

# Leadership analysis based on Shackleton

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



## Introduction

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton, a British explorer, was born in Kilkee, County Kildare, Ireland on February 15th, 1874. His family moved to London when he was 10 years old. At the age of 16, he dropped out from school to join the Merchant Marines, the youngest age to join the service at time. In 1898, Shackleton became a qualified master and a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve in 1901. Yearning for adventure and fame, in 1901 he applied for a position in Robert Falcon Scott's Discovery expedition to the Antarctic.

Unfortunately, in 1904, he was sent back home due to his health problem. With the strong desire of adventure and reputation, Shackleton amended his failure by returning to Antarctica as a leader of Nimrod Expedition in 1907. His purposes were to explore the Ross Shelf Ice and the south magnetic pole. The journey was a success with his discovery of Beardmore Glacier on the Antarctic Plateau on January 09, 1909. On his comeback, Shackleton received many honors and awards for the successful expedition. Wikipedia) The “real” journey of Shackleton began on August 1st, 1914 where he went along with his 27 crew members, left London for South Georgia in the purpose to complete the trans-Antarctic expedition – the ship was called “The Endurance”. On 24th February, 1915, the Endurance got stuck in the ice pack, crushed by the ice and was finally sunk under the ice in the same year on 21st November. Regardless to the shortage of foods, supplies, no communication equipments, plus the unbearable cold winter, Shackleton and his crew never gave up hope.

On May 19th 1916, Shackleton and his two other crews – Worsley and Crean – crossed South Georgia in search of the whaling stations on the east-coast. They went on foot for 36 hours over the Glacier Mountains and at last arrived at Stromness whaling station. All the 27 men were amazingly able to return in good spirit after almost two years they were stranded in the Antarctic. (Timeline) After World War I in 1921, Shackleton returned to the Antarctic and led another expedition with John Quiller Rowett to examine Enderby Land. However, Shackleton died from angina pectoris on January 5, 1922.

Followed by the request from his wife, Emily Mary Dorman, Shackleton was buried at Grytviken, South Georgia, leaving 3 children at the time of his death. (Encyclopedia) This report shows various concepts related to Ernest Shackleton's leadership style in the successful accomplishment of the expedition including the traits, behaviors, the contingency and what it takes to make Shackleton become such a great leader.

## **The Concepts**

What does it mean to be a leader? The concept of being a leader has been carried through times. With a capable leader comes great success.

As this is one of many theories studied by numerous aspects, ranging from history, philosophy and the scientific perspective of approach. There are several distinctive measures that we can use to define the complexity of leadership. Often confusing, people nowadays who are not extensively equipped with the knowledge may misunderstand the differences between being a manager and a leader. In the case of Ernest Shackleton and his

ability he demonstrated, we can say that he is a great leader with essential manager's skill set that had made him who he is known for today.

If we are to look at Ernest Shackleton's journey similarly to an organization, with reaching the North Pole as the company's main objective, we can judge and evaluate his performance based on how far the goal has been completed. Shackleton was a great leader in such ways that he created a compelling image both for himself and his crews. This comes from mainly his passion and love for adventure that has thrived his goals all his life. While being such a leader, he is also a capable manager. A vision alone did not help Shackleton in reaching his goal.

Through being prepared and equipped with great experiences that he devised from his earlier voyage, he was able to realistically plan out steps by steps what he expected to achieve. Of course, these plans would not come together effectively if not for Shackleton's leadership skills. Back in the days, leadership was defined as heroism, where leaders before being considered as one had to possess all the knowledge, skill sets and abilities to overcome any obstacles. While being such the case, the way in which Shackleton demonstrated his leadership skills were not entirely true to this theory.

While being a very attractive role model, he also possessed numerous traits, even those that are relevant to business leaders we can find today. To promptly put it, his successes are all thanks to the following traits that he has reflected:

- Out of all the possible traits he exhibited, the most important was inarguably the ability for him to remain optimistic under any circumstances and the self-confidence that he always expressed. This certainly affected the productivity of his crew and his success. He was open-minded to opportunities and the passion to willingly learn new skills relative to achieving his vision. Being able to draw out the big picture and actually do something about it has helped him reach his desire.
- He was highly motivated. This comes from his unmovable passion for adventure that he innately possessed.
- He was observant of his crew members. Being able to keep close attention to the needs and wants of the individuals has helped him to identify the strengths and weaknesses that he can use to his advantage.

