

Personal leadership skills analysis



For this essay I have audited my leadership skills using theoretical models and referred to specific situations and experiences. This encompasses personal, academic and professional reflections and explores opportunities for my career paths and personal development with an Action Plan for the future.

This has required critical evaluation of my own development needs in light of my own aspirations, establishing an understanding of my transferrable skills and how these can be enhanced. For this I have considered situations in which my leadership traits, styles and skills have been utilised to help create successful outcomes.

Background

My career path has involved working closely with and taking an interest in people, both clients and colleagues alike. In developing my management skills, I am continually pursuing further ways of improving the effectiveness of these interactions which is immensely rewarding for me.

On leaving school, my first employment was within the travel industry. From the outset, I sought to improve skills and enjoyed the challenge of meeting the needs of customers, budgetary targets, training of staff, problem solving, through to the opening and management of a travel agency branch several years later.

Apart from the GCSE qualifications gained at school, any further academic or professional learning has been gained whilst in employment.

The skills and achievements in my personal life are equally transferrable to my work life. For example, as Chairman of a genealogical society for several years and public speaking engagements both serve as reminders that I have organisational, research and presentation abilities which I can and should be utilising and developing along my career path.

I am a prison officer and, three years ago, I learnt that my establishment was funding a Foundation Degree in Offender Management. My initial reaction was one of excitement as I had, for several years, considered some form of Higher Education by way of personal and professional development, but had never explored the options.

It was a source of immense satisfaction to pass the course and achieve Distinction grade.

My learning journey, experiences and personal developments, undertaken in the last three years, would take more than the word count of this essay allows, yet there are key points to reflect on in order to analyse my own leadership skills and continue their development.

Theoretical Models and Personal Experience of Reflection in my Professional Development:

From my earliest days in retail employment, then Care Work and on to prison officer, I have been fascinated by people and behaviour. Working alongside others, as well as empowering and training gives me great personal and professional satisfaction.

Using reflective models such as Gibbs (1998), shown in Appendix III, I came to realise that how I interpret situations influences my interactions with others. As I will illustrate, this relates directly to my personality style and how I manage people and situations. Linked to this is the importance I place on how I am viewed by others and naturally seek collaborative and open relationships. Many of these values are found in Carnegie (1938), listed in Appendix I.

The Study Skills Self-Assessment which I completed on 23 October 2007 (Appendix II) highlighted three main employability skills I need to develop as:

Improving own learning and performance

Application of number (data collection and interpretation)

Information and technology proficiency

Alongside these, to develop, are my personal attributes of

Self confidence

Flexibility and adaptability

Judgement

In this assessment I also reflected on my own specific weaknesses which include being too self-critical and not praising my own achievements enough which can affect my ability to be objective about my performance. I have a strong underpinning need to defend others and leap to their rescue which I have come to see as a hindrance to my own development and of those I seek

to help. This is a particularly important area for me to address as future management roles will require me to allow others to take their own personal responsibility and only offer guidance as appropriate. This ‘rescuer’ style is schema-related and I have considered schema theory and how this applies to me. Beck, (1967: 233), described a schema as

“.. a cognitive structure for screening, coding, and evaluating the stimuli that impinge on the organism”.

In short, schemas are the filters or core beliefs we have about ourselves or the world around us which influence how we interpret different situations in our lives.

The nature of the work I do in offender rehabilitation requires me to undertake regular de-briefing, supervision, yearly health reviews and bi-monthly counselling. This, together with schema theory and other therapy models I use with prisoners, which I have also applied to myself, means I spend a lot of time being introspective and sharing reflections with colleagues. This helps define practical steps for a successful future but also enables me to gain wider perspectives in understanding, leading and managing others with a range of resources and situational analysis capabilities.

