

Second Edition

Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming



**Simon Priest
Michael A. Gass**

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Priest, Simon.

Effective leadership in adventure programming / Simon Priest and Michael A. Gass.-- 2nd ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7360-5250-X (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Recreation leadership. 2. Outdoor recreation--Management. 3. Leisure--Management. 4. Recreational therapy. I. Gass, Michael A. II. Title.

GV181.43.P75 2005

790'.06'9--dc22

2005003376

ISBN-10: 0-7360-5250-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-5250-4

Copyright © 2005, 1997 by Simon Priest and Michael A. Gass

All rights reserved. Except for use in a review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying, and recording, and in any information storage and retrieval system, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

The Web addresses cited in this text were current as of January 25, 2005, unless otherwise noted.

Acquisitions Editor: Gayle Kassing, PhD; **Developmental Editor:** Melissa Feld; **Assistant Editors:** Michelle Rivera and Kathleen D. Bernard; **Copyeditor:** Jocelyn Engman; **Proofreader:** Erin Cler; **Indexer:** Dan Connolly; **Permission Manager:** Dalene Reeder; **Graphic Designer:** Fred Starbird; **Graphic Artist:** Dawn Sills; **Photo Manager:** Kelly J. Huff; **Cover Designer:** Keith Blomberg; **Photographer (cover):** Art Explosion; **Photographer (interior):** Simon Priest unless otherwise noted here. Photo on page 29 courtesy of North Carolina Outward Bound School; 67 courtesy of Sandra Lynn; 27, 133, 175, 243, 261, 291 courtesy of Taras Ferencevych; 45, 148, 185 courtesy of Browne Center; 84, 117 © Richard Etchberger; 11, 17 © International Stock; 47 © Human Kinetics, Inc.; 113, 249, 264 © ImageState; 145 © Photri/Wallis/Poulet; 199 © Danilo Donadoni /Bruce Coleman Inc.; 236 © Jock Montgomery/Bruce Coleman Inc.; 275, 281 © Keith Gunnar/Bruce Coleman Inc.; 275, 299 © @davidsandersphotos.com; 305 © Sherri Meyers; **Art Manager:** Kelly Hendren; **Illustrator:** Keri Evans; **Printer:** Sheridan Books

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Human Kinetics

Web site: www.HumanKinetics.com

United States: Human Kinetics
P.O. Box 5076
Champaign, IL 61825-5076
800-747-4457
e-mail: humank@hkusa.com

Canada: Human Kinetics
475 Devonshire Road Unit 100
Windsor, ON N8Y 2L5
800-465-7301 (in Canada only)
e-mail: orders@hkcanada.com

