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## *Dimensions of Leader Behavior* ✓

**The more effective leader balances his behavior between  
initiating action and demonstrating consideration**

CLARENCE J. CUNNINGHAM

*A number of methods for examining leadership and leader behavior have been devised. Most of these methods have been tested in a variety of circumstances but have not been applied to the professional Extension worker. However, leader behavior of county Extension agents has been studied as it relates to the concepts of initiating structure and consideration. These concepts and the result of their application are summarized in this article.*

WE ALL have our own ideas about leaders—our own concepts of leader behavior or “leadership” as we may choose to call it. In addition to our own involvement in professional roles of leadership, we frequently talk about leaders, work with leaders, and try to train young people to be good leaders. But of what are leaders made?

In the fields of sociology, social psychology, and education many research findings have been published on this subject. The experiences of professional workers, as well as research in the field of leader behavior, have provided us with several basic concepts which can help as we pursue our professional responsibilities. These concepts can be especially valuable in selecting and training lay leaders.

Before looking specifically at the leader behavior concepts, it may be well to point out that the term “leader behavior” (rather than leadership) is used deliberately. Halpin<sup>1</sup> says that the term leadership implies inherent characteristics of behavior which transfer equally well to a variety of situations. Those who support this definition of leadership also support the idea that we cannot train

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew W. Halpin, *The Leadership Behavior of School Superintendents* (Columbus, Ohio: College of Education, The Ohio State University, 1956), p. 11.

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leaders for a task—all we have to do is identify those magic inherent characteristics of a leader. The term *leader behavior* permits us to make no presuppositions about the leader or the situation. Leader behavior is that which can actually be observed.

The most common description of leader behavior is in terms of the democratic/autocratic/laissez-faire approach. These views of leader behavior, although widely discussed, have faults which limit their usefulness. These terms tend to carry connotations which are distinctly good or bad in our society. This limits the acceptance of useful ideas contained in each. In pointing out the limited use made of the democratic/autocratic concepts in research in the public schools, Charters says that “. . . perhaps we can expect no more from concepts as value-laden as ‘autocratic’ and ‘democratic’ administration. After all, research on central components of an ideological system is not likely to be impartial.”<sup>2</sup>

#### LEADER BEHAVIOR CONCEPTS

Description of leader behavior in the context of *initiating structure* and *consideration* appears to be most useful to Extension workers.

Initiating structure refers to the leader's behavior in endeavoring to establish well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and methods of procedure. Consideration refers to behavior indicative of friendship, mutual trust, respect, and warmth in the relationship between the leader and members of his staff.<sup>3</sup>

*Initiating structure* refers to “getting the job done.” *Consideration* reflects concern for individuals in a group and their feelings. The individual who exhibits behavior highly oriented toward initiating structure is one who sees or recognizes the job to be done and moves to accomplish it. This individual is task-oriented. He strives to fulfill the purposes of the organization, often at the expense of others concerned. Initiating structure reflects behavior which:

1. Emphasizes the quality of work.
2. Clarifies everyone's responsibilities.
3. Is continually planning to get everything done.
4. Offers new approaches to problems.
5. Is first in getting things started.
6. Encourages the meeting of deadlines.

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Charters, Jr., “The Social Background of Teaching,” *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, N. L. Gage (ed.) (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1963), p. 781.

<sup>3</sup> Halpin, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

The individual, exhibiting behavior highly oriented to consideration, tries to maintain close understanding between members of a group. This person is *more* concerned with group cohesiveness than with accomplishing specific purposes. Consideration is reflected by a person when he:

1. Finds time to listen to others.
2. Does little things to make it pleasant to work with him.
3. Shows interest in others as persons.
4. Compliments others for their work.
5. Has an open ear.
6. Has others share in making decisions.

The terms initiating structure and consideration grew out of research dealing with the observation, description, and measurement of leaders. Researchers described the behavior of a leader much as the social-psychologist uses "group achievement" and "group maintenance." Group achievement is most clearly indicated by the extent to which the group accomplishes its tasks. Group maintenance measures such factors as (1) the extent to which a group remains intact and maintains cooperation among its members and (2) the morale of the group. The parallel between these concepts has been pointed out:<sup>4</sup> group maintenance and consideration refer essentially to the same leader behavior concepts; so do group achievement and initiating structure.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Leader Behavior Desired*

Which type of leader behavior is the more productive? It has been found among aircraft commanders,<sup>6</sup> school executives,<sup>7</sup> and county Extension agents,<sup>8</sup> that individuals who rate high in both

<sup>4</sup> Charters, *op. cit.*, p. 785.

<sup>5</sup> Another theoretical concept of leader behavior, developed in the field of education, essentially points out these same generalized leader behavior dimensions—initiating structure and consideration. This theoretical concept of leader behavior has been described in terms of nomothetic, idiographic, and transactional dimensions. See Egon G. Guba and Charles E. Bidwell, *Administrative Relationships: Studies in Educational Administration* (Chicago: The Midwest Administration Center, 1957), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew W. Halpin, "The Leader Behavior and Effectiveness of Aircraft Commanders," *Leader Behavior: Its Description and Measurement*, Ralph M. Stogdill and Alvin E. Coons (eds.), Bureau of Business Research: Leadership Series No. 88 (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1957), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> John Giesy, *The Leadership Behavior of School Superintendents*, report of a clinic in educational administration (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Clarence J. Cunningham, "Measures of Leader Behavior and Their Relation to Performance Levels of County Extension Agents" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1964), pp. 128-29.

initiating structure and consideration are the more successful leaders. In other words, to be an effective leader one cannot "sit and wait" for action to happen, nor can he fail to consider the feelings of those others working with him. The effective leader must know when to step out and move ahead, but he must not forget that others in the group or organization may not feel or understand everything he does. Thus, he needs always to establish an atmosphere of mutual warmth and trust.

