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# Restaurant Managerial Style: How Effective? How Versatile?

## **Abstract**

Restaurant management and the leadership styles of men and women who serve as hosts to the dining public are the subject of this study. The author asks: What kind of managers are they? What are the operational results of their efforts? Is there a relationship between managerial style and operational outcomes? How are managerial styles themselves related to each other?

## **Keywords**

David L. Whitney, Restaurant Managerial Style: How Effective? How Versatile?, Trait theory, Psychological tests, Deserter and Missionary, Country Club management, Mr. Wonderful, Authoritative, Coercive, Pacesetter, Democratic, Coaching, Affiliative, MSQ

# Restaurant Managerial Style: How Effective? How Versatile?

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*Restaurant management and the leadership styles of men and women who serve as hosts to the dining public are the subject of this study. The author asks: What kind of managers are they? What are the operational results of their efforts? Is there a relationship between managerial style and operational outcomes? How are managerial styles themselves related to each other?*

Early in the twentieth century, theorists declared that effective leaders were distinguished from ineffective leaders by a specific set of personal characteristics or traits. The challenge was to determine exactly which traits were associated with effective leaders. Once this was accomplished, those who possessed the predetermined superior leadership traits would be groomed for greater managerial responsibility. Approximately 50 years of research produced a mountain of data containing hundreds of research models relative to these endeavors. Many of these were simply based on indications from group members concerning who they preferred as a leader and what traits in that leader caused them to make that choice.

After nearly a half century of trait theory optimism, confidence waned as the study of leadership and managerial style had become a hodgepodge of trait lists, each of which rested on some sort of research, and none of which supported each other substantially.

There was more to the research, however, than uncovering a master list of traits. Many researchers looked past the theory itself to the more pragmatic issue of leader selection and sought the development of psychological tests which would indicate who had been born with leadership ability. This hope died at mid-century along with trait theory enthusiasm.

By this time researchers, without denying trait theory as a metaphysical foundation, were largely dedicating themselves to the study of behavior associated with leadership. From a multitude of traits, leadership theory had turned to a multitude of behaviors. A watershed research project begun in 1945 at Ohio State University and written about by Hemphill and Coons in *Leader Behavior: Its Descriptions and Management* was based on two behavioral factors first identified in the now famous Hawthorne Experiment. These two factors were called "initiating struc-

ture” and “consideration” and the research resulted in the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ).

Originally the LBDQ was used in military studies; but soon the major application of LBDQ principles was in industry where the two categories of behavior were related to central industrial concerns such as production, turnover, employee morale, etc. Results were mixed. However, the question which remained unanswered involved what constituted the best style of leadership. Almost reluctantly, because it admits to the unlikelihood of constructing a universal best-method theory of leadership/managerial style, researchers and management practitioners faced the possibility that effective leadership might depend on the situation in which it is exercised. The outcome generally arrived at in the last 20 years suggests that effective leadership is dependent on an individual manager’s behavior plus varying situations and follower groups.<sup>1</sup>

From today’s vantage point, it can be observed that managers/leaders in food service organizations behave in an infinite variety of styles, from a blend of coercion and consensus to what Clutterback called “management by anarchy.”<sup>2</sup> Add to this assortment of styles the even greater variety of situations and the possibilities for a style of managerial behavior are indeed countless, and so are the descriptions — from Blake and Mouton’s “country-club” management<sup>3</sup> to Thompson’s “Mr. Wonderful” style,<sup>4</sup> to Reddin’s “deserter” and “missionary” styles.<sup>5</sup>

Within the hospitality industry, Derakshan<sup>6</sup> used the Ohio State University leadership dimensions of consideration and initiating structures as he tested 94 employees and their supervisors in nine fast-food restaurants. His purpose was to determine what relationships existed between span of supervision and “leadership directiveness.” Findings indicated a relationship between the wider spans of supervision and less initiating structure and consideration. Narrow span of supervision tended to result in higher measurement of both initiating structure and consideration. The researcher’s conclusion is an interesting one: Restaurants operate best when leadership style is high in both dimensions — what Derakshan calls “benevolent autocracy.”

Sepic, Maher, and Fiedler<sup>7</sup> examined the effectiveness of leader-match training in the hotel industry. Leader-match was described as “the relationship between the leader’s managerial style and his control over the work situation.” Findings suggested that hotel managers’ performance improved as a result of training in leader-match principles, i.e., in adapting their managerial style to control factors in hotel management situations.

The amount of empirical research in the area of leadership/managerial style and its relation to restaurant operation is very limited. Sometimes it appears large because so many popular articles and applications are being generated by management consultants who are practitioners, not researchers. This house seems to be built more on jargon than empirical research.

