

What makes a Great Leader?

Introduction

The essay will discuss and critically analyse the attributes required in order to make a good leader. I will be undertaking the task of looking into Sir Alan Sugar and discuss his characteristics and how he went on to become such an influential leader in today's society. I will be underpinning his styles/traits with various theories and models to support his approach in communicating and motivating people. I will also be discussing my personal leadership traits/styles based on the questionnaires undertaken and justify the areas I feel that do not represent my character. I will then critically evaluate on how I can implement change for the future highlighting areas of weakness.

Overview of Alan Sugar and Context of Business

According to Business Leader (2018) and Leaders for Business (2019) Alan Sugar is regarded as a British entrepreneur and a media personality. He is best known for the viewer's favourite business-based TV show, The Apprentice which involves a dozen candidates who undertake a series of tasks and are whittled down each week until the climax where one is offered a contract to work alongside Sugar. He is also the entrepreneur behind Amstrad consisting of electrical goods and supplied about 30% of the set-top box devices for Sky (BBC, 2007) (Business Insider, 2015). Sugar is most renowned for being a business leader, but he is also a property tycoon making him one of the richest people on earth (Express, 2019). Alongside founding Amstrad (BBC, 2007), the real estate company Amsprop has steadily grown to an impressive portfolio consisting of properties in prime inner London locations. Amsprop frequently handles vast amounts of construction and redevelopment estates through management. Amsprop is active in acquiring to add to the property portfolio (Amsprop, 2019). Northouse (2015) explains that creating vision requires a leader to implement a vision of the future which is far greater than the present while articulating ideals and values.

Nature and Nurture

Sugar demonstrated his work ethic early in life through the sheer attention to detail and eagerness to get his hands dirty. While facing poverty such as non-

ownership of a bicycle, he built one for himself using an old frame. This fits into the situational leadership style whereby Sugar is task-centred where focus is put on the task in hand and is more suited to hierarchical organisations (the founding of Amstrad). This also has the components of a transformational leadership. Sugar developed autonomy and empowerment at a young age where he elevated his expectations to go beyond resulting in self-actualisation (Western, 2008). At age 12, Sugar was up at 6am every day to work at a local greengrocer and by the time he left school at 16 his earnings were outstripping those of his father, who worked in a tailoring sweatshop. Sugar states that he had seen his family struggle trying to make ends meet. This is where he made the intention to ensure his own life would take another path. Sugar also stated that he did not want to be treated by employers the same way his father did (Alan Sugar, 2011). Sugar's ideal follows those of McGregor's Theory Y of management where work is natural and satisfaction through exercising self-direction is the reward for individuals (McGregor, 1960). Sugar explains that the staff were the reason behind Amstrad's success and regardless of whether they were on the production line or managerial positions all shared the excitement. Sugar took pride in being involved with everyone directly and believed that in order to ask others to do a task, he should himself undertake the role in order to first envisage production (Sugar, 2010). According to BBC (2007) Sugar is described as "abrasive, opinionated, hard-working" and "Sir Alan is living, growling proof that you can reach the top and yet retain a distinct Cockney flavour". Sugar's management style involved creating a family culture and that the staff felt that Sugar was speaking to them on their level. This notion merges with relationship-centred leaders (situational leadership) as Sugar focused on people and participation (Western, 2008).

Background and Family

Sugar was born in 1947 and brought up in a council house in Hackney (BBC, 2007). He is the fourth child of Nathan and Fay (Jewish family), joining twins Daphne and Derek, and eldest sister Shirley (Express, 2019).

Early Influences

Sugar has described to be proud of his Hackney heritage and feels that it has shaped the man he is today stating:

my East End background might have made me a little rough round the edges, but that's not something I can do anything about. It was good training for

reality: it kept me down to earth and taught me to quickly appraise situations and assess propositions (Burden, 2010, p. 3).

Motivation/Communication

Sugar has received honours throughout his life including being knighted as part of the Queen's New Year Honours list for his services to the electronic industry in 2000. In 2009 he was recognised as a life peer and became Baron Sugar (Business Insider, 2018). Moore (1927, p.124) defined leadership as "the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation".

