Successful Leadership Styles
One style does not fit all

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Executive Summary

In business, there appear to be as many ways to lead organizations as there are leaders. The most successful leaders have integrity, they inspire people with a shared vision of the future, they set clear goals and motivate people towards them, they manage delivery, and they communicate well with their teams. However, leadership is not "one size fits all" thing, and styles vary significantly among the successful leaders.

Why are some leaders successful, while others fail? The truth is that there is no magic combination of characteristics that makes a leader successful, and different characteristics matter in different circumstances. Psychologists and behaviorists have developed a number of theories from a variety of perspectives:

1. What type of person makes a good leader? Trait theories argue that effective leaders share a number of common personality characteristics or traits. These include being independent, adaptive or contemplative.

2. What does a good leader do? Behavioral theories focus on how leaders behave. For instance, do leaders dictate what needs to be done and expect cooperation? Are they democratic, autocratic, strategic or laissez-faire?

3. How does the situation influence good leadership? The realization that there is no one correct type of leader led to theories that the best leadership style depends on the business situation and requirements of flexibility and adaptability.

4. What is the source of the leader's power? Power and influence theories of leadership take an entirely different approach – these are based on the different ways that leaders use power and influence to get things done, such as collaboration, engagement or structure.

DHR International and the LSI

At DHR International, we have recruited thousands of senior executives and we understand the need for making objective, fine discriminations among high functioning professionals, managers and executives within same career fields (CEOs, CFOs, marketing, sales, etc.). Working with Somerville Partners, we have developed a comprehensive approach to understanding leadership styles. The Leadership Style Indicator (LSI) measures 46 attributes important to understanding work and leadership behaviors within a business environment. The data was normed on more than 15,000 executives and professionals across broad range of companies in diverse industries, utilities and government.
While there are a large number of leadership styles, we believe that a few styles are more successful in large complex organizations. Typically a “strategic” orientation with a “collaborative” or “organized” style is proven to be successful. But other styles that are “autonomous”, “driven” or “flexible” may be relevant in different organizations.

1. An executive of a private equity backed company lead a US based manufacturing company for more than 20 years to be one of the world’s most profitable and efficient heavy industry production operations, with enviable environmental record and position in community relations. His leadership style from the LSI was found to be Organized Collaborator.

- Organized Collaborators organize and structure what needs to be done and get an early start on things even without deadlines; they use methodical and systematic approaches to tasks while actively involving all those having a role; they give others opportunities to shine and create stable, predictable environments where balance between work and personal lives can be achieved; they infuse work with playfulness; they minimize risk -- carefully examining all the possibilities before moving ahead.

- Organized Collaborators thrive in work environments characterized by clarity around roles and responsibilities; where methodical and systematic approaches to achieving objectives are rewarded and where high levels of collaboration with others involved in projects is needed for success; where opportunities to insert pleasure into work life as well as encouragement for maintaining a balance between work and personal lives is valued over achieving success at all costs.

- Organized Collaborators find lack of stability and disorganization difficult to tolerate for long; they become fatigued when opportunities for R&R are blocked or where everything is taken very seriously; they find it uncomfortable to take risks when time to evaluate possible consequences is restricted; they are frustrated by having outside forces delay getting early starts on important tasks

2. This executive running a major business unit in an IT services company was focused on innovative solutions that led to the rapid growth of his business in a very competitive environment. His leadership style from the LSI was found to be Autonomous Driver.

- Autonomous Drivers seek center stage and strive to get things moving in directions that promise to bring success; they are stimulated by worthy competition, challenging objectives and significant obstacles; they persuasively convince others to join in and push people to do their best; they have little patience with those requiring lots of support or encouragement -- preferring, instead, those as driven to succeed as they are; they keep their emotions in check and logically and rationally think through decisions based on what the data and analysis tell them.
- Autonomous Drivers thrive in environments characterized by high levels of competitiveness; where premiums are placed on those with high levels of competency; where logic and reason hold more value than consideration of people’s feelings and comfort; where basking in the spotlight is uniformly valued and sought out by those with ambition for higher impact; where there are clear winners and losers in most endeavors.

- Autonomous Drivers find environments challenging that are characterized by egalitarian teamwork; where the good of the group takes precedence over individual needs; where supporting the efforts of others is valued over individual achievement; where emotions flow freely and decisions place a premium on consideration for the sensitivities of all participants.

3. This top executive in a global 500 company having P/L responsibility for Europe and Central Asia was rated by the senior team as an exceptional leader. He was consistently delivering superior profits when compared to his contemporaries. His LSI leadership style was found to be that of the **Strategic Collaborator**.

- Strategic Collaborators develop conceptual frameworks for action based on understanding of the needs of people; they lay out the information in ways that allow people to come to their own conclusions; they establish balance between work and personal lives; they orchestrate action from behind the scenes, giving others their time in the spotlight; they involve people viewpoints in key decisions and avoid becoming too focused on single objectives.

- Strategic Collaborators thrive in environments characterized by focus on meeting the needs of all those involved; where developing guiding frameworks within actions can be taken; where many people are giving opportunities to demonstrate their skills; and where people are encouraged to have lives with many interests involving lots of different people.

- Strategic Collaborators are challenged by environments characterized by careful attention to detail, where individual effort is more important than collaboration; where the expectation to devote all one's energy to a single objective exists; where doing what makes sense or what logically needs to be done takes precedence over the needs of the many.

4. This COO oversaw the building of a healthcare network of centers across the U.S. from one center to more than 25 achieving this rapid growth while, at the same time, reaching the company’s first positive cash flow and then EBITDA positive well ahead of projections resulting in an acquisition. Her leadership style from the LSI was found to be that of an **Involved Strategizer**.
- Involved Strategizers passionately commit to causes where articulating the best course is critical and where interdependency among members of the team is necessary for success. Involved Strategizers paint compelling pictures of where they want everyone to go while attending to the individual needs of teammates and protecting the best interests of the group.

- They involve everyone and incorporate the best ideas people bring into the strategy being executed; they encourage perseverance until success is achieved. Involved Strategizers thrive in environments where collaboration and close team work is required for success, where imagination and creativity can be applied to the task at hand, and where members of the team look out for one another.

- Involved Strategizers are challenged when faced with requirements to carefully attend to many details, analyze numeric information or swiftly address performance issues among members of their teams. They may struggle with environments requiring them to keep a cool head when faced with frustration and challenge.

It is clear that one size does not fit all situations and leaders use different paths to success. Our LSI tool that matches an executive leadership style with what is required in the organization is more than 25 times more accurate than Interviews used alone. This tool helps companies understand work and leadership patterns with a work environment. It also reduces the problems in the placement of key people.
Established in 1989, DHR International is one of the largest retained executive search firms in the world, with more than fifty offices worldwide. We conduct search assignments at the Board Director, C-level, and functional Vice President levels. Our consultants are experienced professionals who are retained by Fortune 1000 as well as prominent venture firms and early-stage companies.