Whereas, in the past and even recently, I have questioned the decision making processes of management, this has reshaped into a desire to gain a holistic overview of the work environment. Understanding the way we think and manage ourselves and others has been an important facet of my learning over the last three years. Straker (2008) who expands on the work <https://assignbuster.com/personal-leadership-skills-analysis/>

of Gardner (2006) was helpful in appreciating that how we interact with people, at all levels, and is crucial for self development. Overcoming objections to understanding others, for fear that this might disprove our own theories about ourselves and the world are key hurdles of which I must continually be mindful. Negative experiences in this have resulted in an unhealthy view of the workplace but, as I said earlier, the benefits of a more engaging view have proved beneficial in my work and personal well being.

As well as using Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1998), Kolb (1984) also helped me to evaluate experiences and test hypotheses but I did not find it took me to the point of action whereas Gibbs sets out the plan for ongoing development which is crucial for me so as not to remain procrastinating. Moon (2004) has been a useful resource on reflective practice, reminding me that reflection is not just important in itself, but must also lead to positive change,

In observing what gets in the way, rather than being stuck in analysis, to move beyond and set goals for positive development has been essential learning for me and has been a surprising benefit which I had not expected several years ago.

Leadership Employability Skills

I recently completed an Employability Skills self assessment exercise which we first undertook in the first semester of the Foundation Degree. On doing this, I compared the results from the two. It was encouraging that one of my main developments appears to have been in problem solving and I consider my Higher Education studies over the last three years as contributing to my deeper analysing abilities. In light of earlier descriptions of my learning

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journey and reflective logs, it is gratifying to see that I have come a long way in, not only overcoming my own obstacles to learning, but making measured and significant achievement which then enables me to guide others in their roles.

Among the key learning experiences for me, alongside the above, are a recognition of the roles of others, networking and effective communication.

My career path has involved working closely with and taking an interest in people, both clients and colleagues alike. This was particularly apparent when I recently updated my Curriculum Vitae (Appendix IV), which was last compiled almost fifteen years ago. In developing my management skills throughout my degree studies, I have discovered further ways of improving the effectiveness of these interactions which is immensely rewarding for me.

Through networking with management and departments for resources on researching prison policy, security and management skills, I am now feeling positive and motivated to succeed in career development. Not only is this important from a practical, self-development perspective, but also the fulfilling sense of achievement this will bring.

Until recently, I was Supervisor of the Core Sex Offender Treatment Programme which was an important role in developing my leadership skills, promoting staff well-being as well as guiding staff's professional development. Another important aspect of this was to remain flexible yet consistent in balancing these needs whilst focussing on the goals of the establishment Business Plan and Key Performance Target (KPT) priorities.

This mirrors Handy (1987) who argues for such flexibility in his Trust Control Theory.

I find myself taking the opportunity to develop the skills of others very seriously and is personally rewarding and empowering. The values I attribute to this mirror those of Kandola and Fullerton (1994) in their Mosaic Vision which I have included in Appendix V.

In Transactional Analysis Theory (Bern, 1961), every individual's personality is made up of three parts 'Parent', 'Adult' and 'Child'. An assessment of my own revealed a predominantly 'Nurturing Parent' relationship style which is immensely rewarding personally, but can prove emotionally draining and is not without its practical problems. However, developing assertiveness skills in establishing my own identity and skills base has the benefit of overcoming any negative rumination and keeps lines of communication open.

An example of achieving this was in challenging my line manager over my yearly performance review where I was rated 'Achieved' and not 'Exceeded' which I felt was deserved. I could have overlooked this and ruminated unhelpfully, believing him to be responsible for not recognising my achievements, but chose instead to 'manage my manager' and argued my case. I found the [www. h2training. com](http://www.h2training.com) website interesting which had useful strategies for reminding me how to maintain my own degree of self-determination. Quoting from this site:

“ It's unreasonable to expect your manager to be entirely responsible for accelerating your career: ultimately, it's your own responsibility. Remember

that an expectation is also resentment waiting to happen, and it is very difficult to hide resentment.”

http://h2training.com/managing_manager_tips.html [accessed November 2010]

Suffice to say, my performance record was amended accordingly.