Alan Sugar's Leadership Styles

Trait Theory

Alan Sugar demonstrated leadership qualities from a very young age through his drive to work and earn, to selling electrical goods and subsequently founding Amstrad (Burden, 2010) and Amsprop (Amsprop, 2019). This trait presented his power and ownership to overcome a gap by tapping into his skills to what is needed in the neighbourhood and fulfilling needs (Live and Learn Consultancy, 2020) (Amsprop, 2019). Northouse (2015) states that leadership as a trait, is the distinguished qualities of the individual possessing traits such as decisiveness, a confidence to lead and the belief that a great leader is born and not made (special talents). Sugar's early start to life was not an easy one (bought up in a council house with low income), he learnt to adapt and change his life into a successful entrepreneur he is today (Burden, 2010). The **Self-Confidence Trait** defines competence and self-assurance in that a leader's pursuits will result in influencing people (Northouse, 2019). Sugar described himself as "a one-man show" later changing it to "autocratically run" (The Guardian, 2005). The latter comment (The Guardian, 2005) suggests his need to demonstrate trustworthiness and taking responsibility for his actions exhibiting integrity (**Integrity Trait**). Northouse (2019) explains that to exhibit integrity, a leader must be believable and trustworthy. The Guardian (2005) states that Sugar has donated his TV fees to charity. The **Sociability Trait**, (Northouse, 2019) is defined as a leaders' inclination in seeking a courteous, tactful and a cooperative relationship with the people.

Kurt Lewin Leadership Style

According to the Guardian (2014) Alan Sugar is regarded as an autocratic figure due to his “scary” and “controlling” persona in order to be deemed successful. Kurt Lewin’s authoritarian leadership style (Northouse, 2015) is defined as a leader who needs to control subordinates and exerting influence while emphasising, they are in charge. However, the Guardian states (2005) that Sugar is always work orientated, “open for business” and is “open for people to call” in order to make decisions. This mindset demonstrates that autocratic leadership serves a positive purpose providing responsibility to those who seek security and a direction in setting goals (work structure). Sugar’s continued success (Business Insider, 2015) is due to his efficiency in motivating others in accomplishing required standards at work (Northouse, 2015).

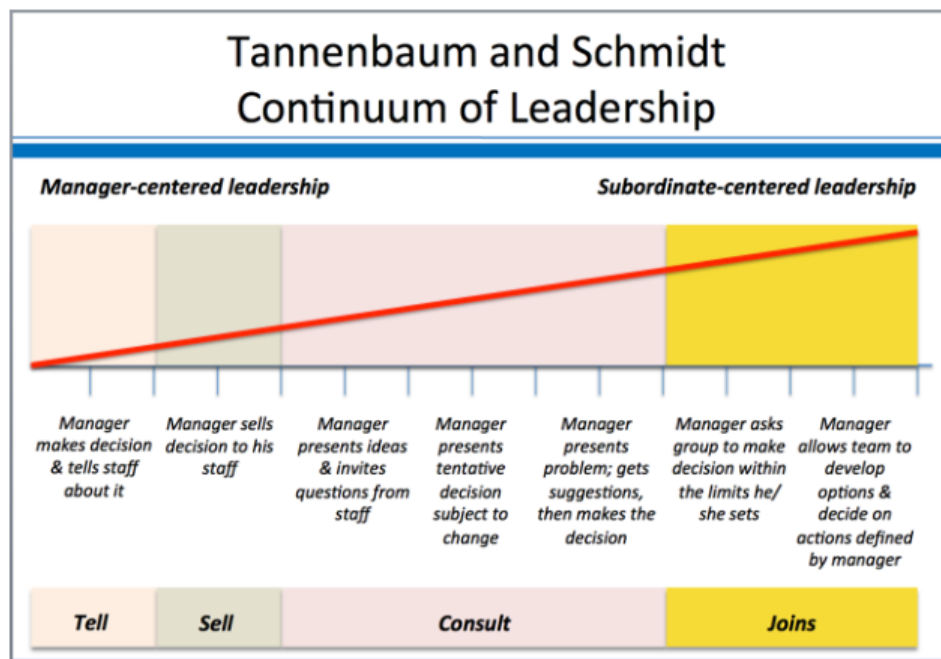
Process Theories of Motivation

According to Latham (2007), motivation is described as both needs and external factors through the form of effort. The idea of improvement signifies the importance of ones’ surroundings as well as taking into consideration how behaviour is shaped while taking in to account the significance of an employee’s needs, attitudes and values. To fully appreciate work motivation, one must identify their goal and project energy towards it. Persistence towards the goal will demonstrate ones’ motivation.

