

How to change a leadership pattern

Many factors influence leadership, and no one leadership style fits all situations. To gain insights into one's leadership behavior and to develop the skills to change one's style, management researchers suggest application of transactional analysis.

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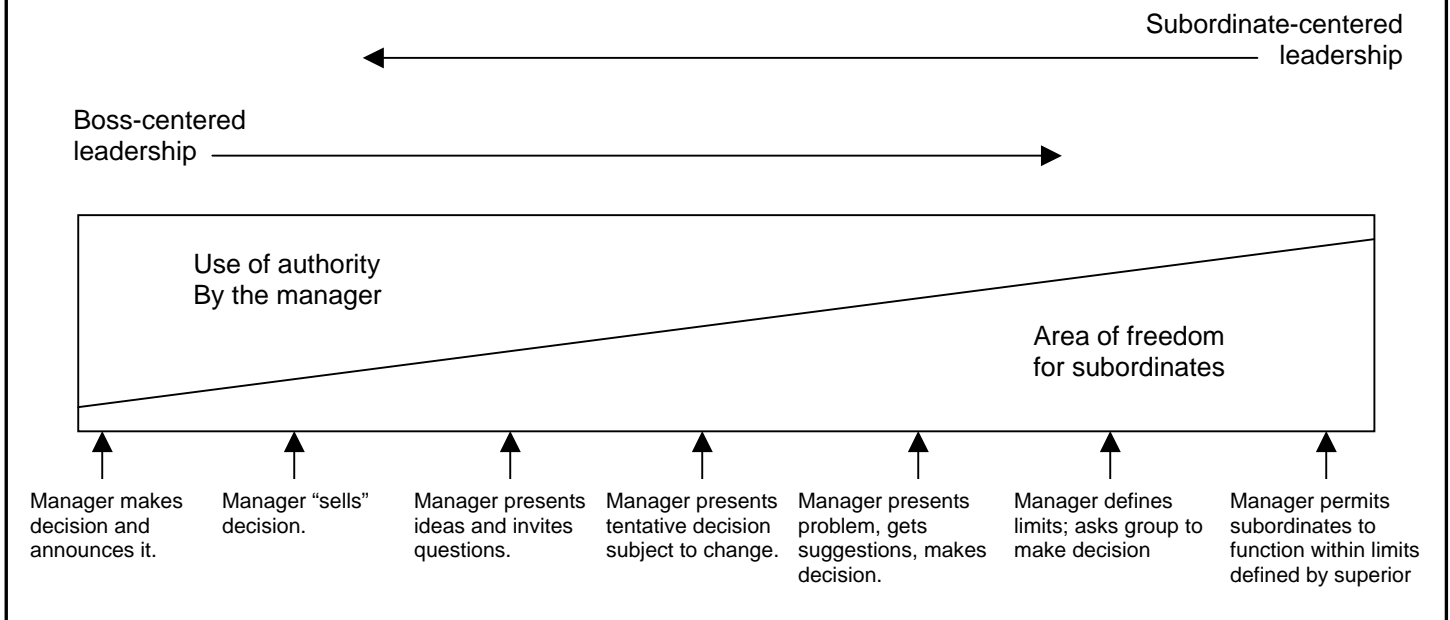
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FEW TOPICS have received as much attention as leadership. Although managers perform various roles, perhaps none is as important as the role of organizational leader. It is generally recognized that in the study of leadership several sets of factors are important, such as forces in the manager, forces in the subordinates, and forces in the situation. There is no doubt that the leader's behavior and his use of authority in directing employees are critical in determining the effectiveness of the leadership pattern. Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt, in their classic article, "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," (*Harvard Business Review*, May—June 1973) present a variety of possible behaviors ranging from maximum use of authority with low degree of freedom for subordinates to minimum use of authority with high degree of freedom for subordinates. The different styles of managerial behaviors are charted in Figure 1.

Although the model clearly shows that leadership behavior should be viewed on a continuum with different degrees of authority, it does not suggest how to *change* a leadership pattern. Fortunately, we have a tool that can assist a manager to alter behavior. By applying transactional analysis (TA), the manager can gain insights into his own behavior and that of subordinates, an advantage that may be the first step in changing behavior from an ineffective mode to one that fits the personality of the leader, the subordinates, and the situation.