I recently had to step down from Sex Offender Treatment work which I found difficult to accept. I, therefore, reappraised my personal development and used reflective skills (Kolb, 1984 and Beck 1967) to help evaluate the experiences and to understand how I was interpreting them. By doing this, I was able to negotiate a role within the drugs support team after originally being offered an office based assessment position which I would have found unfulfilling. Indeed, on reflection, assertiveness and negotiation are two core management attributes which are now part of my skills set.

Drawing together the range of experience and interests I have enjoyed over successive years keeps me, first and foremost, actively engaged in working for and alongside others. My role as a drugs support worker requires the key skills I possess with the realisation and expectation that they can be further developed with a particular emphasis on evaluating the management requirements of this work. This is encouraging and, in this period of change, I have come to realise the importance of job satisfaction as a key motivator for me.

An important element of my professional life is to uphold personal and corporate values of decency and ethical practice including cultural diversity.

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I was pleased to be able to highlight these values in my ‘ Diversity’ Foundation Degree project from January 2009 where I made recommendations for valuing the diversity of staff and prisoners and improving ethical practice in Programmes Awareness training at Full Sutton. This was well received by the treatment management team resulting in the training being strengthened in this area.

On sharing the findings of my Transactional Analysis with a work colleague, my ‘ nurturing parent’ style was acknowledged and confirmed through my perceived empathic nature. In looking at my management style, it is important that I maintain a balance between this and being careful not to go into ‘ White Knight’ schema-driven mode, where I need to defend others at all costs. Developing a style which cares for others yet enables them to function on their own merits allows me to function better as a genuinely caring person in my work and as a leader.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory (1943), reminds me that my own needs count as well as those of other people. In other words, putting other people first all the time is detrimental to my own well-being and valuing myself is, in itself, a key assertiveness skill. I continually remind myself of the announcements on aircraft during safety briefings where, in the event of oxygen masks being deployed, you are instructed to put your own on first before aiding anyone else. If you don’t, you might pass out beforehand and then no one is saved.

Critically evaluating My Leadership and Management Style

Some years ago, a colleague of mine who has since retired, told me his thoughts on a particular Senior Manager. He used a phrase which, though meant in a derogatory sense, I have never forgotten. He said “.. as a ‘ leader of men, I would only follow him out of curiosity”.

This colleague had spent many distinguished years in the Armed Services as a Regimental Sergeant Major and had been in the Prison Service for around 15 years. He had, therefore, some considerable experience of different management and leadership styles.

Using established theory I continually analyse my own strengths and weaknesses in areas of leadership and management.

Fayol (1916) highlighted five common elements of management which are essential to the role. These include the ability to look to the future, to be organised and co-ordinate the organisational objectives, leading (though he defined it as ‘ commanding’ which is unhelpfully autocratic) and, finally, to control the above elements using all means at his or her disposal.

Whilst this was written at the beginning of the last century, the basic tenets of management Fayol lists are still valid though one’s own personality also engenders an effective workforce which can achieve results. The latter is personally important as I seek to have followers rather than delegates and makes me, as a manager, more of a leader.

I recently completed the Myers Briggs Personality Type Questionnaire. Having done this a couple of years ago, I decided to redo this using an internet-based assessment resource ([www. teamtechnology. co. uk](http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk))

[accessed 15 September 2010], which produced a comprehensive 200 page report. Summary in Appendix VI

The results proved very interesting and formed a cohesive assessment which affirmed the beliefs about my personality and leadership attributes gained over the last few years. This was confirmed through the initial questionnaire together with a separate subtest which had similar outcomes and, interestingly, the results were very similar to my previous assessment two years previously.

Essentially, I have a strong focus on values, feelings, compassion and important beliefs where current experiences hold great learning importance. Team values are high and my role in ensuring the well-being of those with whom I work is important to me.

