



INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA-WALES

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Leading and Developing People

Steve Job: A leadership case study

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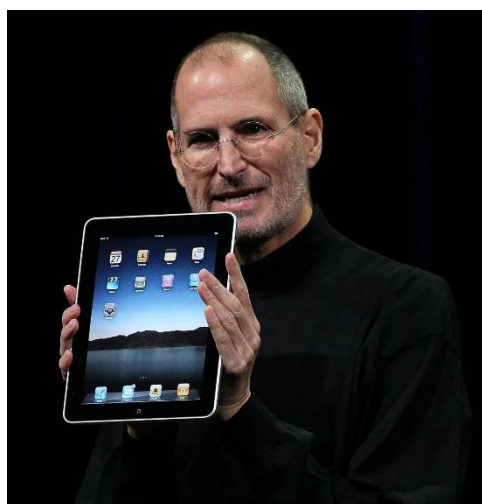


Figure 1: Steve Jobs. (Levy, 2023)

Steve Paul Jobs was born in San Francisco, California, in the United States (Levy, 2023). His adoptive parents moved him to Cupertino, California, which is now referred to as Silicon Valley, where they raised him (Levy, 2023). He attended Reed College, one of Portland, Oregon's most elite schools, but dropped out after only one semester (Kim, 2020). Due to his interest in engineering and art, he enrolled in a variety of classes, including a calligraphy class, to hone his soft and hard skills before he formally dropped out of college (Crowe, 2021).

After dropping out, Jobs worked at Atari as a video game creator and backpacker across India (Nath, 2023). Back in Silicon Valley, Jobs began to demonstrate leadership qualities by suggesting that Wozniak, a friend from high school, join him in creating their own computer logic board, the Apple I, in the garage of Jobs' parent's house (Levy, 2023). Steve Jobs was known as a pioneer in the personal computer era (Levy, 2023). With Steve Wozniak's engineering skills and Jobs creativity, Jobs has portray his leadership skills in establishing Apple Company Incorporated in 1977 with the success of Apple II (Levy, 2023).

He was fired from Apple after some underwhelming product sales, but he didn't stay remain for long (Nath, 2023). Instead, he soon founded a new company named NeXT Incorporated and built workstation computers for the education market, where his product is successful (Nath, 2023). Then he succeeded in turning Pixar into a significant animation studio (Nath, 2023). Steve Jobs' ability to prevent Apple from going bankrupt and taking over as CEO in 1996 is his most notable leadership accomplishment (Levy, 2023). He reestablished himself as a skilled high-technology marketer and visionary throughout his time at Apple (Levy, 2023). This truly shows how Jobs perceived the computer revolution might be in the future.

Jobs is known for his transformational and autocratic leadership, which can be seen from his quote as followed:

“Innovation has nothing to do with how many R&D dollars you have. When Apple came up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R&D. It’s not about money. It’s about the people you have, how you’re led, and how much you get it.” – Steve Job (Younes, 2020)

Fast-paced technological advancement rises in the change of consumer preferences, fierce competition and the emerging economy lead Jobs to continuously innovate his product to better suits the current generation and to ensure their company maintain its competitive advantage in the technology industry (Levy, 2023). Different leadership styles would be required in a highly complex adaptive system in the twenty-first century in order to promote

innovation, adaptation, and high performance in the workplace. This is due to the changes that occur more rapidly which create a more complex daily scenario. As a result, it's necessary to fill the organization's requirement for a visionary transforming agent and to make it possible for better-informed decisions to be taken (Bohra, 2022). This essay will then analyse Steve Jobs' leadership style to ascertain whether it was successful in motivating innovation, adaption, and high performance. This is done in light of the context in which Jobs operates.

Leadership is a subjective term that could be widely determined by any individual due to its wide array of leadership reasoning, authority positions it holds and style (Strait, 2020). To fulfil the objectives of the organisation or group, people must be motivated and inspired by the leader's ambition, skills, personality, and other traits (Strait, 2020; Rahmawati, 2021). Although defining it might be complex, leadership will primarily consist of leader, influence, follower, intention, common purpose, change and personal responsibility (Rahmawati, 2021). Autocratic and Transformational leadership styles will be used in the analysis of Steve Jobs, coupled with a critical assessment of how each affects the ability to promote innovation, adaption and high performance.

According to Owusu-Manu et al. (2020), transformative leadership is characterised by a leader's charismatic influence on his or her set of standards, values, and beliefs. There are various characteristics to be evaluated of Steve Jobs to determine whether he really portrays transformative leadership. Encouraging followers' motivation would be the first characteristic (Khan et al., 2020). Steve Jobs is known for his leadership approach which makes use of the "reality distortion field" enabling him to push his team to their maximum potential and creativity in innovating Apple's products (Gilmanov, 2023). This strategy aims to inspire his team members by showing them that everything is possible if they challenge themselves and utilise their potential (Bans-Akutey, 2021). For instance, Kenyon, a Macintosh system engineer, worried about the lengthy boot time (Paddock, 2021; Silvestre, 2018). Jobs then replied, "Could you find a way to reduce the boot time by 10 seconds if it would save a person's life?" (Silvestre, 2018; Paddock, 2018). Jobs then continues by illustrating the advantages and disadvantages of creating a shorter reboot time (Silvestre, 2018). This inspired Kenyon, who the next day created a method that boots up 28 seconds faster (Silvestre, 2018). In addition, a greater example would be the 2007 release of the iPhone, a gadget that combines the functionality of a phone, iPod, and internet connection (Levy, 2023). This product first looked unachievable, but thanks to Steve Jobs' self-assurance and clear vision of the future, he was able to motivate his team to develop one that would foster innovation, deliver excellent

performance, as well as bring about significant changes and adapt to the 21st century (Levy, 2023).

