

2 LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK

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A leader is best
when people barely know that he exists,
not so good when people obey and proclaim him
worst when they despise him.
Fail to honour people,
they fail to honour you.
But of a good leader who talks little,
when his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
they will all say, we did this ourselves.

LAO TZU (C. 450 BC) in HEIDER (1985)

... leaders are neither born nor made – they grow.

MARY COX

Expeditions are demanding experiences full of opportunities and challenges. These challenges are part of the reason why people choose to face unfamiliar situations such as difficult weather conditions or terrain, changes to travel plans or using new equipment in a strange place – all in the name of adventurous pursuit, scientific study or a community project. The many problems to be faced on an expedition can, of course, never be fully predicted. This uncertainty is part of the fun of expeditions, but it can also be the source of conflict and danger. It is the management of these diverse and changing factors that is the concern of the leader, a complex and dynamic role. Leadership is about working with people: to maximise the experience for everyone; to resolve problems that arise; and to get the job done safely and happily! This chapter briefly outlines some of the factors that contribute to effective leadership.

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LEADERSHIP

Leaders are people who take on a particular role in relation to other people and 'leadership' is the set of behaviours that they use. The 'qualities' approach to leadership suggests that leaders possess certain attributes or qualities that make them suitable for leadership. It is probable that everyone possesses latent qualities that lend themselves to being a leader, which may or may not emerge depending on circumstance and inclination. When they do emerge, their effectiveness will depend on the confidence, experience and maturity of the individual.

Leaders, however, also require a range of specific skills to undertake the job. These can be described under three headings:

1. **Hard skills**, e.g.
knowledge of human physiology
knowledge of the environment
technical skills related to the activity
safety methods, planning and administration.
2. **Soft skills**, e.g.
understanding of individual and group psychology
communication skills.
3. **Meta-skills**, e.g.
judgement, perception
creativity
problem-solving.

The way in which leaders blend their personal qualities with the various skills that they possess to respond to certain situations results in the leader's style. Style can mean the distinctive way in which someone always does things (rigid/set) or it can be seen as the way chosen at a particular time to cope appropriately with a particular situation (flexible). As expeditions involve such a diverse range of circumstances, a leader will be required to adopt a flexible approach involving a range of styles.

The key skill, then, for all expedition leaders is choosing what style of behaviour to use to respond to problems or resolve conflicts, i.e. deciding how to decide.

The issues

- The aim or focus of the expedition: although all leaders are concerned with both the accomplishment of a task and the development (needs) of the group members, it is important to be clear which of these is the main purpose of the expedition. This will affect the way decisions are made as well as their outcome.
- The stage of development of the group: as an expedition progresses, so the capability of the group develops and this will affect the style of decision-making and the role of the leader as time passes.

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- The nature of the situation: a planning decision about logistics requires a different style of decision-making to that in an emergency. The situation and the skills and resources available to deal with it will be balanced by the leader, who can then select an appropriate style.

The focus of the expedition

The motivation to undertake an expedition will stem from one of two focuses:

- 1 to achieve a certain task
- 2 to provide an experience for a certain group of people.

This determines the focus of the leader. Although it is probable that both motives are involved in most expeditions, it is vital to be clear to yourself and your members which is the ultimate aim.

John Adair's action-centred leadership model (1988) helps to explore this (Figure 2.1). This model demonstrates the three main areas to which a leader must attend if a task is to be achieved with maximum satisfaction to all. Often, an inexperienced leader focuses his or her attention on getting the task done and is unaware that effective leadership requires him or her to consider the group and the individual as well. Without this attention, the task may never be completed because of such problems as a breakdown in communications (team) or low morale (individual). This model was developed for application in industry and for this purpose the sphere on top is the task area so, despite the need to attend to individuals and to group interaction, the task is the main focus. The job of industry is to make a profit. Without this, a firm cannot exist and the secondary outcomes of providing fulfilling work for the individual and achieving group cooperation will be impossible.

This orientation for the model applies to the expedition with the ultimate aim of achieving a task such as the ascent of a peak, or the undertaking of a particular piece of field research (i.e. task-focused expeditions). Expedition literature is full of examples of expeditions that have failed to complete their task because individuals have put their personal ambitions before those of the team. There are also many examples of effective leadership, one of the most famous being Shackleton's commitment to saving his men shipwrecked in the Antarctic.

