The Blake Mouton Managerial Grid

Balancing Task- and People-Oriented Leadership

When your boss puts you in charge of organizing the company Christmas party, what do you do first?

Do you develop a time line and start assigning tasks, or do you think about who would prefer to do what, and try to schedule around their needs?

When the planning starts to fall behind schedule, what is your first reaction? Do you chase everyone to get back on track, or do you ease off a bit, recognizing that everyone is busy just doing his/her job, let alone the extra tasks you’ve assigned?

Your answers to these types of questions can reveal a great deal about your personal leadership style. Some leaders are very task-oriented; they simply want to get things done. Others are very people-oriented; they want people to be happy. And others are a combination of the two. If you prefer to lead by setting and enforcing tight schedules, you tend to be more production-oriented (or task-oriented). If you make people your priority and try to accommodate their needs, then you’re more people-oriented.

Neither preference is right or wrong, just as no one type of leadership style is
best for all situations. However, it’s useful to understand what your natural leadership tendencies are, so that you can then begin working on developing skills that you may be missing.

A popular framework for thinking about a leader’s ‘task versus person’ orientation was developed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in the early 1960s. Called the Managerial Grid, or Leadership Grid, it plots the degree of task-centeredness versus person-centeredness and identifies five combinations as distinct leadership styles.

Understanding the Model

The Managerial Grid is based on two behavioral dimensions:

- **Concern for People** – This is the degree to which a leader considers the needs of team members, their interests, and areas of personal development when deciding how best to accomplish a task.
- **Concern for Production** – This is the degree to which a leader emphasizes concrete objectives, organizational efficiency and high productivity when deciding how best to accomplish a task.

Using the axis to plot leadership ‘concerns for production’ versus ‘concerns for people’, Blake and Mouton defined the following five leadership styles:

![Figure 1: The Blake Mouton Grid](image-url)
Impoverished Leadership – Low Production/Low People

This leader is mostly ineffective. He/she has neither a high regard for creating systems for getting the job done, nor for creating a work environment that is satisfying and motivating. The result is disorganization, dissatisfaction and disharmony.

Country Club Leadership – High People/Low Production

This style of leader is most concerned about the needs and feelings of members of his/her team. These people operate under the assumption that as long as team members are happy and secure then they will work hard. What tends to result is a work environment that is very relaxed and fun but where production suffers due to lack of direction and control.

Produce or Perish Leadership – High Production/Low People

Also known as Authoritarian or Compliance Leaders, people in this category believe that employees are simply a means to an end. Employee needs are always secondary to the need for efficient and productive workplaces. This type of leader is very autocratic, has strict work rules, policies, and procedures, and views punishment as the most effective means to motivate employees. (See also our article on Theory X/Theory Y [1].)

Middle-of-the-Road Leadership – Medium Production/Medium People

This style seems to be a balance of the two competing concerns, and it may at first appear to be an ideal compromise. Therein lies the problem, though: When you compromise, you necessarily give away a bit of each concern, so that neither production nor people needs are fully met. Leaders who use this style settle for average performance and often believe that this is the most anyone can expect.

Team Leadership – High Production/High People

According to the Blake Mouton model, this is the best managerial style. These leaders stress production needs and the needs of the people equally highly.
The premise here is that employees understand the organization’s purpose and are involved in determining production needs. When employees are committed to, and have a stake in the organization’s success, their needs and production needs coincide. This creates a team environment based on trust and respect, which leads to high satisfaction and motivation and, as a result, high production. (See also our article on Theory Y.)

**Applying the Blake Mouton Managerial Grid**

Being aware of the various approaches is the first step in understanding and improving how well you perform as a manager. It is important to understand how you currently operate, so that you can then identify ways of becoming effective in both areas.

**Step One: Identify your leadership style**

- Think of some recent situations where you were the leader.
- For each of these situations, place yourself on the grid according to where you believe you fit.

**Step Two: Identify areas of improvement and develop your leadership skills**

- Look at your current leadership approach, and think about whether it suits the context.
- Look at ways that you could improve. Are you settling for ‘middle of the road’ because it is easier than reaching for more?
- Identify ways to get the skills you need to reach the Team Leadership position. These may include involving others in problem solving or improving how you communicate with them, if you feel you are too task-oriented. Or it may mean becoming clearer about scheduling or monitoring project progress if you tend to focus too much on people.
- Continually monitor your performance and watch for situations where you slip back into bad old habits.
Step Three: Put the Grid in Context

It is important to recognize that the Team Leadership style isn’t always the most effective approach in every situation. While the benefits of democratic and participative management are widely accepted, there are times that call for more attention in one area than another.

If your company is in the midst of a merger or some other significant change, it can be acceptable to place a higher emphasis on people than on production. Likewise, when faced with an economic hardship or physical risk, people concerns may be placed on the back burner, for the short-term at least, to achieve high productivity and efficiency.

Note:
Theories of leadership have moved on a certain amount since the Blake Mouton Grid was originally proposed. In particular, the context in which leadership occurs is now seen as an important driver of the leadership style used.

And in many situations, the "Team Leader" as an ideal has moved to the ideal of the "Transformational Leader": Someone who, according to leadership researcher Bernard Bass:

- Is a model of integrity and fairness.
- Sets clear goals.
- Has high expectations.
- Encourages.
- Provides support and recognition.
- Stirs people’s emotions.
- Gets people to look beyond their self-interest.
- Inspires people to reach for the improbable.

So use Blake Mouton as a helpful model, but don’t treat it as an "eternal truth".

Key Points
The Blake Mouton Managerial Grid is a practical and useful framework that helps you think about your leadership style. By plotting ‘concern for production’ against ‘concern for people’, the grid highlights how placing too much emphasis in one area at the expense of the other leads to low overall productivity.

The model proposes that when both people and production concerns are high, employee engagement and productivity increases accordingly. This is often true, and it follows the ideas of Theories X and Y, and other participative management theories.

While the grid does not entirely address the complexity of “Which leadership style is best?”, it certainly provides an excellent starting point for thinking about your own performance and improving your general leadership skills.

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What members say...

Dianna wrote

Glad you enjoyed the learning stream smita shukla! They are really helpful for understanding a specific develop topic and they provide lots of resources to draw information from. And I love the confidence that comes through your post! Yes, you can be a great leader - you have so much to offer based on your experience alone. Add to that great people skills and you have a recipe for
success.

Keep us posted on your career and progress. We’d love to hear how the training helps you.

Cheers!
Dianna

September 12, 2010

sshukla wrote

I really enjoy learning Leadership Skills, it so true about leadership style best to suit every situation in our business industry, I never had managerial position, always behind the door, to I have learn I can become Team Leader, all quality and talent I have all these years 20 years experiences and expertise will help me to move my next career. Learning Class is really useful and informative to learn new skills, thank you every so much for suggest me to follow. smita shukla

September 11, 2010

Rachel wrote

Also see more members’ comments at http://www.mindtools.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=193

November 5, 2006

James wrote

Just a note to say how important this Blake Mouton Grid idea is.

In my first managerial job, my approach was so far into the “Produce or Perish” quadrant it wasn’t true. There was nothing malicious about this, it was just that I got the job by being very results-focused (as very many do) and I continued with this previously successful approach after the promotion...

I hope that this article helps people in that position avoid a long and painful learning process!

What have other people experienced in making this transition?
October 27, 2006