

# Analysis of Leadership Style: A Case of One Leader

Othman Alyafei

Independent Researcher, Doha, Qatar

Email: othman\_yahary@yahoo.com

**How to cite this paper:** Alyafei, O. (2023). Analysis of Leadership Style: A Case of One Leader. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 11, 511-520. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2023.113029>

**Received:** April 23, 2023

**Accepted:** August 21, 2023

**Published:** August 24, 2023

Copyright © 2023 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

Organisations have been changing and have encountered an accelerated rate of change. This accelerated change rate has led to increased interest in how to be at the leading edge of corporate business with a focus on the employees responsible for leading out that strategic change. This article analyses the leaders who are working in a leading Energy organisation. This article also reviews the leadership style of the subject leader and his way of leading his team in addition to the formation of his leadership style with reference to various classical and contemporary theories of management. It is apparent that the subject leader has proven to have leadership skills to properly analyze the sensibilities of cultural differences both on an interpersonal level and on the practical and professional levels. Therefore, he is not only able to form personal and emotional ties with his subordinates, but he is also able to do this cross-culturally.

## Keywords

Leadership, Behavioral School of Leadership, Situational Theories of Leadership

## 1. Introduction

Organisations have been changing over the last century or so and have faced an accelerated rate of change in the last decade. The reasons for change have been multifaceted stemming from competitive forces led by increased globalisation, integration of ideas, reduced barriers of entry to doing business and the reduced time to market a business idea. Technology and changing mindsets have helped accelerate this change. This accelerated change rate has led to increased interest in how to be at the leading edge of corporate business. More importantly it has focussed attention on the people responsible for drafting and leading out that

strategic change—the leaders of these organisations.

This article looks at a project manager at a leading Energy organisation. Widely hailed and respected as a leader and nominated for awards within the organisation, this article also looks at how his leadership fits into classical and contemporary theories of management. The article examines why his leadership is excellent under various criteria prescribed by Kotter (Kotter, 1990), namely as creating and emotionally connecting to a vision, leading various cultures to create shared values, non conformity and open mindedness to develop good adaptability to situations and finally empathy towards his followers. It is to be noted that the subject leader and the organization he works for are kept anonymous due to confidentiality reasons.

The subject's leadership is then analysed under situational leadership theories such as Blake and Mouton's (Blake & Mouton, 1964) managerial grid and Robert House's (House, 1971) path goal theories along with appropriate behavioural management theories. My key points and conclusions are finally discussed along with my derived understanding for leadership in theory and practice as a future management studies graduate.

Moving steadily upwards as a manager from the ranks of engineering, the subject leader has demonstrated leadership and vision which is in line with various theorists' idea of an effective leader. His leadership is exemplary in my view due to his ability to lead multi cultural team members based on the culture of the individual as well as the call of the situation; the ability to translate the organisational vision by creating a sub vision for his department/team; being emotionally connected towards the sub vision and being emotionally and empathically connected with his followers. However, prior to analysing his, it is well worth considering the concept of leadership as defined by theorists.

## 2. The Idea of Leadership

Kotter (Kotter, 1990) sets the tone by viewing leadership as “defining what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision and inspires them to make that happen despite the obstacles”. Kotter (Kotter, 1990) compartmentalizes management as against leadership and states that while managers manage structures, leaders create them. This elevates the idea of leadership and gives us the notion that it is the domain of CEO's and the future of an organisation and its leadership lies largely with corporate strategists.

However another school of thought led by Gardiner (Gardner, 1989) emphasizes that differentiating management and leadership as too different is risky as “leaders may end up looking like a cross between the Pied Piper and Napoleon” i.e. trying to manage men as well as structure in an organisation may give an unreasonable dimension to leadership.

Both Kotter (Kotter, 1990) and Gardiner (Gardner, 1989) agree that leadership is about making subordinates think beyond their formally defined roles, think long term, look beyond the obvious and have political influence to execute the defined vision.

Looking from a practical perspective, most successful organisations indeed have one visionary leader who is often glamorised. However, successful organisation and in turn successful leadership is the result of creating many successful leaders through the organisation to create sub-defined visions for each department, role or subset of the overall organisational vision. Part of a leader's role is to manage, but leadership far transcends management.

Khurana (Khurana, 2002) has cautioned against glamorising heroism of leadership as he believes managers may deliberately create change, reject formal authority and in general put self interests over those of the organisation. Gardiner (Gardner, 1989) and Khurana's (Khurana, 2002) arguments thus both imply that leadership of men has to be in unison with other organisational elements such as structure, culture and vision.