Many expeditions, particularly youth expeditions, have a different focus. For these it is appropriate to turn the model round so that the individual focus is at the top, i.e. the aim of the expedition is personal development (Figure 2.2).

In this case, working as a team to achieve a task is a means of completing the ultimate aim of personal development. The task and team will be chosen to suit the development of the individuals best. This may mean that the group members choose their own tasks and the leaders primarily act in support of these decisions. The leader must certainly be prepared to allow variation in the job being undertaken to suit the

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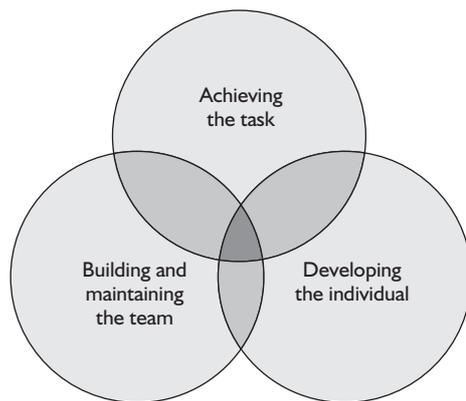


Figure 2.1 *John Adair's action-centred leadership model (Adair, 1988)*

needs of the personalities. In this case, it may be better to state the aim of the expedition as providing opportunities for mountaineering experience rather than the ascent of a certain peak. Perhaps the first decision a leader should make is whether the expedition focus is a specific task or personal development.

Example

A serious river crossing lies between the base camp and the expedition area.

- **Task focus:** the important thing is to gain access to the expedition area. The leader may decide to build a bridge to overcome the obstacle.

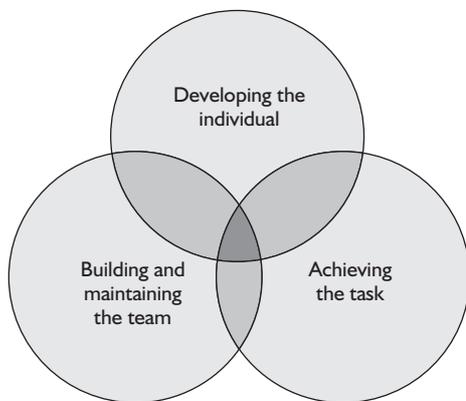


Figure 2.2 *Adaptation of model for youth expeditions*

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- **Personal development focus:** the main need is to teach the members how to undertake their own river crossing so that independent decisions can be made safely later in the trip. A training session is organised and crossings supervised until the leader is satisfied that they are safe.

DECISIONS AND GROUP DEVELOPMENT

It is unusual in the field for people to be told to lead an expedition. Generally, they don't get given the job to do, but choose to undertake it because it was their idea. Ownership of the idea can be hard to let go because it often requires the commitment of one person to provide the energy to make the trip happen. This will inevitably be the person whose idea it was. However, if the trip is to be a success, the group needs to be involved and share in the leader's enthusiasm and commitment. He or she will need to share knowledge, skills and the control of decision-making.

Decision-making

Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1968) model (Figure 2.3) is a simple way to look at control in the group. Although there are six steps described, these are intended to function as a continuum.

Tells

The leader assesses the situation, the group and their resources, selects a course of action and tells the group what to do. He or she may or may not consider what the group think and may or may not give reasons. Members do not participate in the decision-making. "This is the way we are going to cross the river."

Sells

As before, the leader makes the decision without consulting the group, but communicates it to the group giving reasons and explanations. "I want you to cross the river like this because ..."

Tests

The leader identifies a problem and proposes a solution to the group, giving his reasons. He or she invites questions and discussions before finalising the decision. "How are you feeling about this river crossing?"

Consults

The leader presents the problem and relevant background information then asks members for their ideas on how to solve it. The leader then decides on the course of action. "Do you need any help to do this?"