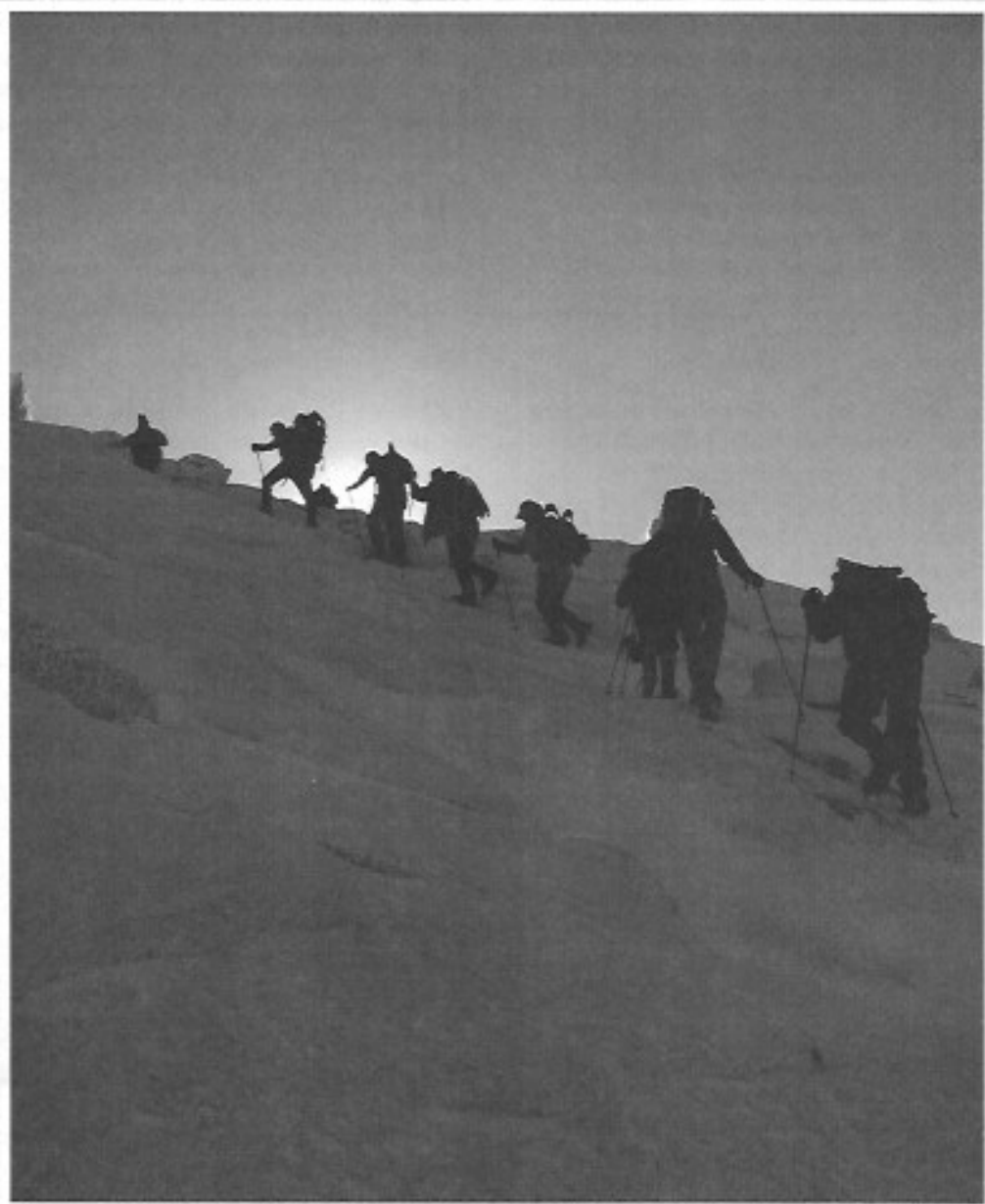
Europe: Human Kinetics
107 Bradford Road
Stanningley
Leeds LS28 6AT, United Kingdom
+44 (0) 113 255 5665
e-mail: hk@hkeurope.com

Australia: Human Kinetics
57A Price Avenue
Lower Mitcham, South Australia 5062
08 8277 1555
e-mail: liaw@hkaustralia.com

New Zealand: Human Kinetics
Division of Sports Distributors NZ Ltd.
P.O. Box 300 226 Albany
North Shore City
Auckland
0064 9 448 1207
e-mail: info@humankinetics.co.nz

CHAPTER

18



Flexible Leadership Style

A novice leader has marched a group of expert climbers up a long trail to an alpine meadow to establish a base camp for a week of climbing in California. The weather is clear, spirits are high, and plenty of low-impact campsites are available. Nevertheless, the novice leader tells the group members where they must put their tents. Arguments ensue, many of the climbers revolt, and eventually the entire group mutinies and selects a new leader. The old leader isn't sure how things got so out of hand!

An expert leader has allowed a group of novice paddlers to find its way back to camp after a full

day of sea kayaking among a maze of islands off the coast of British Columbia. In fact, this schoolteacher has relaxed during most of the afternoon as the students have done much of the work to successfully find their way back. Still an hour from camp, at the end of an open crossing, the group spots a stranger waving frantically on the beach. The teacher simply paddles on by and asks the students to take care of the situation! The group investigates and finds that the man is injured. The paddlers are unsure of what to do and so fall into arguing; one tired student begins to cry. The teacher returns an hour later and is surprised to see things much the same as when the group first arrived!

