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LEVEL OF EXISTENCE & LEADERSHIP STYLE – IS THERE A CORRELATION?

Nicole A. Roberson, North Lake College

This study was conducted to determine whether the Discovery Assessment (DA) used to assess level of existence and the Styles of Leadership Survey (SLS) used to assess leadership style would aid in the selection of managers. Graves (1970) asserted that people progress through eight levels of existence and people with the higher levels of existence possessed the psychological maturity needed for today's managers. Blake and Mouton (1964) concluded that there were five primary leadership styles and the one high in production and people was the most optimal. The data revealed a link between level of existence and leadership style.

INTRODUCTION

A bevy of research suggests that top executives are constantly searching for better and more accurate employment screening tools. It has been proven that when companies use employment tests, their success rate in selecting the best candidate to fill a position is more than 50% (C. Williams, 2003). The benefits of utilizing instrumentation in the selection of employment candidates extends to all persons included in the process – not simply the employer. In other words, all suffer when the best person for the position is not selected.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Discovery Assessment (DA) based on Clare Graves' Levels of Existence (1970) and the Styles of Leadership Survey (SLS) based on Robert Blake and Anne Mouton's Managerial Grid (1964) could assist employers in selecting the most appropriate candidate for a particular managerial position.

In this study, college students seeking a bachelor's degree in business were given to both instruments; the DA and the SLS. The results identified specific patterns that can be used to make future hiring decisions.

PITFALLS OF LESS THAN OPTIMAL SELECTIONS

When an inappropriate person is selected, it can cost companies thousands of dollars and hundreds of man-hours. If that person leaves, the organization has to spend time and money looking for a new candidate to fill that management position. In the 2001 article, "Employee Turnover Costs in the U. S.," Manpower Argus reported that organizations spend over \$75 billion each year to replace employees who have voluntarily left organizations. If, on the other hand, the inappropriate person stays with the organization; employee morale may decline, organizational productivity may decrease, and employee turnover may increase (DeCenzo & Robbins, 1999). An inappropriate selection can adversely affect the candidate as well. For example, if someone is hired for a position and she/he is not adequately prepared for or where there is a less than an optimal fit, a great deal of anguish may result for the candidate. The inappropriate candidate may have altered his/her life in order to meet the demands of the position. This candidate may have also chosen this position over other potential employment

options, which may have resulted in a better fit. In essence, the company is not the only consideration when one examines the benefits of screening instruments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Levels of Existence

Dr. Clare Graves' (1970) research focused on the various stages of human development in terms of psychological maturity. Specifically, he believed that persons at higher levels of development were better equipped to handle complex, organizational issues with a high degree of integrity. Graves (1970) called his typology Levels of Existence.

Similar to Abraham Maslow, he (1970) theorized that people have the potential to pass through eight levels of existence. He posited that the psychology and/or mental state of a person changes with each level. "His acts, feelings, motivations, ethics, values, thoughts, and preferences for management are all appropriate for that state" (Graves, 1970, p. 134). In other words, a person's level of existence affects every aspect of his or her life, and each level is manifested differently. Graves (1970) believed that a person must attain certain mental realizations or milestones before he or she can proceed to the next level.

Graves (1980) named and labeled each level of existence with descriptive words. Graves (1980) also asserted that during the odd numbered levels (1, 3, 5, and 7), a person would be focused more on self; and during the even numbered levels (2, 4, 6, and 8), a person would be focused on the community or environment (Graves, 1980). For this study the lower levels are one through four and the upper levels are five through eight.

The first level of existence is the animalistic, instinctive, physiological, survivalistic level of human development (Graves, 1974). People at this stage of development are consumed with meeting their basic physiological needs for water, food, vitamins, and so forth. Unlike Maslow, however, Graves (1974) did include sex in this level of existence. A person at this level only reacts to the environment and will not try to manipulate the environment in any way to meet his physical needs. People at this level will eat food that is readily available in their environment such as berries and nuts, will go into a nearby cave when it

rains for shelter, and will drink water from a fresh water river when they are thirsty. Value and ethical systems are devoted to the survival of self and meeting individual basic needs (Graves, 1974).

The tribalistic, animistic, safety state is the second state identified by Graves (1974). During this state, people depend on rituals and traditions to keep them safe from the "bad spirits" (p. 74), "evil forces" (p. 74), and/or unexplainable occurrences in the world. Specifically, they rely heavily on magic, superstitions, witchcraft, and myths to explain the uncertainty in the environment and to keep them safe from harm.

