A critical analysis of personal leadership style assignment

A critical analysis of personal leadership style with reference to classical theoretical frameworks. The aim of this study is to examine my personal leadership style, in the context of some of the major classical theoretical frameworks of leadership from within the wide body of literature available on this subject. I will aim to apply the analysis of these theories to my own leadership practice and style, and to identify areas where theory can improve my performance within the workplace.

I will also look at data from a small scale study of my co workers' perceptions of my leadership, s well as information from self assessments of my leadership style. Have been a manager now for nearly five years, initially as a first line supervisor in a large urban local authority Children's Social Care (SC) department, and more recently, as a Service Manager for SC in a large rural authority. As such, have a good level of experience of leading and managing teams of social workers and team leaders. Prior to embarking on the Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management, I had not studied leadership in any detail.

My practice of leading and managing has as such been based on my own experience f being managed, my observation of other managers and leaders (both good and bad), my own ' instincts' as to what I think works, and on my own experience of success and failure as a leader and manager. As my career has progressed, and I have thought more about focusing on the quality and consistency of my leadership, I have wanted to understand leadership as an academic concept, with a view to improving my personal performance, the performance of my teams, and ultimately the service I provide to children, young people and families.

My interest in this subject is not only personal – it reflects a wider debate thin the field of social care around how services for children can be managed more effectively, efficiently and safely, particularly in the context of high profile ' failures' to protect children. The Children Act 2004 (HEM Government 2004) set out guidance for a new way of working to safeguard children more effectively. The adoption of a multi-agency approach to working with children is central to this guidance. Similarly, in the area of management of Children's Services, a multi-agency approach is viewed as central, as evidenced in the ' Championing

Children' document (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2006), which is subtitled: ' A shared set of skills, knowledge and behaviors for those leading and managing integrated children's services' In the foreword to this document, Beverly Hughes, then Minister of State for Children and Families, highlighted the significance of leadership in this new way of working. ' We will only be successful if our services have the right quality of leadership and management. We need leaders and managers who can build teams competent and confident in this new means of service delivery… (DOCS 2006: 1) The government social work task force, established following the death of Peter Connelly (baby in 2007 (Lord Laming 2009), highlighted the significance of leadership (or lack thereof) for social work as a profession. " Social workers are unsure about where to look for leadership of their profession, and for representation in the policy debates that shape practice and conditions on the frontline" (DOCS 2009: 44) Where it is identified that there are problems within any organization, then leadership and management must be considered central to any attempt to effect change.

In this assignment, I hope to make a mall contribution to the body of work which sets out how this may happen, at an individual and organizational level. Currently work as a Children's Service Manager (SCM). I and two other Cams, oversee the operational management and provision of statutory children's social work services within the area. I manage two team leaders, who in turn each manage a team of approximately five qualified social workers and two unqualified social work assistants. The work undertaken by these teams is highly stressful and extremely pressured.

Resources are limited and understanding is a perennial issue. As such, in my role as an operational manager and leader, am faced with daily challenges in terms of managing the work safely, whilst supporting, leading and developing my teams and staff. Social workers and team leaders work within a tight statutory framework. The prime legislation governing the work is The Children Act 1989 (HEM Government 1989), alongside other important documents, including Working Together 2006 (HEM Government 2006), The Children Act 2004 (HEM Government 2004), The Public Law Outline (Ministry of Justice, 2008).

Social workers also face the challenge of being subject of intense public scrutiny, allowing several high profile child deaths, most notably Victoria Climb (Lord Laming 2003) and Baby Peter (Lord Laming 2009). The failings of social workers and other child care professionals from Harrying is not the subject of this piece, but they give some context to the climate of anxiety and scrutiny in which social workers practice at present, and this presents a leadership challenge to those managing social work services.

These high profile failures have also been one of the main driving forces for the current legislative and practice frameworks in which social care professionals errantly practice. The ' Every Child Matters' Green Paper led to the Children Act 2004, which is significant in many ways but not least in its clear expression of the need for the provision of integrated services for children and closer working between those agencies responsible for children particularly around the issue of safeguarding.

The teams which I manage cover part a large rural county. The county is divided in to four areas, each managed by their own district council. Social work services, provided by the County Council, are provided by four areas co-terminus with the district council boundaries. The area covered by my teams is geographically large. Currently, there are over 33, 000 young people aged 0 to 17 in the area. The indices of need show 26. 7% of children are in deprivation in the area (Office for National Statistics 2009).

