

Sir alex ferguson
leadership principles
of management
management essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sir Alex Ferguson is a Scottish football manager, born on December 31st, 1941 in Glasgow. He is considered by many as the best manager in modern football. But before becoming the famous and well-known manager of Manchester United, he went through several stages. Alex Ferguson started as an amateur playing for Queen's Park, while working in a shipyard as an apprentice and a Trade Union representative (Alex). Then, in 1964 he turned professional when he joined Duffield and afterward Rangers FC where he was successful. His professional career was marked by a low point when he left Rangers FC, later he joined two teams but he was not as successful. In 1974 he started his managing career with East Stirlingshire at the early age of 32 as a part-time job, but quickly changed team for a full time position by signing with St Mirren. While managing them he was able to lead them to the First League in only three years. But his contract was cancelled due to several violations. He then moved to Aberdeen where he had a difficult beginning, especially with some of his player, who did not respect him because he was not much older than them. His first year was of acceptable performance he finished fourth of the league. But later he was able to lead them to success by winning the League and the European Cup Winners' Cup. At this point Ferguson won the respect of his player and built solid reputation in the field. After four successful seasons with Aberdeen he joined Manchester United in 1986.

When Alex Ferguson joined Manchester United, it was going through tough times. Many players were not in a good physical condition and some of them were heavy drinker. Although, he was able to put them back in shape, he did not succeed to win any tittle for more than 6 seasons. The fans were

disappointed by his results but the top managers decided to keep him. This decision paid when he led the team to the premier league title, and it was the start for its legend as a manager of Manchester United. From this point and so on Alex Ferguson always led them to win titles, and he became the legend he is now.

Alex Ferguson leadership style is said to be tough, aggressive and loyal with high ethical standards and commitment toward and from the players. Many of his players highly regarded him and considered him as a disciplinarian with a hard character and a stubborn man. But Alex Ferguson proved that his leadership style is working and producing great results. It is demonstrated by the fact that he was able to lead each team he managed to great results through his 38 years managing career, even if the team is in the worst positions, before he started managing it.

This case study will look at the leadership style of Sir Alex Ferguson and analyze it. First, it will start by looking at different management style and see the ones that are close to the one of Alex Ferguson. Then using these leadership styles it will explore how they can be used to improve Alex Ferguson style. The case study will also try to explain the reasons of Alex Ferguson management style. Finally, it will try to see if Alex did things differently would it make him as successful as he is now. But first the case study will define the scope of leadership it will be working with.

1-Leadership:

Leadership is the ability to unite and mobilize the energies around a one

action. It is generally the result of a formal or informal election, explicit or <https://assignbuster.com/sir-alex-ferguson-leadership-principles-of-management-management-essay/>

implicit in which the majority of the group's members recognizes one of them as the legitimate leader and delegate its decision-making power (Definition Leadership). However, leadership has various meanings for people and mainly among leaders. Each leader/authority emphasizes on different aspects of leadership that he believes are the most important. Three Authorities were chosen to serve in defining and narrowing the scope of leadership for the case study; each one has its own approach that is described below.

Peter Drucker (1909-2005), a famous American theorist of management affirms that a leader must always think through the organization's missions, goals and define them. He also believes that no one can be a leader without trusting his team or having the responsibility to encourage the team to be stronger. (Definition Leadership - for the 21st Century.)

John Adair (1934-), a British academic and theorist of leadership believe that all leadership skills are related to the triumvirate (Task, Team, Individual) and the connection between those three. Moreover he consider that there's no single style of leadership, that all potential leaders will have to cope with different situations continuously and that making strategies is a priceless added value. He also contrasts between leadership and management. (Definition Leadership - for the 21st Century.)

Rudolph Gulliani (1944-), an American lawyer and politician, former Mayor of New York (U. S. A) believes that all leaders must be always prepared and aware of its surrounding environment. For him representing people is a big responsibility and the leader must never harm the image of his people, by

paying attention to every single detail of his words and actions. According to him, a true leader should always impose his values, principles and beliefs so he won't seem weak and be discarded by people. Being loyal to your follower's is also an essential trait of leadership because it keeps them stimulated and motivated. (Definition Leadership – for the 21st Century.)”

