

Interpersonal Skills for IT Project Management – Handout

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What are Interpersonal Skills?

Can be conceptualised as **the people skills needed to interact with individuals associated with an IS project** (Ue et al., 1994).

In a journal article entitled, ‘The database designer is a person too!’, Artz (1994) makes a case that, managers must emphasise “**the development of interpersonal skills as well as the development of technical skills. Such interpersonal skills as negotiation, conflict resolution, and consensus building are needed**”.

With these skills, a manager, “**can influence top management; can relate to the broad picture, can develop co-operative relationships with large numbers of people (inside and outside their company); develop teamwork; sensitive to personal needs; can motivate specialists, subordinates, or peers**” (Skyrme and Earl, 1990).

These may include individual's behaviours and attitudes, leadership, communication, negotiating and influencing, and relationship management.

A. Being an IS Hybrid

Goldilocks walks into the bears' kitchen. She sees a bowl of porridge and takes a taste. "Yuk" she cries, "This porridge is far too hot." Then she spies a second bowl, and eats a spoonful from that. "Yuk" she cries, "This porridge is far too cold." Finally, she sees a third bowl of porridge, and starts to eat from it. This time she says nothing because this time the porridge is just right.

The term hybrid was originally coined by Peter Keen in the mid 1980s, but received its most precise and most quoted definition by Michael Earl:

"A person with strong technical skills and adequate business knowledge or vice versa hybrids are people with technical skills able to work in user areas doing a line job, but adept at developing and implementing IT application ideas"(Skyrme, 2002).

Building on POSSET, an overall competency profile for IS hybrids must:

- bridge the gap between **information systems and business** through expertise in IT, in information, and in the workings of organisations.

- bridge the gap between **hard and soft** through an understanding of data, formal procedures, and technology alongside expertise in the political arts of negotiating and influencing.

Interpersonal:

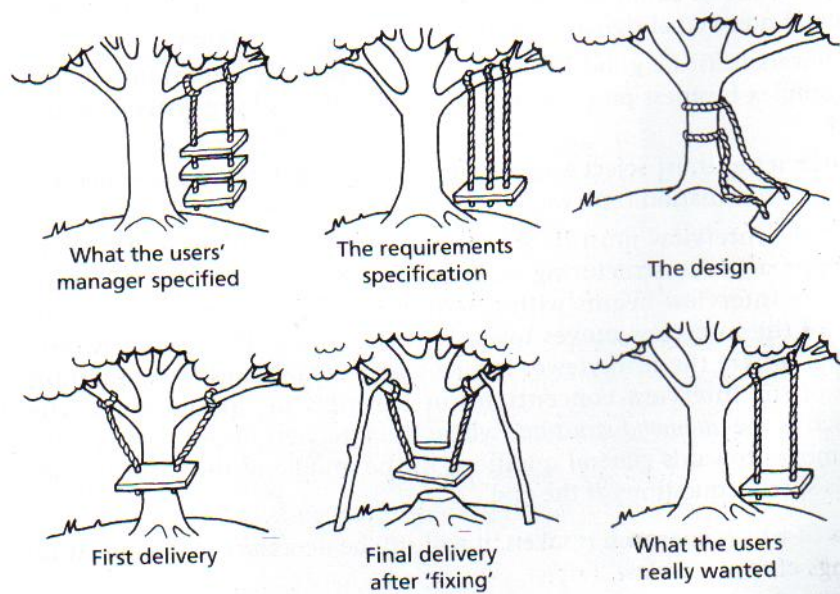
- Leadership
- Communication
- Negotiating and influencing
- Relationship mgmt

C2. Communicating for Different Stakeholder Interests

"Why Should I: what's in it for me?"

Varying interpretations of users' requirements occur at different stages in the project.

Varying Interpretations of User Requirements in the Information Systems Development Process



Johnston (1995) in Bocij et al. (1999:361)

"Why Should I: what's in it for me?"