Douglas McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y

Carson (2005, p450-460) states that Douglas McGregor’s theory detailed managers’ characteristics in dealing with employees with Theory X and Theory Y. His thinking was that managers in the Theory X category believed that employees were dissatisfied with work, needed control and purpose in the workplace. In contrast McGregor stated that in Theory Y however managers believed that employees were self-disciplined, had a sense of direction and were well driven. Sugar has been described as a bully but Murray (2010) states that Sugar is assertive in manner and that he has a team of loyal staff for over 30 years. The staff team have felt motivated enough to have supported him in building his business empire including a network of advisors and friends. To many, Sugar has been regarded as a role model. This underpins McGregor’s theory Y.

Tannenbaum & Schmit Continuum Leadership



According to Harvard Business Review (2020), Mr Tannenbaum and Mr Schmidt succeeded in capturing the focal ideas that questioned how managers led organisations. The concept of ‘group dynamics’ focused on the team rather than only on the leader and resulted in the importance of leader input and participation in decision making such as the efficiency in directive leadership paying attention to motivation and relationships. Murray (2010) states that Sugar has mastered assertiveness through years of experience via self-awareness on how to communicate smoothly so to get the job done. Harvard Business Review (2020) states that the continuum leadership explores a range of possible behaviours a leader possesses through authority and the amount of freedom available to subordinates in decision making. It is desirable to be not be extreme on either ends as extreme left demonstrates high level of control by managers while sitting on the extreme right demonstrates high level of control to subordinates. Sugar believes in treating people fairly and does not set out to humiliate others. Constructive criticism is given for subordinates to learn from mistakes making a better future. This enables the facilitation in getting the best out of people while implementing negotiation (Murray, 2010). According to Murray (2010) Sugar is described as a leader who is very assertive and confident in decisions made and wanting to convey his messages to subordinates. His leadership style falls on the left of Tannenbaum & Schmit Continuum Leadership.

Behavior points occurring along the left of the continuum:

- The manager makes the decision and announces it. The leader identifies an issue(s), implements solutions and reports back to subordinates for implementation. The leader does not need to consider the feelings of the subordinates and no opportunity of participation in the final decision (Harvard Business Review, 2020). Although Sugar's leadership is presented as a forthright and firm approach, he is clear about what is happening and offers reasonings behind the decisions and forthcoming outcomes (Murray, 2010).
- The manager "sells" the decision. The manager takes ownership of the decisions made and persuades subordinates in accepting it. The manager also recognises resistance from employees and seeks to offer employees what they must gain from the decision (Harvard Business Review, 2020). Murray (2010) states that Sugar manages a leadership style where he can articulate a logical and sensible message in relaying understanding through humour and tact. Sugar can explain where subordinates have gone wrong and how things can be rectified by taking charge.
- The leader presents ideas and invites questions which initiates trust (Mindtools, 2020). Sugar's leadership style while managing Amstrad was creating an informal and flexible structure. There was no hierarchical power, so everyone was treated with equality and allowed to make decisions (Murray, 2010).

Process Theories of Change

Change is defined as a transitional state to a new situation. New and ever-changing complexities such as technology, continuous development towards change initiatives is a triggering force for the future (European Journal of Business and Management, 2018).