The purpose of this article is to provide the missing link between TA and leadership by (1) explaining some basic TA concepts, (2) discussing the leadership patterns that may originate in one of the three ego states (the Parent, the Adult, or the Child), and (3) recommending ways to use TA for changing the leadership pattern.

**Figure 1
Continuum of Leadership Behavior**



The ego states in TA

Transactional analysis was developed by the late Eric Berne and popularized in his book *Games People Play*. The general value of TA in improving communication soon became evident. More recently it has been shown that TA may also be used to improve appraisal. It also can be used to change leadership behavior.

TA consists of several parts: Structural analysis, which focuses on the ego states of individuals; the analysis of transactions, which emphasizes the interactions between individuals; the way time is structured, which includes the analysis of psychological games people tend to play; and finally the life positions one may adopt about oneself and others. This discussion, though, will emphasize the ego states, explained through structural analysis.

An ego state, according to Berne, is a consistent pattern of feelings and experiences directly related to a corresponding pattern of behavior. Each personality, then, consists of three ego states: the Parent, the Adult, and the

Child. (These terms have nothing to do with age; they refer only to ego states.)

The *Parent* ego state may be seen, for example, in authoritative and even prejudiced behavior that is learned, to a large extent, from parents and other influential persons, especially during early life. A manager, then, operating in this ego state would make extensive use of authority, giving little freedom to subordinates. This would correspond to the left side of the model in Figure 1.

The *Adult* ego state, on the other hand is the rational part of the personality. The behavior includes, for example, information gathering and decision making based on a careful analysis of the facts. This ego state can be seen in a leadership behavior that may approximate the middle part and slightly to the right of the model in Figure 1.

The *Child* ego state—the third part of the personality—pertains largely to emotional aspects. It consists of the mental recordings of internal events. This ego state could probably be seen in the leadership behavior described at the extreme right side in the model.

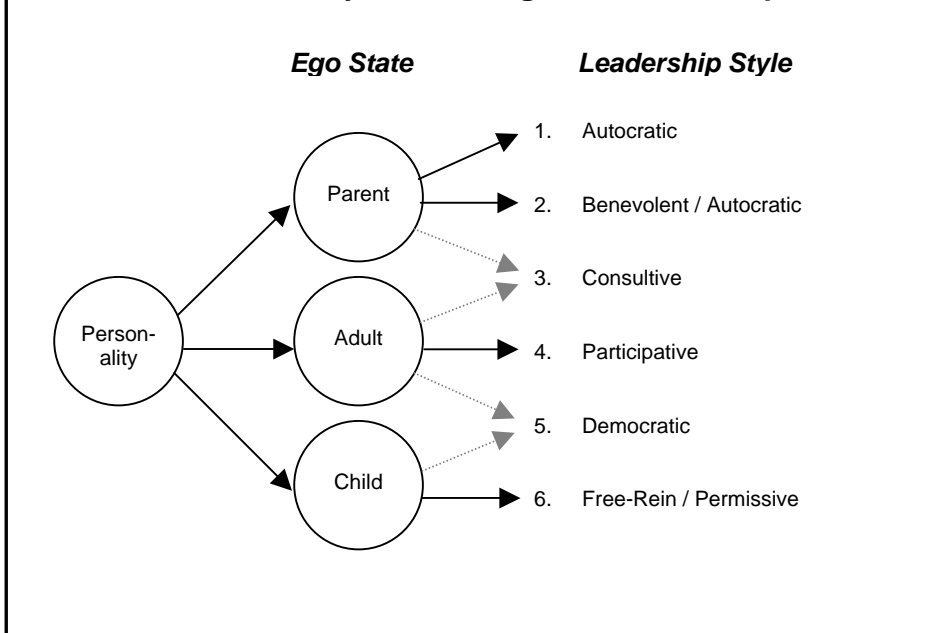
The point is that the ego states of leaders may help to explain their behavior. TA facilitates the recognition of the ego states and provides us with the tools for changing one's leadership style to fit a variety of leadership situations.

Leadership Behavior: Parent, Adult, Child

Each ego state is a source of managerial behavior. The most likely relationships between the ego state and leadership style are summarized in Figure 2 in which popular—and shorter—labels are used to describe the managerial behaviors using different degrees of authority and the respective areas of freedom of subordinates.

1. *Autocratic leadership and the Parent ego state.* An autocratic leader operates primarily from the Parent ego state. In fact, this manager is often critical and even prejudiced in the relationship with subordinates. Authority, unfortunately, is often seen as the principal— if not

Figure 2
Personality and Managerial Leadership



the only— way to guide subordinates in their jobs.