Wants and Needs:

"Wants were seen as frivolous, unnecessary and expensive, while needs were business-oriented, task-related and still expensive" (Patching & Chatham 2000:158)

Different Stakeholders have different wants and needs:

Key amongst these will be (Cadle and Yeates, 2004: 291):

- **Decision makers:** those who make major project-related decisions, such as whether or not to proceed with the project.
- **Gatekeepers:** those who control access to higher authorities.
- **Influencers:** those who advise decision makers or whom decision makers take note of.
- **End users:** those who will directly use the output from the information system and/or from the business function it supports
- **Champions:** those who will support and muster resources for the project.

BOX 1

Tailoring Your Message

A behavioural approach to IT projects means understanding the different individuals that have to be dealt with, and tailoring messages accordingly. At a simple and formal level, this could mean emphasising the financial aspects when talking to an accountant, and emphasising the personnel aspects when talking to a human resource manager.

However, tailoring can become a lot more subtle. One can characterise stakeholders and customise communication to fit individual characteristics.

The down to earth ones <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be organized and structured• Be practical and realistic• Work logically and systematically through your analysis• Offer proof and evidence	The theoretical ones <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show how it fits into the bigger picture• Ensure the theoretical base is sound• Appeal to my intellect and imagination• Be a credible source of information
The sociable ones <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be clear and explicit, don't just imply• Show me how people will benefit• Demonstrate immediate and practical results• Show me respect	The idealistic ones <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage with my personal values• Paint pictures and draw analogies that have meaning• Be passionate and engage my imagination• Show how it will contribute to the 'greater good' of human kind

Whatever the delivery techniques used, though, content must always bear in mind the individual's personal objectives and values.

A. Negotiating

A1. The Framework of Negotiations

A systematic application of techniques to negotiation might take the following steps (Fowler 1998, Gillen 1999):

- **Preparation:** getting as much information as possible not just in relation to the topic under discussion but also in relation to the objectives and values of other parties; being clear about one's own 'bottom line'.
- **Initial exchange:** drawing out other individuals and probing with questions to develop a better sense of their objectives and values; weighing up relative bargaining powers.
- **Negotiation:** being assertive; using and observing body language; identifying issues that can easily be agreed and issues that are low-cost to one side but high benefit to the other; being creative about what can be traded; exploring possible compromises.
- **Agreement:** summarising the discussion; avoiding/dealing with last minute conditions
- **Implementation:** setting out a clear schedule of tasks and responsibilities

Principled Negotiation

- **Technique 1:** "Separate the people from the problem". Try to set aside emotions and focus on the objective issue.
- **Technique 2:** "Focus on interests, not positions". What are the underlying goals/agendas? Try to avoid starting with a particular position: "We won't pay more than ..."; "We have to have it by ...".
- **Technique 3:** "Before trying to reach agreement, invent options for mutual gain". Once problems and interests are aired, try to brainstorm a wide variety of possible outcomes.
- **Technique 4:** "Insist on using objective criteria". Are there measures, standards, benchmarks, policies, values, expert opinions, etc that can be used to make a decision rather than subjective, emotional, political, personal criteria?

(Meredith & Mantel 2003:313-4 citing Fisher & Ury 1983)

A2. The Organisational Politics of Negotiations

"Influence is the process whereby A seeks to modify the attitudes or behaviour of B. Power is that which enables him [sic] to do it. ... If we are to understand organizations we must understand the nature of power and influence for they are the means by which the people of the organization are linked to its purpose." (Handy 1992:123)

Categories of Power

Power is notoriously tricky to define:

"We may say about it (power) in general only what St. Augustine said about time, that we all know perfectly well what it is - until somebody asks us" (Bierstedt 1950:750, cited in Bannister 2003)