There are, however, elements of this personality ‘type’ which I am aware can be problematic if not managed appropriately. I do have a tendency to avoid conflict yet can be stubborn where my own values come into conflict with corporate ‘ideals’ in which I run the risk of failing in objectivity. These are negative traits which I have been consciously working on over the last few years and serve to remind me that, whilst having a ‘default’ style, this does not preclude effective working on these to the benefit of all concerned.

Interestingly, the top two ‘best matches’ of jobs for me based on ‘enjoyment’ are actor and musician; for ‘match’ came out as counsellor and customer care’ and a combination of ‘match and enjoyment’ came out as counsellor and actor. All of these I have both experience and interest in and the traits from these have indeed shaped my leadership style.

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The Humanist approach described by McGregor (1964) looked at how individual attitudes can affect behaviour. He purported that there are 2 types of leader (using an ' X' and ' Y' continuum ranging from a negative to positive view of subordinates respectively). The latter, he showed, have a greater chance of effective performance from the workforce through a nurturing approach which I can identify with. A reflective log from December 2009 is included in Appendix VII. Again, as with most models, there is a ' typical' style for each individual manager but even the most open and supportive one can revert on occasions to ' X'-typical strategies and responses. This can be somewhat confusing and lacking in continuity for the workforce and, potentially unsettling as I will illustrate later in this essay.

The model is similar to Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) who use the continuum from ' Authoritarian Task Orientation to Democratic Relationship Orientation' where I operate towards the latter and Goleman (2000) on which I identify with the ' Affiliative' (people come first) stage.

Operational leaders, as covered by Maxwell (2002) have great value to an organisation in providing stability, devising systems and solving problems with positive engagement. However, because of their focus on detail they can overlook the bigger picture, sometimes lack motivation and are not effective in dealing with conflict. Very often, paraphrasing Maxwell here, operational leaders are not very good at " getting their hands dirty" but readily raise the flag at the moment of achievement. Thankfully, whilst viewing myself as an operational leader, I do like to share in tasks as well as delegate.

John Adair (2002) in his range of leadership treatises, (which, incidently, build on the previous models of Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1964) and Fayol (1916) highlights three key management responsibilities under his banner of ' Action Centred leadership'.

Achieving the task

Managing the team or group

Managing individuals

Whilst advocating a shared responsibility between the individual and external factors, it does not, however, take stock of the individual in the leadership role which I view as crucial.

A similar but more complex model I have become interested in, is known as Crew Resource Management (CRM) which was originally devised by NASA to explore the human factors in civil aviation accidents in the 1970's. Several industries have adopted and adapted their own models accordingly and my interest will culminate in a dissertation for my Degree on the benefits of adopting a CRM approach to Prison Service critical incidents.

Tasks or people? Workforce or Team ?

It is clear that leadership is different to management though a good leader will have good management skills.

In considering whether I impose myself as leader to focus on task or allow the team to flourish utilising their own skills, I completed the T-P leadership questionnaire (Appendix VIII). This scored exactly midway between the two, <https://assignbuster.com/personal-leadership-skills-analysis/>

highlighting my awareness and flexibility to respond to both important aspects.

How we respond to a leader gives some indication of our own skills and that of the one in the supervisory role. As one who aims to lead by inspiration, I am more inclined to follow Kolb's (1984) model of learning and encourage people to adapt concrete way of doing things to update their skills base and find more effective ways of working (feeling, watching, thinking, doing). An autocratic leader would be less inclined to allow such flexibility and attempt to ensure compliance from those who might be more inclined to 'kick and scream' in and against the process.

An effective leader should also take individual learning styles into account as no one method fits all. Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Inventory (1982), highlights the differences that exist, as I have found even within small teams, yet we all work together and effectively, notwithstanding that everyone's experience of being under the same leadership will be different.

