

Module 2.1 Enquiry 2: Leaders and businesses

| Learning outcomes | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 | Developing and applying understanding of leadership styles. |
| 2 | Identifying leadership qualities and matching to varied situations. |

| | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Resources | Student sheets. |
|-----------|-----------------|

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Time | 45 minutes. |
| Running the activity | An introduction to leadership styles with a simple matching exercise which should be undertaken in groups. This is followed by a comparison of different leadership qualities which could be a group or an individual activity. |

Module 2.1 Enquiry 2: Leaders and businesses

Part 1 Three leaders, three businesses

Type A

Jack Turner went into industry after serving as an officer in the Navy on a Type 42 destroyer. A great believer in efficiency, he would bark out orders as though still on his ship. Everything had to be done the right way and the right way was Jack Turner's way. No mistake was missed by 'Mr. Turner', who seemed to decide everything and explain so little. Occasionally he was known to smile and even gave staff an unexpected bonus. But no one doubted that iron lay behind his smile. His particular characteristic was his energy in 'getting to the bottom of the problem'. He left no stone unturned in investigating the reasons for weak performance.

Type B

Ann Thompson's staff valued the monthly team meetings in her office, with their strong coffee, honest talking and a sense of humour. They knew that Ann could make tough decisions, but she always listened first and gave her reasons afterwards. All the employees felt able to get on with their own jobs, but knew they could ask for help when needed and rely on Ann's judgement – which was always scrupulously fair. Sometimes the hours were very long when there was a lot of organising to do and a tight timetable, but most of the staff would respond with commitment.

Type C

The punch lines in Dave Rawlings' jokes were better known than his decisions. In fact, no one had ever known him to decide anything. 'Do your own thing', was Dave's usual advice when asked for his opinion. Occasionally however, when delivery dates had slipped badly, Dave would become a whirlwind of energy and demand miracles from everybody, including himself. Strangely, despite its erratic output, the business was a continued success.

Business X

Computer Solutions Ltd specialises in devising custom made software for small businesses. All the employees are highly trained programmers who have to solve technical problems in imaginative ways. When they encounter difficulties with a particular job, they are expected to consult each other and use each other's experience in a collaborative way.

Business Y

Stores for All is a major holding company which owns seven different retail chains, each with its own style and speciality. There are department stores, shoe shops, jewellers, electrical goods outlets and, strangely, a chain of golf courses. Each individual chain is expected to meet exacting performance targets. At regular intervals, the board examines the accounts of each chain. Those which appear to be under-performing are sometimes subject to ruthless action. They may have to close down their less profitable outlets, or may be sold off to the best bidder in short order.

Business Z

White Horse Conferences specialises in organising business conferences and events. Sometimes these are major international gatherings in prestige venues, but the team also often runs small scale meetings for professional or recreational purposes. Employees have to be excellent planners who can think of every aspect of the organisation needed. At the same time they need to be good problem solvers who can react quickly in the event of mishaps.

Your agenda

Working in small groups, discuss and answer, giving reasons:



- 1 What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three leaders, the types A, B and C, described?
- 2 Which of the three leaders, types A, B and C, would suit each of the three businesses X, Y and Z?

Part 2 The view of the guru

Warren Bennis (born 1925) brought leadership to a new, mass audience. Leadership had been largely forgotten as a topic worthy of serious academic interest until it was revived by Bennis and others in the 1980s.

Bennis' work stands as a humane counter to much of the military-based, hero worship which dogs the subject. Bennis argues that leadership is not a rare skill; leaders are made rather than born; leaders are usually ordinary people – or apparently ordinary – rather than charismatic; leadership is not solely the preserve of those at the top of the organization – it is relevant at all levels; and, finally, leadership is not about control, direction and manipulation.

Bennis' best known leadership research involved ninety of America's leaders. These included Neil Armstrong, the coach of the LA Rams, orchestral conductors, and businessmen such as Ray Kroc of McDonald's. 'They were right brained and left-brained, tall and short, fat and thin, articulate and inarticulate, assertive and retiring, dressed for success and dressed for failure, participative and autocratic', said Bennis. The link between them was that they had all shown 'mastery over present confusion'. Bennis' message was that leadership is all-encompassing and open to all.

From the ninety leaders, four common abilities were identified: management of attention; of meaning; of trust; and of self. Management of attention, said Bennis, is a question of vision. Indeed, he uses a definition of leadership as: 'The capacity to create a compelling vision and translate it into action and sustain it.' Successful leaders have a vision that other people believe in and treat as their own.

Having a vision is one thing, converting it into successful action is another. The second skill shared by Bennis' selection of leaders is management of meaning – communications. A vision is of limited practical use if it is encased in 400 pages of wordy text or mumbled from behind a paper-packed desk.

Bennis believes effective communication relies on use of analogy, metaphor and vivid illustration as well as emotion, trust, optimism and hope.

The third aspect of leadership identified by Bennis is trust which he describes as 'the emotional glue that binds followers and leaders together'. Leaders have to be seen to be consistent.

The final common bond between the ninety leaders studied by Bennis is 'deployment of self'. The leaders do not glibly present charisma or time management as the essence of their success. Instead, the emphasis is on persistence and self-knowledge, taking risks, commitment and challenge but, above all, learning. 'The learning person looks forward to failure or mistakes', says Bennis. 'The worst problem in leadership is basically early success. There's no opportunity to learn from adversity and problems.'

The leaders have a positive self regard, what Bennis labels 'emotional wisdom'. This is characterised by an ability to accept people as they are; a capacity to approach things in terms of only the present; willingness to treat everyone, even close contacts, with courteous attention; an ability to trust others even when this seems risky; and an ability to do without constant approval and recognition.

Source: *The Ultimate Business Guru Book*, Stuart Crainer, John Wiley, 2002



- Compare each of the three leaders in Part 1 with the view of the guru.
- To what extent does each of them embody the qualities outlined by the guru?
- Discuss your conclusions before writing them down.

This document has been downloaded from the Nuffield Economics and Business website www.necb.org