Their existence is a state similar to Pavlovian classical conditioning which conditions people to perform certain actions in response to specific stimuli in the environment (Graves, 1974). For example, some tribes at this level perform a special ceremony when they experience an unexplained hardship such as a deadly virus that kills a substantial portion of their food supply or when they experience a severe drought (Graves, 1974).

In many cases, these people do not even know why they perform the specific rituals or hold certain beliefs. They look to the elders in the group or tribe for explanations, guidance, and direction. People at this level value stability and tradition. They want things to remain the same and feel threatened by any change in their environment, culture, customs, and so forth. These individuals are unable to adjust to changes and/or innovations of any kind (Armour & Browning, 2000; Graves, 1974).

The third psychological state is the egocentric, Machiavellian state (Graves, 1974). This is the first of three states Graves (1974) added to his theory that augment Maslow's (1943) theory. People at this level of existence go by the following mottos: "only the strong survive" and "might is right." They hold a Promethean point of view where the "haves" have certain privileges and rights while "have nots" do not. In other words, they value separation among the classes. These people value power and force and believe that they should take what they want regardless of whom they hurt in the process. They will take advantage of anyone in any situation if the opportunity arises in order to get what they want. These people seek immediate self-gratification and feel little or no guilt or remorse for their actions. This is evident when a war ensues and one ruler attempts to dominant and/or acquire resources of another neighboring country without regard for the potential loss of life and moral considerations (Armour & Browning, 2000; Graves, 1974).

Graves (1974) described the next state as sacrifice, conformity, salvation, saintliness, and absolutism. This is the second state Graves added which adds to Maslow's (1943) original work. People in this level believe that there is one right way to do things and have a low level of tolerance for people who hold different beliefs. They are very judgmental and usually possess a high degree of self-control. They believe that a higher power, specifically their particular God,

is overseeing their actions and has established a master plan for their lives and the world around them. Their values center around sacrificing, playing fair, obeying the rules, submitting to authority figures, and living right now so that they will be rewarded later by their God. They believe they have a moral duty to help and aid the less fortunate. People's worth at this level is measured by how well they live according to prescribed rules and laws. They feel so strongly about their beliefs that they are willing to die for them (Armour & Browning, 2000; Graves, 1974).

Materialistic, entrepreneurial, manipulative, calculated, competitive, and independent is how Graves (1974) described the fifth state. People at this level are interested in mastering the universe. They value knowledge, success, and advancement. They will invest the time and energy into learning their craft so that they can achieve their personal goals. These individuals are self-motivated, appreciate efficiency, and capitalize on opportunities. Although people at this state are interested in the self, they will take into account how their actions will affect others, unlike persons in the third state. These people hold the belief that the world is full of opportunities and will oppose any restrictions preventing them from taking advantage of those opportunities. They measure their success in terms of accomplishments, possessions, and awards (Armour & Browning, 2000; Graves, 1974).

A person in the sixth state is characterized as sociocentric and is concerned with understanding how past actions have positively and negatively affected them, other people and world around them. Specifically, they want to know how they have helped and harmed the world. People at this level have a high need for affiliation with people who share their beliefs. They value giving back to nature and want to create harmony in the world. As a result, they are more tolerant of people who hold different religious and cultural beliefs. These people strongly oppose any physical violence. They have an internal drive to protect the environment; promote the civil rights of all individuals, especially the weak and vulnerable; and are committed to creating a classless society where genuine equality is present. This psychological state is analogous to Maslow's (1943) Belongingness and Love Level (Armour & Browning, 2000; Graves, 1974).

The existential, seventh level, is a milestone in human development according to Graves (1970). This is the final stage Graves added to Maslow's Hierarchy. He believed that people who reach the seventh stage are born again because they begin to use more of their brains, which previously remained unutilized or underutilized. They are consumed with understanding everything about their environment. People at this level value knowledge, life, flexibility, and reality. These individuals believe that the entire universe, including living and nonliving things, is interdependent. If you harm or destroy one thing, you harm and destroy other things. They quickly adapt to new situations, have a high tolerance level for the unknown, and

can accept all people. They are completely nonjudgmental. They want to be heard but will also listen to others. Their main concern is to "express self so that all others, all beings, can continue to exist" (Graves, 1970, p. 153).

The final level or psychological state identified by Graves (1970) is the experimental or H-U level. People at this level value an unimaginable world of beauty and endless pleasure. They truly take time to smell the roses and watch the sunsets. The words that most describe this psychological state include wonder, holistic, and simplicity. These people relish human diversity and show true love toward all people even people with opposing beliefs. These individuals also adapt very quickly to new situations and have the ability to conceptualize highly complex models. These individuals can see the whole picture of life and all of its interrelated parts (Graves, 1970).