In the two scenarios, both leaders made the same mistake. They simply failed to shift their styles to suit the conditions they encountered. Instead, they implemented the same style they had used throughout the day and probably used frequently when leading other trips. In each case, the leaders could have been far more effective had they expressed a more appropriate style for each situation. In this chapter, we discuss how and when to adapt, or "flex," leadership styles by presenting a model to guide you when making these critical choices.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Leadership styles are the ways in which you express your influence. We can categorize styles in many different ways. For example, as a leader, you can be seen as telling, selling, testing, consulting, joining, and delegating in your efforts to influence (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973). Such styles are often portrayed as a range of approaches characterized by how much authority you exercise and how free group members are to contribute to the situation (D. Grube, Phipps, & A. Grube, 2002; Warner, 2004).

When using the telling style, you make the decision and demand action from the group members. When selling, you make the decision and convince the group members of its merit. When testing, you present the decision, but invite group members to modify it. When consulting, you present the problem and seek input in the decision. In joining, you outline the entire problem and let the group

formulate the entire decision. In delegating, you let the group members outline the problem for themselves and come to their own decision.

We can group these styles into three sets of pairs to define three outdoor leadership styles that form a continuum of decision-making power: **autocratic** (telling or selling), **democratic** (testing or consulting), and **abdicative** (joining or delegating). (See chapter 5 for how the three styles relate to group development.) The autocratic style is characterized by an authoritarian approach in which you hold complete power over decision making and dictate the needed response. The democratic style involves shared decision making, with you and the group working together to solve problems. The abdicative style is an outgrowth of the *laissez-faire*, or "leaving to do," approach (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1938), in which you abdicate all decision-making power to the group and agree to abide by their resolutions. True dictatorial, or all-leader power, and *laissez-faire*, or all-group power, have limited application in outdoor leadership settings, since negotiated involvement by both parties is often a necessary part of adventure experiences, and effective leadership involves influence from both parties as well. Figure 18.1 summarizes the three outdoor leadership styles along a continuum of actions leaders can take.

LEADERSHIP ORIENTATION

Historically, researchers have identified two dimensions that determine a leader's orientation to leadership: task and relationship (Stogdill &

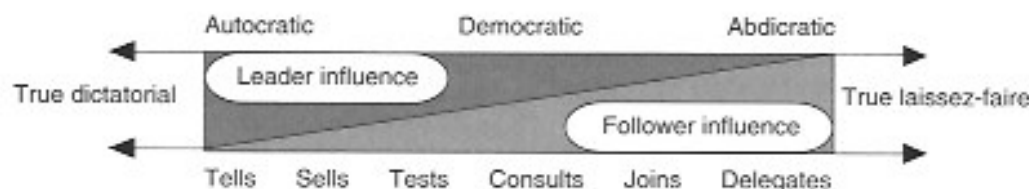


Figure 18.1 A continuum of outdoor leadership styles.

Leadership Power

Groups will not follow a leader they perceive as powerless or not influential. But no matter what your level of leadership experience, you possess some bases of power from which you can influence others. Leadership power has been categorized as coming from at least five sources: referent, legitimate, expert, reward, and coercive (French & Raven, 1960; Raven & Rubin, 1976).

- ▶ **Referent power** is the least obvious source, but is the most voluntarily accepted of the five. When as a leader, you are admired, identified with, or valued by group members, they are more likely to agree with you, support your opinions, and follow you. We can say you have referent power if the group members gauge or mirror their personal actions by your actions.
- ▶ **Legitimate power** refers to the authority given you when you are appointed by a controlling agency or elected by group members. The more prominent or recognized the appointment or election, the greater is the legitimized power. Most group members will follow you if you have been given the moral right or legal responsibility to make certain decisions on their behalf.

- ▶ **Expert power** is achieved through perceived competence. The more knowledge, skill, and experience you appear to have, the more likely group members will respect your expertise and the more likely they are to follow you. Often this power is founded on your expertise in one situation and is unlikely to generalize to other situations.
- ▶ **Reward power** is achieved by giving a reward for effort. As a rewarding leader, you influence group members by offering positive incentives, such as fewer chores or recognition for a job well done. This ploy only works if the group members value the rewards. It fails if group members do not like the incentives.
- ▶ **Coercive power** involves the threat of punishment and usually follows the failure of reward power to influence people. As a coercive leader, you influence group members by threatening them with negative incentives such as decreased responsibility or carrying more weight on a trip. Ethically, this power has no part in outdoor situations, since forcing people to act ignores challenge by choice and can potentially destroy the adventure experience or create barriers to learning.

