

Leadership and the Supervisor

Real leaders are ordinary people with extraordinary determinations.
—John Seaman Garns

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- Describe patterns of leadership, or leadership "styles," ranging from rigid (autocratic) to open (participative).
- Review opposing sets of assumptions about people that give rise to different leadership styles and establish the necessity for flexibility in leadership.
- Determine the primary characteristic of effective leadership and relate the employees' view of the supervisor to critical elements of leadership performance.
- Emphasize the importance of an effective one-to-one communicating relationship with each employee and stress the essential two-way character of interpersonal communication.
- Highlight the common barriers to effective communication and suggest how they can be avoided or overcome.
- Offer guidelines for improving the supervisor's listening capacity.
- Introduce cultural diversity considerations as they affect leadership style and employee communication.
- Suggest guidelines for effective interpersonal communication in the supervisor-employee relationship.

FOR CONSIDERATION: ONE BOSS TOO MANY

The engineering and maintenance groups at Memorial Hospital are managed by three first-line supervisors. These supervisors and a department secretary report directly to a manager of engineering and maintenance who, in turn, reports to the director of environmental services.

The institution is in the midst of a prolonged period of growth and expansion owing mostly to merger and acquisition. Almost weekly some organizational unit or another is being located to new quarters or drastically rearranged within its original area. The institution promises to be in a chronic state of change for some time to come, with much extra effort required by engineering and maintenance as numerous areas are opened, renovated, or rearranged. The position of director of environmental services was created at the start of this period of major change. The incumbent was hired specifically for his apparent ability to get a new operation up and running through active involvement of personnel at all levels.

The director was quick to discover that his immediate subordinate, the manager of engineering and maintenance, came across as a man of considerable inertia who moved slowly, was reluctant to change, and usually defended "the way we've always done things."

Although the manager had long-standing relationships with the three supervisors, the director began avoiding the manager and dealing directly with the first-line supervisors. Most matters, however, found their way back to the manager who would then take action or give instructions contrary to what the director had done.

After several weeks in this mode of operation, one of the first-line supervisors summed up their circumstances as follows: "We now have two bosses, and they're opposed to each other on everything. What one decides, the other reverses; what one puts together, the other tears apart. They can't even agree on anything as basic as an obvious need for disciplinary action. How do we go about maintaining effectiveness in dealing with our employees, and how do we prevent morale and efficiency from going straight down the drain?"

Instructions

As you proceed through this chapter, consider the foregoing case. Based on what you believe to be sound management, develop an approach the three supervisors might take. State any assumption you may have to make, and be prepared to explain the reasons for your recommended approach.

INTRODUCING LEADERSHIP

Many people have some potential for leadership, although in some individuals this potential may be limited. The essential difference between the leader and the nonleader is often determined by the degree to which a person succeeds in learning about leadership and applying what has been learned.

Leadership is like many other human endeavors—talent helps, but it is not necessary to be extraordinarily talented to be successful. You may not be a natural leader; you may not be able to run a large organization or get hundreds of people to follow you in some undertaking. However, you stand at least an average chance of being able to furnish true leadership to the employees in a department or work group.

Because there are vast differences in perceptions of what characterizes a leader and how a leader should behave, this discussion of leadership begins with the consideration of style—the patterns of behavior exhibited by leaders as they work.

PATTERNS OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership styles range along a continuum from purely authoritarian at one extreme to fully participative at the other. In the scale in **Figure 9-1** from left to right the following styles are delineated:

- *Exploitative autocracy* describes the harshest style of leadership. The exploitative autocrat not only wields absolute power over the people in the group but also uses the group primarily to serve personal interests. This type of leader literally exploits the followers.
- *Benevolent autocracy* exists when the leader firmly wields absolute power but is usually kind and generally sincere in believing that the behavior of those in the group must be closely ordered and regulated for the good of the

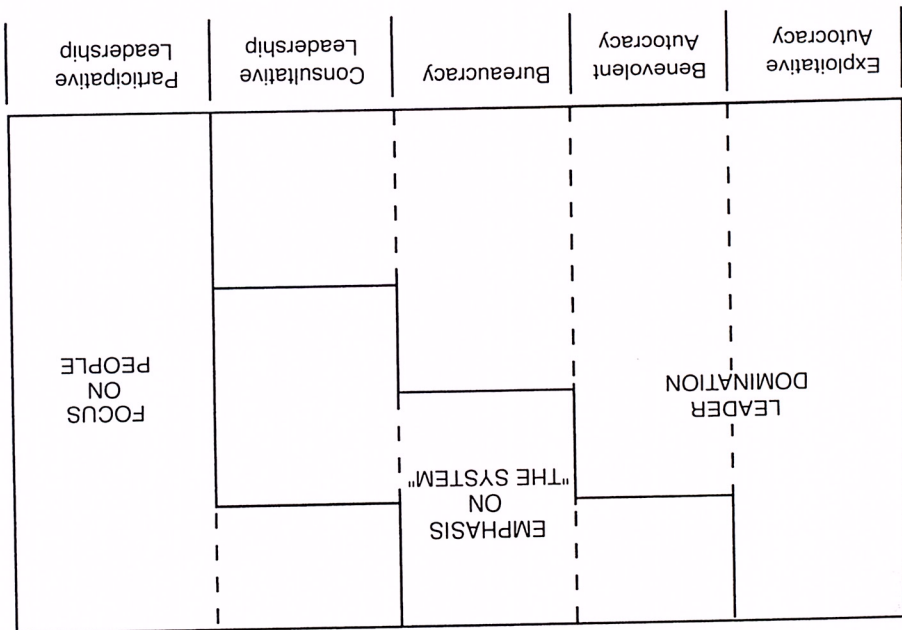


Figure 9-1 Patterns of Leadership

organization. Mentions of autocratic leadership throughout the remainder of this chapter refer to this particular leadership pattern.

- *Bureaucracy* is a term that immediately raises visions of massive federal and state government agencies (especially where health care is concerned). As a leadership pattern it refers to the primary emphasis on rules and regulations. The bureaucratic leader goes by the book, creating new rules and regulations as new situations arise, to such an extent that the "book" itself often becomes more important than the purpose it is intended to serve.
- *Consultative leadership* is exhibited when the leader remains open to input from members of the group, but, by pronouncement, attitude, or practice, retains full decision-making authority. In many instances consultative leadership is appropriate, but often consultative leadership is practiced under a participative label. Some supervisors claim they are open to participation, but in practice they are "open" only as long as the employees come up with the same decisions they would have made themselves.
- Full *participative leadership* exists when plans or decisions are made by all of the department's employees as a group or team. The supervisor is a key member of the group, providing advice, information, and assistance in any way possible but in advance has made a decision to accept the outcome of the group process.

With the exception of exploitative autocracy, no particular leadership pattern can always be labeled "wrong." What is right for one department may be wrong for another; what is right in one particular situation may be wrong under a different set of circumstances. And what was right at some time in the past may be wrong today.

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