2-Leadership Theories:

In the light of these definitions of leadership from different authorities and an investigation of leadership theories, several of them seem to be candidate to match Alex Ferguson leadership style. These theories are: Great Man, Trait theory, Contingency and Situation theory, Path Goal, Behavior. Below is a concise description of each one of them which gives the necessary information needed to compare them to Alex Ferguson leadership style.

Great Man:

It was developed by Thomas Carlyle in the mid-19th century. This theory states that leadership skills are innate, not acquired or developed and that people are born natural leader. Hence there is an inheritance character. The theory also emphasize on the fact that leaders arise to lead others when they are needed. (Leadership Styles)

Trait Theory:

Traits theory built up on the Great Man theory. It took successful and less successful leader through history and defined traits that are common between them. The results were classified to the following categories “ Drive,

desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, job-relevant knowledge, and extraversion” (Sidanim, Jamali, Robbins & Coulter).

Contingency and Situation theory:

This theory relies on the fact that leadership style depends on variables and erratic conditions, and that we could choose the one that fits the best our situation. This implies that we can use a leadership style or just a part of it and that no theory is better than the other. (Boyd)

Path Goal:

This theory emphasizes on the idea that a leader’s duty is to assist his employee to achieve their goals and to make sure that their goals align with the company’s ones. (Boyd)

Behavioral Theory:

The Behavioral theory assumes on the contrary of the Great Man theory that leaders are made rather than born. The central idea of the theory is that the leadership style is about what the leader does and not about its traits (Leadership Style). The behavioral theory defines three leadership styles: Democratic style, Autocratic style and Laissez-fair style. Democratic is about involving employees and other staff in decision making and taking their opinion into account. Autocratic is a one man rule. The leader gives instructions, dispatch tasks and dictates rules, the participation of other members is minimal if not absent. The laissez-fair style offers freedom to employees in decision making and let them accomplish their tasks the manner they want.

<https://assignbuster.com/sir-alex-ferguson-leadership-principles-of-management-management-essay/>

3-Ferguson Leadership Style:

From the theories cited above we can discard three that does not match Alex Ferguson style. These theories are Great Man theory, Contingency and Situation theory and Path Goal theory. Below are the reasons for each one of them about why they do not match Alex Ferguson style.

The Great Man theory does not apply to Alex Ferguson, simply because in each team he did not meet success until he spend few years to fine tune his strategies. If he was a born leader he would have met success in his first or second year at most. A Great Man would be José Mourinho. Although he was a translator and had no experience in managing teams, he was able to make a breakthrough in the football world. He met success in his early career by winning the Champions League with a midlevel team, which was FC Porto, and in a time span of 8 years he was able to win 20 titles. He was also able to win a major title with each team he managed.

The Contingency and Situational theory does not match Alex Ferguson style for the simple reason that Ferguson Kept the same management style in each team he managed. It can be demonstrated by his quote “ My way or the Highway”.

Path Goal does not fit Alex Ferguson style because he has an autocratic leadership style; he is the one who decide the goals for the team, hence he does not care for the goals of other players and staff.

Discarding the theories cited above we are left only with two theories that match completely or partially Alex Ferguson leadership style. These theories are Behavioral and Trait.

The Traits theory partial fits Alex Ferguson leadership style, even though it relies on the Great Man theory because of three reasons. First, Alex Ferguson is self-confident, he always believed in his leadership style, by applying it in every team he managed. Also he asked the payers to believe in him even though they were not doing well at the beginning. The best example for that is his wining of the league cup after a disastrous previous season while Manchester United was risking a fall to the second division. Second, he has an achievement drive trait, Alex Ferguson invest a lot of energy in everything he does, by attending every training session and getting involved in anything that might be in the interest of the team. He is always first in the practice session, the last one that leaves and he wants to convey this behavior to all the players. One example is Ryan Giggs a Manchester United player since 1993.