Coons, 1957; Blake & Mouton, 1978; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). As mentioned in chapter 5, the leadership style that you express, especially in difficult times, will depend on your orientation to the dimensions of tasks and relationships. We can think of the orientation to these two dimensions as the levels of concern that you have for getting the job done, or achieving the goal (task), and for looking after group interactions, or maintaining a positive atmosphere among the followers (rela-

tionship). Figure 18.2 shows these two orientations in a matrix.

These leadership orientations help determine the most appropriate style for you to express. If you want to get to the top of a peak at all costs, you may express an autocratic style to push people upward. Or as a laid-back leader, you may float down a river on a lazy day, engaging people in conversation and expressing an abdicratic style. In general, task-oriented leaders tend toward

autocracy and relationship-oriented leaders tend toward abdication. But without the capability or willingness to flex your leadership style away from your preference, you will fail to be fully effective.

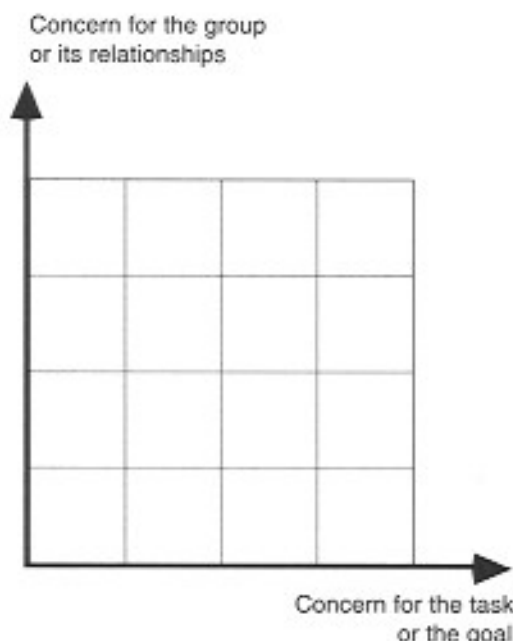


Figure 18.2 A matrix of outdoor leadership orientations.

CONDITIONAL FAVORABILITY

The most influential orientation for you as an outdoor leader, however, is not task or relationship, but the favorability of conditions in which you find yourself (Priest & Dixon, 1991). Conditional favorability for outdoor leadership is a mix of five factors (Fiedler, 1967; Benson, 1986; Ford, 1987):

1. **Environmental dangers:** weather, perils, hazards, and objective and subjective risks
2. **Individual competence:** experience, confidence, skill, attitude, behavior, and knowledge
3. **Group unity:** morale, maturity, cooperation, communication, trust, responsibility, and interest
4. **Leader proficiency:** credibility, judgment, stress, fatigue, and perceived capability
5. **Decision consequences:** clarity of the problem, sufficient solution time, available resources, expected ramifications, and degree of uncertainty or challenge

Figure 18.3 summarizes the favorability of conditions expressed as a continuum from low to high.

CONDITIONAL FAVORABILITY

Low	Medium	High
Bad weather Many perils and hazards Mostly subjective risks not easily controlled	Environmental dangers	Good weather Few perils and hazards Mostly objective risks under human control
Disintegrated and divided Distrustful and competitive Immature and irresponsible	Group	Cohesive and unified Trusting and cooperative Mature and responsible
Novice members Incompetent, unskilled, unable Unsure, inexperienced, unknowledgeable	Individuals	Expert members Competent, skilled, able Confident, experienced, knowledgeable
Deficient and incapable Lacks power base for credibility Poor judgment, stressed out, fatigued	Leader	Proficient and capable Holds strong power base for credibility Sound judgment, in control, fit
Problem cloudy and uncertain Insufficient time and resources available Challenge high with unacceptable outcomes	Consequences of the decision	Problem clear and defined Sufficient time and resources available Challenge low with acceptable outcomes

Figure 18.3 A spectrum of conditional favorability.

