

Leadership and management related studies essay

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Autocratic, Democratic and Laissez-Faire Leadership A classic study that has generated much subsequent research on leadership style was conducted by Lippitt and White (1943). The researchers` trained confederates in three different leadership styles- autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire – before establishing them as the leader of after-school activity clubs for school boys. Unsurprisingly, Lippitt and White found that democratic leaders were the most popular with group members. Such leaders fostered a friendly, cooperative, task-oriented atmosphere that was associated with high group productivity, regardless of whether the group leader was present. Autocratic and Laissez-faire leaders were both less popular with group members, but for quite different reasons.

Autocratic leaders created an aggressive atmosphere which was only productive when the leader was present to guide activities. Laissez-faire leaders, on the other hand, created a more pleasant and cooperative group atmosphere but had low leadership productivity, although productivity increased if the leader was absent. Task versus Socio-Emotional Leadership According to Bales (1950) that there were two types of leadership: task-focused and socio-emotional. Task focused leaders are primarily concerned with achieving the aims and goals of the group, and ensure this happens by focusing on the task needed to reach those goals. They are knowledgeable, directive, and efficient, but tend to distance themselves from other of the group.

An example of an individual with this type of leadership style is entrepreneur Sir Alan Sugar. Bales argued that people could be either a task-focused leader or a socio-emotional leader but could not be both simultaneously.

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Thus, a group would ideally need two leaders: one task-focused to ensure that the group has direction and is productive, and one socio-emotional to ensure that the group is friendly and cohesive. It is easy to see how these two leadership style apply to the earlier research conducted by Lippitt and White (1943). Autocratic leaders are high in task-focus but low in socio-emotional dimension, whereas Laissez-faire leaders are low in task-focus but high in socio-emotional focus. Although Bales argued that people cannot have both styles, Lippitt and White have argued that democratic leaders can be defined in precisely this way, being both task-focus and socio-emotional.

Subsequent research has echoed the idea that task-focused and socio-emotional leadership styles cannot be rigidly separated from one another. Sorrentino and Field (1986) had groups of four members take part in a series of problem solving tasks. They found that group members who were success-oriented (focused on achieving the goals of the group) and affiliation oriented (focused on gaining approval and establishing friendly relations with group members) were rated by others as being the most competent, confident, influential and motivated group members, making the biggest contribution to the group. Moreover, these individuals were nominated to be leader by 94 percent of the group members. In sum, it appears that most effective leaders are those who can combine the best of both words – an ability to focus on the task at hand to achieve the goals of the group, but also a friendly, interactive style that generates a positive group atmosphere and pleasant leader-follower relations.