### **Problem Involves National Restaurant Chain**

In a recent six-month period, a national restaurant chain in the special-

ty/family category judged 30 percent of its 140 company-owned restaurants to be unsatisfactory in one or more critical areas of operation. In an attempt to determine the causes of these unsatisfactory ratings, top management considered that the restaurant unit manager's style might be related to operational outcomes.

Those outcomes were being measured by means of an instrument called the Operation Evaluation. All restaurants were evaluated equally in terms of four categories:

- facility cleanliness, repair, safety
- food quality, handling, procedures
- customer service
- administration, marketing, financial reporting, employee training

Under these four categories, nearly 300 individual items are examined quarterly by trained auditors.

The Operation Evaluation is a critical control device because it enables corporate overseers to measure quality and uniformity so that a restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, is expected to closely resemble one in Seattle, Washington, in terms of the evaluation's criteria.

At the base of the entire process is the corporate assumption that the four areas of evaluation — facilities, food quality, customer service, and administration — are positively related to the ultimate restaurant success: profit. Therefore, corporate executives watch the Operation Evaluation like a barometer, and when 30 percent of the restaurants were evaluated "unsatisfactory" in one or more of the four categories, they were determined to seek the cause.

In assessing whether or not the behavior of the restaurant manager is related to operational outcome, managerial style is defined as follows:

behavior you use to plan, organize, motivate, control. The extent to which you listen, set goals and standards, develop action plans (short and long range), direct others clearly, give feedback, reward and punish, develop subordinates, and establish personal relations with subordinates.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the Operation Evaluation, the Managerial Style Questionnaire (MSQ)<sup>9</sup> was used to measure self-perceived managerial styles. The MSQ is a 37-item, forced-choice instrument developed to measure self-perceptions regarding six dimensions of managerial style. According to the protocols of the instrument, managerial styles are categorized into six designations:

- **Coercive:** provides clear direction: tells subordinates what to do without listening...expects immediate compliance or obedience...controls tightly, requires many detailed reports...gives more negative and "personalized" feedback (e.g., name calling)...motivates by threats of discipline or punishment.
- **Authoritative:** Is firm but fair...clear directions. Tactful, but leaving no doubt as to who makes the decisions...listens to input...influences subordinates by explaining the "whys" behind directions

in terms of subordinates' or the organization's best interests...monitors task performance...gives positive and negative feedback.

- **Affiliative:** [Is characterized by] people first, task second...concern for personal popularity most important...no clear direction, goals or standards...job security, fringe benefits, keeps subordinates happy...avoids conflicts...rewards personal characteristics rather than task performance...rarely punishes.
- **Democratic:** [Is] participative... "trust" vs. specific direction or close supervision...subordinates participate in decisions...makes decisions by consensus...holds many meetings, listens...rewards adequate performance, rarely gives negative feedback or punishment.
- **Pacesetter:** Do it myself...has high standards, expects self direction...leads by example of "modeling"...has trouble delegating, believes s/he can do most jobs better than subordinates...coercive when performance is poor...does not develop subordinates..."lone wolf," little coordination or social support.
- **Coaching:** Is developmental...sees the manager's job as helping or showing subordinates how to improve their performance and professional development...directs by asking subordinates to set their own goals, develop plans, and identify solutions to problems.<sup>10</sup>

Managers from 120 company-owned restaurants who had been operating in their stores during two quarterly operation evaluations provided the sample for the study. All members of the sample group completed the company's 13-week training program and served as assistant managers in the system prior to their promotion to manager. The group is predominantly male, aged 23 to 63. Educational background is varied and is not addressed in this study.

Operation Evaluation data were obtained for each manager's restaurant while the MSQ provided profiles relative to each one's style of management. These two sets of data were analyzed statistically for relationships.

### **Coaching Style Related To Management Success**

Managers with high scores on coaching style were found to have higher operation scores in the area of facility cleanliness, repair, and safety. Since this is an area where managers are very highly dependent upon the activities of their staff, it may be suggested that the coaching/teaching style is more effective in developing subordinates who will be both able and willing to exert energy in an area of restaurant operation which is not generally perceived as glamorous, i.e., mopping floors or cleaning restrooms. The coaching style, by definition, respects the potential of a subordinate to learn, to self-motivate, and to become proficient in a task. Perhaps this respect elicits a greater effort from employees in work areas which lack other positive motivating elements.