Such a manager, for example, identifies the problems, objectives, and plans for the subordinates. He selects the course of action to be taken, and subordinates have few opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Consequently, there is little commitment by subordinates to the aims of the organization. This leader may even use threats to get things done. Moreover, controls are rigid, and the manager acts as a judge in evaluating the performance of subordinates. In short, under this kind of leadership, subordinates have little freedom to influence their own work environment.

2. *Benevolent-autocratic leadership and the Parent ego state.* The benevolentautocratic leader also operates primarily from his Parent ego state. More specifically, it is especially the Nurturing Parent ego state that establishes the relationship between the superior and subordinates. Such a manager will identify problems, objectives, and plans for the subordinates. He may ask for some

inputs from his people, which, however, may or may not be seriously considered. Although there is some upward communication, information flow is primarily downward, and it is evident that this kind of leadership provides for rather limited freedom for subordinates.

3. *Consultive leadership:* The Adult and Parent ego states. A consultive manager presents ideas, invites questions from subordinates, and considers their inputs. This leader, for example, may use his Adult ego state to gather information necessary for decisions, although the decision might still be implemented through the Parent ego state.

A manager using the consultive leadership style provides a moderate number of opportunities to subordinates for participating in goal setting and the development of plans. Also, there is a considerable degree of integration of objectives and plans of various organizational units. Communication, in general, tends to flow fairly well, both vertically and horizontally. Further, subordinates do have some say in the evaluation of their own

performance. In all, the consultive manager provides an environment that encourages problem solving and decisions based on objective facts, although the implementation of plans may still be done from the Parent ego state.

4. *Participative leadership and the Adult ego state.* This manager feels OK about himself and others. The leader, utilizing his Adult ego state, collects data relevant to the decision. Subordinates, on the other hand, have a great deal of freedom to participate in the identification of problems and in suggesting solutions. The leader and the followers jointly set objectives, jointly develop plans, and jointly evaluate alternative courses of action. The emphasis may be on the smooth functioning of the group with free flow of information. The organizational climate, then, is conducive to self-control and self-development, with a high degree of integration of individual needs and the demands on the organization. The leader's style, based on the Adult ego state, provides ample freedom for subordinates to utilize their potentials.

5. *Democratic leadership:* Adult and Child ego states. This manager uses less authority and gives even more freedom to subordinates than the participative leader. As a manager he may not even reserve the final decision-making authority. His aim is to get consensus among the group members. Although this leader may derive his behavior from the Adult ego state by using the group to collect relevant information, decisions will not always be based on the facts as seen by the manager; instead, group members may override the leader's decision because of the leader's emotional concern for consensus as an end in itself. It is quite possible, therefore, that such a leader may operate both from the Child ego state and from the Adult.

6. *Free-rein/permissive leadership and the Child ego state.* The leaders using this managerial style may make few

decisions, leaving this to a great extent to subordinates. This manager uses a minimum amount of authority, giving maximum freedom to subordinates. He may avoid using power because of Not-OK feelings derived from his Child ego state. Or, it may simply be the result of a carefree attitude. There is little or no systematic effort by the leader to set objectives, identify problems, or develop plans. Subordinates may do as they wish. When creative ideas are developed by subordinates, they are seldom implemented. Further, this manager exercises little control and does not hold subordinates accountable for results. A close look at such a manager reveals that his behavior

can improve the interaction with his people by providing the proper stimulus to get a more effective response. Specifically, he can direct his message more frequently to the Adult ego states of subordinates, and the tools provided through TA can facilitate the interactions with employees.

Perhaps the easiest way to increase effectiveness is to begin with the leader. The individual who recognizes the ego state that gives rise to his leadership style will be able to better assess the forces not only in himself but also in subordinates and in the situation. More specifically, effective leader behavior requires (1) the recognition of one's own ego state, (2) the strengthening of

main tool to managing. This leadership pattern, however, can become especially dysfunctional if the base for behavior is the Prejudicial Parent ego state. Such a leader, for example, may have preconceived notions of the proper way of behaving. He does not recognize alternative ways of managing. The result is behavioral inflexibility.