From these brief points of view, all these traits are necessary components of making a great leader, and it has become the keys to many booming leadership stories in the business worlds that exist today.

Traits, behavior and relationship As mentioned above in the previous section, Ernest Shackleton had a variety of leadership traits that define his voyage to the North Pole. He was, many considered self-confident, motivated, optimistic as well as being a leader with a great drive factor to influence his crews/employees. He was considered a great image, a true hero in his own time.

However, like any leader, he isn't perfect. His success came with the price of lives from his crew members. Although his vision was accepted by many

like him, he had made decisions that led to the disastrous situation that would have likely otherwise, created another turn of event. But undoubtedly, his leadership had proven its wonder under extreme conditions. He was passionate and considerate to his crew, but to a certain extent, some might say he was a bit of a daredevil to risk his entire ship to bet against the intense conditions that are unlikely to be anticipated.

The life and time of Ernest Shackleton is perhaps one of many well-known cases and a great example of the autocratic leadership style in conjunction with traits that belong to the democratic class. The style that Shackleton adopted was mainly due to several reasons that had proved to be more effective. During the voyage, Shackleton relies upon his personal judgments and close supervision to guide the crew members through the harsh punishment of mother nature.

Having closely worked together with the crew members, in which most of them looked up to Shackleton as a respectful leader with a burning passion that ignited their own, the crew members were able to develop a sense of trust and heroism in his figure. Since he and the crew members have always been together directly under his influence and command, a sense of synchronization, rather than individualism was needed in order for things to flow fluently throughout his trip. This is especially true during those times where his ship, the Endurance got struck and stranded on ice.

It was during this time that his autocratic style really shines. Put under the circumstances of such hardship and craziness, one could possibly go insane from fear, hunger, and desperation. It was crucial that each member of the

party followed orders and did not revolt against their own will. Shackleton's leadership style helped the entire crew to stay positive and motivated, and insisted on drawing out the survival factors in each member not to give up their lives so easily. For Ernest Shackleton, there was a time pressure and a need for regulation within the group.

Not only that his sense of responsibility, able to put his people first when he turned back after almost making it to the destination when one of his crew members' condition became fatal was important, his ability to think straight in these tough times had proved Shackleton to become a great example under the definition of leadership. In relation to the previous point, we can conclude that Shackleton's leadership style is another representation of the consideration style since he cared about his men's emotions and safety rather than his own success.

According to the voyage, his crew enjoyed three full meals for the celebration of Leap Year Day and he also organized other fun activities for his crew such as dog racing, despite all the ruthless weather that were almost close to killing them everyday. When the Endurance got wrecked into the sea, instead of being all hopeless and upset, Shackleton told his crew that they are going home. This infamous quote marked his true spirit and show that he was one of the greatest leader of all. By reassuring the crew through focusing on the needs and desire that they currently uphold, he lightened up the hopes for his crew that they can go through this tough situation together, in which they did at the end. From business point of view, Shackleton applied an Employee Centered Style throughout the whole

expedition. He led his crew (employees) in positive ways and cared about his followers both physically and emotionally. He considered himself as one of the followers, as a part of the group, not just by calling himself a leader and only know how to announce decision or order others to get the works done. This can be summarize through the definition of “ lead by example” leadership style.

When the going got tough, the needs for harmonization and unification of each members' will is very important for survival. Ernest Shackleton, while trying his best to individualize his leadership according to each subordinate, was more focused on trying to lead everyone towards the same path. Through the application of heroism, Shackleton was able to guide the crew and motivate them by targeting the respect and mutual feeling that the crews already feel toward him. This accentuated the spirits of all the members, unifying all their needs and centralized it as a whole.

