

Explicating John Adair's Action Centred Leadership – Fieldwork

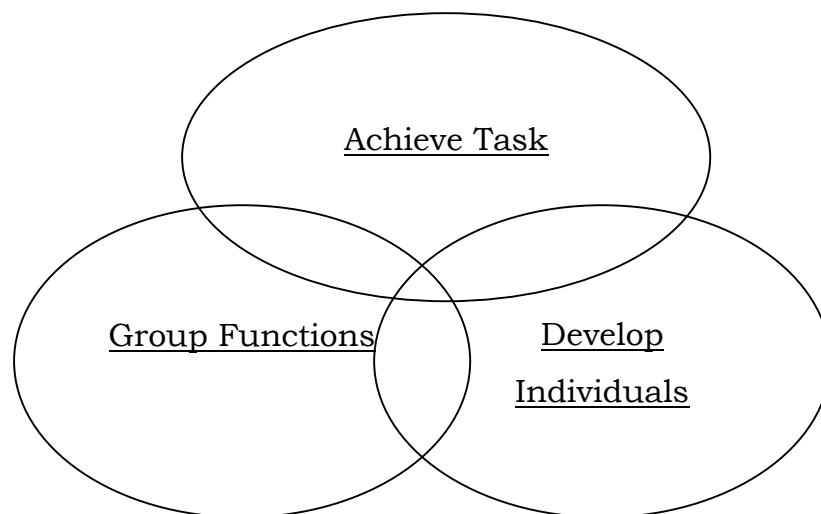
Examples from Further Education

Marian Iszatt White

Centre for Excellence in Leadership

Lancaster University, UK.

The following resource document seeks to ground Adair's Action Centred Leadership model in practical examples from Further Education, by using brief case studies based on ethnographic research conducted in the sector. Four situations are outlined representing, respectively, leadership which balances the three elements of Task, Group and Individual, and which favours each of those elements in turn. It is thus hoped to provide concrete examples of what the different elements of leadership may look like in practice, and to provide a basis for discussion concerning when it may be appropriate to emphasize one element over the other two.



Achieve Task

- Defining the task
- Making a plan
- Allocating work and resources
- Controlling quality and tempo of work
- Checking performance

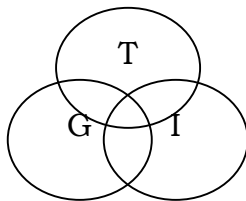
Develop Individuals

- Developing and coaching individuals
- Attending to personal problems
- Offering recognition and status

Group Functions

- Establishing clear standards
- Maintaining discipline
- Building team spirit
- Encouraging a sense of purpose

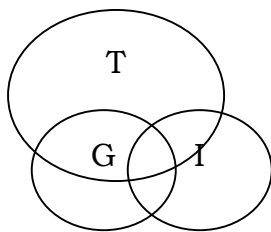
Balanced Leadership Case Study – Restructuring Lifelong Learning



The SMT of Shaftsbury College were considering how best to restructure their Lifelong Learning (Adult & Community Learning, Learn Direct, Basic Skills, Distance Learning, etc.) operation. Tim (Head of LL) had explained the existing structure to Matthew (new VP), who is now talking this through with the SMT. Some aspects of the operation are not working well and they need to make it more effective, both in terms of the outcomes generated and in terms of the time they are having to spend on it given that it is a relatively small part of the college's operations (Task). Part of the problem is that Tim is abrogating responsibility for some aspects of his role and has no overall strategy for what he is doing. Having spoken to him at some length, Matthew is convinced that this is a skills problem rather than an attitude problem. They therefore need to offer him training and support to help him develop into the more strategic aspects of the role (Individual). They are also aware that Tim's

tendency to shortcut procedures and 'go his own way' (particularly with regard to the taking on of contract staff and the pay rates he is authorising) is causing friction with other departments and particularly with the Finance and Admin teams. If the restructuring is to work, it will be important to address these frustrations, and get people to agree to a fresh start. The SMT will then have to monitor things closely to ensure that new working procedures are established and maintained (Group). It is only by focusing on all three aspects of the situation simultaneously that effective changes can be made.