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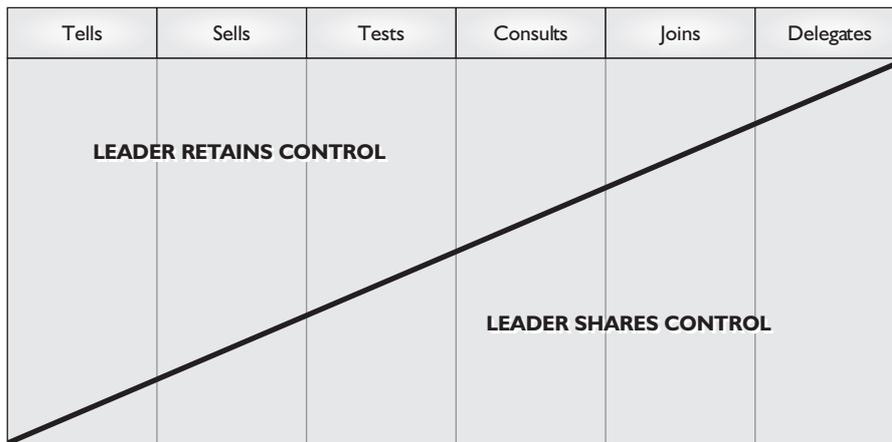


Figure 2.3 Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1968) decision-making continuum

Joins

The leader identifies the problem and then joins in the discussion. The decision will be a joint one. "How shall we go about this?"

Delegates

The leader or a group member identifies the problem. The group are asked to make their own decision as to the best action to take. The leader may participate in the discussion and will support the decision once taken. "You sort out how to get across."

Sharing control leads to an effective team, well motivated and efficient, but the decision about which style to use also depends on the skills and resources available and the effectiveness of the group in using these and in working together.

Group development

Tuckman and Jensen (1977) identify four stages through which a group progress when they are brought together to complete a task: forming – storming – norming – performing. As they become acquainted with the problem and aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses, they become more effective.

Forming

The forming phase occurs as group members make initial contact with each other and the leader. It is characterised by a feeling of uncertainty. There is a high awareness of the leader as the group seek direction and endeavour to come to terms with the task and each other.

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Storming

As the group gain in confidence, and control of decision-making begins to shift from the leader to the group, relationships go through a more searching and aggressive phase. The transition can result in conflict but the shift in control is essential if a functional group is to materialise. This is the “shake down”.

Norming

The result of the storming phase is that the group learn to “rub along”. Roles are defined, strengths and weaknesses recognised, and compromises renegotiated. The group have arrived at a shared goal and an acceptable culture to live by.

Performing

All the group’s energy is directed at achieving the goal. Everyone is playing their full part and problems are tackled openly. This phase is often described as synergetic, i.e. the value of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Morale and achievement are high.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A DYNAMIC APPROACH

The Hersey and Blanchard model, called situational leadership (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969), is a way to look at leadership style in relation to the development of a group (Figure 2.4). This includes their skill level as well as their ability to work together. The appropriate style adopted by the leader will help to ensure this development.

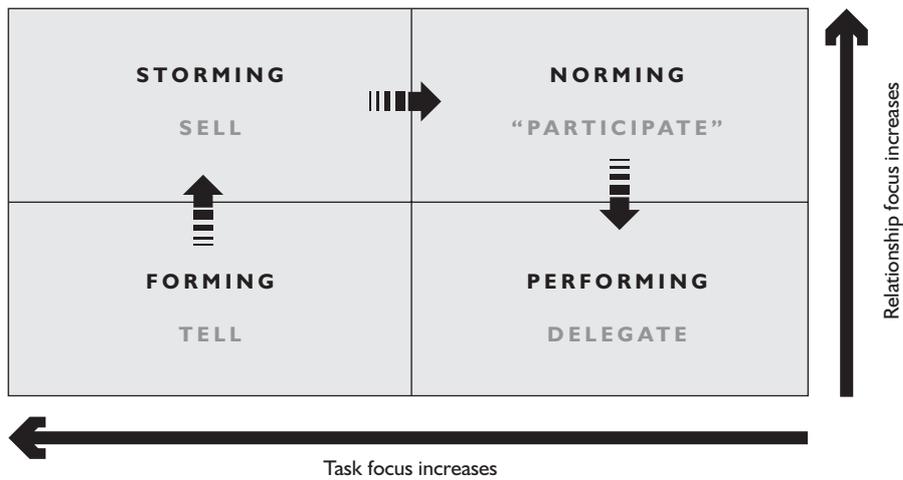
When a group forms, the leader’s main concern is to familiarise them with the skills needed to undertake the task. In this situation, the focus will be on the task and “telling” is the most effective leadership style. This might equate with recruitment and the defining of roles in an expedition.