CONDITIONAL OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP THEORY MODEL

Combining the information on leadership styles, leadership orientations, and conditional favorability creates the **conditional outdoor leadership theory** (COLT; Priest & Chase, 1989). Figure 18.4 illustrates this theory. Note that the orientations, or the concern for tasks and the concern for relationships, are represented by the x- and y-axes, respectively, and that conditional favorability is represented by the z-axis. With this graphic framework in place, the three outdoor leadership styles can be spread across the matrices created at high, medium, and low favorability.

Conditions of **medium favorability** highlight the typical outdoor settings in which the dangers are acceptable, the leader is proficient, the individuals are reasonably responsible, the group gets along fairly well, and the consequences of decisions are mostly recoverable. Under moderately favorable conditions, if your orientation is toward relationships, you may express an abdicratic style, and if your orientation is toward tasks, you may express an autocratic style. If your orientation is balanced between both tasks and relationships, you may express a democratic style. The style depends on the "pull" of the respective concerns. A greater pull by one concern as well as your preferred orientation will cause you to favor one style over another.

Conditions of **high favorability** exemplify a more desirable outdoor setting in which the dangers are minimal, the leader is most proficient, the individuals are very competent, the group gets along extremely well, and the consequences of decisions are minor. Under highly favorable conditions, like many leaders, you may shift toward a relationship orientation, allowing an abdicratic style to prevail. Given a strong enough orientation toward the task, however, a democratic style or perhaps even an autocratic style can be appropriate. When things are good, like many leaders, you may pay more attention to the group and therefore transfer decision-making responsibility. Hence, if you find yourself in this situation, you will likely employ an abdicratic style, delegating power to the group.

Conditions of **low favorability** hallmark the less desirable outdoor setting in which the dangers are extreme, the leader is deficient, the individuals are incompetent, the group gets along poorly, and the consequences of decisions are major. Under

unfavorable conditions, like many leaders, you may shift toward a task orientation, favoring an autocratic style. But given a strong enough orientation toward relationships, a democratic style or perhaps even an abdicratic style can be appropriate. Still, when things are bad, you will probably pay stricter attention to the task and therefore retain decision-making responsibility. Hence, if you find yourself in this situation, you will likely employ an autocratic style to authoritatively vest power in yourself.

APPLYING THE COLT MODEL

Let's look at a real-life example by applying the COLT model to a backpacking adventure. You are responsible for teaching route finding to five participants on the first day of a three-day trip near timberline during the summer in the Rocky Mountains.

At the trailhead, you inform the group members that they are in charge of reading their maps, using their compasses, and finding their way to the campsite. You have chosen an overall abdicratic style because conditions are high in favorability. The participants are skilled in navigation, their spirits are high, you are a master orienteer, well within the proficiency requirements for this activity, the weather is clear with no apparent danger, and the consequences of the backpackers getting lost are minor since they have plenty of daylight and all their overnight gear. Furthermore, at this time, your concern lies with relationships. You are giving group members a chance to learn for themselves as they work together as a team. Therefore, an abdicratic style is appropriate, leaving the group to learn from its own minor mistakes. If your attention shifts more toward the task and somewhat away from relationships, you would probably flex toward a more democratic or autocratic style.

As time goes on, conditions deteriorate, and such a flex does indeed become necessary! It's several hours later, and group members are experiencing some confusion at a trail junction. The group has stopped discussing possible solutions and is now arguing over which path to choose: the left or the right. The members all have strong opinions as to which direction to take, and tempers flare because they are tired and hungry. Confusion erodes group morale. To further depress the conditions, you are frustrated, concerned with the lack of teamwork displayed by the group. The weather

