

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEORY

Trait and Behavioural Theories

Stogdill · Ohio State & Michigan · Blake & Mouton

PAPER 01 / 04

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

This paper opens the Leadership Styles and Theory series in Furtherance's reference library. It covers the first two eras of leadership thought – the search for the traits of leaders, and the shift to their observable behaviour. The question it answers: is leadership about who you are, or what you do?

Stogdill's reviews ended the “great man” hope that leaders share a fixed set of traits, opening the behavioural era. The Ohio State and Michigan studies reduced leadership behaviour to two dimensions; Blake and Mouton turned those dimensions into a practical grid – and a claim about the one best style that the next paper undoes.

Ralph Stogdill 1904–1978

Leadership research · the trait reviews

CORE THESIS

After reviewing decades of trait research, Stogdill concluded that **no set of traits universally distinguishes leaders** from non-leaders. Traits matter, but only in relation to the situation – a finding that ended the “great man” era and turned the field toward behaviour and context.

FRAMEWORK

Claim	Implication
No universal leadership traits	Being a leader is situation-dependent
Traits interact with the situation	The same trait helps in one context, not another
Later partial revival	Some traits (e.g. intelligence, conscientiousness) do matter modestly

METHODOLOGY

Comprehensive reviews of the leadership-trait literature across several decades.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Stogdill redirected the entire field from character to behaviour and situation. The critique cuts the other way: later meta-analyses restored a modest but real role for traits, so his verdict was somewhat overstated.

Ohio State & Michigan Studies 1940s–1950s

Behavioural leadership · two dimensions

CORE THESIS

Leadership **behaviour** reduces to two broad, largely independent dimensions: one oriented to the **task**, the other to **people**. Because they are independent, a leader can be high on both.

FRAMEWORK

Study	Task dimension	People dimension
Ohio State	Initiating structure	Consideration
Michigan	Production-oriented	Employee-oriented (and participative)

METHODOLOGY

Large questionnaire studies and factor analysis of subordinate ratings of leader behaviour.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Established the two-factor behavioural view that underpins almost every later style model. The critique: the link between these behaviours and hard performance outcomes proved inconsistent.

Blake & Mouton The Managerial Grid, 1964

Leadership development · the managerial grid

CORE THESIS

Leadership style can be plotted on two axes – **concern for people** and **concern for production** – producing a grid of styles. Blake and Mouton argued that high-high “team management” is the single best style.

FRAMEWORK

Grid position	Style
1,1	Impoverished – minimal effort on either
9,1	Authority-compliance – production over people
1,9	Country club – people over production
5,5	Middle-of-the-road – balance by compromise
9,9	Team management – high on both (the ideal)

METHODOLOGY

An organisation-development model built for assessment and leadership training.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

A popular, practical way to operationalise the two behavioural dimensions and prompt self-reflection. The critique: its prescription of one universally best style (9,9) sits squarely against the contingency evidence in the next paper.

Synthesis

Contribution	Era	Key idea	Critique
Stogdill	Trait	No universal traits	Traits partly revived later
Ohio / Michigan	Behavioural	Task and people dimensions	Weak link to performance
Blake & Mouton	Behavioural	The managerial grid; 9,9	“One best style” contested

FOR THE OPERATOR

The trait-and-behavioural era moved leadership from innate character (Stogdill's verdict: no universal traits) to observable behaviour on two dimensions – task and people (Ohio and Michigan, Blake & Mouton). Its limit is the search for a single best style: the claim that 9,9 always wins founders on evidence that the right style depends on the situation. That is exactly where the next paper begins.