A “selling” style is adopted when the group start wanting to share control of the venture and the leader needs to explain the reasons for making certain decisions. The focus will now be on relationships as well as the task, a most demanding time. There is often conflict (“storming”) but this is a necessary stage and an effective leader will tackle this positively. With some members of the team involved in the planning, this may well occur at home. With others it may well be in the field.

Once the team are familiar with their roles and have the skills and resources to undertake them, it is important for the leader to share the decision-making with the group. Participation involves testing, consulting and joining as styles and the leader’s focus will move from the task to concentrate on relationships. On some expeditions leadership never progresses beyond this stage to ensure that the leader’s experience is fully used.

An effective group will, after some experience, be able to perform and will gain the most satisfaction when decision-making is delegated and sharing control is at its greatest.

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TELL – Leadership style

FORMING – Group development

Figure 2.4 Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model superimposed on Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) group model

Notice the relationship between this model and Adair's spheres of task, team and individual. Here "individual" and "team" are combined in "relationship" and the model suggests a time sequence for which spheres, or group of spheres, the leader needs to attend to when taking account of the group development process.

Example

Tackling river crossings on an expedition in Iceland: on the first occasion the group were instructed (told) how to cross. At the next few crossings the leader explained (sold) the reasons for selecting certain sites and using certain methods. Groups then took increasing responsibility for these decisions (participated) until the leader allowed independent trips out (delegated).

Of course this is a simplistic model. An expedition is not one but many tasks and individuals vary in the skills that they possess and the rate at which they integrate into a team. Certain expedition tasks, e.g. safety, will always need to remain in the leader's control. On the other hand, the leader may never have control over areas of specialism in the team. In this case the specialist is the "leader" in this area. New and unexpected situations may throw an experienced team back to square one for a time and extended chains of communication may mean that only the leader has all the information to make decisions, despite the experience of the team. Nevertheless, it is

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a useful model for increasing a leader's awareness of a range of styles open to him or her and identifying some of the situations in which they might be used.

FURTHER INFORMATION

References

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Useful addresses

- Basic Expedition Leadership Award, British Sports Trust, Clyde House, 10 Milburn Avenue, Oldbrook, Milton Keynes MK6 2WA. Tel: 01908 689180, email: admin@bst.org.uk, website: www.bst.org.uk/bel.html
 Institute for Outdoor Learning, The Barn, Plumpton Old Hall, Plumpton, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 9NP. Tel: 01768 885800, fax: 01768 885801, email: institute@outdoor-learning.org, website: www.outdoor-learning.org
 National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), 284 Lincoln Street, Lander, WY 82520-2848, USA. Website: www.nols.edu

Expedition and field leader's logbook

For those who want to develop their qualifications to lead an expedition, the RGS (with IBG) and the Young Explorers' Trust have published a logbook in the belief that leaders require varied kinds of experience in the field as well as formal training in technical and people (soft) skills. This logbook aims to:

- provide a framework for leaders wishing to develop their expedition skills with training and experience
- record this training and experience
- act as a reference for leaders and organisations wishing to assess the training and experience of the holder.

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This logbook is intended to complement existing logbooks that expeditions might also use (e.g. *Mountain Leader Logbook*). The *Expedition Leader's Logbook* is 30 loose-leaf, punched colour pages. Download the A4 logbook or A5 logbook to suit your needs from www.rgs.org/je

Register of personnel available for expeditions

A register for those with skills to offer expeditions and fieldwork projects (e.g. doctors, nurses, mechanics, scientists) is maintained by the RGS–IBG Expedition Advisory Centre (EAC). Those wishing to join this register should ask for the appropriate form. Send us an email with your CV (email: eac@rgs.org).

Leaders looking for members for their own expeditions are welcome to consult this register at the EAC. If you are unable to visit London, please supply us with a detailed “job description”. There may be a small charge to cover photocopying. Contact us with your requirements.

Bulletin of expedition vacancies

The EAC also publishes a bulletin of expeditions and fieldwork projects seeking members, often with specialist skills. If you wish to recruit members for your expedition, please send details of your requirements including dates, costs and skills needed. The bulletin is updated every two months.