Although the Parent ego state may be appropriate for some situations, problems usually occur if it is the only basis for directing subordinates. Such a leader may not recognize problems because his perceptions are dominated by his early experiences stored in the Parent ego state. Such perceptions may also inhibit the search for alternative solutions to a problem. In fact, his leadership style may result in a rigid, unimaginative organization. Also, since subordinates are not invited to participate in the decision-making process, they may not be committed to the aims of the organization. The problem is that such a manager may not even recognize the potentials of the subordinates and consequently will not utilize their full capacity.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that the leader operating from the Parent ego state is completely ineffective. Indeed, at times demanding authoritative direction, as in an emergency situation, this kind of leader can provide direction to a leaderless group. Similarly, the Nurturing Parent ego state may be appropriate for encouraging employees with Not-OK feelings to contribute to the organization. However, if this behavior becomes the predominant style, it may result in docile, dependent, yes-men employees.

Some managers take the other extreme and lead through the *free-rein/permissive* style, based on their Child ego state. It is true that, at times, this may result in creative ideas. However, in organizations it is also necessary that these innovative ideas become a reality and get implemented. Such a leader, unfortunately, may not give the required direction to subordinates. Objectives and plans may not be integrated with those of other

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originates primarily from the Child ego state, with decisions made on impulse rather than on a rational basis.

How to change the leadership pattern

Leadership is a complex process. There is, however, general agreement that the leader is one who considers:

- The forces in himself or herself.
- The forces in those led subordinates.
- The forces in the environment.

Clearly, to change the forces in the environment is often difficult, if not impossible, for the individual to initiate. On the other hand, to modify responses in the subordinates is not an insurmountable task. In fact, a manager

the Adult ego state, (3) the identification of the ego state in others, and (4) the selection of the ego state demanded by the situation.

1. *Ego states in the leader.* There is no one best way to lead. Leadership style may range from one extreme, with the manager using a great amount of authority and leaving almost no freedom for subordinates, to the opposite end of the continuum, at which little authority is used by the manager, giving a great deal of freedom to subordinates.

The predominant ego state in the leader certainly influences his behavior. For example, the *autocratic* and even the *benevolent-autocratic* leader probably sees the use of authority as the

departments. With poor standards, control is difficult and little accountability may be demanded from subordinates.

The *participative* manager, on the other hand, operates primarily from his Adult ego state. He feels OK about himself and others. Consequently, he is not threatened by the participation of subordinates in the decision-making process. In fact, he encourages subordinates to identify problems and to suggest solutions to overcome them. Goal setting and planning are done jointly by the manager and subordinates. Activities are coordinated with those of other organizational units. Specifically, the organization is seen as an interlocking, interdependent system in which all employees—managers and nonmanagers—contribute toward common aims. Control information, for example, is collected on an objective basis. Similarly, subordinates are evaluated primarily on results rather than on personality traits.

One might incorrectly infer that the leadership style based on the Adult is the only way to manage. However, in a wellrounded personality all three ego states—the Parent, the Adult, and the Child—are important. Similarly, leadership styles ranging from autocratic to free-rein/ permissive may be appropriate at times, depending on the subordinates and the situation, as will be discussed below. It is true, nevertheless, that too often the Adult is underutilized.

2. The strengthening of the Adult. The Adult ego state, like character, must be developed. This requires patience, confidence, supreme concern, and persistence. The Adult can be cultivated and utilized in several ways. By searching for the facts, preconceived notions may be uncovered. Thus, one may become aware, through the use of the Adult, when the Parent or Child responses are appropriate or when they are dysfunctional.

It is the Adult, then, that restrains the automatic Parent or Child responses. It is the Adult that asks probing questions, listens to new ideas,

and tests them against reality. It is the Adult that initiates the setting of challenging, yet realistic objectives. It is the Adult that systematically searches for alternative courses of action and estimates their probability of success. It is the Adult that argues sincerely and courageously for an ethical, but perhaps unpopular, issue. It is the Adult that assumes responsibility for his own actions. Of course, such a manager may make mistakes; but he learns from them and then focuses on the future. In short, the OK manager operating from the Adult ego state feels confident, OK about himself, which allows him to select any of the three ego states appropriate to fit the occasion. And the selection is a conscious one, made through the Adult ego state.

3. Ego states in subordinates. The effective leader not only develops an awareness of his own ego states as sources of his behavior but also recognizes the ego states of followers. For example, the Not-OK Child in the subordinate may need encouragement. Consequently, the leader, using his Nurturing Parent, can instill an OK-feeling in the subordinate by giving positive reinforcement. As the subordinate progresses toward a healthy self-image, the manager can direct his communication to the Adult ego state in the subordinate, promoting emphasis on objective datagathering and analytical decision making. This, of course, is the first step in the professionalization of employees and managers.