One of the most important sources of reflection in considering my own style of leadership, plus a reinforcement of my own beliefs and values, is represented in the Style Theory of Leadership developed by Blake and Mouton (1964). This, essentially, follows on from McGregor's 'X-Y' theory and is more relevant to those predominantly on the 'Y' axis and where a level of trust in management structure exists in the workplace. However, Blake and Mouton explored the benefits of those that put tasks before people and vice versa. Ultimately they considered whether concern for people or concern for production was more important for leaders.

As with other models, the day to day style of individuals in leadership roles can vary but everyone has their own 'default' mode. Where productivity appears more important than the maintenance and well-being of the staff, I can find myself at odds with the management and perceived ethos of the establishment at which I work.

With the Blake Mouton model, I was relieved to have my default leadership style confirmed as 'Team Leader'. This is indicative of high concern for both people and production where emphasis is placed on a spirit of teamwork and mutual co-operation. This also engenders a safe environment in which commitment from all sides is more readily forthcoming.

However, in completing a recent practical assessment for a promotion board I failed to attain the required grade. I knew this as soon as the assessment was over, though I had to wait two months for the official result. In fact, I knew during the assessment, I was reacting totally contrary to my normal sense of priorities when faced with a constant stream of problems to solve. I found myself focussing primarily on the tasks and not enough on the personnel. For example, when faced with a member of staff who was emotionally upset at a domestic issue, I asked if he was okay to continue to get his landing unlocked and would look to help him with his problem later. Afterwards I learnt that the assessors were looking for 'Utopian' responses in all scenarios assuming all needs could be immediately provided so I could have put staff welfare first, getting his role covered immediately so he could then get home to sort his issues. However, I reverted to my current work role where the pressure to meet deadlines sometimes overrides 'well-being'. As this was completely at odds with how I believed I would normally have

reacted, I was left feeling ill at ease and questioned why I persisted in this way when I am naturally ‘ Y’ (using McGregor’s model, 1960) and more ‘ team’ focused than task orientated (Blake Mouton, 1964).

Whilst I may not fully understand why, at least it is a recognised trait

“..... theory X managers (or indeed theory Y managers displaying theory X are primarily results oriented”

Internet source <http://www.businessballs.com/mcgregor.htm> [October 2010]

On reflection, I am convinced that the culture and environment of the higher management structure (which demands and focuses on results and targets) filters down and, no matter how much one tries to resist or even kick against it, it permeates one’s own work practice after a while. The climate in which I work consistently places emphasis on the meeting of Key Performance Targets (KPT’s) and now, the Service Level Agreement (SLA). In meeting these as well as ever increasing budgetary constraints, every facet of work culture is placed under the microscope and, wherever possible, cut, yet the targets must be met regardless.

However, no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves or expectations laid at our ‘ office door’, it is how we respond that is important and the acceptance of our personal responsibility to be channelled into effective working.

An important element of relationships, at all levels including personal and business, is trust. Where one perceives this to be eroded or not present due
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to conflict in aims or values, it can have a destructive affect on effective co-working. As can be seen above, this is something I am struggling with in the corporate ethos where I am constantly second-guessing the motives behind management decision-making.

However, to be an effective manager, I am mindful of maintaining a healthy approach to embracing the mission of the workplace even though I may not fully understand or have access to the full rationale behind the decision making processes from Higher Management. As a leader, I have to convey to those I wish to work effectively under me, that this mission is achievable and in the common interest despite my own such uncertainties. Maintaining personal integrity and establishing trust are essential in my personal, professional and leadership identity.

Straker (2008: 208) talks of ‘ transaction cost’ and ‘ trust boundaries’.

Essentially he argues that trust, if allowed to erode or not fostered within an organisation can impact on delivery and there has to be a ‘ cost’ on both sides to re-establish this. As he says

“.. the overall cost can be minimised with up-front investment in, and subsequent maintenance of, trust”.

If one does not have that sense of belonging within the trust group then there is something wrong with the work relationship and part of effective management and leadership performance is to be pro-active in fostering trust and encouraging people to enter the ‘ trust boundary”.

