

John Adair - Action-Centered Leadership

John Adair (b.1934) is one of Britain's foremost authorities on leadership in organisations.

Before Adair and arguably still today people associated leadership with the so called 'Great Man Theory'.

One charismatic individual who used his or her personal power and rhetoric to mobilise a group.

Adair approached leadership from a more practical and simple angle; by describing what leaders have to do and the actions they need to take.

His model was figuratively based on three overlapping circles representing:-

Achieve the task.

Build and maintain the team.

Develop the individual.



This creates a clear distinction between leadership and management. Creating charismatic 'Great Man' leaders is difficult and cannot be relied on. You cannot guarantee that such a person can be developed and, once developed, that they will be reliable.

Adair's theory is more practical and shows that leadership can be taught and that it is a transferable skill.

The three circles in Adair's model overlap because:-

- The task needs a team because one person alone cannot accomplish it.
- If the team needs are not met the task will suffer and the individuals will not be satisfied.
- If the individual needs are not met the team will suffer and performance of the task will be impaired.

Leadership Functions

Adair lists eight Leadership Functions required to achieve success. These need to be constantly developed and honed to ensure success.

- **Defining the task:** Using SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Constrained) to set a clear objective.
- **Planning:** An open minded, positive and creative search for alternatives. Contingencies should be planned for and plans should be tested.
- **Briefing:** Team briefings by the leader are a basic function and essential in order to create the right atmosphere, foster teamwork and motivate each individual.

- **Controlling:** Leaders need self-control, good control systems in place and effective delegation and monitoring skills in order to get maximum results from minimum resources.
- **Evaluating:** Assess consequences, evaluate performance, appraise and train individuals.
- **Motivating:** Adair identifies eight basic rules for motivating people* in his book *Effective Motivation* (Guildford: Talbot Adair Press, 1987). Adair also created the 50:50 rule which states that 50% of motivation comes from within a person and 50% from his or her environment and particularly the leadership they encounter.
- **Organising:** Good leaders need to be able to organise themselves, their team and their organisation.
- **Setting an example:** The best leaders naturally set a good example. If effort needs to be made it will slip and a bad example is noticed more than a good example.

Motivating Your Team

The eight rules for motivating people:-

- Be motivated yourself.
- Select motivated people.
- Treat each person as an individual.
- Set realistic but challenging targets.
- Understand that progress itself motivates.
- Create a motivating environment.
- Provide relevant rewards.
- Recognise success.

John Adair's work is in line with motivational theorists such as Maslow, McGregor and Herzberg.

He emphasises the need for development of the team and team building.