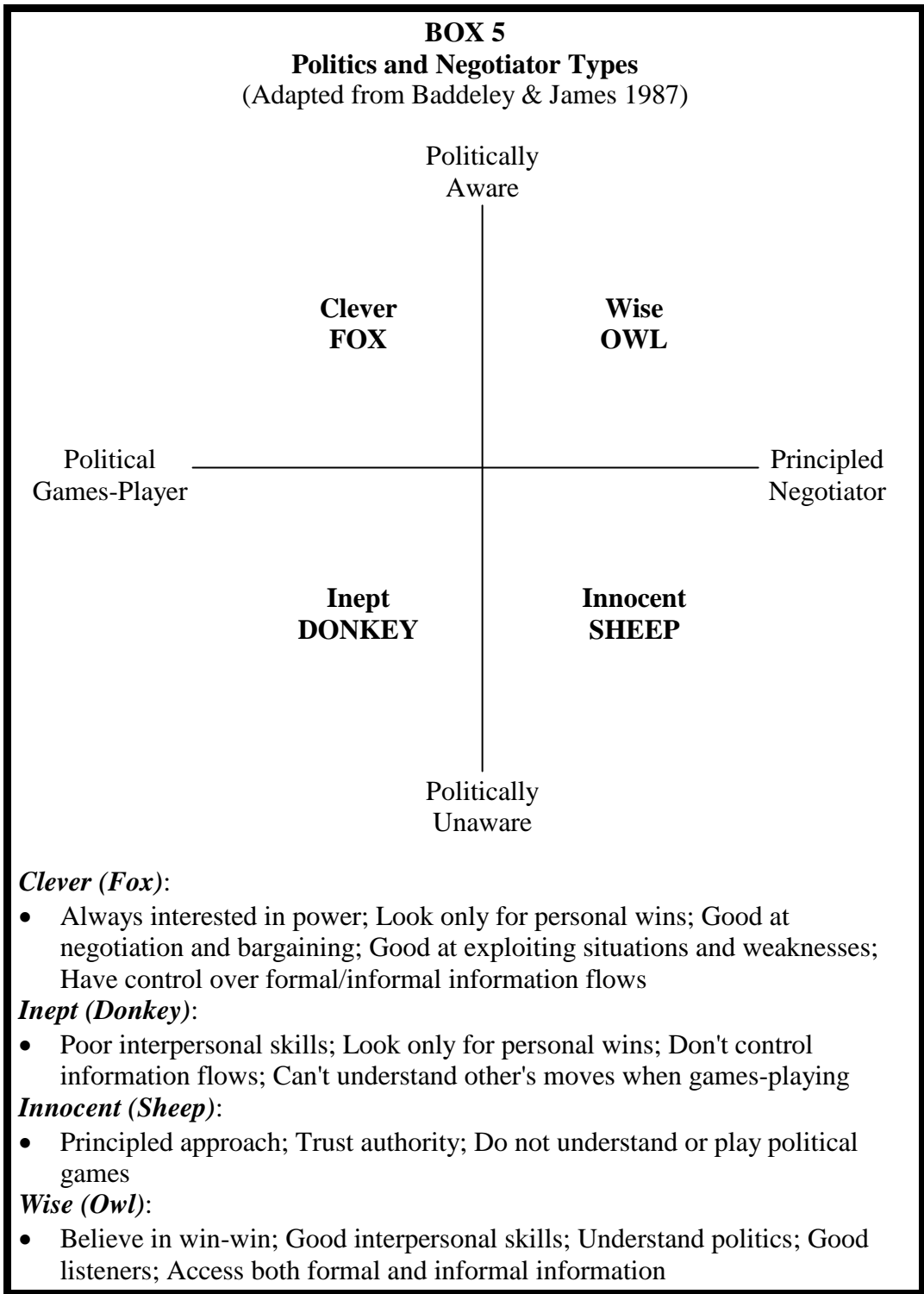
One approach to definition identifies different types of power (from Buchanan & Huczynski 2004, with adaptations from Blair & Meadows 1996 and Mullins 2002):