Kotter (Kotter, 1990) has characterized leaders as being different from managers on three simple points (detailed differentiation: Appendix 1) as creating and motivating others to achieve a vision and the ability to influence people through charm, political manoeuvring rather than solely utilizing structural authority like a manager. Summarizing these ideas, it is understood that leadership is partly enhanced by authority, but the desire and willingness of followers to follow based on a leader's attitude truly enhances leadership. Leadership is thus found at all organisational levels rather than pure structurally defined leadership levels.

### 3. What Makes Him an Effective Leader?

One of Kotter's (Kotter, 1990) differentiations on management and leadership is the process in which a leader leads his subordinates and in the way a vision is created and internalised among followers.

The subject leader leads a diverse team made up of 8 different nationalities. Believing strongly in the overall organisational vision of creating employment for nationals, the subject leader has had to successfully identify and groom potential nationals ready to take on further leadership positions. The subject leader has also had to internalise these concepts with other nationalities, and to have them accept the organisations vision which may have not necessarily been in line with their personal self goals and interests. Some of the tools that the subject leader has used are the following:

#### 3.1. Being an Empathic Listener to the Line Staff Reporting Hierarchy

Negotiating such a tricky and difficult subject such as nationalisation with other nationalities in a multicultural environment has required a lot of empathy in dealing with areas such as recruitment, compensation, benefits and other aspects.

The subject leader, in my opinion, has been an excellent leader on the empathy front as there are many instances of him going beyond his defined role as a manager by associating with his team. He has a personal association with each of

his followers knowing their families, strengths and weaknesses. Part of this empathy is culturally rooted in local culture, but nonetheless, placing emphasis on family ties creates a leadership style that is more people-oriented as opposed to a management style where there is a clear distance between manager and subordinate.

In one instance wherein a subordinate was a regular underperformer at work, subject leader took extra efforts to understand the deeper reasons behind this. Knowing the subordinate's family helped the leader understand that he was undergoing health issues. The subject leader backed the person with additional hospital leave which resulted in the individual being a current outstanding departmental performer. Thus by showing empathy, the subject leader managed to strengthen rapport, elevate morale and motivate his follower to achieve more.

### **3.2. Using Authority and Personal Social Relations to Achieve Clear Defined Goals**

The subject leader has used numerous techniques to lead and motivate his staff by appraising staff on their strengths and weaknesses and negotiating joint objectives and rewards. He has used the authority bestowed on him by the organisational structure to clarify, outline and demand the achievement of objectives and targets as defined by the shared vision as well as sitting down with individuals on a weekly basis to understand his subordinates' approach towards their assigned goals. In many cases, he has clearly outlined to his team members what further skills and training is needed for them to be promoted and has sat them down regularly to monitor the same. He also maintains a very approachable and open to ideas technique to the roles and vision assigned to his department.

### **3.3. The Connectedness to the Goal of the Organisation**

A passionate leader is emotionally connected to the vision he creates. The subject leader strongly believes in the role of nationals and nationalization. The emotional connectivity that he shares is highlighted in the insistence on the willingness to train skilled and inexperienced locals rather than hire experienced non nationals. He has also created joint venture training sessions for locals abroad with international organisations. This emphasizes the commitment to his sub vision outlining his leadership rather than being a disconnected manager.

This has served to galvanize the locals working in his department as they are more connected and tuned into understanding the level of responsibilities expected from them as outlined by their leader. He has also managed to keep expatriates connected to the vision by ensuring them fairness and objectivity in dealings of work, giving them equal training opportunities and encouraging them to stay trained and updated and to ensure that they are not axed i.e. he has used encouragement rather than fear to bring out their followership. The subject leader thus has managed to drill down the vision of the organisation into sub visions in his department.

Leading diverse cross-cultural teams is a very challenging task. The subject

leader handles a section which consists of managing various nationalities within the organisation as well as handling various sub contractors from different countries in consulting, implementing and executing various projects.

The subject leader, being a keen observer of people, has understood that different cultures have different thought processes and approaches towards work. In one of the recent projects handled under his leadership, the consulting and design was done abroad under his. Dealing with international experts in the field, the subject leader led the employees with motivation and delegation.

The project execution stage called for a different approach. Project implementation was given to a number of contractors with a largely Asian expat workforce sometimes even led by Asian companies. Most Asian cultures are heavily patriarchal preferring to be led by instruction. At times, rewards have to be clearly defined, goals have to be clearly set and instructions clearly laid down. The subject leader, in his weekly meetings with contractors, switched from a purely consulting and monitoring perspective as in the design phase to one of close supervision of deadlines, at times displaying concern for people by empathizing on the practical problems for implementation; but at the same time displaying great concern for the task and the deadline at hand.

Finally when the project required interaction with local authorities (i.e. the electricity and telecom bodies), the subject leader shifted to a shared vision approach with likeminded leaders in those organisations, ensuring that the project was commissioned within record handing over time. In the event of obstacles, the subject leader ensured that he used the appropriate tools in the appropriate situations by using persuasiveness, political will in the form of higher management intervention as well as direct structural authority to implement his sub-vision of commissioning the project on time.