In general, a manager is more likely to address the interpersonal transaction to the Adult ego state of the employee if the subordinate:

- Has the knowledge and experience required to make the decision.
- Understands his goals and that of the organization so that he can use his Adult state to search for alternative ways to achieve the aims.
- Has had opportunities to prove that he is capable of making effective decisions.
- Has special (perhaps highly technical) knowledge the manager may not have.

- Can cope with uncertain situations by having a high tolerance for ambiguities.

In summarizing this section, it can be stated that managers too often direct the message—in TA terms, the transactional stimulus—to the Child ego state of their subordinates. This may be very ineffective because the new labor force is usually well educated, has high skills, and also demands responsibility. People can be professionalized by creating an environment in which the Adult ego state of subordinates is better utilized. This benefits both the organization and individuals, who can grow within the organizational environment.

4. Ego states demanded by the situation. Finally, the effective manager considers the situation when selecting the ego state for guiding subordinates. Thus, he might consider the type of organization, the nature of the tasks, and the problem itself.

Over time, organizations, like individuals, are guided by values and traditional ways of doing things. If, for example, the organizational climate discourages taking the initiative and finding new ways, then a sudden shift to a more participative leadership pattern will probably be met with skepticism. A subordinate, who has constantly heard the phrase, "We have always done it this way," will perhaps be difficult to convince that there are benefits in searching for different alternatives and experimenting with new processes. Similarly, if a benevolent/autocratic organization suddenly withdraws the traditional support, people will feel frustrated and helpless. The point, of course, is that people must be prepared for the change in organizational climate and values.

Another force in the situation is the nature of the task that demands different ego states as sources of leadership behavior. For example, people who have used a proven production process for many years may not see the value of questioning well established methods even though new

technology may be available. In contrast, a research group with a tradition of exploring new ideas and new ways of doing things may be prepared for a leadership style based on the Adult ego state of their boss.

Different problems may also demand different leadership styles. For example, in a situation with many possible alternatives, the Child and Adult ego state may be utilized

effectively to find creative solutions. On the other hand, a fire in the building may require a strong direction from the boss's Parent ego state to guide employees to safety. At other times, the Adult may be appropriate for selecting from among many alternative courses of action. It is the Adult that guides the definition of the problem, the evaluation of the alternatives, and the

selection of a course of action based on this analysis.

We can conclude, then, that the effective leader uses his Adult state to recognize the relevant factors such as the type of organization, the nature of the task, and the problem itself; and then selects the ego state appropriate to the situation.

TA and the Effective Leader

Leadership is one of the most widely discussed topics in management. It is the leader who makes decisions vital to the health and survival of the organization; who determines the organizational structure; and who identifies the critical areas of control. Finally, it is the leader who establishes an environment in which individuals work together in groups to achieve individual and organizational objectives.

Many factors influence effective leadership, and there is no one best leadership style that fits all situations. Instead, the effective leader uses the degree of authority appropriate to the situation and the subordinates. To gain insights into one's leadership behavior and to develop the skills to change one's style the application of transactional analysis is recommended.

Critical to the understanding and changing of one's behavior is the recognition that the leadership style may originate in one or more of the ego states. First, the Parent is usually the source of the autocratic, the benevolent/ autocratic and at times, the consultive leadership styles. Second the Adult is usually the source of the participative leader behavior, but may also contribute to the consultive and democratic style. Third, the Child is usually the source of the free-rein/permissive leadership style; the Child may also be found in the democratic managerial style.

The effective leader recognizes ego states that are the sources of his leadership inclinations. Although all three ego states—the Parent, the Adult, and the Child—are important to a healthy personality, it is the Adult that is too often underutilized and needs to be strengthened. Furthermore, the effective manager can improve interpersonal transaction with subordinates by recognizing their predominant ego state. Finally, the successful manager analyzes the situation; that is, he selects his ego state and associated behavior based on an analysis of the type of organization, the nature of the task, and the problem itself.

In conclusion, then, the effective manager recognizes his own ego states, those of subordinates, and those demanded by the situation. He is then not only better able to select the appropriate leadership style, but even more important, he can use the tools of transactional analysis to *change* his leadership style. This benefits the leader, the subordinates, and the organization.