Observations regarding the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of the coaching style of management must be tentative, however, because

the correlation between that style and facility cleanliness/repair/safety was low, ( $r = .231, p < .05$ ). Nonetheless, although low, this correlation was the only one between managerial styles and the operational categories found to be significant at the .05 level.

Perhaps this finding is of some interest when one considers the apparent prevalence of coercive and highly authoritative managerial styles in restaurant operations. This study did not produce data to support a contention that the nature of restaurant operations necessarily requires coercive or authoritative management. Similarly, of course, affiliative, democratic, and pacesetter styles were found unrelated to operational outcomes. Only coaching style was found to be significantly related to success in one area of restaurant operations.

Corollary findings in this study indicate that some managerial styles may be exclusive of others. For example, significant negative correlations were found to exist between several types of management:

- coercive and democratic ( $r = .5, p < .001$ )
- authoritative and democratic ( $r = -.55, p < .001$ )
- authoritative and pacesetter ( $r = -.41, p < .001$ )
- affiliative and pacesetter ( $r = -.42, p < .001$ )

Specifically, these findings indicate that few managers can be expected to practice all six styles equally or even to any extent at all. For example, coercive and democratic managers will rarely if ever borrow from each other's style.

### **Management Styles Tend To Exclusivity**

One may speculate on the reasons for this mutual exclusivity. First, why is it that coercive and authoritative managers tend not to employ the democratic style? In the case of some coercive managers, lack of management skill or experience may make threatening an employee easier than listening to him or her. Due to immaturity, a manager may not be aware of alternative behaviors. To the coercive or authoritative manager, the democratic style may appear powerless, and loss of power is anathema to this type of manager. It must also be remembered that group decision-making takes time and restaurant operations often demand rapid reactions.

Second, as noted above, authoritative and pacesetter managerial styles also seem at odds. One possible explanation might be that delegation of tasks and authority is a key element of both styles; authoritative managers do it consistently and pacesetters do it rarely. Both would find it difficult to adopt the other's style.

Third, pacesetter managers were significantly non-affiliative in style. Recalling that pacesetters have very high standards, one might expect them to be unwilling to allow another to perform a task that can only be accomplished "right" by the pacesetter. Very high personal expectations, coupled with doubt in the ability of subordinates to do the job well enough, and frustration at being overloaded with work which the pacesetter claims he or she would love to delegate but simply cannot —

all may combine to make the pacesetter a non-affiliative manager, one who cannot be concerned with interpersonal relationships because there does not seem to be enough time to develop them, nor sufficient basis to maintain them.

Fourth, the question may be asked: What happens when a manager has to manage outside his or her primary style? For instance, when a democratic manager is called upon to turn around an unprofitable operation by getting tough, the research indicates that democratic restaurant managers rarely become authoritative or coercive in style. One might postulate that managing under critical turn-around conditions calling for high task emphasis would stress a democratic manager. In high-task situations such as dinner hour rush, personnel shortage, equipment failure, large banquet events, facility remodeling, special promotions, and a variety of customer-related emergencies, one must be able to demand effective performance from subordinates and be able to discipline or discharge those who fail to perform. The reverse may also be true. Conditions requiring employee participation in a democratic decision-making process, especially the introduction of change, may stress the coercive or authoritative manager who, by definition, generally resists the democratic process.

### **Study Provides Insights Into Behavior**

The preceding discussion provides valuable insights into managerial behavior. How much flexibility can be expected of a restaurant manager? For example, when employee turnover is unacceptably high under a no-nonsense, coercive manager, can one reasonably demand a behavioral change to a more democratic style? Can pacesetters become affiliative? Can they learn to delegate? Findings of this study suggest that the 120 managers tested have not yet learned that kind of flexibility. Many of their behaviors are mutually exclusive.

However, in asking "Can change be learned?," we may also be suggesting the solution. Change can be learned, and one style of management is, by definition, a teaching style — coaching. Coaching managers are mentors, teachers, developers.

This study found coaching to be compatible with all other styles of management. This suggests that the behaviors associated with coaching may be practiced by all managers. This possibility becomes all the more interesting when it is remembered that coaching was the only managerial style related to high scores of the Operation Evaluation. Coaching is not only an available tool to managers, but an effective one as well.

If coaching is effective at the unit level, it may also be an appropriate style for upper management, enabling them to see "the manager's job as helping or showing subordinates how to improve their performance and professional development...directing by asking subordinates to set their own goals, develop plans, and identify solutions to problems."<sup>11</sup>

When coaching is exercised up and down the organizational ladder, individuals may learn to accept their managerial styles, build on strengths, address weaknesses, and become more effective where it counts most: operations, and, ultimately, profits.



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