“ We might have got home from a European away game at four in the morning, yet you can pretty much guarantee he’ll be first in at Carrington at 8am the next day – and will be last to leave. You’ll then stick the TV on later that night and see him at a function in London. It’s unbelievable.” (Giggs)

Third, Alex Ferguson has also the “ Honesty and integrity” trait, he has always being frank with his player and staff, he applied the rules he wants his players to observe on himself. He also got the FIFA Presidential Award in 2011, for his exemplary attitude.

The Behavioral was kept due to Alex Ferguson autocratic leadership. He has an autocratic leadership first because he needs to control everything inside the club. He controls the transfers, the practice session, the hiring of staff. The second reason is because he is a disciplinarian and a feared coach. One example of his disciplinarian aspect is his fining of Beckham and suspending him for an important game, because he was taking care of his son while his wife was in a fashion week. This disciplinarian attitude with all players includes the highly paid players was most of the time attribute to his success. Another aspect of his autocratic style is mixing players around to have a better mechanics inside the team, without anyone complaining about it. The final aspect of the autocratic style is his mind game with other managers; he tries to intimidate them by making deprecating comments.

4-Way of Improving the Leadership Style:

Now that Ferguson's leadership style is encapsulated by two theories, it is safer to look for ways that can improve Ferguson's leadership style. It is very difficult to do so, because trying to find flaws in a method that has been working for 38 years is hard. However, during the analysis it was noticed that some of the players lacked motivation or it faded with time. That's why using the democratic style from the behavioral theory would keep the players motivated and the manager will get some feedback on what he is doing and can resolve ongoing problems inside the team. He will also give details about his decision which will help some player get out of the fog and understand better what he is doing, especially when there is a Sword of Damocles on a player and his situation is unclear. The second theory that would help

keeping the player motivated is the path goal one. It will be helpful to use it <https://assignbuster.com/sir-alex-ferguson-leadership-principles-of-management-management-essay/>

because it cares more about the player and work with him to achieve his own goal. Hence, he will be always motivated to work harder.

5-Reasons behind the Leadership Style:

Covering the type of Alex Ferguson leadership style and how he can improve it lead to try to find the reasons he choose to be this kind of leader. One reasons for developing an authoritative style is because he started young, and he had some respect issues from some player because he was not much older than them or sometime younger than them. A second reason would be his position as a Trade Union representative in his early twenties, made him lead all the workers and defend them in front of the managers of the shipyard. This experience helped him a lot in a shaping a tough and self-confident personality. It also allowed him to understand the sense of a culture and how much it is important to have one inside a group of people. Another point due to his membership to the union is developing a sense of unity; thus his saying no one is above the team. Being in an environment composed only by male imposed some kind of strict rules that would keep the player respecting the team.

6-Another way of Leadership?

Understanding why Alex Ferguson developed his leadership the way described above rises a question, could he has done better by choosing another strategy? This question is hard to answer because at any point through his career its method did not fail him, but always proved him right.

However, an attempt to answer this question would not harm. To do so,

there is only one case where we can compare him to another manager. This <https://assignbuster.com/sir-alex-ferguson-leadership-principles-of-management-management-essay/>

manager would be Arsene Wenger, he is the only one who spent a considerable amount of time with a team as a manager and is still managing it. Doing a quick comparison over 2000-2010, we notice that Ferguson won more title than Wenger. One would object that they do not have the same resources. It is not true Arsenal and Manchester United are both major clubs of the Premier League. Now, performing a quick comparison in their leadership style we find out the Wenger lacks some traits that Ferguson has, and also that he follow the democratic style whereas Ferguson follow the autocratic. One major difference is Wenger follow also the path goal theory. From these points we can deduce that Ferguson could not have done better if he chooses a different method. However, the reader should keep in mind that this is just a quick comparison and might be misleading since it interpolates from basic data and does not go thoroughly through all the points mentioned in the case study.

Conclusion:

Through the analysis of Alex Ferguson leadership style in this case study, there is no doubt of the greatness of the man. He was able to impose his way of doing things everywhere he went. Alex Ferguson was able to partially merge two leadership theories that are not compatible into a single one and comes up with his own management style. His life experience played a major role in developing his leadership style. In fact, being part of the Trade union and starting as a young manager were decisive in building up his leadership style. Finally, doing thing differently would not have changed great thing in his career as demonstrated by case study.