

TASK VERSUS RELATIONSHIP LEADERSHIP

Manager's natural characteristics (or styles) are as diverse as the people they manage. How you deal with one of your team and how you speak to them in a specific situation may be different to the way that you would deal with another in the same situation. How they respond to you can be a direct reaction to how you have spoken or dealt with the issue. The old adage 'it's not what you say, it's how you say it' rings true in many instances, especially in a boss-subordinate relationship.

By analysing your predominate management style and how it motivates or de-motivates your staff may allow you to examine the interactions you have with staff members and develop more effective strategies for leadership.

Task Behaviour versus Relationship behaviour

Task behaviour is when your actions are centred on the task - the job that needs to be done. Relationship behaviour is when your actions are more centred towards relationships with your people.

Someone who concentrates on task behaviour to get the job done:

- Concentrates on numbers.
- Is very target/results orientated.
- Is activity centred.
- Believes in hands-on involvement.

The benefits of being task orientated are:

- Hits target/gets results.
- Gets a job done quickly.
- Keeps control.
- Avoids waste (profitable).

Examples of Relationship Behaviour

- Someone who concentrates on people.
- Helping people to achieve their full potential.
- Counsels staff members at length.
- Believes in being available at all times.

Benefits of being relationship orientated

- Staff members like you.
- Builds confidence in staff.
- Manager has two-way communication with staff.
- Good teamwork.
- Helps development of subordinates.

There are problems associated with being too task orientated:

- Communication is one way - downwards from the manager.
- There is little or no feedback from staff.
- Numbers rule.
- People don't get developed and may lose interest in the job.
- Results are short lived.
- Turnover of staff may be unacceptably high.
- No manager = No results.

There are also problems of being too relationship orientated:

- Managers may be too involved with people's problems.
- Not result-orientated and have a greater potential to miss targets.
- Staff members see you as one of them not as a manager.
- Difficult to reprimand staff as relationship issues override task issues.
- Quality orientated rather than volume orientated.
- Manager is more inclined to procrastinate and is prone to complacency.

So having looked at the benefits and problems of task and relationships, we need to understand our behaviour as managers. One of the key issues of effective management is the ability **to be flexible**. Your behaviour needs to move between task and relationship depending on the situation and person involved. An effective manager must have the ability and willingness to switch between task behaviour and relationship behaviour when the situation calls for it.

Imagine this as a bridge with each type of behaviour on either side. Half way on the bridge the manager should be able to demonstrate both task (instruction, directions) and relationship (responding, talking, counselling, listening) behaviours in equal amounts.

One of the harder aspects of leadership is when the manager has to demonstrate higher levels of either task or relationship. The manager must be able to cross onto the task side and take control of a situation and direct. Difficult if he/she gets on well with the team and doesn't wish to 'upset them'. The opposite can be just as difficult for the manager that likes to always be in control. Crossing over to the relationship side means releasing some authority to the team but is essential if the team is to be given the opportunity to develop its strengths and stand on its own feet.



You may feel that you are too geared towards the relationship style of management and would find it difficult to change your behaviours and decisions because you feel that you would be perceived as uncaring or aggressive. Vice versa, if you feel that task behaviour describes you and the way you manage your team then releasing (or relinquishing) control may make you feel more vulnerable and open to dissent or attack.

It may be difficult to change your behaviours but the decision must be based on what you are attempting to achieve as a manager and leader. Are your current actions producing a highly motivated, hard working team that trusts and respects you or do you find the opposite is your current reality? The following strategies may give you ideas how to get started.

Becoming more task orientated

- Directing the team's and individual's actions
- Telling team members what, how, when and who's to do it
- Setting specific goals and organising their completion
- Establishing time lines and following through on promises for delivery
- Directing and controlling when appropriate
- Providing immediate, constructive feedback
- Being unafraid to take corrective action and discipline staff

- Giving more support to subordinates
- Communicating more freely
- Facilitating interactions within team
- Active listening to concerns
- Providing more feedback
- Not reacting to situations without seeking information first

Split into groups of two and discuss whether you feel you are more task or relationship orientated. Part of the discussion should focus on specific situations where you feel your behaviours are effective or ineffective. Referring to the above strategies discuss whether you feel different behaviours will help you to deal with situations more effectively. Note your actions below.

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