An Ohio study of Extension agents produced a few specific findings that might convey more clearly the importance to Extension of these leader behavior dimensions:<sup>9</sup>

1. The most effective Extension agents were above the median as leaders on both initiating structure and consideration dimensions. Effectiveness was measured by a forced choice personnel evaluation system.<sup>10</sup>
2. The least effective men Extension agents were those below the median on both initiating structure and consideration leader behavior dimensions. However, the same trend did not hold for home economics agents.
3. Effective county Extension agents in 4-H Club work tended to exhibit behavior more characteristic of the initiating structure concept and less of the consideration concept than did agricultural and home economics agents.
4. Effective Extension agents performed at a high level regardless of the leader behavior of the other agents with whom they worked.

#### APPLICATION

These two concepts—initiating structure and consideration—if kept in balance, can be useful to all Extension personnel. As the Extension worker begins to work with any committee or on any project he can progress effectively if he keeps these two concepts in mind:

1. Someone has to initiate change—new programs or procedures normally will not grow from the "grass roots" unless seed is planted.
2. The leader must remember that, normally, he must not move so fast that he loses his group.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

<sup>10</sup> Robert W. McCormick and Archie E. Hudson, *A Forced-Choice Personnel Appraisal and Counseling System for Ohio County Extension Agents* (Columbus, Ohio: Cooperative Extension Service, The Ohio State University, 1962).

A look at a planning committee in home economics will illustrate how the two concepts can be followed. The traditional planning committee will seldom initiate work with disadvantaged families. This means the professional must do the initiating. However, if consideration is not given to the established planning committee, misunderstanding or "revolt" may result. Certainly, during the planning process the leader (the professional worker) must add three heaping tablespoons of initiating structure; she must also fold in, gently, two tablespoons of consideration.

Extension personnel performing the role of county chairman, area chairman, specialist chairman, or department chairman can gain increased effectiveness by analyzing and reflecting on their own leader behavior in relation to these two concepts. Individuals assuming these roles must, in fact, *initiate*. New programs, new procedures, or any educational innovations will almost always be initiated at one of these levels of leader direction. However, the chairman "worth his salt" will also recognize the need to show *consideration* for those working with him. Although not an easy task for the individual highly oriented to initiation, the chairman must strive to maintain mutual understanding and trust with his co-workers if he is to attain maximum effectiveness.

The concepts of initiating structure and consideration are useful not only to the professional in his work; they can also be used in selecting and training lay leaders. We might ask a few sample questions to show the usefulness of these concepts in the selecting of lay leaders:

- To lead a campaign to take soil tests, what type of leader do we want to select?
- To work effectively in an organizational capacity with an older-member 4-H Club, what type of leader do we want? With a younger-member 4-H Club?
- To teach a few lessons to limited-resource families, what behavior do we want a selected leader to exhibit?

Each of the situations posed by these questions could require a different type individual. It might be well to remember that just as individuals vary in their leader role behavior, so do the demands of different situations. We can train lay leaders to be aware of the behavior they should exhibit. The 4-H Club leader certainly can be taught that he must give directions, at times, to get a meeting started, but that he must not dominate the discussion or fail to accept ideas and plans of the members.

## SUMMARY

The two concepts of *initiating structure* and *consideration* are useful ways to think about leader behavior. Both have been shown to be needed by leaders. Initiating structure refers to that behavior which is associated with establishing channels of communication, of identifying new methods or procedures, and of attempting to accomplish the task at hand. Consideration refers to behavior associated with warmth, mutual trust, and respect between the leader and the group members. Not only are both these dimensions needed by every leader, but research findings show that the more effective leaders are those who can balance their behavior between initiating structure and consideration. The two concepts are useful in guiding the Extension worker's own action; they also aid in directing his work in selecting and training volunteers.

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WHOM DO YOU SIDE WITH—C. H. Edwards or the Editor? (See "Dialogue with a County Agent" in *Points of View* in the Fall, 1966 issue.) Do views expressed on the first pages of this issue clarify the argument? Maybe you have a point of view not yet expressed. Is it the responsibility of contributors to a professional journal to use only language that everyone will understand from their present background or does the reader have a responsibility for attempting to grasp ideas expressed in partially unfamiliar language? Or, do these two questions define the issue at all?

If you've been tempted to get into the argument, here's your opportunity. We're encouraging you to do so. This is your chance to talk back! As Editor, I took advantage of the situation to talk back to the county agent under whom I started my professional career in Extension. I don't remember if, as an assistant county agent, I felt as free to "talk back" to the county agent as I do under present circumstances. But that's one of the important values of a professional journal—points of view can be expressed that may involve "taking issue" with ideas expressed by someone else. That's an accepted professional way of coming to clearer understandings of what the issues really are—and perhaps to a clarification of ideas. There is no "establishment" point of view. Such a publication allows professionals to talk to each other.

Address your points of view to the Editor or to Mr. Edwards (with a copy to the Editor). Send to G. L. Carter, Jr., Editor, *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, 101 Agricultural Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.