Managerial Grid

In 1964, Blake and Mouton published *The Managerial Grid*. They described five different management styles and the types of behaviors exhibited by each one. The Managerial Grid has two main axes on which managerial styles are plotted. The horizontal axis denotes a manager's concern for production; the vertical axis denotes a manager's concern for people. Each of the five styles is plotted on the grid from 1 to 9 on the vertical and horizontal axes.

Depending on a manager's level of concern for production and people, a manager will exhibit behaviors of one of the five managerial styles identified by Blake and Mouton (1964). The five managerial styles (as cited in Nelson & Quick, 2000) include the impoverished manager (1,1), country club manager (1,9), organization man manager (5,5), autocratic manager (9,1), and team manager (9,9). Each of the five types of managerial behavior is described in this section.

The 1,1 or impoverished managerial style has minimum concern for people and production. Maintaining the status quo, delegation, and strict adherence to company policy are the management tools utilized by this manager. According to Blake and Mouton (1964), this type of manager has psychologically withdrawn and detached himself from the organization because of a consistent pattern of actual or perceived defeat and/or frustration within the organization. The detachment is a way for the manager to prevent and eliminate further disappointment and frustration. The impoverished manager will "leave no mark on the organization of which he is a member, but neither does the organization leave its mark on him" (Blake & Mouton, 1964, p. 86). This trade off in the eyes of the impoverished manager is a logical solution for coping with the present position and a way to attain personal goals of collecting a salary and future retirement benefits (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Nelson & Quick, 2000).

The second type of management style is the autocratic or 9,1 management style. There is a high level of concern for production and a low level of concern for employees within

the organization. Control, explicit policies and procedures, efficiency, and quotas are some words that describe the behavior of this type of manager. Success is defined in terms of achievement of organizational production goals. The autocratic manager views the employees as equipment, living machines that should be molded to fit the production line. "My way or the highway" is the motto of this type of manager (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Nelson & Quick, 2000).

The 1,9 or country club management style is the next type of management style. This type of manager focuses attention on the people within the organization and very little attention toward production within the organization. The physical health and psychological well being of the employees is of utmost concern to this manager. If a question arises where a choice must be made between the well being of the employees and meeting production goals, the well being of the employees will come first. The manager can be described as understanding, fun loving, supportive, and giving. The country club manager views his or her working relationship with employees in terms of an extended family; and, as such, they should interrelate as "one big happy family" (Blake & Mouton, 1964, p. 64). As a manager, the country club manager feels responsible for ensuring that the work environment is pleasant and comfortable like a home away from home (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Nelson & Quick, 2000).

The 5,5 or organization man management style is the fourth major management style. There is a moderate level of concern for people and a moderate level of concern for production. The organization man leader is constantly involved in a balancing act to manage the needs of employees and the production goals of the organization. The organization man leader operates under the assumption that contradictions exist between people and production; and, as a result, trade-offs must occur. In other words, neither production nor people are optimized because there is a constant give and take between the two forces. The following words would describe this type of manager: motivating, fair-minded, negotiating, and realistic (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Nelson & Quick, 2000).

The final management style identified by Blake and Mouton (1964) is the 9,9 or team managerial style. According to Blake and Mouton (1964), this is the optimal management style and results in the greatest satisfaction of employees and the highest level of productivity within the organization. The goals of the employees and the organization are one and the same. The team managerial style can be described as committed, synergetic, and interdependent. This managerial style is successful because managers involve employees in every aspect of the organization from decision making to implementation. The end result is that employees create an environment that meets their needs as well as the needs of the organization (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Nelson & Quick, 2000).

RESEARCH DESIGN

In February and March of 2005, two self-reported questionnaires were used to test whether a relationship exists between a person's level of existence as indicated by Graves' (1970) typology and a person's leadership style as defined by Blake and Mouton's (1964) typology. The DA was used to determine a person's level of existence, and the SLS was used to determine a person's leadership style.

The DA consisted of approximately 30 multiple-choice questions and 10 open-ended questions (Cowan & Todorovic, 2004). It has been found to be reliable and valid in identifying a person's level of existence. Specifically, Hurlbut (1979) proved that this instrument was a reliable and valid instrument for determining a person's level of existence. The multiple-choice questions were scored automatically by the computer, and the open-ended questions were scored by Cowan and Todorovic.