- **Reward power:** the ability to distribute valued resources as rewards. Such resources may include promotion, money, praise, office space, information, etc.
- **Coercive power:** the ability to punish. This comes from the ability to instigate either formal or informal punishments. It can also be associated with the "negative power" to prevent or delay things happening, which is a form of punishment. It is the threat of punishment rather than punishment itself that is used in many cases.
- **Legitimate power:** the power that comes from one's formal position of authority within an organization. Often that power relates to the rewards, punishments, information (i.e. the other components of power) that go with the formal position/role. It also, though, relates to the symbolic power of a role and the rights within a position to access others, to take decisions, and to make and implement rules
- **Expert power:** power that comes from expertise that is acknowledged and valued by others. This partly relates to a real track record of suggested courses of actions that worked (and a lack of those that failed). However, it also related to imagery; to making oneself appear to be an expert.
- **Personal (referent) power:** the ability to influence others due to one's personal characteristics. This relates to a range of often hard-to-define factors that include charisma, confidence, empathy and competence. As with expertise, these relate as much to a projection as to real ownership of a characteristic.

These five types, to a certain degree, can be related to the individual as they are; there are also sources of power that derive from the individual's position in a network, including:

- **Information power:** the ability to gain valuable information and the ability to use it in decision-making or communication. Such information typically comes from being well-placed in an organizational network. This means having: **betweenness** (being between others so you can control information flows between them); **connectedness** (being linked to many others inside and outside the organization); **closeness** (being close to others so you have direct access to them).
- **Affiliation power:** power derived from one's association with other powerful figures or groups. This, like other sources but even more so, relates to perceptions

as much as realities. It is also a reminder, though, of the contribution of social capital to all types of power: that which allows one to draw on resources from other members of a personal network.



Techniques of Influence

"The worm that destroys you is the temptation to agree with your critics, to get their approval." (Harris 2000)

The way people seek to use their power during an IT project will be through various techniques of influence (adapted from Buchanan & Huczynski (2004:840-841) partly citing Kipnis et al. (1984)):

- **Reason:** "relies on the presentation of data and information as the basis for a logical argument that supports a request." Reason is typically a first choice for influencing a boss or subordinate, and it often relates to a base of expert or information power.
- **Friendliness:** "depends on the influencee thinking well of the influencer." It is often used with co-workers, but may also be used with subordinates and superiors. It often relates to a base of personal power.
- **Coalition:** "mobilizing other people in the organization to support you, and thereby strengthening your request." It depends on the size and strength of the influencer's personal network, and so relates to affiliation power particularly.
- **Bargaining:** "negotiating and exchanging benefits based upon the social norms of obligation and reciprocity." The resources traded are very varied but can include assistance, support and information. It often relates to a base of reward power.
- **Assertiveness:** uses continuous reminders via an insistent and forceful manner. It is often used with subordinates and relates to a base of legitimate power.
- **Higher authority:** "uses the chain of command and outside sources of power to influence the target person." This can be the threat or promise of involving the influencee's boss, or invoking that boss' own priorities. It can also involve an appeal to higher ethical or cultural values within the organization. It may involve recourse to outside "experts", such as consultants, or to the media. A variation, much found in IT projects, is to blame the technology or the data, though this may fall under the heading of manipulation. Its strength relies particularly on affiliation power.
- **Sanctions:** influence through the promise of reward or threat of punishments. In its negative form, this may encompass all formal disciplinary procedures up to dismissal. It may encompass informal actions: blame, bad-mouthing, bullying. It may also encompass the removal of rewards (e.g. transfer, demotion). Sanctions often relate to a base of legitimate or coercive power.
- **Manipulation:** influence by controlling the framing of discussions, or the claimed rules for discussion, or the information that is allowing into a negotiation. Part of this process will be the manipulation of the public discussions and public relations that set much of the agenda for IT-enabled change. This type of approach may also include undermining others involved.
- **Withdrawal:** influence through disengagement or non-compliance.

BOX 6
Influencing Techniques in IT Outsourcing
(Lacity & Hirschheim 1993)

- **Selective use of decision criteria:** suggesting criteria for assessing the outcome and contents of change that favour your own position.
- **Selective use of information:** disseminating only that information about change that favours your own position; withholding information that does not favour your position; distorting information in your favour; overwhelming opponents or decision makers with information until they agree to your viewpoint.
- **Use of outside experts:** legitimating what you want by hiring an external consultant to put it into an 'objective' report.
- **Building coalitions:** forming temporary alliances with internal and external power holders by identifying areas of common interest.
- **Cooptation:** bringing those who oppose the change onto the team that is planning the change.

