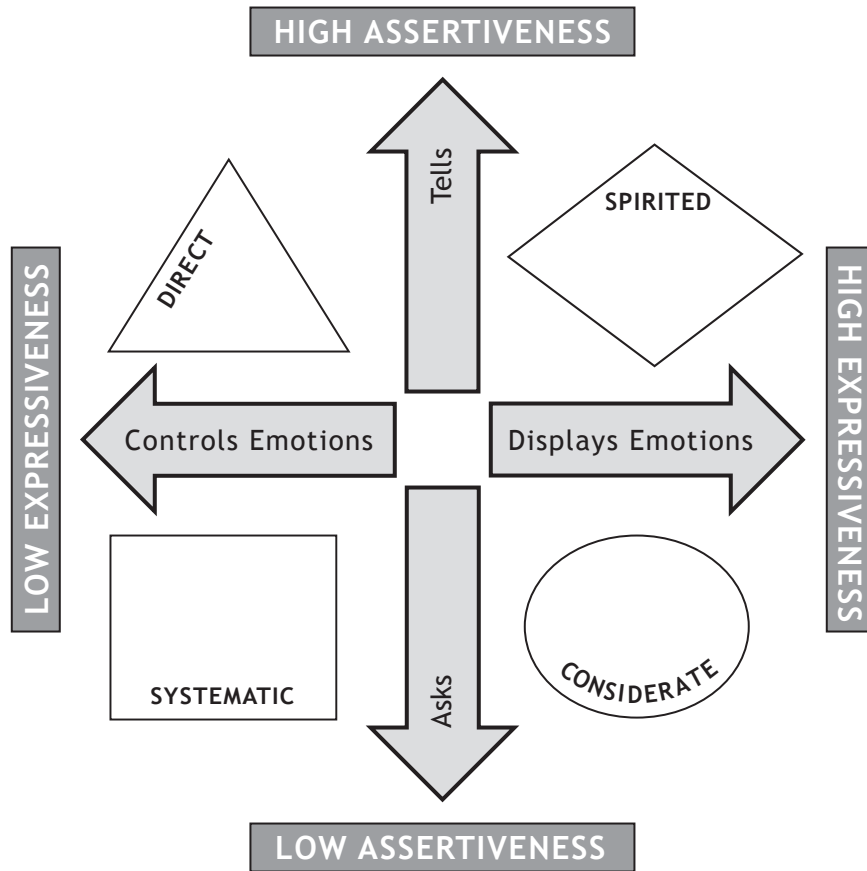
FIGURE 4: The Four Leadership Styles

The Assertiveness and Expressiveness dimensions are indicated by two perpendicular lines. The result is four quadrants representing four distinct styles: *Direct*, *Spirited*, *Considerate*, and *Systematic*. These four styles are shown in figure 4.

This model forms the basis for the entire HRDQ Style Series: *What's My Style?*, *What's My Communication Style?*, *What's My Time Style?*, *What's My Leadership Style?*, *What's My Coaching Style?*, *What's My Learning Style?*, and *StylePlay*.

Leadership + Style = Leadership Style

Leadership can be defined as *the process of influencing others to work toward predetermined goals*.

Style can be defined as *the way a person usually behaves when he or she is able to do things his or her own way*.

Put leadership and style together and you get the definition of leadership style: *A person's unique way of influencing others to work toward goals*.

The most effective leaders adapt their leadership styles to meet the requirements of individual situations. The four leadership styles appear below.

Direct = *High assertiveness, low expressiveness*
Leads by taking charge.

Spirited = *High assertiveness, high expressiveness*
Leads by inspiring.

Considerate = *Low assertiveness, high expressiveness*
Leads by building group harmony.

Systematic = *Low assertiveness, low expressiveness*
Leads by planning carefully.

Individuals can demonstrate a variety of leadership styles. Some people may even combine leadership styles that appear contradictory. Conceivably, one person might be a results-driven "people person," combining the Direct and Considerate styles, while another person might be a charismatic number-cruncher, combining the Spirited and Systematic styles. Yet most people have a dominant leadership style, one style they feel most comfortable using.

Descriptions of each of the four styles appear on pages 16–17. Each of the four athletic coaches mentioned earlier is listed under the leadership style he represents. In addition, political and corporate leaders appear under their respective styles. These leaders are presented only by way of illustration.

△ DIRECT

◇ SPIRITED

How does this leader approach a task?	***How does this leader approach a task?***
△ Takes charge.	◇ Visualizes the big picture.
△ Gets down to business.	◇ Turns work into play.
△ Focuses on deadlines.	◇ Imagines possibilities.
How does this leader relate to others?	***How does this leader relate to others?***
△ Tells people what to do.	◇ Inspires people to think of new ideas.
△ Tells them to get going now.	◇ Generates excitement in others.
△ Directs their attention toward the finish line.	◇ "Rallies the troops."
What is the result?	***What is the result?***
The job gets done *now*.	People align themselves behind a vision.

EXAMPLES:

Vince Lombardi
Former Head Coach
Green Bay Packers

Margaret Thatcher
Former Prime Minister
Great Britain

Rudolph Giuliani
Former Mayor
New York City

Jack Welsh
CEO
General Electric

Rupert Murdoch
CEO
News Corp.