The SLS consisted of a 60-item paper/pencil self-report instrument. It utilizes a 10-point William-Hall scale and has been proven to be both reliable and valid in identifying a person's leadership style. "The median coefficient of stability is greater than .70" (Hall, Harvey, & Williams, 1995, p. 3).

Exactly 121 (60.5%) students of the 200 undergraduate business students included in the sample completed both the DA and SLS. Students were asked to complete the DA via the internet and the SLS in person. The results of the DA and SLS instruments were matched with the student who completed the particular surveys. A chi-square test was

performed on the data to determine if there is a relationship between a person's level of existence and corresponding leadership style.

RESULTS

To begin with none of the participants surveyed was found to be animalistic (level 1), tribalist (level 2), or experimental (level 8) regarding Graves' Levels of Existence. Regarding the Styles of Leadership Survey, none of the participants was assessed as an impoverished leader.

Because the response rate was less than optimal, participants assessed as having the lower levels of existence (Level 3-egocentric and Level 4-absolutistic) were examined together and participants who assessed as having the higher levels of existence (Level 5-materialistic, Level 6-sociocentric, and Level 7-existential) were examined together. The chi-square test was performed on the data of the combined scores. Refer to Table 1 below.

Forty-one (33.9%) students ranked as either egocentric or absolutistic (group of lower Levels of Existence). Of these students, 5 were team leaders, 8 were organization man leaders, 12 were autocratic leaders, and 16 were country club leaders. Exactly 68.3% of this scored as either an autocratic or country club leader. Eighty (66.1%) of the students were materialistic, sociocentric, or existential (group of higher Levels of Existence). Forty-four students were team leaders, 15 were organization man leaders, 9 were autocratic leaders, and 12 were country club leaders. Exactly 73.8% of the participants in this group scored as either a team or organization man leader.

Table 1: Combined Scores

			sls				Total
			1	2	3	4	
low_up	lower	Count	5	8	12	16	41
		% within low_up	12.2%	19.5%	29.3%	39.0%	100.0%
		% within sls	10.2%	34.8%	57.1%	57.1%	33.9%
		% of Total	4.1%	6.6%	9.9%	13.2%	33.9%
	upper	Count	44	15	9	12	80
		% within low_up	55.0%	18.8%	11.3%	15.0%	100.0%
		% within sls	89.8%	65.2%	42.9%	42.9%	66.1%
		% of Total	36.4%	12.4%	7.4%	9.9%	66.1%
Total		Count	49	23	21	28	121
		% within low_up	40.5%	19.0%	17.4%	23.1%	100.0%
		% within sls	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	40.5%	19.0%	17.4%	23.1%	100.0%

- 1 – Team Leaders
- 2 – Organization Man
- 3 – Autocratic Leaders
- 4 – Country Club Leader

The chi-square was 24.105 with 3 degrees of freedom and a .000 p value. The results for this chi-square test are valid and confirm that there is a relationship between a person's level of existence and their leadership style.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The results of the Discovery Assessment and the Styles of Leadership Survey administered to undergraduate students in February and March of 2005 confirmed that there is a link between a person's level of existence and their corresponding leadership style. Specifically, the results verified that, when grouped together, participants with the lower levels of existence (tribalistic, egocentric, and sacrificial) tended to assess as either autocratic or country club leaders. The higher levels of existence (materialistic, sociocentric, and existential) tended to assess as either organization man or team leaders.

Regarding the individual levels of existence and the individual leadership styles, the findings were inconclusive. Basically, because eight of the cells used in the chi-square test contained values less than five, the results may not be valid. In other words, the data could not be used to conclusively provide insight into which level of existence (Materialistic, sociocentric, etc.) was linked with which leadership style (country club, organization man, etc.).

Major Implications

The field of leadership, specifically the area of situational theories which attempt to identify what type of people will work well in specific environments, will benefit most from this research. Because the findings identified the predominate leadership style (autocratic, country club, organization man, and team) of each participant as well as their level of existence, researchers and practitioners using the Blake and Mouton (1964) and Graves (1970) instruments may relate leadership styles to the various levels of existence. Similar to Fiedler's (1969) Least Preferred Coworker theory, using the Blake and Mouton (1964) and Graves (1970) instruments may provide insight into better matching the person with the right job. For example, if a person possesses the country club leadership style and their level of existence falls at the fourth level where they value conformity and sacrifice, it may be best to place the person in a leadership position in the marketing department because the employees in that department may respond better to a country club leadership style; furthermore, this type of position may meet the person's needs to follow rules by having to stay within budgetary boundaries and meet publication deadlines.