The next characteristic would be that Steve Jobs build a working-for-common-good company culture (Nasrudin, 2022). Jobs has encouraged a two base approach to the team which persistence is crucial as well as innovation fosters initiative and leadership (Sharma, 2022). Jobs encourages his team to put the customer's needs first rather than thinking only about the bottom line which is the profit (Kakde et al., 2020). This would be consistent with Job's claim that "customers do not know what they want until we have shown them" (Kakde et al., 2020). Thus, by giving them the chance to influence how the world is changed through technology, Jobs has also promoted a culture where employees feel like they are making a meaningful contribution (Muldrew, 2019). Quotes by Jobs "The people who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the one who does" (Malakat, 2022). Employees are given this sense of purpose and vision to help them adapt, be more creative in how they complete their work and perform better for the organisation (Malakat, 2022). An illustration can be found in the campaign Jobs started after he was reinstated as Apple's CEO in 1997 following his financial issues (Levy, 2023). He developed the "Think Different" campaign which yet simple but brings lots of context to Apple's brand image (Levy, 2023). This not only attracts more customer towards the Apple brand but also inspire the team to strive for greatness by visualizing high performance through innovation and making the statement a reality that will be portrayed to every user, especially in this current 21st century where technology advancement is accelerating daily.

The last characteristic would be the emphasis on authenticity, cooperation and open communication held by Steve Jobs (Chemko, 2022). Jobs is known as a leader who is very blunt due to his clear, and direct ways of communicating when he would criticise on some matters (Kakde et al., 2020). His style of communicating enables a clear and straightforward task and vision to be communicated to his teams (Kakde et al., 2020; Malik, 2019). This made it simpler to comprehend. Aside from that, Jobs encourages a participative approach to his team in enabling a vision to be achieved in the real context (Malik, 2019). This strategy encourages teams to think from the perspective of the market, which promotes innovation and helps products and services adapt to the rapidly changing market (Glasgow, 2020). This open communication also enables to help Jobs to portray his authenticity trait to his teams (Gardner et al., 2021). For example, due to his perfectionism and attention to detail, he urged his

engineers to create a nice chip for the Macintosh (Montag, 2018). This small difference would be the thing that set apart Jobs product with other competitors. The small detail and the simple approach he often focused on enabled Apple to constantly innovate its product (Kakde et al., 2020). In addition, a culture of trust and openness was created where workers felt comfortable discussing their ideas and grievances (Malik, 2019). For instance, Jobs requested an intuitive user interface during the creation of the Macintosh and worked with the team to produce a product that was both innovative and user-centric (Isaacson, 2012). Therefore, innovation, adaption and high performance are encouraged.

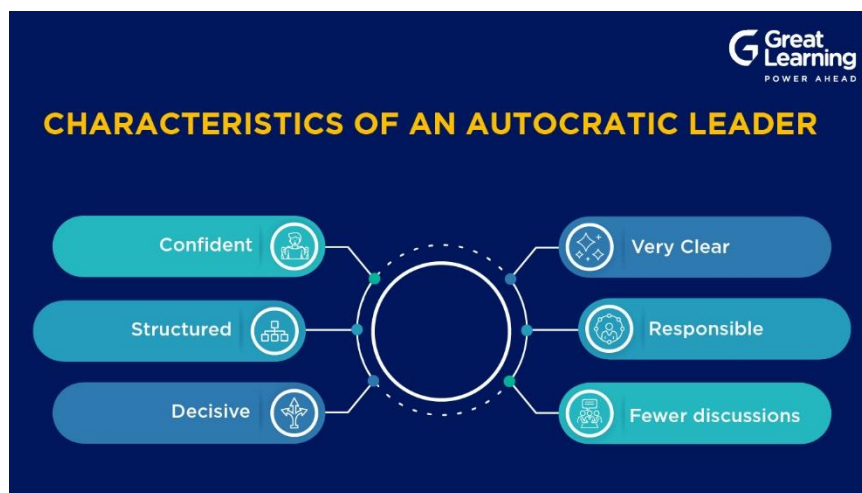


Figure 2: Characteristics of Autocratic (Sajjan, 2022)

Autocratic leadership, on the other hand, is when a leader has organisational power that allows them to make full decision-making, set schedules, decide group policies, and assign tasks to employees without taking into account their input (Yamak and Eyüpoglu, 2018; Sousa & Rocha, 2019). There are several characteristics as in Figure 2 that should be analysed to determine whether Steve Jobs is really an autocratic leader. The first characteristic is by being confident (Sajjan, 2022). With this vision, Steve Jobs has been incredibly confident. He once said to his employee, “Don’t compromise! It was all about determination to make a great product and everything else was secondary” (Kakde et al., 2020). His confidence has raised the team morale, which hence encouraged continuous innovation as well as enabled Apple to create a better performance (Kakde et al., 2020). For example, Jobs displays his confidence in showing the first iPhone’s revolutionary feature during its launch (Levy, 2023).

The second characteristic was a structured system is made (Sajjan, 2022). Jobs has a reputation for being a leader that is highly detail-oriented, task-oriented, and perfectionist, sets clear goals and holds his team to a high standard (Kakde et al., 2020). This is evident in the development of the Macintosh or Mac which he leads (Levy, 2023). In this project, he separated the teams into smaller groups, giving each group a task that was specifically designed to help Macintosh succeed (Levy, 2023). In this structured system, every employee is pushed to drive harder in which Jobs has fired emotionally engaged people that are seen as not suited for this system (Bohra, 2022). "Steve Jobs focused his laser beam on you and didn't bat an eye. It was a distortion that reinforced itself (Kakde et al., 2020). Although it could be perceived as bullying, this encourages people to work harder (Kakde et al., 2020). This structure's system does inhibit innovation and make it harder for adaption as the work environment is seen as very stressful (Team, 2022). However, from a wider perspective, it does enhance Apple's performance as their teams are pushed to create products that are thought to be unattainable or ridiculously excellent (Malakat, 2022). Thus, Jobs might help Apple outperform its rival and obtain a competitive edge in the technology industry.

Furthermore, Jobs has shown clarity in its vision in which he specifically and clearly stated her vision, expectation, and how he would like the product perceived to be (Sajjan, 2022). According to Kakde et al. (2020), this characteristic mainly concentrated on talking about the expectation of a product and is results-driven rather than emphasising the people. By concentrating on topics that have a significant impact on his followers, he also seems to be able to simplify difficult ideas (Malakat, 2022). For instance, he streamlined the company's product line and developed the "think different" marketing strategy for Macintoshes (Levy, 2023). He purposely creates that campaign to engage with the customer and promote Apple's brand to the customer (Levy, 2023). A simple and clear statement enables a message to be easily gauged by the customer and enables Apple's brand image to become stronger. But because he has a perfectionist personality, he frequently snaps at his teams when things don't go as planned (Kakde et al., 2020). But because of his perseverance, he would keep stepping up, ensuring that everyone continued with the endeavour and making the seemingly impossible happen (Sharma, 2022). This would lead to more pressure on their team in making higher performance despite reducing the innovation and adaption.

The last characteristic to be discussed was decisiveness (Sajjan, 2022). Apple co-founder, Stephen Wozniak has regarded Jobs as the main business decision-maker (Team,

2022). Even amid uncertainty, he was capable of acting quickly to make difficult judgements (Team, 2022). Jobs once said that “as a leader, deciding what to do is as important as deciding what to do which is true for companies and products” (Kakde et al., 2020). For example, while Apple are facing financial difficulties, Apple’s board of directors requested Jobs to lead the company again in June 1997 (Levy, 2023). He was successful in guiding Apple through several strategies after the takeover to overcome its financial issues (Levy, 2023). During the product development meeting, “Stop! This is crazy” he shouted, marched towards the whiteboard and proclaimed that product-development teams should only concentrate on our “great” products, after returning to Apple in 1997 (Kakde et al., 2023). He was successful in making the iMac the best-selling personal computer in the country in 1998 and generating steady profits for the business (Levy, 2023). This has demonstrated how Jobs managed to make wise decisions and handle crisis management effectively in a timely manner, benefiting the company through his vision (Bohra, 2022). However, this authoritarian leadership characteristic does lessen the possibility of the employee contributing to the decision (Team, 2022). Hence, the likelihood of innovation is reduced as the decision are only focused on the leader. However, their performance would be improved a lot since the direction of the goal is easier to be achieved without being interrupted by other individuals.

In conclusion, based on the critical analysis of both leadership styles, the best fit for Steve Jobs would be the transformational leadership style. However, autocratic leadership are still in need in a certain scenario and can be a complementary leadership style which could help in making superior leadership outcome. His key concept which is persistence as well as innovation which drive initiative and leadership do help Jobs to transform Apple from a specialised computer manufacturer (which began with the release of a personal computer known as Apple II into the market) into a global technological company which have brought changes to the society in the 21st century (Sharma, 2022; Levy, 2023). Under the direction of Jobs, Apple continuously searched the market for any gaps they could find that would enable them to develop and bring new products to the market. This kind of strategy helps them to gain a competitive advantage and continue to be a market leader in the technology industry. The reason is that their fast rate of moving their product along with the technological advancement do help their company to adapt to the changes of the complex environment. This achievement is also attributable to Jobs' visionary leadership, which inspires workers to challenge accepted norms and push their creative bounds (Kakde et al., 2020). As can be seen, Apple continues as

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a high-performance company in this current era which shows the success of Jobs's legacy in leadership that brought Apple to constantly move forward in the industry.

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