

## Leadership- What Does It Really Mean?

If you open almost any text, or read any article about management these days the topic of leadership is guaranteed to come up. Much of it centers around “leadership style”, whether leadership is an innate or learned ability, is it an art or a science, and what is the most effective leadership model. The critical question is how do you measure the effectiveness of leadership?

Daniel Goleman, writing in the March-April edition of the **Harvard Business Review**, talks about these issues as well as several others. Starting with the last question – How do you measure the effectiveness of leadership; he provides a very short answer. Leaders get results. Effective leaders are capable of turning objectives- strategic, financial, organizational, or all three into reality. In the final analysis that is the true test of leadership.

To that end, Goleman and others have explored the issue of which leadership style produces those results most consistently. Some of the answers might surprise you. The simplest answer is that effective leaders employ a number of different styles based on the environment, circumstances, and other related factors.

As early as 1984, Dr. Paul Hersey began talking about what he called “**Situational Leadership**.” Hersey indicated that employees, or people in general both singularly and collectively operate at four different stages of what he calls “readiness”, and that these stages also change based on environmental factors. He asserts that each of these “readiness” stages has a corresponding leadership style that is most effective in managing the employee or group. He also indicates that you will get the behavior you manage for, so utilizing the appropriate leadership style is critical to achieving the desired results. The key is to match leadership style and readiness which requires skills at both assessment and application. Hersey identified four corresponding leadership behaviors to match.

Goleman goes a step further and identifies six management models and a set of “emotional intelligence” factors that are imbedded in each. He describes **Coercive, Authoritative, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetter, and Coaching** in some level of detail as well as the emotional intelligence factors incorporated in each.

The interesting thing is that in a study of almost 4000 executives the highest performers exhibited mastery of at least four of the six and could move between them quite fluidly as circumstances or staff change. As a rule they outperformed the objectives of their organizations by a factor of 15 to 20%. Similarly executives who lacked the “emotional intelligence” competencies under-performed expectations by the same percentages.

What was common to both Goleman and Hersey is the concept that these are competencies not innate abilities; they can be learned and practiced.

I would recommend both the article and the book to any current or aspiring management practitioner. My intent is to illustrate three concepts. **First**, leadership is about results. Anything else is interesting, but not terribly relevant. **Second**, there is no one management or leadership style, which guarantees success. Effective manager/leaders use a portfolio of skills and techniques. **Thirdly**, effective management and leadership skills can be taught and should be constantly refined.

Anecdotally, in this age of “visionary” and “participative” leadership it was interesting to note that the results of Goleman’s research indicate that the singular leadership style with the highest overall positive correlation on climate was the **Authoritative** style. Apparently people are still looking for leadership and direction in the final analysis. (The authoritative style here shouldn’t be confused with the traditional definition of authoritative behavior.)

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