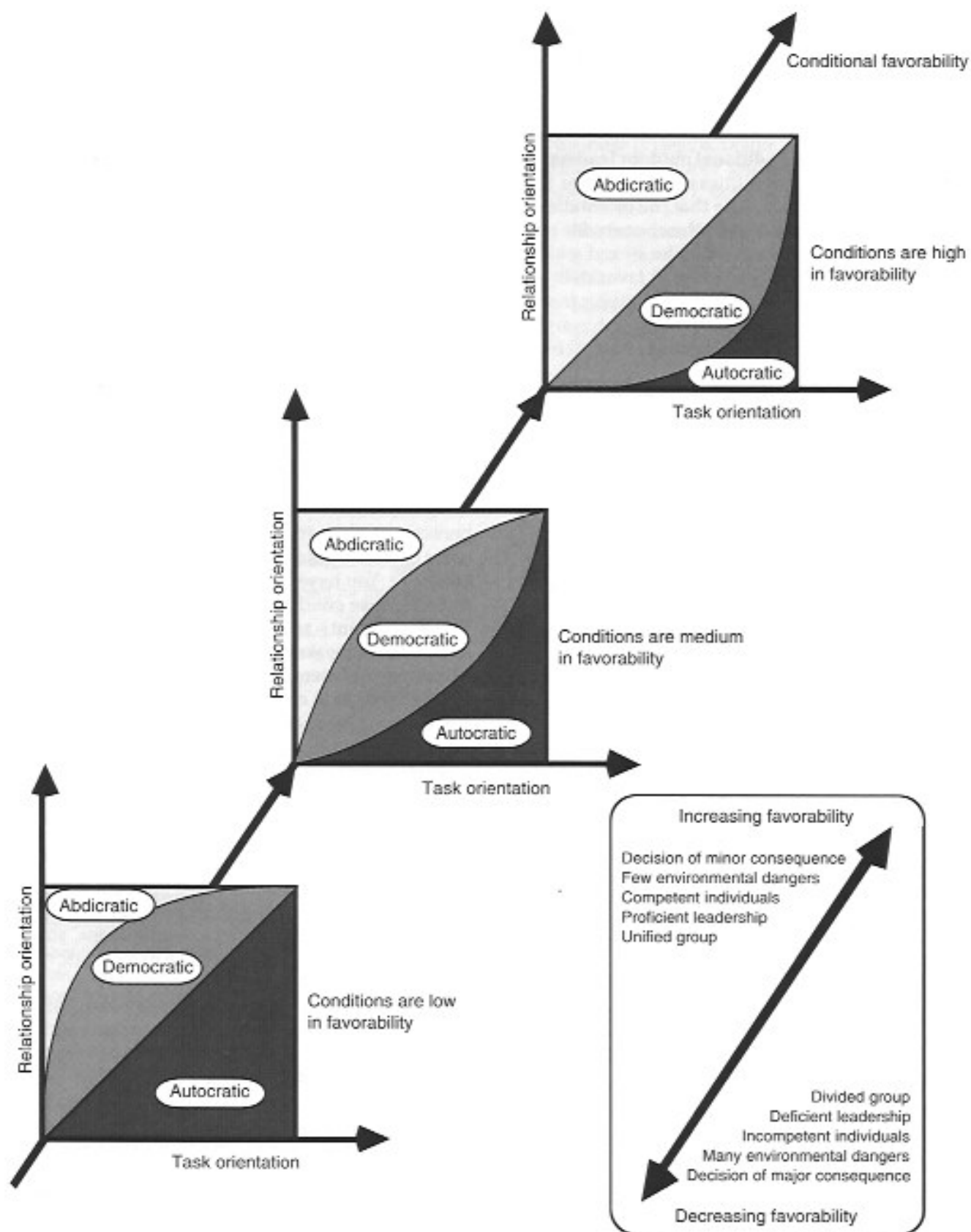


Figure 18.4 The conditional outdoor leadership theory (COLT).



Appropriate choices of leadership style and flexibility can create critical differences in adventure experiences.

is changing dramatically for the worse: snow begins to fall as a few group members express a desire to hurry up and decide, because they are getting cold. You choose to enter into the decision-making process with a democratic style. The final decision rests with both the group and you, but you attempt to influence the group toward picking the correct path. In addition, under such conditions, which we can now label as medium favorability, you are prepared to flex autocratically if the concern of hypothermia arises or abdicratically if the group is ready to work toward the correct decision on its own. In the former case, you are concerned about the task of keeping everyone safe from cold exposure, and in the latter case, you are concerned with rebuilding positive relationships in a dysfunctional group.