Kurt Lewin 3 Step Change Process

According to Brown (1998) Lewin devised a change model in three phases: unfreezing, change and refreezing. This entails the process in creating a perception that change is required and in turn directing focus in behaviour in reaching the new norm. In the Amstrad days Alan Sugar followed his instincts and questioned the norm. His mission was to make products readily available to everyone and not just for the elite (Murray, 2010). The stages are as follows:

- Unfreezing: the initial step requires an awareness that change must happen though it might meet with resistance. The leader must create a competitive advantage in the current climate and explore how the change is to be implemented while benefitting the subordinates (Brown, 1998). Sugar's impoverished background spurred him to provide affordable products for a lower rate to the working class. The revolution began when Sugar wanted to innovate on a larger scale (Murray, 2010).
- Change: the organisation can now recognise the transitional move into the changing step. Known as 'transitioning' step here change becomes a reality. Change must be carefully planned and continuously reminded of and the reasons of wanting to execute change in the first place. In order to implement change, Sugar carried out expert industry research into profiteering out of the hi-fi world resulting in cheaper manufacturing strategies proving to be successful. Due to competitors catching up with Sugar, new innovations were continuously devised.
- Refreezing: The final phase is enforced as reinforcing symbolising the new state of change while allowing everyone to accept the changes (Brown, 1998). Sugar devised Amplifiers which were cheaper on the market and made accessible for teenagers to purchase. Sugar recognised that teenagers were not too set on a top-notch sound system but rather a product which would simply play music from their bedrooms (Murray, 2010).

Evaluation of Personal Leadership Style/Traits

Trait Emphasis

Upon completion of the Conceptualising Leadership Questionnaire (Sage Edge, 2019) I can clarify that I have scored highest in the **trait emphasis** (score of 19). Trait emphasis consists of fitting within the individualistic leadership bracket and 'the great men' theory whereby defining aspects of personalities of great leaders (often men) were studied and findings on charisma, vision and courage were exemplified (Western, 2008). I believe that I do possess trait emphasis whereby I find myself to act on my own assumptions which Western (2008) explains, trait competencies relate to what leaders do rather than what personalities a leader possesses. I do find this concept individualistic however, I do take accountability on completion of tasks with persistence in pursuit of desired goals whether it's in a personal setting with the family dynamic or alongside a peer group. I also take initiative in social situations amongst peers

whether it's through problem solving on a task (group work) or tolerating situations of frustration (when in disagreement) while still holding personal identity and self-confidence (Stogdill, 1974). I do strongly believe that I have the ability to influence others' behaviour and I do this by sheer drive, motivation and confidence in any given situation. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) state that there are six traits that make up a right leader. These are characteristics such as drive, motivation, integrity, cognitive ability, confidence and task knowledge. An individual can be both born and develop these traits and play a strategic role in the leadership process. I do believe I have 'social intelligence' and can adapt to changes in situation such as unforeseen circumstances that can rise abruptly (changes to work schedule) and effective leadership must be implemented to manage the situation in order for operations at home run smoothly minimising routine changes. According to Zaccaro (2002) social intelligence is defined as encapsulating capacities such as social acumen and awareness and selecting the best response in any given situation (social environment) and are outlined as of importance in leadership qualities. According to Stogdill (1948) the trait approach faces criticism as it fails to take into consideration situational effects while factoring into characteristics of a leader and explains that certain traits that make a leader effective in one situation does not necessarily make them good leaders in another. This has been a case in my leadership in instances where I have not made the best decisions and have called on others for support. Sage Publications (2020) states that some individuals have traits that help in emergence of becoming a good leader but cannot maintain leadership overtime which effectively means situations influence leadership.

Authoritarian Leadership

On completion of the Leadership Styles Questionnaire (Sage edge, 2019) I can clarify that I have scored highest in **authoritarian leadership** style (score of 23). I must say I am not surprised by this outcome as I liken myself to Alan Sugar's leadership qualities (The Guardian, 2014) and feel I am self-directive in decisions made and like him exert effort in all tasks while motivating others to do the same through leading by example for instance, I will complete my part of a group exercise sufficiently and on time and in turn monitor and push others to fulfil their commitments with the same effect (Northouse, 2015: The Guardian, 2015: Sugar, 2010). Authority compliant leadership places emphasis on the task and not on the people performing (Northouse, 2013) but I feel it is important to not to use people merely as tools to drive results and applying

participative leadership can result in inviting others in sharing ideas on how to get things done if they feel they cannot keep up with my expectations (Northouse, 2015). Leadership coercion is described as, the use of force to influence change and is seen as the dark side of leadership (Northouse, 2019).

