

## *Leadership Styles*

This essay describes an early study of leadership behavior. Four groups of 10-year old boys were subjects. Each groups consisted of five members who met after school to engage in hobbies and social activities. Four adult leaders were trained to exhibit three types of leadership: autocratic, democratic, and laissez faire. The leaders were shifted from group to group every 6 weeks. Each time they moved to a new group, they changed their leadership behavior. Each group, therefore, experienced each style in a different order and with a different leader.

In the autocratic climate, the leader determined all policy, gave instructions one step at a time, told the boys exactly what to do and who to work with, and was personal in praise and criticism. In the democratic climate, all policies were determined by the group with the leader's assistance, tasks were outlined in advance, members could work with whomever they chose to, and praise and criticism were objective. Finally, in the laissez faire climate, the group had complete freedom with a minimum of leader participation. The leader supplied information only when asked, did not dictate task or work partners, and made to attempt to appraise performance. Individual differences in acting out the roles seemed to be minor. The boys' behaviors under these conditions were observed and analyzed. The results were as follows. Laissez faire was not the same as democracy. In the laissez faire climate, there was less and poorer work and more play, and the boys expressed preference for the democratic leaders. Democracy was efficient. Although the quantity of work under autocracy was greater, originality and work motivation were stronger with democracy. Autocracy can create discontent that does not appear on the surface. There were more dropouts and discontent in autocracy, and "release" behaviors. There was more group mindedness and more friendliness in democracy. Spontaneous subgroups were larger. Group-minded remarks were more marked as was mutual praise, friendliness, and willingness to share.

The results show that leadership style does affect the climate sustained and the kinds of worker behaviors that result.

Source: Ralph K. White and Ronald Lippitt, "Leader Behavior and Member Reaction in Three 'Social Climates'," in *Autocracy and Democracy*, eds. Ralph K. White and Ronald Lippitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).