"IT managers are often politically naïve. They perceive political behaviour as manipulative and unscrupulous, and many therefore engage in avoidance tactics." (Patching & Chatham 2000:xxxiii)

BOX 7
Information Systems and Organisational Politics
(Adapted from Singh 2006)

Why information systems projects involve organisational politics

- **Resources:** IS projects attract significant resources (money, equipment, people).
- **Power:** IS projects change organisational foundations of power – rewards/resources, legitimacy, expertise, kudos, information – creating the potential for both winners and losers.
- **Centrality and Boundary-Crossing:** IS projects are increasingly a) central to organisational functioning making them more important in political terms; b) crossing internal and external organisational boundaries making them more potentially a source of conflict by bringing different interests into contact.
- **Success:** politics is as much a part of getting an IS to succeed for the organisation as it would be a part of "getting your own way"

Power and Influence Exercises

EXERCISE 1 – Work in pairs or small groups. Imagine (as a group) that you are a junior manager in an organisation in a developing/transitional economy with a good idea for a new information system. How will you convince your boss to support that idea?

Identify your two most likely sources of power and identify the one influence technique you would most likely use. If appropriate use your own work experience as a guide.

EXERCISE 2 - Work in groups of four and divide into two pairs. Each pair should select a different but fairly simple topic for influence: help with an assignment; the location for some out-of-class activity; a financial loan; etc. (Alternatively, pairs can role play IS-related issues.) Each pair should then identify the categories of power they have at their disposal and the techniques of influence they wish to use. Each pair should undertake a short interaction with the other pair. The group should then reflect on the role of power and influence.

EXERCISE 3 – Read the boxed case study below. If you were working in the Department of Justice, how would you respond to the police department's tactics? What sources of power could you call on? What influence techniques would likely work best?

BOX 8
Games Playing in Ireland's Penalty Points Systems

In 1997, an e-government project was announced to implement a penalty points system for traffic offences in Ireland (Bannister 2003). "This system finally stuttered into life in early 2003 with just one of the 68 listed offences (speeding) being operational." The main reason for delay was politicking by the four main agencies involved – the Department of the Environment and Local Government (with ultimate responsibility for licensing); local authorities (which issue driving licenses); the police and its parent department: the Department of Justice; and the judicial system (courts).

The police needed their computing systems to be upgraded in order to get the penalty points system operating properly, and sought to create an unstoppable momentum for this by issuing a tender. However, facing a budget crisis, their parent Department of Justice refused the required funding to fulfill this tender. Through a well-timed leak to national newspapers blaming the DoJ for delays to the penalty points system, the higher authorities of the media, citizenry and, hence, more senior politicians were enlisted on the side of the police, who showed good mastery of two techniques: a) selective release of information; b) using public forums to pressurize other players.

The courts, meanwhile, wanted nothing to do with the new system because they already had more than enough on their plate, "being in the middle of a major system upgrade". They opted for a tactic of withdrawal.

D3. Developing Country Cultures and Negotiations

EXERCISE – in the second handout there are some outlines of different national cultures. Are there particular cultural issues we need to bear in mind when listening, communicating, negotiating, influencing?

Are these real or stereotypes?

B. Networking

"It's not what you know, it's who you know"

B1. Why Network?

EXERCISE - Why network? - Think of two potential benefits. Think of one potential downside.

B2. With Whom to Network?

EXERCISE - Map out the members of your current network: family, friends, colleagues, work contacts. Distinguish between core network members (with whom you are regularly in touch, whom you could easily ask for a favour) and peripheral network members.

Which members of your network would be of value in getting you a job or in getting you a new job/promotion?

Now identify people not currently in your network who would be of value in getting you a job or in getting you a new job/promotion.

B3. How to Network?