The turbulence that his group had to go through could had left a devastating effects, instead, they became stronger and stronger as each obstacles were overcome with joy and hope that Shackleton, with his leadership style represent. Much had changes since Shackleton became a living legend, but the principal and theory, as well as practical principle still remained the same. The business world that we live in today has much to apply. Leaders today need to adapt to changes, being able to quickly think on their feet and remain charismatic to the subordinates are the key ingredient to creating a great leader.



As corporations are adapting more changes and restructure down to a heterarchy level, we see a more decentralized structure in which employees are encouraged with power. But the needs for centralized authority remained the same under emergency, and that leads us to the next section of this report.

Contingency approaches to leadership One may believe that perhaps Ernest Shackleton and what he had to go through had shaped the way that his business style he adopted. In relation to the Fiedler's Contingency Model, we start by examining Shackleton's decision in relation to the situation that befell him.

This model allows us a mode of evaluation for both the leadership styles and the organization situation, under two criteria, which are task and relationship. Shackleton had demonstrated a flexible style of leadership in numerous cases. He was not afraid to change and adjust his tactics to achieve his goals. This is especially true during the highlight of his voyage sailing on the Endurance. The Antarctica weather was harsh and unforgiving, putting a toll on Ernest to outperform the condition to survive. His goal upon setting sail was to set foot on the icy North Pole, but was later changed to endure the coldness and to get out of here alive.

Such a drastic change in the situation asked for great demand in Shackleton to judge the situation as the lives of his crews are placed in his hands. A shift from a task-orientated style to a more relationship-orientated style challenged him mentally. As the result, he was able to accomplish his task of getting his crews out alive. Based on the three key elements of the situation,

since he was able to develop such mutually agreement among the group and himself. They truly admire and had confidence in their leaders. Thus, this leads to a unification of the group towards achieving the goal.

The task structure that Shackleton's crew had to undergo was of immense difficulties. The unpredictable outcome caused the group to have a low task structure to enhance flexibility. Therefore, the responsibility that Shackleton had to shoulder was huge. This lead to the last element of position power. Since the group was striked with an unexpected turn of event, it was up to Shackleton to steer the crew back to following the objective, which he had done magnificently thoroughmotivationand encouragement as a leader. The Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Theory can also be used to explain the leadership style of Ernest Shackleton.

Since Shackleton's crew were very well equipped mentally due to their leader's constant motivation and the method that led them, together with the low task structure, Shackleton need to employed the Participating strategy, followed up with the Delegating strategy. At first when the Endurance was out of hope to be recovered, his crews were no doubt feeling desperate about the situation. But with Shackleton's igh spirit, they were able to pick up from scratch. In other words, they were able but unwilling when faced with such a disastrous situation. They need guidance and irection as the objective of the voyage had completely changed. Shackleton had done so very effectively in inspiring the will to live, through his famous quote " We're going home". As the situation progress, Shackleton was able to slowly earn more trust and confidence in his crew, this slowly move the

relationship behavior position down to the lower end, toward the Delegating strategy area. During his search out for Elephant Island, he had to make a decision to leave the crew behind as to find a way to contact the mainland and signal for help, he delegated Thomas Crean, his second-in-command crew to take charge after he was gone.

This could not be done without a high level of trust and high level of abilities to achieve such task. It was remarkably assuring to the rest of crew that when he announced he would come back for them, which he did. ( Find more information about the other 2 theories ) The Path-goal theories also contribute to analyze the leadership style of Shackleton in a very definite way. According to the definition, Path-goal theory full reliable on the leader's responsibility to lead and motivate in order to achieve organizational goal.

The journey that Shackleton had to travel was filled with adversity. At first, he was determined to reach the North Pole as this is the set objective, and he communicated this objective very well to his groups of followers. This in return affected the kind of motivation that the crews expected from the voyage. During that time, the glory and fame of being the first few men to set foot on the Arctic ice was indeed very attractive, especially for the adventurous souls like Shackleton and his crews who were seeking intrinsic rewards as the mean to strive for the objective.

