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LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR
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INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays an important role in modern organisations because of leaders' impact on the behaviour, motivation, performance and organisational direction of employees. Leadership is also able to improve employee engagement, develop organisational culture, and help businesses respond positively to change (Eduzor, 2024). Effectiveness in leadership, however, is situation-dependent; that is, leaders usually have to vary their behaviour towards various employees and organisational issues. According to Goleman (2017), six leadership styles exist: visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter and commanding, and each of them can be implemented in different circumstances. This essay critically analyses three of such approaches, which are: democratic, visionary and coaching leadership. Considerations are made of their characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and viability in business. The essay also identifies some of the important contemporary leadership skills, including emotional intelligence, communication, decision-making, adaptability, strategic thinking and employee development, as well as considers how these skills can support organisational performance and long-term development.

DISCUSSION

Leadership and Goleman's Leadership Framework

Leadership can be considered an activity in which one influences a group to achieve shared objectives (Northouse, 1999). Leadership is not about formal authority; it is about inspiring employees, providing direction and creating relationships that facilitate organisational objectives. Based on his framework, Goleman (2017) states that successful leaders do not rely on a specific style but apply various styles depending on the situation. His paradigm has been largely associated with emotional intelligence, particularly self-awareness, empathy, relationship management, and knowledge of employees' needs. Leadership effectiveness is thus dependent on situational flexibility, employee relationships, and organisational context. The style that worked so well during the organisational transformation might not be the right one to apply in case of a crisis. Modern leaders must thus understand when to apply democratic, visionary, or coaching approaches and modify their behaviours accordingly.

Democratic Leadership Style

A participative style of leadership is democratic, where employees are encouraged to contribute ideas and contribute to the decision-making process. It involves consultation, open communication, collaboration, active listening and consideration of different views are put in place until decisions are made. Goleman (2017) believes that commitment can be improved under democratic leadership because employees are given an opportunity to influence decisions that affect their work. The primary advantage of democratic leadership is that it involves employees to a larger extent. Employees who feel their opinions are valued may demonstrate greater commitment, motivation and responsibility. Involvement may also enhance creativity as cross-functional individuals will bring varying knowledge and views (Singh et al., 2025). This can enhance the quality of decisions and teamwork, and develop trust between employees and leaders. Participative leadership can also empower employees by developing their confidence and decision-making skills.

However, democratic leadership has its limitations. Consultation can be a sluggish decision-making process, particularly when there are opposing views among employees. Agreement can be difficult to reach, and there is sometimes confusion about who the ultimate leader is due to over-involvement. Democratic leadership might not be appropriate in cases of emergency situations when prompt decisions are needed (Rosing, Boer and Buengeler, 2022). New product development is one such good example. A manager may consult marketing, finance, operations, and customer service workers in the process of designing a new product. The difference in their opinions can define customer requirements, operational limitations and economic impacts, which leads to stronger decision-making. Democratic leadership will therefore be quite helpful in a scenario where creativity, employee knowledge and commitment are important and speed is not.

Visionary Leadership Style

Visionary leadership is all about having a clear and appealing future direction and motivating the employees to work towards realising this direction. Visionary leaders articulate long-range objectives, establish shared ground and explain how employees' efforts contribute to overall organisational objectives. According to Liu et al. (2022), this style works best when an organisation needs a new orientation. One of the greatest advantages of visionary leadership is its capacity to introduce strategic clarity during periods of uncertainty or change. Communicating

where the organisation is going and why it needs change enables leaders to create greater congruence between individual and organisational objectives. A motivational vision can increase motivation efforts, innovativeness and organisational change. Visionary leadership may thus be useful when companies require employees to comprehend and advocate long-term strategic goals.