EXERCISE - Look again at those key people you're not in contact with. How could you contact them? What could you offer for exchange?

C. Leadership

"The difference between leadership and management was once summed up in the following way by someone looking out of our office window in Covent Garden in central London:

'Imagine there's a sudden power failure on the tube [*London underground rail system*]. The system halts and all the lights go out. In the central control room someone is marshalling resources, implementing the standby facilities, rescheduling the trains, calling the emergency services. That's management. **Someone else is walking along the darkened platform with a torch bringing a trainload of people to safety. That's leadership.'**"
(Cadle & Yeates 2001:288)

Kouzes & Posner (1995, cited in Cadle & Yeates 2001), for example, identified common leadership practices as:

- **Challenge the process**
 - Search out opportunities for improvement
 - Experiment with new ideas and take some risks
- **Inspire a shared vision**
 - Describe the future for your people and help them to feel what it could mean
 - Get others to help you communicate this vision
- **Enable others to act**
 - Encourage people to work together to solve problems for the group
 - Develop and coach your people so that they grow in confidence and skills
- **Model the way**
 - Be the example and behave as you want others to behave
- **Encourage the heart**
 - Recognise individual accomplishments
 - Celebrate success

C1. Leadership Styles

BOX 9

We Admire Leaders Who Are ...

- **Honest:** trust others and can be trusted.
- **Competent:** at their particular management tasks.
- **Forward-looking:** thinking about the future as well as the present.
- **Inspiring:** enthusiastic and positive.

(Cadle & Yeates 2001:296-7)

Three different types of leader (Patching & Chatham 2000:105-9):

a. Traditional Manager

- Systems and task orientation.
- Creating and sticking to rules.
- Monitoring and measuring.
- Process oriented and job allocation.
- Fitting people to jobs.
- Treating people as a resource.
- Creating certainty, regularity and consistency.

b. Laissez-Faire

- Being a member of the team.
- Sharing out the responsibility.
- Hanging on to technical expertise.
- 'Us' versus 'them'.
- Anti-bureaucratic.
- Letting people do their own thing.
- Focus on jobs rather than purpose.
- A need to be liked.

c. Leadership

- Mature and robust.
- Empowering and enabling.
- Inspiring and motivating.
- Creating a vision.
- Effective delegation.
- Bringing out the best in others.
- Treating people as people.
- Creating trust, honesty and integrity.
- Developing people to their full potential.

EXERCISE - (adapted from Patching & Chatham 2000)

There are ten sets of statements below. Score each statement in each set by distributing 5 points among the three options.

For each statement in a group of three, think about how you really are (not how you think you ought to be). If only one statement represents how you really are, score 5 for that statement and 0 for the other two. If two statements represent how you really are, spread the 5 points between them (4 and 1, or 3 and 2) according to the balance of your behaviour. If all three represent how you really are, give each statement an appropriate weight (3, 1, 1 or 2, 2, 1).

- 1a It is important to have clear plans
- 1b It is important to provide those around you with a clear vision for the future
- 1c It is important to work on tasks as they arise rather than trying to foresee the future

- 2a It is good to take things on an ad hoc basis, dealing with matters as they arise
- 2b It is good to allocate clear areas of responsibility to each person in a team in order to get work done
- 2c It is good to spend time with team members ensuring everyone has a common vision for the future

- 3a Teams work best by all pulling together - that's the way to ensure work gets done
- 3b If I were team manager, one of my most important jobs would be to motivate and energise team members
- 3c If I were team manager, one of my most important jobs would be to 'steer the ship' and to maintain control

- 4a I believe - in a changing world - that it is best for me to encourage creativity in others and to change my own work in order to anticipate the future
- 4b I believe that we learn by experience and we can use that experience to remove the need for rules or routines
- 4c I believe that it is best to take a systematic approach, creating routines that ensure efficient service and project delivery

- 5a If I am leading a group, the 'buck stops with me'
- 5b If I am leading a group, I think problems should be solved or dealt with by those who create them
- 5c If I am leading a group, I would give responsibility and authority to group members, but would accept that I remain accountable