Shackleton was a dedicated man, his passion not only reminded himself of the goal every day, but it was also the fuel that ignited the dedication of his crew members. He kept the rewards clear as they moved along, even when the Endurance crashed. Shackleton still managed to quickly adapt to the

situation and influence his team through the change of “reward”, which was now to safely escape his hazard. This theory explained how he was able to keep the motivation of his “employee” high throughout the voyage even when there was a change of goal, especially when the change was so drastic.

Ernest Shackleton’s leadership style is also applicable to the explanation of the Vroom Jago Contingency Model. Similarly to some of the models and theories above, this theory characterizes the participative leadership degree and how it correlates with the results and accountability of the decision. At the time when Shackleton first commenced the journey, he gathered groups of attuned people based on character as well as competence. He knew very well the danger and how the strength, both physically and mentally of his crews had to face. The selection process picked out crew members with a positive attitude.

This helped Shackleton’s leadership style to take effect in the most successful way. He had also developed a strong sense of loyalty and trust towards his crew members. This significantly proved to be the decisive factor as the *Endurance* got stranded on ice when it really shined. To an extent during the voyage, his participation was at the facilitate degree as he understood the ability of each individual well enough to let them take charge while presenting ideas and experience on equal terms. When the *Endurance* sunk, he became more delegating as the group faced extreme adversity, while keeping them motivated.

One can interpret and use different models to define Ernest Shackleton’s leadership style. Based on the diagnostic questions, he was actively involved

in the preparation process before they set sail, showing a high level of participation and consideration as the expedition was many adventures' dream at that time. By sharing the vision, he was able to collect the most suitable group of people. Because the importance of commitment was very high, Shackleton would personally interview each member he chose for a mutual agreement on the objective of the journey.

Since Shackleton had been on past trips to the North Pole, he used the experience to persuade people and form a reliable trust conformity. This helped to increase the likelihood of commitment of his followers out of respect for passion and knowledge. Shackleton implied the motivation theories very well as he was able to convince the sailors of the goal that he wanted to achieve, turning it into the goals of the group as a whole. This increase in support for the goal helped them to overcome challenges together later on.

Last but not least, his team was not only dedicated but highly trained for such an expedition. Shackleton was able to trust them and delegate tasks effectively. Based on the style of leadership that Shackleton represents, we can use the Path Goal Theory to best explain his style, as motivation towards the same goal as a team was the critical factor. His team was put to the test in such a condition that will easily drain the lives out of anyone, but with high motivation and a clear goal that unified them, he successfully pulled through and survived the weather that everybody deemed impossible.

Without the cooperation of each member, perhaps he could not have made it and that is why this theory is best implied to explain his leadership style.

The leaders as an individual Throughout his lives on the expeditions, we have seen how great a leader he was through the team members that he motivated, but how about concerning Ernest Shackleton as a leader in his own definition?

1. Big five personality that ES had:
2. I would say ES had an internal Locus of Control. He was self-motivated and was likely to influence others.
3. ES was authoritarian. He relied on position power.
4. Shackleton's End Values were to lead an adventurous life, explore the trans-Antarctic. His Instrumental Values were being responsible to his crew, being honest, being helpful.
5. I think ES was a Theory Y Leader. He valued his crew and understood what his followers wanted or needed so that they have the strengths to keep struggling throughout the hardship they had.

## Notes

1. That money, however, came from people who could afford it. Works Cited " Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton. " Encyclopedia of World Biography. 2004.
2. Encyclopedia. com. 2 Jun. 2012 . " Shackleton" Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 2 June 2012. Web. 02 Jun. 2012.
3. Feb 2002 Web. 02 Jun 2012. <http://personnel.ky.gov/nr/rdonlyres/6c98ae12-6df1-4476-acd3-ff1c9b2770f4/0/someshackletonleadershiplessons>.

4. pdf [http://leadership.wharton.upenn.edu/l\\_change/Interviews/Shackleton](http://leadership.wharton.upenn.edu/l_change/Interviews/Shackleton).

5. pdf <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/business/leadership-lessons-from-the-shackleton-expedition>.

6. html? [pagewanted=all http://artofmanliness.com/2011/08/02/leadership-lessons-from-ernest-shackleton/](http://artofmanliness.com/2011/08/02/leadership-lessons-from-ernest-shackleton/)