There are approximately 50 children in the area who are subject to child protection plans, and approximately 110 children who are Looked After by the local authority. The Department for Children Schools and Families (DOCS) monitors the performance of local authorities via various Key Performance Indicators (Kips), which encompass all areas of social work practice. These include timescales for completion of initial and core assessments, timescales for initial and review child protection conferences, stability of placements for Children Looked After, health and education outcomes for Children Looked After.

Whilst these in some senses provide a simple assessment of progress and achievement within teams, they also present a significant challenge in achieving certain parameters set by central government and senior managers, and supporting staff in improving these Kips with limited resources and increasing workloads. Have set out some of the leadership challenges within my current role. These are currently amplified by threats of significant cuts in government spending due to the current national budget deficit.

These may not be new challenges within this sector, or within the world of business and employment. However they are new challenges for me personally, and in this assignment, I am aiming to assess my own leadership style, critically evaluate it in the context of the available literature, and identify areas of learning and improvement which will allow me to work more efficiently, whilst supporting my team leaders and social workers more effectively.

There are many different theories of leadership and management, and the study of leadership can be seen to date back to Aristotle and Plato (Carrot, Zachary and Horn 2003). I will attempt to present a brief overview of some of the ' classical' theories of leadership as described in the wide body of literature. It is not exhaustive, but I hope that it reflects with reasonable accuracy those theories which are the most widely researched and described.

Prior to examining individual theories, I should comment briefly on the terms ' leadership' and ' management', which will be used frequently throughout

the text. Much of the current literature and debate is focused on leadership, but many job titles refer to managers or management. In truth, there is a great overlap between these two terms, and defining leadership is a notoriously difficult task. Morehouse (2007) cites Stodgily (1974) in pointing out that there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it.

However, Morehouse goes on to present a useful working definition himself: " Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (1997: 3) Leadership as a concept is not new. History records great leaders dating back thousands of years. The concept of management, whilst it shares many common characteristics with leadership, can be seen to have originated with the onset of industrialization.

Morehouse (1997) cites Payola (1916) who identified the primary functions of management as planning, organizing, staffing and controlling. Cotter identified similar categories, though he substituted budgeting for staffing (Van Maurice 2001), Essentially, management can be considered a practical task, which focuses on plans, budgets, resource allocation, policy and procedure, and monitoring, while dervish can be characterized as being more concerned with vision, direction, emerging workers and inspiring others to change (Research in Practice 2003).

People are led, whilst ' things' are managed (Gill 2006). However, I do not believe that these two descriptions need be mutually exclusive, and in this piece, I will work on the basis that there is a considerable overlap between the two, and that they can often be considered interchangeable. Certainly, in

terms of my own workplace and the day to day decisions which are made as a leader and manager, it is difficult to easily separate the two functions.

Van Maurice sums up this quite succinctly when describing the work of Cotter: ".... Management and leadership are not mutually exclusive. They can be complementary and they can overlap. ... However, management and leadership can be very different. Plans do not need to include a vision and the processes of motivating and controlling can be quite dissimilar" (Van Maurice 2001 : 45) Perhaps the earliest systematic attempt to analyses the nature of leadership is what became known as the Trait approach.

Also referred to as ' Great Man' theory, it focuses on identifying the personality characteristics of those individuals who are considered successful leaders, and attempting to use that information to identify potential leadership characteristics in others. Morehouse (2007) and Research in Practice (2003) identify five major leadership traits which have emerged from many studies of this area throughout the 20th century; intelligence, self confidence, determination, integrity, sociability.

McCall and Lombard (1983) looked at both successful and failed leaders and identified four traits which seemed linked with success; emotional stability and composure, admitting error, interpersonal skills, and intellectual ability. A major criticism of Trait theory is that the research produces so many different characteristics associated with leaders as to make them analytically vague – there does not appear to be a definitive list.

Furthermore, it does not explain why some individuals who have the ' right' traits do not go on to be good leaders (Carrot 2007). It does not recognize

the fact that different situations may require different talents and skills. It also provides very little useful information as to how leadership skills can be developed and encouraged in the workplace – if the suggestion is that leaders are born rather then made, then many of the heartsickness identified above do not suit themselves to being easily changed or developed.