- 6a Before starting work with a team, I would make sure that all team members are committed to our chosen course of action
- 6b When working with a team, I would insist that team members conform to established standards
- 6c When working with a team, I believe that everyone has their own best approach and that I should not interfere

- 7a If I were managing a team, I would make sure everyone knew the exact terms of the contract, so they could fulfill its obligations
- 7b If I were managing a team, I would make sure my staff were so motivated that they would naturally go the 'extra mile' for the customer
- 7c If I were managing a team, I would make sure that work patterns were quite flexible but non-urgent problems would rarely get to the top of the list

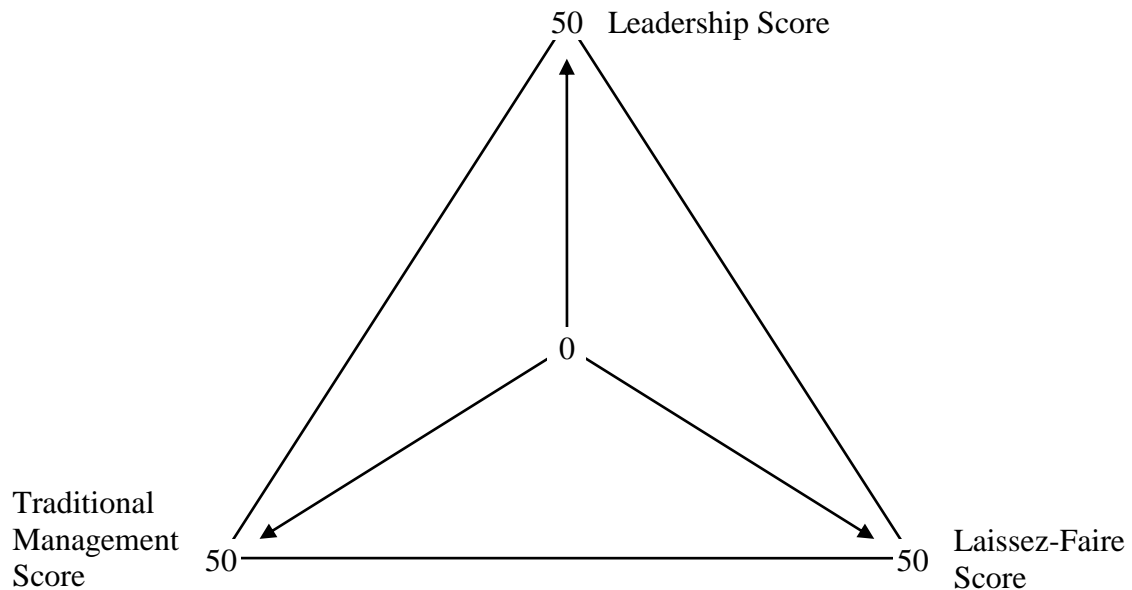
- 8a I take an interest in people as individuals and understand what makes each of them 'tick'

- 8b When working for an organisation, I think we should get on with our own work, helping each other out as and when necessary
- 8c People look to me for impartiality and fair judgement if there are differences of opinion
- 9a People often come to me with problems because they know I can solve them
- 9b I would want to lead by example and be respected by others for my expertise
- 9c People describe me as an inspiring person
- 10a In managing a team, I think it best to help team members grow by empowering them
- 10b In managing a team, I think it best to involve others in reviewing options but with the understanding that decisions are ultimately mine to make
- 10c In managing a team, I think decisions are best taken by people who are working on the relevant job; I would try not to get involved

Put your scores into the grid below:

Question	TM-score	LS-score	LF-score
1	1a	1b	1c
2	2c	2b	2a
3	3c	3b	3a
4	4c	4a	4b
5	5a	5c	5b
6	6b	6a	6c
7	7a	7b	7c
8	8c	8a	8b
9	9a	9c	9b
10	10b	10a	10c
Total			
	TM-score	LS-score	LF-score

Plot your leadership profile on the following chart:



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**"Big
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- Moral
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- Vision/strate

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