Second, the results from this research can contribute to the psychology field regarding personality characteristics; in this case, levels of existence. Because individuals' personalities have been found to remain stable and unchanging over time, it may also be possible to pinpoint an individual's leadership style at a very young age. In other words, if a person's level of existence is consistent over

time, then their leadership style may also be consistent. For example, if a person shows a preference for the autocratic leadership style and knows that he or she reverts to that preferential leadership style in most leadership situations, he or she can consciously move toward positions where that style can be utilized. When there is similarity between a person's leadership style and a particular position, that person may be more productive and, in turn, assist the organization in meeting its goals.

Next, these findings are a tremendous addition to leadership development. Employees and job candidates taking the Discovery Assessment and/or the Styles of Leadership Survey can learn how they rate as potential leaders. Also, organizational managers may use the survey results to train and develop future leaders for their organization.

Human resource management researchers and practitioners will also profit from this research data. The field of human resources management may want to utilize these research findings to extend motivation theory. It has been shown that different things motivate people. The challenge is finding the best way to motivate each employee. The Discovery Assessment provides insight into what is likely to motivate individuals at each level of existence. For example, individuals at the materialistic level respond to tasks that enable them to accomplish personal goals. Participants at the sociocentric level respond to tasks that help coworkers and/or customers, according to the Graves' (1970) typology.

Next, information gleaned from the Graves (1970) and Blake and Mouton (1964) instruments can also aid in organizational succession planning. Administering these two instruments to current employees may enable human resource personnel to identify employees who possess similar levels of existence and leadership traits to those employees currently in the leadership positions. This information could then be used to identify possible replacement employees. Human resource personnel and other key executives may then have the time to train and groom those replacements.

Finally, the DA and SLS may assist employment specialists in identifying employees with desired traits and placing them in specific positions. In other words, this data may further research in the area of person-job fit. For example, if there is an opening in the production warehouse where a more autocratic manager is needed, then the human resource specialist may administer the DA and/or the SLS Survey and use the results to place the person with the appropriate level of existence and leadership characteristics in that vacant position.

Limitations

Although the research confirmed a relationship between a person's level of existence according to Graves' (1970) typology and their leadership style from the Blake and

Mouton (1964) instrument, there are three major limitations to this research.

First, 121 students of the 200 students in the sample completed both the DA and SLS. That is a 60.5% response rate. This low response rate caused the chi-square test for the individual levels of existence and leadership styles to be invalid because there were several cells with less than five values.

Second, several participants' responses contained two or more levels of existence and/or leadership styles. To resolve the ties and to increase the numbers in the other categories of levels of existence and leadership styles, the following process was followed. Anytime there was a tie regarding the levels of existence as identified by Graves (1970), the lower level was used. For example, if the participant scored as both materialistic and sociocentric, then the materialistic was used.

Anytime there was a tie between the optimal leadership style and a less desired leadership style as identified by Blake and Mouton (1964), the less desirable style was used. For example, if there was a tie between the team leader and country club leader, the country club leader was used; if there was tie between team leader and organization man leader, the organization man leader was selected. There were no ties between the autocratic and country club leaders. In other words, none of the students had the same score for autocratic and country club leadership on their Styles of Leadership Survey.

Next, there may have been some bias in the way the participants answered the questions because the surveys were not anonymous. In some cases, it is likely that the participants selected responses they believed they should select according to prevailing theories rather than what they truly felt. This may explain why there was such a high number of the existential level and team leader participants. For example, Graves (1970) believed that there were only a small number of the existential individuals in our society, while over 20% of the participants in this sample scored as a existential level. Also, because the participants were undergraduate business students, they were familiar with the Blake and Mouton (1964) Managerial Grid. They may have answered the questions in such a way that they were able to select the answers for the team leadership style, the optimal leadership style according to Blake and Mouton (1964). This may explain why a large percent (40.5%) of the participants were assessed as team leaders.

Future Research Process Possibilities

There are three main avenues that future researchers can take to extend this research. First, it may be beneficial to administer the DA and the SLS instruments several times over a 5- or 10-year period. The results may provide insight into whether a person's level of existence and/or leadership style changes over time or remains constant.

Next, the study should be repeated to include actual managers and other leaders who work for organizations in various fields such as business, education, and government. The results may differ greatly from those of undergraduate business students because these participants will have actual work experience managing employees. In other words, their experience may enable them to better pinpoint and communicate their actual leadership style.

Finally, a 360-degree DA and SLS would be more accurate than just the self-report surveys used in this research design. For example, if the DA and SLS are administered to the leaders, their subordinates, their coworkers, and so forth; the results may be more accurate.

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