

The Style Approach to Leadership

In 1974 R. M. Stogdill, a researcher professor at Ohio State University discussed the **style approach** to leadership in this book, the *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*. The style approach, based on data collected from over a decade's worth of survey research, views leadership as more than a collection of personality traits or endowed skills. Instead, this approach models leadership as function of a leader's actions with respect to their subordinates across the spectrum of employment environments.

The style approach measures a leader's style or behavior over two continuums, namely: (1) the task behavior continuum, and (2) the relationship behavior continuum. **Task behavior** refers to a leader's ability to help an organization achieve its mission and goals (ie. leaders give clear direction), while **relationship behavior** refers to a leaders ability to foster a collegial, professional working environment (ie. leaders nurture the emotional tenor of the workplace).

The Managerial/Leadership Grid graphs the two continuums on separate, perpendicular axis to better visualize the various combinations of task behavior and relationship behavior that define different styles of management (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Managerial-Leadership Grid, *EnrichWise*. (2012)

Strengths:

- First approach to look beyond personality and skill to focus on the nature of workplace interactions
- Supported in literature by exhaustive Ohio State University (Stogdill, 1974) and University of Michigan (Bowers & Seashore, 1966) studies, among others
- Promotes conception of leadership behavior from both the task and relational perspectives
- Facilitates self-reflection and self-learning for leaders

Criticisms:

- Little research to measure the alignment behaviors with the actual achievement of organizational goals
- Fails to be a true theory of leadership because it doesn't identify a universally successful leadership style
- The Managerial-Leadership Grid unjustifiably implies that high concern for relationships and high concern for tasks together are a superior leadership style, when there seem to be times when other combinations may be better suited

Applicable Leadership Instruments:

- Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Stogdill, 1963)
- Leadership Grid (Blake & McCanse, 1991)

References:

- Blake, R. R., & McCanse, A. A. (1991). *Leadership dilemmas: Grid solutions*. Huston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Bowers, D. G., & Seashore, S. E. (1966). Predicting organizational effectiveness with a four-factor theory of leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 11, 238-263.
- EnrichWise. (2012, July 18). The Managerial ~ Leadership Grid ~ What type of manager/leader are you? [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://enrichwise.com/2012/07/18/the-managerial-leadership-grid-what-type-of-managerleader-are-you/>
- Stogdill, R. M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: Free Press.