It begs the question, therefore, who and under what conditions will we follow? Should we be expected to lead and expect 'blind faith'? What criteria and principles should be presented in order for others to set out on the journey with us ?

Handy (1987) suggests that in order for an outcome to remain constant, the Trust-Control balance might need to shift between leader and subordinates and I can see merits in this as relationships, as well as work pressures, are fluid in nature.

There are three established styles of leadership: autocratic, paternalistic and democratic. History records successful leaders who have exhibited all of the above. Each style can work and produce results but demands a flexibility on the part of the workforce to fit in with the style and it is that response which can be acknowledged and worked with or not as the case may be,

As for my own style, confirmed as a nurturing parental approach, this has immense benefits for myself and for those who work under me as they feel supported and, more importantly in my opinion, affirmed in their roles with their own skills base recognised and developed. As with any style there are costs and, as I am finding, where my own sense of values conflicts with the demands laid upon me, this can have a detrimental effect to my own sense of purpose within the organisation.

It is important, therefore, that structures and lines of communication are open which allow for that expression of view. However, this, in itself, is not without the potential cost. As I found when 'raising my head above the parapet' on several occasions, to express concern and personal frustration

with the direction expected by senior managers, it can 'blot one's copybook'. Again, it is important for me to consider how much of this is down to my own personal perception and how able I am to see my subordinate's perspective and, crucially, the aims and focus of the establishment delivery objectives.

Conclusion

In terms of future roles, I am best placed to consider managerial positions. The Foundation Degree and BA(Hons) are regarded as valuable qualifications both for their content relevant to the Criminal Justice System and Leadership and Management but also symbolising the desire and commitment I have and have shown for continued self development (Appendix IX).

In the final analysis, the human dynamic is the most beneficial resource in the workplace but it is also the most fickle and, at times, fragile.

To lead is a privilege and to follow is an opportunity. I can only strive to make myself worthy of the trust placed in me to, not only get the job done, but to enable others to be the very best they can be and, in the process, ensure I am followed out of respect and not coercion or, indeed, curiosity.

Appendices: I. Excerpt from Carnegie (1938)

II. Study Skills Self Assessment

III. Gibbs' (1998) Reflective Cycle

IV. Curriculum Vitae

V. Kandola and Fullerton (1994) Mosaic Vision

VI. Myers Briggs Personality Type Questionnaire

VII. Reflective Log on McGregor ' X, Y Theory'

VIII. T-P Leadership Questionnaire

IX. Professional Development Plan

Appendix I

Excerpts from ' How To Win Friends and Influence People' Carnegie (1938)

Fundamental Techniques in Handling People

Don't criticize, condemn, or complain.

Give honest and sincere appreciation.

Arouse in the other person an eager want.

Six Ways to Make People Like You

Become genuinely interested in other people.

Smile.

Remember that a man's Name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language.

Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.

Talk in the terms of the other man's interest.

Make the other person feel important and do it sincerely

Twelve Ways to Win People to Your Way of Thinking

Avoid arguments.

Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never tell someone they are wrong.

If you're wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.

Begin in a friendly way.

Start with questions the other person will answer yes to.

Let the other person do the talking.

Let the other person feel the idea is his/hers.

Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view.

Sympathize with the other person.

Appeal to noble motives.

Dramatize your ideas.

Throw down a challenge.

Be a Leader: How to Change People Without Giving Offense or Arousing Resentment

Begin with praise and honest appreciation.

Call attention to other people's mistakes indirectly.

Talk about your own mistakes first.

Ask questions instead of directly giving orders.

Let the other person save face.

Praise every improvement.

Give them a fine reputation to live up to.

Encourage them by making their faults seem easy to correct.

Make the other person happy about doing what you suggest.

Appendix II.

Study Skills Self Assessment

Appendix III.

Gibbs' (1998) Reflective Cycle

Appendix IV.

Curriculum Vitae

Appendix V

My Personal and Professional Values Related to 'The Mosaic Vision' (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994)

Mission and values (I tend to have a 'rescuer' style in