However, we cannot yet entirely dismiss trait theory. Lousier and Cache state that: " Trait theory is still being studied today as empirical research on leadership has come full circle, by re-visiting the original belief that traits play a role in predicting leadership qualities and identifying potential leaders (Lousier and Cache 2007: 32) Like the Trait approach, Behavioral or Style approaches can be characterized by a focus on the leader and solely on what he or she does.

The trait approach as been criticized for its reliance on what appear to be largely fixed personality based characteristics. However, a Behavioral approach aims to describe what leaders do rather than simply their individual personality characteristics. Although it is possible to identify many different types of behavior exhibited by leaders, various researchers have suggested that behaviors can be broadly categorized in to two types: task behaviors and relationship behaviors (Morehouse 2007, Research in Practice, 2003 Van Maurice 2001).

Task behaviors are concerned with the completion of goals, concrete objectives, surreal outputs, whereas relationship behaviors deal with how leaders and subordinates feel about themselves as individuals, with thoughts and feelings. Stodgily (1974) called these initiating structure behaviors (task)

and consideration behaviors (relationship). Similarly, researchers at the University of Michigan identified employee orientation (relationship) and production orientation (task) (Morehouse 2007).

Halting and Wilier (1957, cited in RIP 2003) also identified task and relationship behaviors as the two essentially discrete elements of the leadership role. Blake and Mouton (1985) developed a widely recognizes model for describing managerial behavior from this approach. Their leadership grid plots relationship behaviors (concern for people) against task behaviors (concern for results) to identify five different managerial styles. This tool is useful for identifying how leaders operate, and the style of leadership they adopt. Critically speaking, like Trait theory, Behavioral approaches fall down in that they are primarily descriptive.

Presenting an analysis of an individual's style and behavior does allow them to consider making certain changes, but does not revive a clear plan as to how change can be achieved. It has also been criticized for failing to make any links between leadership style and performance outcomes (Morehouse 2007). The current political climate means that the achievement of clearly identifiable performance targets is considered essential, particularly in the public sector. Where an approach to leadership does not enable any links to be made between leader performance and performance outcomes, then it is open to criticism at a very basic level.

Contingency theory, extolled by Fred Fiddler in the sass, attempts to match dervish styles to specific situations. (Van Maurice 2001 Fiddler, stated that the effectiveness of a leader depends on certain situational factors, namely;

(i) the extent to which work is defined and structured; (ii) the nature of the relationship between leader and followers, and (iii) the level of power the leader has within an organization (Fiddler, cited in Gill 2006). Fielder developed what he called the least preferred co-worker scale to identify the extent to which leaders are motivated on task behaviors or relationship behaviors.

This information can then be used to predict how effective leaders re in different situations defined by the variables list (i) to (iii) above. Contingency theory seems to be a step forward from Behavioral Style and Trait approaches in that it attempts to match the way leaders behave to certain factors within their workplace. It enables broad predictions to be made with regard to what is likely to be effective and it acknowledges that individuals may not lead successfully in all situations.

However, like the Trait and Style approaches, it tends to be primarily descriptive, and does not provide a framework by which leaders might alter their style to fit different circumstances. Indeed, Fiddler himself has suggested that it may be easier for an organization to change the leader than for a leader to attempt to change his style. The approach seems to suggest that leaders should be selected for particular situations, or that organizations can change the situations rather than the style of the leader. After all, in this framework, style is presented as fixed and based on the leader's psychological makeup (Gill 2006).

Lousier and Cache (2007) suggest that there are strong links between traits and behaviors, in that many leadership behaviors are based upon the traits

of the deader. They also suggest, however that behaviors are much easier to change than traits and as such behavioral theories offer more scope for change than trait theories. The situational approach to leadership is one of the most widely recognized. Its main proponents are Hershey and Blanchard, who have written extensively on the subject (Blanchard et al 2007).

The approach builds on Contingency theory to some extent – it suggests that leadership varies as situations change, so different situations require different forms and styles of leadership. However, it suggests hat leaders need to be more flexible in their approach to certain situations and that they are able to adapt their behavior dependent on what they are faced with. This may sound to the lay person almost self evident, but as previously described, other theoretical approaches to leadership had focused on the personality traits of the leader, and on fixed behavioral traits of leaders which were not adaptable to different situations.

