



## The Never-Ending Search for the Secret of Effective Leadership

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Management philosopher and religious commentator Charles Handy, in his seminal book *Understanding Organisations*, described the search for leadership as being like the quest for the Holy Grail. And there can be little doubt that any student of management and the way it works in organisations will inevitably consider theories of leadership.

The challenge, as Professor Handy recognised, is in being able to accurately and precisely define what leadership consists of – not as easy as it might seem – as well as presenting a unified model of how it achieves the desired objective of consistent behaviour by followers. Willingness by others (followers) to actively engage in behaviour that is consistent with a particular objective is the key to success in leadership. We see the results of cooperative behaviour around us every day of our lives and, moreover, marvel at achievements that are only possible by groups of people acting in concert to attain outcomes that align with predetermined aims.

The reality of one person's ability to influence others in being willing to engage in consistent and dedicated effort and actions (behaviour) is dependent on a range of highly complex and multifaceted factors, some of which are extrinsic and many of which are intrinsic. Indeed, so crucial is understanding what produces internal desire (intrinsic) by individuals to engage in particular behaviour that a plethora of management theories are dedicated to this end. These are known as motivation theories.

Every academic and/or commentator has agonised as to what effective and successful leadership consists in the quest that Professor Handy alludes to in order to provide a truly universal model. The results of their efforts are competing theories (explanations) of what is likely to work given certain conditions (factors). Or to put it more prosaically, what does a leader have to do in order to ensure their influence produces predictable actions by, frequently, a group of people? And this is exactly the conundrum that means they will not achieve the objective of an agreed model of leadership. People are not unthinking machines and, as well as having their own internal logic and emotions, will vary their input into activities and tasks in a way that, for instance, a robot won't.

People possess a wonderful range of skills that, when harnessed by leaders with vision, demonstrate the best of humanity; imagination, creativity and the ability to love. But as history attests, there are all too many leaders whose vision was based on the desire to acquire greater power and wealth by subjugation. The belief that some leaders possess a trait known as Charisma, a special power that enables them to naturally influence others in a way that attracts attention and admiration, is seen as having the greatest potency of all. We especially see Charismatic leaders in politics and religion.

In that vast majority of organisations, the ability of leaders to influence others is based on a combination of shared meaning as to what is important (culture) and the fact that authority is vested in individuals to issue instructions that may or may not have been collectively agreed (so called 'legal-rational' authority). However, though responsibility to achieve something can be delegated to others, the authority will rest with the leader.

The *Certificate in Leadership and Management in Socially-Orientated Organisations* will seek to explore the ways in which effective leadership can be better appreciated through developing deeper understanding of both the issues that affect that actions of individuals and factors that are contingent in the situation in which everyone, both leaders and followers, operate. As we will discover, those leaders who are most effective have a repertoire of skills and approaches that they are able to utilise that are sensitive to the requirements of the task(s), the situation they must achieve actions by others in and, of course, the people they are expected to produce action in.

As a concluding thought it's worth stating that the most successful organisations tend to be those in which people sense an extremely high degree of affinity with. In effect, those who are committed to the objectives of the organisation display behaviour consistent with their personal beliefs and value system. In examples in which these conditions exist, and which the author has researched, it is noted leaders exhibit reduced authoritarian behaviour and are perceived by followers to assist followers by facilitating them to produce consistently high levels of performance. As such the organisation becomes a highly functioning entity that produces benefit for all concerned.

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