

The Integrated Leadership Model and Measure — bringing order into chaos?

Leadership is a topic which is high on the agenda for most organisations. It is difficult to pick up a respectable magazine or journal and not find in it some reference.

The one thing we are not short of is leadership models and advice. There is a huge choice available and more emerge almost weekly. There is a degree of faddism in this area. Once popular models fade, to be quickly replaced by others. The question of whether or not they work better is rarely addressed. In practice there is little integration or comparison. It is, therefore, rarely possible to say if one model is better than another.

The critical question is “are any of these models better than others — or just newer?” All the models have appeal and most seem to contribute something to our understanding of leadership. This is particularly true of behavioural models. But there is very little solid objective evidence to support one particular picture of leadership style and behaviour.

There is good reason for this. If leadership style and behaviour is, to a large extent, situational then it is extremely difficult to measure its effectiveness. But how situational is it really? Is it situational according to a set of factors that are fairly constant or is it affected, as some suggest, by the way society and commerce is changing in response to economic and cultural pressures?

Another related issue is that many of the models appear to overlap or look at the same aspect of leadership from a different perspective. The connection between models is rarely made explicit and the rich source of information provided by a comprehensive overview of the complex relationships is rarely mined.

Small wonder then that Augier and Teece were able to say in 2005 “as a scientific concept, leadership is a mess”. In that same year, provoked by a discussion with the Institute of Leadership and Management searching for a leadership measure, a major study was launched to examine these issues.

The Study

The study was carried out by AQR Ltd under the supervision of Dr Peter Clough, Head of Psychology at Hull University.

A literature review identified the main leadership models from around the world and grouped them according to their intellectual provenance. This analysis embraced academic and major commercial models. It was interesting to note that there appears to be very little exchange of ideas between academia and the hands-on practitioner.

The first step was to analyse these models by stripping them down to their bare components. The analysis showed that all the models examined had their roots in six common themes. Every model could be traced back to one or more of these six scales.

The next step was to design a 125-item questionnaire which could be used to test this analysis. Around 50 organisations, almost 1600 people in leadership roles (from all levels) completed the questionnaire providing reliable information about age, gender, culture, performance, etc. Organisations were equally divided between the public and private sectors and there were slightly more male responses than female responses.

The results were extremely interesting.

Leadership style

The six specific scales stood up psychometrically — reliability scores were good to high (0.66 to 0.80). The scales appear to reflect aspects of leadership style. *(See diagram below).*

Specific Scales – reflecting Style/Orientation		
Task	↔	People
Flexible	↔	Dogmatic
De-Centralised	↔	Centralised
Reward	↔	Punishment
The Means	↔	The End
Structured	↔	Organic

Analysis showed that there is no particular combination of style which correlated uniquely with high performance across the whole sample. The indication is that leadership style is situational. Different profiles might work better in different situations.

Analysis does show that it is now possible to reliably assess key aspects of an individual's adopted leadership style through a self-report questionnaire (now published as ILM72).

It also worked at the organisational level. The specific scale framework was useful as a map for defining key aspects of the organisations culture. Analysis of the pattern of responses for specific organisations was also effective in explaining organisational performance and behaviour.

Examining each scale in more detail:

Task v Person

This reflects and measures the extent to which the individual is orientated towards meeting the needs of the task or is concerned with the needs of individuals. A central theme in most models, this reflects how a leader believes people are motivated to perform more effectively. At one extreme the leader believes that success breeds success and that people will work more enthusiastically for a successful organisation. At the other extreme, the leader believes that one must focus on the individuals' needs in order to motivate them to greater performance. A balanced leader deploys both approaches as appropriate.

Flexible v Dogmatic

Someone at the dogmatic end of the scale has a strong belief that "he or she knows how things should be done around here".

At the other end of the scale, a flexible style is one where the individual is open to ideas and suggestions, understanding that he or she does not have a monopoly on ideas.

De-Centralised v Centralised

Someone who adopts a centralised style is someone who prefers that everything goes through him or her. He or she may have a strong need to control or may have a less mature group to work with and there is need for strong guidance. Someone with a de-centralised style is happy to delegate to others and to work through others. The ethos is one of empowerment.

Reward v Punishment

High reward indicates that the leader is prepared to reward and recognise acceptable and high performance. This can be tangible benefit or it could be “warm strokes”. Focus on punishment suggests that the prevailing style is to accept good or high performance as the norm (“that’s what I pay the person for already”) and to find it acceptable in some way to punish a shortcoming in performance.

The Means v The End

A leader whose style is focused on the end is someone for whom the result matters more than anything. Everything can be sacrificed for that goal. This does not necessarily mean that he or she is immoral or amoral — simply very focused.

Someone who is focused on the means is someone who is concerned about how the goal is achieved and who will adopt standards and values to ensure that it is done properly. He or she will also take into account the implications of what he or she does — and will typically tend to be concerned about environment and capability in people and process.

Structured v Organic

The organic style is one where leadership seems to come naturally in some way. They learn about leadership in a casual manner by observing others’ behaviours and selecting what they feel works. The structured style is one where leadership is learned more formally. It is drawn from education, models or training — the leader following detailed plans and processes to achieve things through others. The clear implication here is that leadership is learned one way or the other.

If one examines most popular leadership models they will have their roots in one or more of these six specific scales which appear to define leadership style.

Defining Leadership — Its Importance And How It Differs From Management

Literally thousands of definitions exist. There is actually a degree of consensus about what leadership is. Most definitions focus on two themes. Leadership is about **performance** (particularly improving performance) and about achieving this through **followers**.