The situational approach allows for the possibility that leaders can adapt their approach to different situations. It is to difficult to see why this has proved so popular with trainers, offering, as it does, a tool which can be used by leaders and offers them ways to change and manage different situations with different approaches. In a similar vein to the style and contingency approaches, situational management can be analyses in terms of the leader's use of two types of behaviors: directive behaviors (which can be likened to task related behaviors) and supportive behaviors (which correlate to relationship behaviors).

These leadership behaviors can change dependent on the level of development of the staff being led. For example, staff that are experienced and knowledgeable should require less directive management, whilst new or inexperienced staff will require a more directive level of leadership. Thus, the leaders style can vary according to the situation. Within this model, leaders can be judged as effective if they are able to adapt their style to meet the needs of their employees. Blanchard et al (2004) described this approach in their Situational Leadership II model (SLIP).

Diagram reproduced from Blanchard et al (2004) This model describes four different approaches to leadership (directing coaching, supporting delegating) which it prescribes as being useful for staff at different levels of development (or competence and commitment). Blanchard et al describe a process of moving from the bottom right of the diagram, to the bottom left, via the top centre. At all stages, mangers and leaders must assess where their staff are and adjust the amount of support and direction they are receiving accordingly.

In this diagram, the ultimate goal is an employee who requires little support and directive behavior, whilst demonstrating a high level of competence and commitment – i. E. The bottom left of the diagram. This would indicate an employee who is working efficiently and productively, with a minimum amount of managerial input. This tool appears intuitively to make sense. However, Morehouse (1997) criticizes situational leadership on the grounds that it is not backed by significant research evidence, and that some of the assumptions made, whilst appearing logical, are not backed by data.

He is also critical of the lack of explanation of how leaders would apply the model to a large, diverse team, and of the lack of account of individual's demographic differences and how they impact on the leader – member relationship. However, Van Maurice believes that Blanchard should be praised for his common sense approach, readability, and his ability to allow people to translate theory in to practice (Van Maurice 2001). Research in Practice (2003) similarly feel the model is robust, and points to its popularity as a tool for management training.

Transformational leadership is perhaps the most ' current' approach in terms of popularity and current interest. It stems from the work of James Macgregor Burns (Burns 1978). Burns wrote about two distinct elements of leadership transactional and transformational. The former focused on practical task centered exchanges between leaders and followers. The latter approach sees leaders engaging with others and using their charisma and motivational techniques to inspire followers to do better than they might theme's do alone.

The former approach is essentially managerial, exercised by those who hold power within an organization, whilst the latter features the exercise of an individual's personal vision and enthusiasm to inspire followers to achieve more than they might otherwise, and to believe that more is possible. Burns based elements of his work on Mascots hierarchy of needs (Gross 1987: 652). He suggested that Transformational leadership had as its aim the goal of self actualization, both for leaders and followers – that is, to become everything one is able to become (Transformationalleadership. Et 2007). A current example of a transformational leader would be US president, Barack

Obama. It would be difficult to point to any specific policy pledges which had propelled Obama to the Whitehorse, but what differentiated him from his opponents, and from previous presidential candidates, is perhaps his oratorical skill, his ability to create a vision of the future that is convincing to others, and which followers wanted to buy in to. Kananga (2001) also argues that Transformational (rather than Transactional) approaches are more likely to give a moral dimension to leadership.

Burns work was more recently built on by Bass (1985), who described a more systematic model of transformational leadership, placing it at one end of a continuum, with a laissez fairer' style at the other end, whilst transactional management fitted between these two extremes. Bass identified four components to Transformational leadership. Charisma (or Idealized influence) involves the leader acting as a role model, demonstrating values and appealing o followers at an emotional level. Inspirational motivation sees leaders articulating a clear vision with excellent communication skills.

Intellectual stimulation allows the leader to challenge assumptions, take risks and seek ideas from follower to improve an organization. Finally, Individualized consideration articulates how leaders attend to the needs of individual followers, enabling them to further their own growth and achievement. As the name suggest, Transformational leadership is focused round the process of change (Doyle and Smith 2009) and in times of constant change, its appeal is clear. As a public sector employee, any theory which assists me in dealing with the constant change which is part of my work must be considered.