Motivation

In order to demonstrate leadership attributes and motivate others in reaching desired outcomes, I myself think it is important to self-motivate and in doing so I apply **Maslow's Theory of human motivation** whereby I find the most important needs that need to be met are mine and in accomplishing in fulfilling my needs I can reach self-actualisation and mirror my behaviours onto others (Stoyanov, 2017). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) state that the hierarchy is pictured as a pyramid and self-actualisation is the realisation of one's full potential. I do realise that in order to maintain this position I need to keep on top of my basic needs such as psychological needs and self-esteem and this would provide beneficial in motivating those around me for example, helping my children reach their full potential in academia (Pichere, 2015 and Maslow, 1987).

Planning for Leadership Change

Northouse (2015) explains that leadership is about change and often organisations often resist change due to rule changes and new concepts and so an ideal leader needs to be socially perceptive in order to implement change effectively. Socially I feel that I can adapt to change appropriately. I do this by firstly finding out all key and relevant information to ensure I can correctly implement change accurately. Though sometimes this can provide challenging as I am very self-directive, in order to overcome this barrier, I should rely on others more often to support me by welcoming opinions and alternative ideas on how to go forward which will emphasise participative leadership (Northouse, 2015).

Evaluating on questionnaire results, though I do agree that I do possess both trait emphasis and an autocratic leadership style I do however realise that I would like to demonstrate a democratic style as some situations do require it. A situation which I feel passionate about and headstrong might still require myself to see the bigger context and require a 'give and take' approach and compromise to ensure all stakeholders are happy.

Kotter' 8-Step Change

Kotter and Cohen (2002) explains that in the 8-step process to lead change require the following:

- **A sense of urgency:** in order for myself to wanting to compete in an ever-changing world I need to handle crisis effectively in a matter of urgency by realising the reality of the situation and try and control damage best way possible
- **Build a guiding coalition:** Kotter advocates a “dual operating system” whereby hierarchies (singular operating system) are not relied on and therefore creating a network-like structure which works alongside hierarchy that aligns with people’s energy (Kotter, 2014). This ‘merge’ system will enable myself to not have a hierarchical mindset where I place myself on top but provide myself opportunities to align my views with others when working in a team set environment. I do need to appreciate that people accelerate progress
- **Form a strategic vision and initiatives:** Kotter has prompted leaders to think differently during changes and in order to facilitate this, a leader needs to develop skills needed to manage change (Kotter, 2020). I need to clarify how the future is evolving from the past and take initiative through vision to make a better future for myself and those who surround me. I believe this strategy will enhance motivation and productivity of others
- **Communicate the vision:** In order to implement change, a mass number of people need a common opportunity to drive change (Kotter and Whitehead, 2010). I need to offer support to those who require it and talk to peers and understand their concerns in order to unanimously move in the same direction
- **Enable action by removing barriers:** this step requires removing barriers that hinder the vision (Tools Hero, 2020). Actions I need to take are realising the obstacles and dialoguing with all peers so I can establish who are resisting the change. I need to encourage the vision onto others and accept their ideas and implement it into the process
- **Generate short-term wins:** Wins and success are great motivators and should be recognised. Short term goals can often keep track of progress and everyone has clarity of the goal (Kotter, 2020 and Tools Hero, 2020). I believe the best motivator is self-accomplishment and celebrating success with peers. This creates a core component in teamwork and helps in adapting to change. I can energise peers to persist by often

capturing small wins whether it be a completion of certain task or undertaking of a project thus creating a culture of a collective impact

- **Sustain and build on change:** Kotter states that because victory is sometimes celebrated early, some projects fail so, sustainable long-term credibility can improve the overall processes by making continuous improvements along the way (Mindtool, 2020). Ideally, I would like to build on each win by analysing what went right and identify what areas that need improving. Along with peers, setting goals and keeping ideas fresh can create a momentum in the overall culture and achievements made
- **Anchor the changes:** to sustain change, values and vision need to become the core element in the day to day work in determining what gets done (Mindtool, 2020 and Tools Hero, 2020). The step that I need to incorporate are supporting peers by talking about progress made and recognising peers who helped contribute in facilitating the vision.