EXAMPLES:

Tommy Lasorda
Former Manager, LA Dodgers &
2000 US Olympic Baseball Team

Winston Churchill
Former Prime Minister
Great Britain

Nelson Mandela
President
South Africa

Lee Iaccoca
Former CEO
Chrysler

Carly Fiorina
CEO
Hewlett-Packard

CONSIDERATE

How does this leader approach a task?

○ Creates a comfortable environment.

○ Follows procedures that are "tried and true."

○ Establishes an easy work pace.

How does this leader relate to others?

○ Asks for people's input.

○ Listens actively.

○ Provides support.

What is the result?

The group sticks together.

EXAMPLES:

Joe Torre
Manager
New York Yankees

Jimmy Carter
Former President
United States

Vaclav Havel
President
Czech Republic

Ben Cohen & Jerry Greenfield
Founders
Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream

Jeff Bezos
CEO
Amazon.com

SYSTEMATIC

How does this leader approach a task?

☐ Plans carefully.

☐ Analyzes relevant data.

☐ Imposes logic and structure.

How does this leader relate to others?

☐ Asks people to be thorough.

☐ Requests that others think before acting.

☐ Directs their attention toward the data.

What is the result?

High standards, objectivity, and accuracy are maintained.

EXAMPLES:

Phil Jackson
Head Coach
LA Lakers

Dwight D. Eisenhower
Former President and General
United States

Mikhael Gorbachev
Former President
USSR

Bill Gates
CEO
Microsoft

Charles Wang
CEO
Computer Associates

Adapting Leadership Styles to Different Situations

As evidenced by the success of the leaders listed on pages 16–17, each leadership style has distinct advantages. Direct leaders provide a clear sense of direction. Spirited leaders increase their group's energy level. Systematic leaders ensure that others maintain their own exacting standards. Considerate leaders maintain group harmony. Yet placed in the wrong situation, leaders may find that their dominant style becomes counterproductive.

- When crisis strikes, Direct leaders' take-charge style can pull others through. However, when delegating tasks would prove effective, Direct leaders may have trouble loosening their grip.

- When accuracy and objectivity matter most, Systematic leaders' analytical style is an asset. However, when time pressures build, their thoroughness may bog down projects and frustrate others.

- When a group's energy begins to flag, Spirited leaders' spontaneity can provide a vital spark. However, Spirited leaders' tendency to live in the present moment can prove counterproductive in situations calling for careful, long-term planning.

- When team harmony is vital, Considerate leaders' desire to accommodate everyone is a plus. However, when an especially forceful individual or faction pushes for a special interest, Considerate leaders may yield too easily.

Depending on participants' backgrounds and interest levels, you may want to ask them to brainstorm a list of famous corporate leaders. Then they can classify leaders according to style, noting times when these leaders may need to modify their styles.

Of course, participants in most training sessions are unlikely to face the high-stakes situations encountered by CEOs. Odds are, that, when they go into work everyday, they do not face hostile takeovers, nor are they responsible for turning around failing giants. Instead, they may face situations in which they need to motivate employees to complete a project on time. Other times, they may need to spur on a particular employee by providing well-deserved praise. No matter what kinds of situations participants in your groups typically encounter, the same principle applies: To provide effective leadership, people need to adapt their individual styles to the requirements of different situations.

Technical Development

Once the literature on leadership and style was reviewed, two different approaches to developing items were considered. Ultimately, the decision was made to test both approaches on a sample population. In one version of the instrument, adjectives were paired. From each pair, respondents were asked to select the adjectives that best described their respective leadership styles. In the other version, actions were paired, and respondents were asked to select the actions that best described their leadership styles.

In their feedback, respondents stated that results from both instruments successfully captured their own views of their individual leadership styles. In the language of scientific research, both instruments had face validity. However, respondents voiced a unanimous preference for the action version. One respondent's comment was representative of the feedback received on the initial test versions. "The second [action] version really gets me to think about what I do when I need others to get their work done." This comment touches upon an important theoretical consideration.

The current literature defines leadership in terms of a process that occurs between a leader and one or more followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). This process can be observed in the behaviors a leader performs when influencing others to work toward shared goals. Action-based items best capture this dynamic process. Moreover, action-based items are better suited to the current *behavioral* and *situational* approaches to leadership, whereas adjectives are better suited to the *trait* approach to leadership that has, by and large, fallen out of favor (See Trait Era and Behavior Era subsections on page 12).

Once the action-item version was selected, items were tested on a sample population. Respondents were asked to sort the 20 items into the four style categories: Direct, Systematic, Spirited, and Considerate. Those items that respondents consistently had difficulty sorting were either rejected or revised. The resulting items were then combined to ensure that each style was paired with every other style the same number of times. The revised instrument was then sent for review to clients interested in leadership style. Their input was used to create the final version of the instrument.

About HRDQ

HRDQ is a trusted developer of soft-skills learning solutions that help to improve the performance of individuals, teams, and organizations. We offer a wide range of resources and services, from ready-to-train assessments and hands-on games, to facilitator certification, custom development, and more. Our primary audience includes corporate trainers, human resource professionals, educational institutions, and independent consultants who look to us for research-based solutions to develop key skills such as leadership, communication, coaching, and team building.

At HRDQ, we believe an experiential approach is the best catalyst for adult learning. Our unique Experiential Learning Model has been the core of what we do for more than 30 years. Combining the best of organizational learning theory and proven facilitation methods with an appreciation for adult learning styles, our philosophy initiates and inspires lasting change.

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