This approach also has weaknesses. Excessive dependence on the vision of one leader may reduce staff involvement and lead to making the wrong decisions in case the vision is not sustainable. Visionary leaders also have the ability to be highly attentive to future objectives at the cost of specifics of operations. The employees may be opposed to the proposed direction unless the leader is credible or can talk about the vision in a way that is convincing (Utomo, Udin and Haryono, 2022). The digital transformation is a suitable business case. Since an organisation is implementing artificial intelligence, automation or new digital systems, it is possible that employees do not know what is planned to change. It is the transformational leader who will be able to explain how digital transformation will make it possible to be competitive, productive and create value to customers in the future. The leader is able to raise awareness and dedication. Visionary leadership would therefore be particularly useful in business situations that require a strategic change or an extensive change in an organisation.

Coaching Leadership Style

The focus of coaching leadership is on building employee capabilities and aiding employee long-term personal and professional development. Coaching leaders provide feedback, development goals, strengths, and weaknesses, listen and encourage staff to do a better job (Colgate, 2025). This strategy is not just focused on short-term results, but it develops capacity that can be beneficial to the individual and organisations in the long term. Coaching leadership can increase the skills, motivation and confidence of employees. Employees who receive constructive feedback and opportunities for development may be better positioned to manage increased demands. It is also applicable in facilitating talent management, succession planning, and employee retention by training future leaders. Developing employees within the organisation may also improve the organisational knowledge and reduce the dependence on external recruitment.

However, coaching takes a lot of time and leadership. Developmental feedback requires managers to have emotional intelligence, patience, and effective communication to deliver it effectively. Feedback may not be accepted by other employees, and they may not be highly motivated to grow. Coaching is not equally suitable when one has to take action in an emergency situation. The manager may observe a high performer who can be a supervisor as an example (Horvath, Wilder and Guthmiller, 2024). Regular feedback, challenging tasks and agreed development goals can help the manager to make the employee a more effective leader and decision-maker.

Essential Skills Required by Contemporary Leaders

The modern skills needed by leaders to cope with more complex organisational environments are linked to a number of skills. Emotional intelligence is particularly important because leaders also need to understand their own feelings and recognise employees' feelings and needs. Empathy and relationship management can assist leaders in building trust, managing conflicts and choosing an appropriate leadership style (Goleman, 2017). Listening and communication should also be active. Leaders should articulate goals, expectations, and organisational transformations and listen to employee issues and responses. These capabilities particularly apply to democratic leadership, since participation is a central focus, and visionary leadership, where a leader is supposed to project a striking future direction.

The decision-making and problem-solving skills enable leaders to process information, weigh the alternatives and make the correct decisions amid uncertainty. The contemporary business world is characterised by a rapidly changing market, technological revolution and competition, which require leaders to make evidence-based decisions to weigh different stakeholder interests (Suljic, 2025). Change-management capability and adaptability are also important. Good leaders should modify their leadership behaviour in accordance with the needs of the employees, circumstances of the organisation and the stresses of the external environment.

The importance of digital awareness and strategic thinking also continues to grow. Leaders must find new opportunities and threats, understand technological shifts and realign short-term organisational actions with long-term goals. Especially effective in this respect is visionary leadership, which provides direction during strategic change. Lastly, leaders should be capable of building and empowering employees (Liu et al., 2022). Delegation, mentoring, feedback and

development opportunities can improve employee capability and organisational resilience. This is supported by training and democratic leadership that builds on employee engagement and professional development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Democratic, visionary, and coaching leadership styles offer various benefits in modern organisations. Democratic leadership promotes collaboration and employee participation, but visionary leadership provides strategic direction and purpose, particularly in the case of organisational change. Coaching leadership leads to employee growth, employee retention and organisational sustainability. However, the two approaches have weaknesses, demonstrating that a single leadership style is not appropriate in all cases. Leaders are thus advised to adjust their behaviour in response to organisational conditions and employees' needs. Contemporary leaders should work on emotional intelligence, communication, active listening, decision-making, adaptability, and strategic thinking, and invest in staff development. Organisations should also encourage leaders to incorporate multiple leadership styles rather than adhere to only one. The leadership styles devised by Goleman and supported by the day's best leadership practices can be flexibly used to improve employee and organisational performance and long-term sustainability.

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