Conclusion

On conclusion I can establish that to become a great leader several attributes collectively determine a competent leader. Sir Alan Sugar's leadership style has demonstrated that sheer determination and perseverance to drive vision while possessing charisma and charm can contribute to selling an idea while influencing change. Although Sugar is deemed to have an aggressive autocratic leadership style it has been proven that he is still seen as a team player by his need in fulfilling the requirements of both his employees and customers. His leadership qualities derive from taking ownership of decisions made and having confidence to execute his vision. He has always taken responsibility of his actions with integrity and he has the ability to influence people by demonstrating work ethic from an early age while still providing security and direction to employees. The staff are clearly motivated by Sugar's assertive manner and have regarded him as a role model. Years of experience plays to the assertiveness nature and his clarity on goals only strengthens his need for participative work culture where he is able to tactfully critique on areas of improvement while respecting subordinates. He is very meticulous when it comes to planning by undertaking research and having a grasp on reality on what needs to change in the current market.

To summarise my own leadership traits and styles I have realised that I do possess an autocratic approach when leading and I do believe that I am

competent in this category as from a very young age I learnt to do things for myself which has shaped the person I am today. This approach has served me well as I have always continuously developed my skills and broadened my mindset to further better myself so I can support my family and friends effectively. In doing so I have built confidence by recognising that I can lead them while not undermining myself in the process. This is very important in motivating myself while establishing self-growth. I do feel that going forward I do need to become less self-reliant and enable others to offer help to ease the strain. I do believe that in order for others to learn and take direction, I myself need to demonstrate that I can also follow direction. This will demonstrate a participative approach which I think others will welcome.

In order to accurately reflect on this assignment, I had to research textbooks, articles and websites. Both the university online facilities NewsBank and the online library resulted in no information at all on Sugar which I found very disappointing. I found that most articles on Alan Sugar were quite repetitive and only focused on his status and wealth alongside the BBC tv show *The Apprentice* only. Similarly, with books, there were vast amounts of autobiographies which were interview based or self-written or directed rather than other people's perspective regarding his leadership traits. However, with the little information I did gather which underpinned his leadership traits, there were vast number of credible sources which underpinned his methodology in regard to models and theories which supported his behaviours and actions. I used many books from the library which had specific information on leadership and found them readily available without too much hassle. Similarly, I also found many online sources which were suitable too. These even included watching videos online to understand leadership concepts. I think what helped me with determining Sugar's style is my long appreciation the tv show giving me an idea of what he's like as a leader.

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Appendices

Timeline and Themes

1947 - Alan Sugar was born in Hackney (BBC, 2007).

1968 - Sugar started off selling electrical goods out of his van aged 21. Five years later Amstrad was founded (Alan Michael Sugar Trading, an importer/exporter wholesale company specialising in consumer electronics (Express, 2019)).

1985 - Amsprop (real estate) was founded (Amsprop, 2019).

1991 - Sugar took over his favourite football team Tottenham Hotspurs to help ease financial strain the club were suffering from at the time. However, his takeover was not welcomed by the club's fans as they viewed Sugar's involvement as handling the club as a business (Business Leader, 2018).

2001 - Sugar sold the football club describing his 16-year involvement with his boyhood club as "a waste of my life" (Business Leader, 2018).

2005 - Sugar first appeared on BBC reality show, *The Apprentice* (The famous people, 2019).

2007 - Sugar sold his business Amstrad to BSkyB for £125 million citing interest in other business ventures (BBC, 2007) (Business Leader, 2018). However, the Express (2019) state that this was due to the stock market crashing in 1987 that took a toll on the firm.

2015 - Sugar became a billionaire with an estimated fortune of £1.15 billion but has since then released by the Sunday times that Sugar ranks 123rd richest person in the UK

Sugar currently runs the firm Amsprop (Alan Michael Sugar Property), with his son Daniel Sugar who is acting MD. The business invests in commercial properties across London and has sold on some portfolios to investors

resulting in profits. Majority of Sugar's wealth is held by Amsprop and has taken £181 million in dividends in the year 2018 alone (Express, 2019).