Leading in real time thus involves understanding both cultures (personalities) of the interacting forces (followers, etc.) and the situation. Adler (Adler, 1997) writes: "In the last decade the development of global markets has created numerous cross cultural contacts and the ensuing dialogue has formed the basis for transacting global business." Den et al. (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanella, & Dorfman, 1999) emphasize that "different cultures look forward to different leaders".

## **4. Analysing the Effectiveness of the Leadership of the Subject Leader**

Various theorists have given different opinions about the content of leadership. This section visits different schools of leadership thought and concludes about the effectiveness of the subject leader. The traits school of leadership is not discussed because it is a heavily criticized theory by various eminent theorists and effective leadership traits make up an ever increasing list that is mainly acquired.

### **4.1. Behavioural School of Leadership**

The behavioural school believes that a leader displays certain patterns of behav-

our towards his peers and followers. Based on Lewin's theory (Lewin et al., 1939) it seems that the subject leader is a democratic leader who is a good empathic listener, with an open door policy and with a high emphasis on having his followers identify with his shared and understood vision for the department. However, that is not entirely the case as the previous section of leading adaptively has proven that the subject leader has used authority, structure and power distances effectively where task completion is a must and followers have to be led by delegation.

Based on Blake and Mouton's (Blake & Mouton, 1964) managerial grid theory and as shown in Appendix 2, the subject leader would usually be classified as a very good team leader in most cases, since his concern for task as well as concern for people is very high. But I would like to argue that these do not necessarily go hand in hand as sometimes concern for task overruns concern for people especially in cases where people are reportedly less motivated due to various factors such as difference in organisational and personal goals, team dynamics, and cultural dynamics, among others. The subject leader has thus not stuck to obtaining good will but has successfully managed situations being an authoritarian leader as well as a democratic team leader to ensure that his and the organisation's ultimate goal and vision is not lost.

Thus on the Blake and Mouton (Blake & Mouton, 1964) managerial grid, it could be well classified that he belongs to the right hand top grid but in some cases to the right hand bottom grid as below. Under no circumstance or situation does he lose track of the task at hand and is hence an effective leader.

## 4.2. Situational Theories of Leadership

Both the project real time leadership and internalising the vision aspect of the subject leader's leadership outline that he does not particularly fit into a compartmentalized structure as a relationship-oriented leader. In his earlier days coming from a field engineering background and with organisational culture of structured authority, he adopted a task orientated technique as a rising manager. This orientation towards task was necessary at that time as he was more directly involved with lesser skill level followers as well as steadily building his credibility. Rising through the ranks, he has slowly reinvented himself as he has dealt with more highly skilled teams through assuming a people-orientation, so much so, that he has been able to persuade through his traits of negotiation towards a more collective and mature departmental vision.

Dealing with different factionalised subordinate groups such as highly skilled design teams, highly social status nationals as well as low skilled workforces has meant that the subject leader switches behaviours and styles of leadership depending on the situation, which has been successfully demonstrated through various projects. House (House, 1971) defines a good leader as being supportive, directive, participative and achievement-oriented based on situations. The subject leader's leadership has been achievement oriented with the locals, participa-

tive with the expats and directive where needed. It has also switched from achievement-oriented with the consultants to directive with the contractors on major projects.

The changes that have run through the organization over the last decade and a half of the subject leader's service has switched from Westernisation towards a more pro-active local role. As more and more highly skilled nationals are joining the workforce, the subject leader has used macro factors and organisational culture such as a highly developing workforce as well as the urgency and risk of the task at hand in determining his leadership approach to the situation.

An analysis of the subject leader's perception of his followers is quite favourable in terms of his entire team. Thus, the subject leader is a leading by relationships kind of leader. However as discussed in this section, he is remarkably able to move to a more task-oriented focus when the situation demands.

### **4.3. Conclusion about His Leadership**

The leadership of the subject leader is largely well placed due to his ability to handle situations. Handling a multi cultural, multi global team in a largely globally influenced industry requires commitment to vision and an ability to read situations and follower/subordinate mentality well. Adopting the wrong line of leadership may lead to a complete resentment and breakdown of the leader's authority. The leadership of the subject leader is clearly demonstrated by his being voted consistently as one of the best departmental heads in the organisation.

By analysing his leadership through the lenses of various theories, it brings out the flexibility and adaptability needed for leadership in today's competitive world.

## **5. Conclusion**

Observing the subject leader so closely over the years and having taken this organisational behaviour module has led to a more intrinsic understanding of leadership, some insights of which follow.