There is a wealth of literature on the subject of leadership, and the above provides a very brief overview. In order to begin to apply any theoretical approach to my own leadership style, I felt it was essential to gain an objective understanding of how I am ' leading' and managing at the present time. Whilst might have clear ideas about how I think I am working, in terms of real objectivity, I believe I had to seek the views of those with whom I work to gain NY useful understanding of my current work practice. Essentially, I am seeking to analyses my own leadership with reference to leadership theory.

The starting point is therefore an objective viewpoint of my style, approach, positives, failings, in terms of how I mange and lead on a day to day basis. The choice of methodology in any research study is of central importance. In some respects, the choices available for this particular study were limited by the nature of the subjects, and the resources available to the researcher. In attempting to gain the views of those who have experience of my leadership Tyler, was limiting the study to those with whom I work on a day to day basis.

I chose to narrow the potential subjects down further, to those for whom I have line management responsibility. As such, the sample was a non-probability sample, in that it was not trying to represent a cross section of the population, but was focusing on a specific group. This type of selection has been described as purposive sampling (Denseness 1998), and is characterized by the hand picking of the sample, based on a previous knowledge of the research topic, and the relation of the selected sample to that knowledge. In this case, the subjects were and picked because of their

employment within teams led by me. Let there were both advantages and disadvantages to narrowing my choice of sample to this extent. In choosing to limit my subjects to those for whom I have line management responsibility, it could be said that I might limit the many possible views of my leadership style. How I lead is not an experience exclusive to those whom I line manage. It is something which colleagues on my own level will experience, as will my line manager, colleagues in other agencies with whom I have regular contact, and last but not least, those children and families hat I have contact with.

My current position means that I have relatively little direct contact with service users, and as such I do not feel their perception of me would add a great deal to this study. My peers and colleagues from other agencies would doubtless have some unique and highly apposite insights in to my leadership style, but I feel that the small scale nature of this study means that cannot meaningfully canvass all potentially useful views. Denseness (1998) highlights four main research methods – questionnaires, interviews, observations and documents.

Bullock (1989) adds a fifth option – administrated tests and measures. The nature of my study rules out the use of documents or observation. I was, by definition, seeking the views of others and as such needed to gather data which represented other people's views of my leadership. There are clear benefits and downfalls of the remaining three choices. Interviews can be seen to provide rich, vital information with greater depth (Hardball's and Holbrook 2004).

They can appear essentially simple to undertake – an assumption which is not always accurate. They require thought, planning, and a level of objectivity from the researcher which requires discipline and landing. In my case, they were an attractive option for several reasons; I have relatively easy access to the relevant subjects (in terms of both proximity and consent). They are also useful for acquiring ' subjective' date – i. E. That which is based on emotions, feelings, rather than objective facts.

In terms of this study, am actively seeking a subjective view. The main drawback with the use of interviews in this situation is that of confidentiality. I do not feel it would have been realistic to ask social workers and team leaders to honestly and openly respond to me personally about my leadership style. The intimate nature of an interview situation, and the judgments of my own performance that I would be seeking, would place subjects in a very difficult position and would be highly unlikely to reveal accurate and honest results.

This method would clearly raise issues around the power dynamic between leaders and followers, and potential for abuse within this relationship (Liaison 1998). I would certainly have felt uncomfortable with the implications of trying to elicit information in this manner. It might have been possible to use a third party to undertake interviews on an anonymous basis, but this was too resource intensive for a study of this size. Chose in the end to use a questionnaire to gather data.

One of the main advantages of using a questionnaire was the possibility for complete anonymity. Felt that anonymity was an essential requirement to

allow subjects to express themselves honestly with no fear of any consequences. Given the group I was attempting to target, I was able to avoid some of the potential challenges of using questionnaires as a data collection tool. I had easy access to the subject group and I did not need to seek any additional permissions given that I was the subject, and my project was already sanctioned by my employer).

The use of a questionnaire also allowed me to select a larger sample, and would provide standardized data. Each participant in the project would answer an identical set of questions, allowing for possible direct comparisons of responses, and also allowing for an element of quantitative analysis of the responses. There is much written about the pros and cons of both qualitative and quantitative data. Trochaic (2006) feels that there is not always a clear distinction between the two.