Let's say you remain flexible as conditions worsen. Now late in the day and at a much higher elevation, snow is falling steadily, the ground is slippery, and the group has lost sight of any trail it was following. The fog is rolling in, the map indicates intermittent cliff bands in the area, and a poor decision might mean an accident. Individuals are fed, but tired. None are too cold yet, but one

person is feeling ill from the altitude. The group members are frustrated with what they perceive to be a failed exercise. At this point, your immediate concern is getting the group to a safe campsite before members become hypothermic or get lost in the fog. You move to an autocratic style because conditions are definitely low in favorability. But if your attention focuses more on the opportunity for group members to get along or less on getting to camp because the group becomes a team or several camping options unexpectedly arise, you could flex toward a democratic or even abdicratic style.

By maintaining flexibility and by expressing the correct leadership style for each circumstance, you will effectively influence the group, helping it to achieve its goals, which are to maintain its relationships and to deal with the variety of conditions it encounters. Using an inappropriate style at any time in this scenario could have been devastating. Imagine the risks for group members in similarly unfavorable conditions if you were to express an abdicratic style, leaving the decisions entirely up to them! Also imagine the same group at the start of the trip if you were to apply an autocratic style,

◀ EFFECTIVE OUTDOOR LEADERS ▶

- ▶ Understand the connections among influence, power, and style.
- ▶ Are capable of expressing all three outdoor leadership styles and are aware of their concern for task, relationship, and conditional favorability.
- ▶ Flex style to match concerns accordingly and switch style in concert with changing circumstances and conditions.

marching it up the trail in favorable conditions. In the former example, the incorrect style could have resulted in an accident. In the latter instance, the incorrect style would likely have discouraged and frustrated several group members, inhibiting their goals. Thus, your choice of style can make all the difference in an adventure experience. Temper your choice at any given moment with careful consideration for task, relationship, and conditional favorability. Above all, remain flexible in that choice.

SUMMARY

Leadership is a process of influence based on power. Power in outdoor leadership circles comes in five different types: referent, legitimate, expert, rewarding, and coercive. Power refers to control over decision making, and who has the control—the appointed leader or other group members—determines who is being most influential and taking a leadership role.

The three dimensions of the conditional outdoor leadership theory (COLT) are graphically represented by three axes. The horizontal axis (x) is task orientation, or the degree to which you are concerned about achieving the goal or getting the job done. The vertical axis (y) is relationship orientation, or the degree to which you are concerned about interactions within the group and the group's ability to work together. The diagonal axis (z) is conditional favorability, or the degree to which the conditions associated with the task and group relationships are favorable. These are the conditions under which you and your group must function to make decisions. They are derived from five factors: environmental dangers, individual competence, group unity, leader proficiency, and decision consequences.

You may employ a spectrum of leadership styles ranging from autocratic through democratic

to abdicatic. The style you choose depends on how concerned you are about task, relationship, and condition favorability at that moment in time. Autocratic styles are wise when you have a high concern for task and a low concern for relationships and are working under unfavorable conditions. Democratic styles are appropriate when your concerns for task and relationship are balanced and you are working under medium favorability. Choose an abdicatic style when you have a low concern for tasks, a high concern for relationships, and are working under favorable conditions. We encourage you to analyze your style in relation to these three variables and flex to suit the particular circumstances.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Relate the following words to one another in a single sentence: leadership style, power, and influence.
2. Differentiate among the five types of power.
3. Compare and contrast the three outdoor leadership styles.
4. Discuss the effect that a leader's concerns for task orientation, relationship orientation, and conditional favorability has on expressed leadership style.
5. List the five factors that contribute to condition favorability. Provide three examples of each factor that clearly explain what each indicates.
6. Describe two personal experiences in which you have used appropriate and inappropriate leadership styles. Analyze both experiences with the COLT model to explain why one style was effective and the other was not.