As businesses become more intertwined and more complex, the factors affecting leadership differ in time and place. Leadership studies have dealt with organisational culture to an extent but rarely on the culture of individual nations. However, as the world becomes more globalised, national culture has made a regular appearance in leadership discourses. Successful leadership of cross cultural sports teams has meant that it has become incumbent upon leaders to understand what motivates different cultures and adopt those lines.

Leadership is definitely moving towards a more participative and achievement oriented style. It can be well seen that leadership is indeed moving more closely towards selling a created vision towards subordinates. Education, exposure, experience, the internet and a host of other factors have ensured that employees and subordinates today have a higher degree of clarity and thought independence than their predecessors. This shifts leadership focus on to a more participative method for obtaining best results. However, there are still situations and



tasks where a more autocratic method is still needed. Hence the modern school of human resource thought in management has not been able to do away with structures and authority in leadership.

Transformational leadership is a realistic method of leadership but in a way is overhyped and over-glamorised to make it more noticed. However, leadership theories also pervade what are normal mid-managerial positions such as that of the subject leader. Yet applying theorist's viewpoints, the subject leader is an effective leader who is a manager at well known organization. Thus, it is right to conclude that leadership is all about attitude, adaptability and commitment as Kotter (Kotter, 1990) rightly points out: management is all about managing and the nuts and bolts of running an organisation. A person can be a leader or a manager at the same designation. To summarize, managers manage tasks which are immediate while leaders manage visions.

According to Resick et al. (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006), businesses today face international competition for customers and resources, due to the global character of social and political landscapes; and so co-workers, leaders, and subordinates may be placed anywhere in the world. In addition, the growth in the number of multinational corporations and joint ventures over the past two decades has been tremendous. Data suggest that only 47 of the world's 100 largest economies are nation states, the remaining 53 are multinational corporations (Melloan, 2004). As a result, more and more leaders are assuming expatriate roles and are regularly having to interact with colleagues from a culture different to their own. For leaders to be successful, it has become imperative for them to be aware of the cultural differences that influence business practices (Miroshnik, 2002). In particular, managers need to understand the differences in the expectations of leaders across cultures. The subject leader has earned his title as leader due to his diligent attention to the sensibilities of cultural differences both on an interpersonal level and on the practical and professional levels. Therefore, he is not only able to form personal and emotional ties with his subordinates, but he is also able to do this cross-culturally. He is also able to adapt his leadership style situationally, which is again indicative of his leadership abilities. Leadership theories are bound to evolve. If you have the skills in every situation to make your followers want to dream more with you, learn more for you, do more for you and become more than you are an effective leader.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### References

- Adler, N. (1997). *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour* (3rd ed.). South Western College Publishing.
- Blake, R., & Mouton, J. (1964). *The Managerial Grid: The Key to Leadership Excellence*. Gulf Publishing Co.



- Den Hartog, D. N., House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Ruiz-Quintanella, & Dorfman, P. W. (1999). Culture Specific and Cross-Culturally Generalizable Implicit Leadership Theories: Are Attributes of Charismatic/Transformational Leadership Universally Endorsed? *Leadership Quarterly*, *10*, 219-256.
- Gardner, J. W. (1989). *On Leadership* (p. 3). Free Press.
- House, R. J. (1971). A Path Goal Theory of Leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *16*, 321-338. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2391905>
- Khurana, R. (2002). The Curse of the Superstar CEO. *Harvard Business Review*, *80*, 60-66.
- Kotter, J. P. (1990). What Leaders Really Do. *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, p 27.
- Lewin, K., Liippit, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created Social Climates. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *10*, 271-301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1939.9713366>
- Melloan, G. (2004). Feeling the Muscle of the Multinationals. *Wall Street Journal*, 6 January 2004.
- Miroshnik, V. (2002). Culture and International Management: A Review. *Journal of Management Development*, *21*, 521-544. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710210434647>
- Resick, C. J., Hanges, P. J., Dickson, M. W., & Mitchelson, J. K. (2006). A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Endorsement of Ethical Leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *63*, 345-359. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-005-3242-1>

## Appendix 1

Kotter's differentiation on managers and leaders

|                    | Management  | Leadership   |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Direction          | Planning and budgeting, keeping an eye on the bottom line                       | Creating vision and strategy, keeping an eye on the horizon  |
| Alignment          | Organising and Staffing, directing and controlling, creating boundaries         | Creating a shared culture and vision, helping others to grow, reducing boundaries                            |
| Relationships      | Focus on objects/products, selling goods and services, acting as a boss         | Focussing on inspiring people, motivating followers, based on personal power, acting as a coach, facilitator |
| Personal Qualities | Emotional distance, expert mind, talking, conformity, insight into organisation | Emotional connections, open mind, listening, non conformity and insight into self                            |
| Outcomes           | Maintains stability   | Creates change-often radical   |

## Appendix 2

BLAKE & MOUTON MANAGERIAL GRID

The subject leader as a leader on the Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid

