

# Country Club Management and Self-directedness: Implications for Academics and Practitioners of Leadership

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## Abstract

Leadership orientation is an important component of students' leadership development and helps inform the creation and understanding of more advanced models of leadership. Students' level of self-direction must be understood in order to better serve their instructional and leadership needs. The researchers examined leadership style and self-directedness of undergraduate students enrolled in two separate agricultural leadership courses. Data was collected through a combined instrument measuring students' location on the Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid and level of self-directedness. The findings indicated a strong correlation between a people orientation leadership style and self-directedness. The majority of respondents had a country club leadership style. Developing a comprehension of students' previous leadership experiences may provide more insight into their location on the leadership grid and level of self-directedness. Gaining a deeper understanding of self-perceived skills or behaviors of agricultural leadership majors or those minoring in leadership would be beneficial for agricultural leadership educators.

## Introduction

Although original studies on leader behaviors and styles originated in the late 1950s, industry, leadership educators and leadership students still rely on those measures when engaging in leadership development activities. Understanding one's natural leadership orientation is also a basis for more advanced leadership models, such as contingency, situational and authentic leadership (Bass and Bass, 2008). Because leadership behavior models are integral in the development of leaders, it is imperative to understand how they correlate with other models of learning and development.

Blake and Mouton's (1964) Managerial Grid (later changed in 1991 by Blake and McCause to the Leadership Grid) is a model of task and relationship orientation for leaders. Building upon the research line of leadership behaviors proposed by the University of Michigan and Ohio State, Blake and Mouton created a grid system, which associates managers' people (relationship) orientation to their concern for production (task). Utilizing the scores from the Managerial Grid Questionnaire, participants of this study can be classified as one of five leader types; (1) Authority-Compliance (high production, low people), (2) Country Club (low production, high people), (3) Middle of the Road (moderate on both measures), (4) Impoverished (low production, low people), or (5) Team (high production, high people). A further revision by Blake and McKee (1993) expands the original leader descriptors.

Blake and Mouton theorize leaders have a dominate style which is the one used most often and in varying situations. They also conclude other styles can and will be utilized by leaders if and only if their dominate style is not perceived as effective and the leader is reflexive enough to see a disconnect and change his/her style (Blake and Mouton, 1964). Subsequent studies by Hall (1984), Blake and Mouton (1985) and Blake and McCause (1991) found leaders who self-identified as 9,9 or Team Leaders were more effective and were more likely to advance to higher leadership positions within their organizations.

Business can improve productivity by developing an understanding of leadership styles. The change of corporations from hierarchical, national and shareholder-oriented structures to networked, international and stakeholder-focused environments creates a need to

understand what leadership means and how followers react to leadership (Maak and Pless, 2006). A business leader's style, whether in terms of a single project or companywide, can affect organizational performance and different styles are needed in various situations (Müller and Turner, 2007). Supervisors must understand how their leadership style influences employee satisfaction. Managers' leadership styles shape organizational success, as well as employee job satisfaction, commitment and productivity (Rad and Yarmohammadian, 2006). The business world has changed in its approach to leadership with a shift from a more autocratic style to one that is more engaging and encourages employees to get personally involved (Lenhardt et al., 2011)

Research has shown task and relationship oriented leadership behaviors can have an effect in situations important in the business world. Madlock (2008) indicated a mixture of both task and relationship leadership styles leads to higher employee satisfaction. Taberner et al. (2009) found task-oriented leaderships had a positive effect on the creation of transactional normative contracts and higher group accomplishment, while relationship-oriented leadership had a positive effect on the creation of relational normative contracts and no difference in group accomplishment.

As leadership development encompasses leadership training and education, it is imperative to understand how leaders learn (Brungardt, 1996). Adult education has traditionally revolved around a classical teacher-student relationship with the goals of increasing subject knowledge in the student and also to foster skills that will continue to aid the student after the completion of the course (Dynam et al., 2008). Self-directed learning (SDL) is a concept that challenges the classical theory. SDL is a learning strategy where the individual assumes the responsibility and initiative for pursuing the individual's own learning needs and goals (Knowles, 1975). Candy (1991) extended the concept of SDL to education by positing that SDL environments fostered a more fundamental understanding of the subject material as opposed to rote memorization.

Achieving SDL by the student engenders fundamental knowledge that enhances both the skills required for the course and future life experiences. The emergence of a stronger SDL approach to adult education has called into question the efficacy of the traditional role of the teacher (Montgomery, 2009). The SDL framework has become increasingly used in contemporary educational research to address new modes of educational delivery. Irby and Strong (2013) found that students had relatively high willingness to engage in a new education mode like mobile learning. The increased use of technology and asynchronous education delivery systems has facilitated

the incorporation of SDL techniques into modern curriculae (Teo et al., 2010).

Classic SDL theory approaches self-directed learning as the responsibility of both the instructor and the student (Stockdale and Brockett, 2011). Specific characteristics have been attributed to college students exhibiting greater degrees of SDL. Students exhibiting greater levels of self-management, a desire for learning and self-control have been found to express greater levels of self-directedness (Fisher and King, 2010). SDL as an educational framework has the ability to significantly increase student learning when the student demonstrates high levels of motivation, self-management, learning desire and self-control (Abar and Loken, 2010). Students must be prepared to embrace SDL characteristics for effective self-directed learning to occur.

Encouraging students to engage in SDL learning techniques when the students are not ready can lead to inconsistent results and a reduction of classroom efficacy (Yuan et al., 2012).

The traditional teaching style adopted by most university classrooms revolves around the traditional teacher/classroom model in which teachers provide instruction and results are evaluated with assignments (Loyens et al., 2008). Conventional classroom instructional methods naturally inhibit the ability of students to become more self-directed. Courses designed with improving SDL in mind have been shown to increase student levels of SDL (Dynam et al., 2008). Educators should use the curriculum to prepare students for future jobs by moving students from dependence to self-directedness (Pennington, 2004). Strong et al. (2012) found a correlation with students' leadership style and level of self-directed learning. Blake and Mouton's (1964) and Grow's (1991) theories were used to scaffold this study to better understand factors that influence leadership in order to enhance the practice of student leader development.

## **Materials and Methods**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of factors that may influence leadership styles levels of agricultural leadership students. More specifically, the study sought to:

1. Describe students' leadership style;
2. Describe students' self-directed learning levels;
3. Examine the relationship between students' leadership style and self-directed learning levels; and
4. Examine the relationship between students' location on Blake and Mouton's Leadership Grid and level of self-directed learning.

## Opening the Doors

This study used a quantitative research paradigm with survey research as the design for the study. This study was descriptive in nature as it was a census. The population (N = 93) consisted of undergraduate students in two separate agricultural leadership courses from a land-grant institution. The study was conducted during the Fall of 2012 with leadership students in two courses. One course focused on leading and training adults and had forty-three (n = 43) students. The course objectives were to:

1. Define teaching and learning and describe the process of each.
2. Identify the steps and processes related to Instructional Design and the ADDIE Model.
3. Describe and give examples of active training.
4. Identify and distinguish between the different components of an adult training program.
5. Design, develop and evaluate an adult training program.

The other course (course acronym) centered on leadership application and had fifty (n = 50) students. Team Leadership, is a junior-level leadership application course at Texas A&M University. The students in this course are agricultural leadership or university studies-leadership studies majors who have completed at least one course in leadership theory. The course objectives were to:

1. Complete a service-learning project with a community value of at least \$1,000
2. Identify group member roles within their team with 90% accuracy
3. Diagnose stages of the team development process with 90% accuracy

Survey questionnaires were hand delivered to the sample. Eighty-six (n = 86) of the 93 students responded yielding a response rate of 92.47% and two responses were eliminated due to incomplete answers. Therefore, the study produced (n = 84) usable responses.

Leadership style focuses on what leaders do versus what leaders may be. Blake and Mouton's (1964) leadership grid questionnaire, used in this study, was composed of 18 items that assessed two orientations to leadership: people and task. Researchers and practitioners of leadership at Texas A&M University found the Blake and Mouton's leadership style instrument to have content validity for the research objectives in this study. Anchors in the instrument were: 0 = Never, 1 = Seldom, 3 = Often, 4 = Almost Always and 5 = Always. Odd numbered items in the instrument related to the concern for people leadership orientation. Concern for people is the extent a leader considers the interests of team members when

choosing to achieve a goal (Blake and Mouton, 1964). Even numbered items were associated with task oriented leadership. Odd and even numbered scores were summed separately. In order to assess the scoring interpretation of Blake and Mouton's leadership grid, a researcher sums the total of the odd numbered or people oriented responses that result in a single number. The researcher then sums the total responses provided for the task orientation in the even numbered statements with a single number that is produced from the summation. The first number, the people orientation score is identified along the left side of Blake and Mouton's (1964) leadership grid and the second number, the task orientation score, is identified on the bottom of the leadership grid. The two scores are plotted on the grid representing a singular location. The singular location represents the leadership style of the respective individual; (1) Authority-Compliance (high production, low people), (2) Country Club (low production, high people), (3) Middle of the Road (moderate on both measures), (4) Impoverished (low production, low people), or (5) Team (high production, high people). The internal consistency was  $\alpha = .86$  for the leadership style instrument.

Richards' (2005) developed an instrument aligning Grow's (1991) Staged Self-Directed Learning Model to ascertain students' perceived level of self-directedness. A team of adult learning researchers at Texas A&M University found Richard's (2005) instrument to have content validity suitable for this study. Richard's (2005) instrument included 24 items to assess students' level of self-directed learning and included anchors: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree and 4 = Strongly Agree. The internal consistency of the self-directed learning scale was  $\alpha = .85$ . The internal consistency of each construct was reliable according to (Cronbach, 1951) and therefore, deemed acceptable to administer in order to answer the research questions in this study.

The first and second objectives were measured using descriptive statistics. Fraenkel et al. (2012) indicated descriptive statistics enable researchers to illustrate the data's location around a grand mean and standard deviation. The third and fourth objectives were measured with correlation coefficients. Correlations imply the track and scale of variable relationships between -1.00 and +1.00 (Davis, 1971).

The majority of students were male (n = 49, 58.33%), were seniors (n = 55, 65.50%), were between 21 and 23 years old (n = 72, 85.71%), were an FFA or 4-H member (n = 61, 72.62%) and worked at least a part-time job (n = 65, 77.38%). The findings from this study can only be generalized to the sample of students enrolled in the two leadership courses at Texas A&M University and cannot be generalized beyond the target population. However,

the data provided insight on additional factors that can be examined to develop a better comprehension of variables that influence leadership style.

## Results and Discussion

The first objective was to describe students' leadership style. Students' leadership styles were examined in terms of task (Table 1) and relationship (Table 2) orientation. The overall mean for students' people orientation was ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = .94$ ). The highest scoring item was "I encourage my team to participate when it comes to decision making time and I try to implement their ideas and suggestions." ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .90$ ). The lowest scoring item was "I enjoy reading articles, books and journals about training leadership and psychology and then putting what I have read into reading them." ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ).

Table 2 illustrates students' task oriented leadership styles. The overall mean for students' relationship orientation was ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = .95$ ). The highest scoring item was "I honor other people's boundaries." ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .93$ ). The lowest scoring item was "It frustrates me when I have to deal with others' personal issues." ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ).

The second objective of the study was to describe students' self-directed learning levels (Table 3). The overall mean for students' level of self-directed learning was ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = .61$ ). The highest scoring item was "I prefer individual work or a self-directed study group as the teaching delivery method." ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). The lowest scoring item was "I prefer that the instructor provide direction only when requested." ( $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = .68$ ).

The third objective of the study was to examine the relationship between students' people orientation and self-directed learning levels (Table 4). The items "I encourage my team to participate when it comes to decision making time and I try to implement their ideas and suggestions." ( $r = .74$ ) and "The more challenging a task is, the more I enjoy it." ( $r = .71$ ) had Very Strong ( $r \geq .70$ ) correlations to self-directed learning level. The items "Counseling my followers to improve their performance or behavior is second nature to me." ( $r = .57$ ) and "Breaking large projects into small manageable tasks is second nature to me." ( $r = .54$ ) had Substantial ( $.50 \geq r \geq .69$ )

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Students' People Orientation to Leadership (N = 84)**

Items	N	M	SD
I encourage my team to participate when it comes to decision making time and I try to implement their ideas and suggestions.	84	3.41	.90
When seeing a complex task through to completion, I ensure every detail is accounted for.	84	3.36	.80
I closely monitor the schedule to ensure a task or project will be completed on time.	84	3.34	1.11
I manage my time very efficiently.	84	3.17	.93
Breaking large projects into small manageable tasks is second nature to me.	84	3.17	.84
The more challenging a task is, the more I enjoy it.	84	3.09	.88
I enjoy analyzing problems.	84	2.91	1.05
Counseling my followers to improve their performance or behavior is second nature to me.	84	2.83	.93
I enjoy reading articles, books, and journals about training leadership, and psychology and then putting what I have read into reading them.	84	2.58	1.01

Note. Overall  $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = .94$ . Scale: 0 = Never, 1 = Seldom, 3 = Often, 4 = Almost Always, and 5 = Always

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Students' Task Orientation to Leadership (N = 84)**

Items	N	M	SD
I honor other people's boundaries.	84	3.83	.93
Nothing is more important than building a team.	84	3.37	.84
I encourage my followers to be creative in regards to their jobs.	84	3.26	.87
I enjoy coaching people on new tasks and procedures.	84	3.22	.84
Nothing is more important than accomplishing a goal or task.	84	3.20	1.14
I enjoy explaining the intricacies and details of a complex task or project to my followers.	84	3.01	.81
I find it easy to carry out several complicated tasks at the same time.	84	2.97	.86
When correcting mistakes, I do not worry about jeopardizing relationships.	84	2.64	1.06
It frustrates me when I have to deal with others' personal issues.	84	2.49	1.19

Note. Overall  $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = .95$ . Scale: 0 = Never, 1 = Seldom, 3 = Often, 4 = Almost Always, and 5 = Always

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Level of Self-directed Learning (n = 84)**

Statements	N	M	SD
I prefer individual work or a self-directed study group as the teaching delivery method.	84	2.26	.65
I am willing to take responsibility for my own learning.	84	2.19	.57
I use resources outside of class to meet my goals.	84	2.07	.49
I am capable of assessing the quality of assignments that I submit.	84	2.06	.84
I set my own goals for learning without the help of the instructor.	84	2.03	.45
I learn best when I set my own goals.	84	1.95	.52
I have prior knowledge and skills in the subject area.	84	1.88	.71
I prefer that the instructor provide direction only when requested.	84	1.57	.68

Note. Overall  $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = .61$ . Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

**Table 4. Correlations between the People Orientation and Level of Self-directed Learning (N = 84)**

Items	N	r	p
I encourage my team to participate when it comes to decision making time and I try to implement their ideas and suggestions.	84	.74	.00*
The more challenging a task is, the more I enjoy it.	84	.71	.00*
Counseling my followers to improve their performance or behavior is second nature to me.	84	.57	.00*
Breaking large projects into small manageable tasks is second nature to me.	84	.54	.00*
I enjoy analyzing problems.	84	.35	.00*
I manage my time very efficiently.	84	.32	.00*
I closely monitor the schedule to ensure a task or project will be completed on time.	84	.09	.09
I enjoy reading articles, books, and journals about training leadership, and psychology and then putting what I have read into reading them.	84	.07	.22
When seeing a complex task through to completion, I ensure every detail is accounted for.	84	.03	.24

Note. Magnitude:  $.01 \geq r \geq .09$  = Negligible,  $.10 \geq r \geq .29$  = Low,  $.30 \geq r \geq .49$  = Moderate,  $.50 \geq r \geq .69$  = Substantial,  $r \geq .70$  = Very Strong (Davis, 1971).

\* $p < .05$ .

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correlations to self-directed learning level. The items “I enjoy analyzing problems.” ( $r = .35$ ) and “I manage my time very efficiently.” ( $r = .32$ ) had Moderate ( $.30 \geq r \geq .49$ ) correlations to self-directed learning level.

The fourth objective of the study was to examine the relationship between students’ location on Blake and Mouton’s Managerial Grid and level of self-directed learning. The majority of students had a country club management leadership style ( $n = 41$ ). Team management was second ( $n = 17$ ) and impoverished management ( $n = 14$ ) was third. Middle-of-the-road management was next ( $n = 11$ ) and authority – compliance management earned the fewest scores ( $n = 2$ ). Country club management was the only grid area that had enough responses to test for a relationship with students’ level of self-directedness. The data indicated country club management had a Very Strong ( $r \geq .70$ ) correlation to level of self-directedness ( $r = .71$ ).

### Summary

The findings are limited to the population in this study. However, the data does offer insight into individual characteristics that influence leadership styles. Country club management was the only leadership style to be tested for a correlation with self-directedness because no other leadership grid had at least 30 members in the sample. Students scored highly in the areas of country club and team management because their experiences and their generational category of Millennials have put a premium on relationships. Holistic educational pedagogies used by many agricultural instructors cater to the Millennials need for socialized learning and relationship building utilizing team projects (Dunkel et al., 2011). The academic environments students have existed in so far are just as oriented to relationships (through socializing and working in group environments) as they are to tasks (completing assignments and tests). For leadership students, this environment makes pedagogical sense, but educators should be cognizant that Lehman (2011) found students who are high achieving prefer working also on directed tasks. The lack of professional exposure for students where task oriented environments may take precedent may explain their relationship orientation. It is also important for leadership educators to understand the leadership skill make-up of their students. This will allow the instructors of leadership education courses to create assignments that will engage and challenge the students to become more self-directed in their learning.

Students who engage in leadership education courses are more likely to leave the university with proficiency in the “soft” skills needed to be successful in today’s work environment (Brungardt, 2011). These “soft” skills include leader behavior and self-directed learning.

As Williams et al. (2005) found, Blake and Mouton’s Leadership styles were remembered and utilized by students years after they completed a leadership theory course, therefore making it a good model to use when teaching and learning about leadership styles.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Lewis and Jobs (1993) who looked at leadership behaviors, group performance and situational control. They found task-oriented leaders on the Blake and Mouton scale perform better in a high control situation while relationship-oriented leaders, specifically Country Club leaders, are more successful in moderate control situations because they are more likely to engage in collaboration to accomplish the needed task. Students who are more self-directed are more likely to thrive in a moderate control environment where they can engage in learning on their own terms. Popper (2013) studied the implications of perceived distance between leaders and followers and psychological theories of leadership. Popper found those leaders who are perceived to be more distant, or task oriented, felt a higher need to create specific “schemas and leadership prototypes” (p. 5) for their followers to learn; thus making learning less self-directed.

Brungardt (1996) indicated leadership development includes leadership training and education. The task orientation was significant with self-directedness (Strong et al., 2012). The data in this study suggested individuals with high people orientations toward leadership styles are more likely to be self-directed learners. Blake and Mouton (1964) suggested individuals should have equal amounts of a people or task orientation depending on the situation that calls for the respective type of leadership. Those leaders who are team managers (9,9) were found to be more effective by their followers. The combination of this study with that of Strong et al. (2012) suggest that those leaders who are high in task and relationship also tend to be more self-directed in their learning. Regardless of the leadership orientation, having a higher level of self-directedness benefits the learner and the trainer (Grow, 1991). Fisher and King (2010) found students exhibiting greater levels of self-discipline and a desire for learning expressed greater levels of self-directedness.

A larger sample is needed to determine the effect of other areas of the leadership grid having a relationship with self-directedness. The sample may include enough individuals with team management, impoverished management, middle-of-the-road management and authority – compliance management in order to appropriately examine the potential relationship between the leadership styles and self-directedness. Sampling students, who are not majoring in leadership, or other social sciences, potentially would give more diverse responses for

leadership behaviors and skills. A larger sample would also provide data with more power regarding country club management and self-directedness.

This study should be replicated with business leaders. Practicing leaders in a for-profit arena may provide congruent or different results than a student population. The sample in this study included individuals who were a part of the millennial generation. A study involving business leaders may produce parallel or dissimilar results if the sample is composed primarily of participants that are not in the millennial generation.

A study involving previous leadership experience could be beneficial. This study found a majority of the sample were members of FFA or 4-H. This study did not ascertain if the sample participated in any leadership experiences within each of the youth organizations. Developing a comprehension of students' previous leadership experiences may provide more insight into their location on the leadership grid and level of self-directedness.

Gaining a deeper understanding of self-perceived skills or behaviors of leadership majors or those minoring in leadership would be beneficial for agricultural leadership educators. As programs are developing across the country, evaluative measures and possible accreditation leads us to the need for a more comprehensive picture of our leadership graduates. Leadership skills are important to employers but are not always learned through traditional leadership activities (Berle, 2007). As Colvin (2003) notes, the purpose of leadership education is to produce "leaders in social, economic, religious and political realms" (p. 28).

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