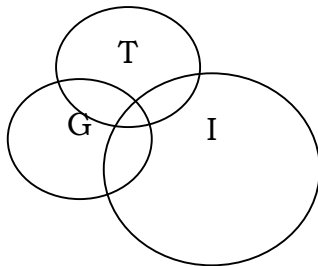
Task Focused Leadership Case Study – Preparing for Inspection



Kate arrived as Principal of Outgate College only a few weeks before it was due to be inspected. As a large general FE college, it had a number of problem areas which were likely to receive poor grades, in particular Construction and Work Based Learning. These areas were borderline 3/4s, and - if graded 4 - could result in Leadership and Management being marked down as well. With a very short timeframe available, Kate would be unable to make the substantial changes she had in view for the longer term. For example, developing a more strategic and innovative focus within her SMT (Group) and taking the pressure off the acting Head of Construction (who was currently struggling) by recruiting someone with more experience into the post (Individual) would have to wait. For now, she would have to focus on ensuring that the college showed itself to best advantage in front of the Inspectors. Hence, she intended to work hard with her VP, who would be the Nominee for the Inspection, to ensure that everything was in place – lesson plans filed, lecturers well prepared, governors briefed, management telling a consistent story about strengths and weaknesses, etc (Task). This meant preparing a raft of documentary evidence, and talking everyone involved in the inspection through it to make sure there were no slip-ups. Once the Inspection was over,

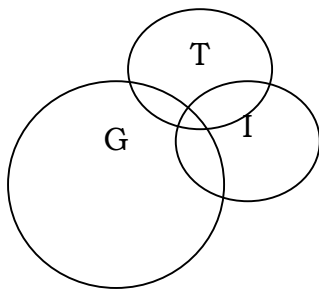
Kate could begin to focus on the other aspects of her role in a more balanced way, getting to know individuals strengths and weaknesses, and building an effective team.

Individual Focused Leadership Case Study – An Under-performing Vice Principal



Steven is the Principal of Lampton College, a high achieving sixth form college in a multi-racial community. He has a strong senior management team, with a diverse range of skills and experience to contribute. He has recently restructured the team, bringing in new members and widening the responsibilities of others, as he feels this will promote a much-needed culture of innovation to ensure the college doesn't 'rest on its laurels' (Task). Overall, this is working well but Steven is concerned that Paul, one of his VPs, is performing poorly in some areas. As VP for Students and Quality, he is very good at generating new ideas, building rapport with staff and students, and working hard on issues that interest him. Where he falls short is in not taking a sufficiently strategic view of issues and their implications for the college, with the result that he often seems under-prepared for important meetings, is late delivering work he is responsible for, and occasionally makes poor decisions. Steven is keen to work with him in a coaching role to develop both his strategic skills and his sense of accountability for his role as a whole (Individual). He hopes that by doing this, he will also be able to resolve the tensions that are developing within the SMT, as a result of others feeling they are having to 'bail him out' when he fails to deliver. This will be particularly important once the new management structure is embedded, and they have all settled into their new roles (Group).

Group Focused Leadership Case Study – Re-building an SMT after Failure



Patricia became Principal of Aspley College after her predecessor left it heavily in debt and producing poor results. A three year financial recovery plan and a raft of redundancies have restored a degree of financial stability, but morale is low and results are still poor. Patricia believes that it will be impossible to significantly raise standards (Task) until the issues within the SMT have been addressed (Group). She has a particular problem with Mike, a very resistant deputy who clearly doesn't like working for a woman and is disrespectful and unprofessional in his behaviour to her (Individual), but believes that this can only be addressed by uniting the rest of the team around common improvement goals (Group) leaving Mike isolated. At the moment, some members of the team get drawn into Mike's subversion of Patricia's initiatives, engaging in side conversations at meetings, working on his priorities instead of hers and undermining her attempts to move the college forward in favour of progressing their own pet projects. By building a common set of aims and objectives for the college, and developing clear accountabilities within the team, Patricia believes it will limit the desire and the opportunity for this kind of behaviour (Group). She can then focus on working with Mike (Individual) to improve their working relationship, and on the real work (Task) of burying the label of 'failing college' for ever.