There is an obvious value in looking at leadership in this way. First, this macro view focuses on what is important about leadership and helps to keep thinking about leadership in perspective. Most models and definitions tend to drill down to a micro view (for good reason — this is where the “how to” question can best be answered). But, as is often the case when you examine something in detail, you can lose the bigger picture. Second, it helps us to understand what is unique about leadership and how it differs from most people’s view of

management. What is becoming apparent is that leadership is important and more and more organisations are beginning to understand its value in developing the business. As Linda Holbeche notes “one key theme ... is that managers are being encouraged to act as leaders...”

Managerial activity is usually about being provided with a set of resources (including people), organising and directing those resources such that an acceptable level of performance is achieved. The level of engagement with employees can be highly structured and formal.

Leadership is very much about engaging employees in such a way that it produces discretionary effort which translates into better and improving organisational performance — exceeding expectations.

Finally, an interesting take on this is that one can see that an organisation can appoint a person to be a manager and inform a number of employees that they now report to him or her. Given a reasonable level of organisation and structure, employees will understand this, accept the manager and will follow his or her instructions.

The question is “Can an organisation appoint a leader?” Who decides who is a leader and who is not? It is likely to be the follower who decides that he or she will follow someone’s lead. The organisation cannot normally require that an employee produces a special effort. So the business of engaging with the follower is a core activity for someone who aspires to be a leader.

Leadership — Core Requirements — The Global Factors

Once the data analysis to confirm the specific scales had been completed, a further analysis revealed that there were three overarching (second order) relationships emerging from the study. The analysis shows that the six specific scales are subsumed under three global scales. Moreover, the reliability scores for each factor was significant (ranging from 0.80 to 0.90).

Examining item content for each factor showed that the global factors were fairly accurately described as:

Determination to Deliver

The extent to which there is a single-minded determination to achieve — both in the short and long term. Leaders who scored highly appear to see delivering what is promised as an over-riding requirement which leads to success and the feeling of success.

These highly-focused people can bruise (or make uncomfortable) people who get in the way or do not respond quickly enough.

This is not personal — it is to do with the attainment of the task and not with a particular view about people.

They will often demonstrate:

- commitment to deliver and a belief in their own ability to do this
- an awareness of how far you can push people to hit the target
- an interest in efficiency and effectiveness
- a concern with the long term as well as the short term — likely to have a vision.

Individual Cohesion — Engaging Individuals

The extent to which there is focus on enhancing the capability, confidence and commitment of individuals to enable them to contribute to the organisation and to fulfil themselves. The emphasis here is on ensuring that people have the skills, knowledge and behaviours to carry out their roles in the organisation and on providing the environment to enable staff to fulfil their potential.

Attending to the organisation's needs in terms of employee development will normally be more of a priority than attending to the individuals' needs — although an effective leader will be aware of both.

Skills and knowledge gaps can threaten achieving the task ... these leaders seek to ensure that everyone is motivated to succeed. They appear to be strongly associated with:

- concern with capability of employees
- a belief that a contented and satisfied employee is likely to be a productive employee
- formation of meaningful relationships
- being emotionally intelligent but not being driven by it — they are aware of the significance of feeling but may be logical and calculating about dealing with that.

Focus On Team Working — Engaging The Organisation

The extent to which there is focus on and attention given to harnessing all the potential in an organisation so that problem solving and decision-making can occur more efficiently and more effectively.

The emphasis here is on enabling groups of people to gather their knowledge, experience and skills and apply these to managing the day-to-day operation within the organisation. A further objective here is to enable ideas and creativity from the whole organisation to be expressed.

There is a firm understanding of the value of team working in a business and good awareness of how it can be developed.

Typically they:

- believe there is value in sharing ideas and getting others points of view
- maximise the use of the skills and capabilities within the workforce
- avoid feeling that they are the centre of everything. They understand that this is not being soft — nor is it concern for feelings. You do not have to like each other, but you do have to work together.

These resonate strongly with the view that leadership is about performance and about engaging with others to deliver that performance.

This also resonates strongly with an overview of many popular and effective models — particularly the action-centred leadership model developed by Professor John Adair almost 50 years ago! There are subtle differences.

The three global factors emerge as reasonably independent factors. Moreover, one of the factors, determination to deliver, emerges as more significant than the other two. There is also some indication that these factors are related to leadership effectiveness. This has implications. First, effective leadership appears always to need focus on performance. It may

even be possible for leaders to demonstrate this kind of commitment to create some level of followership. Although doing only this may only be effective in the short term.

Engaging with individuals or with teams/organisation may enable more effective leadership. Doing both may enable highly effective leadership.

Measuring Leadership Style

An important and valuable by-product of the work carried out has led to the development of a 72-item self-report normative questionnaire (ILM72) which can measure individuals (and organisations) in terms of the six specific scales (style) and the three global scales.

Conclusion

The objective was not to identify a new leadership model. It was primarily focused on tidying up what we already know and creating an accessible coherent picture for those involved in leadership development. Developing leadership skills in UK organisations is critical for our economic development. What we see is that leadership itself has not changed as a concept. It was, and still is, about improving performance and engaging with people in one way or another to do this.

Similarly, leadership style is capable of being defined in a way that can also be assessed (and it too has probably remained constant over many years).

The challenge for HR and for senior executives is to grasp more effectively what is leadership and what it can do for the organisation. Then to assess where they are and to introduce interventions that develop leadership style and behaviour in a predictable way.

The last 30 years have seen a plethora of attractive leadership models and programmes. Most work. They will work better if the users have a better understanding of their context and they can measure what they are trying to develop.

Points to Ponder

- How effective is your organisation at measuring and developing leadership?
- Is there a common understanding at all levels of what leadership means?
- What are the factors affecting your organisation and what does this mean for a preferred leadership style and behaviour.?
- How can this be developed?