

## STUDENT LEADER TRAINING EXERCISE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article outlines a leadership training program for leaders of student campus organizations. While it was designed for undergraduate and graduate students in colleges and universities, it could be used by civic organizations and in high schools, as well. It is based on careful research, is easy and inexpensive to conduct, has been used effectively (field tested), and has the potential to improve the quality of student leadership in a wide variety of organizations.*

Keywords: Leader, Leadership, Student

### INTERACTIVE SESSION

- 1) Session Objective: To conduct a student leader training exercise.  
Target Audience: Those interested in the theory and practice of leadership.  
Number of Participants: Any number may participate (12-16 is a good size).  
Time Needed: From 45 to 75 minutes.  
Materials: Provided  
Room Setup: Movable chairs for small group, then all participant discussion.
- 2) Theoretical framework (see paper that follows).
- 3) Pedagogical implications (see paper that follows).
- 4) Implementation (see paper, and Appendix).

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been an important component of the social sciences for well over a century (Van Fleet and Yukl, 1986a). Once thought of as a somewhat simple construct, it is now recognized as one of the more complex of social phenomena. The sheer volume of the leadership literature precludes detailed descriptions of various models or an

exhaustive bibliography (see, Yukl and Van Fleet, 1992; Yukl, 2006).

Most leadership research uses a behavior approach in which what leaders actually do is the focus, and the relationship of behavior to effectiveness or success is studied. While there has been little agreement about what categories of behavior are most meaningful, a promising taxonomy that appears capable of integrating most behavior research has been proposed by Yukl (2002; 1989).

We elected to use the behaviors associated with that taxonomy for several reasons. First, as just indicated, the behaviors identified in most leadership research are included in this taxonomy. Second, the behaviors are generic ones that are applicable to all types of leaders and organizations, and they may occur in interactions with anyone. The specific form of each of the behaviors would, of course, vary from context to context. Third, all of the behaviors are relevant for leadership effectiveness, even though their relative importance varies across situations. Fourth, the taxonomy was developed through a careful construct validation program that involved years of research and is more intensive and comprehensive than previous ones (Yukl, Wall, & Lepsinger, 1990). Finally, the taxonomy has been used in numerous studies with correlations higher than those usually obtained with other questionnaires or survey instruments.

In studies using this taxonomy, several categories are usually found to be important for any given situation suggesting that managers may need to be skilled in a range of behaviors in order to be effective. This situational approach emphasizes that different behavior patterns will be effective in different situations, and that the same behavior pattern is not optimal in all situations. Despite the situational demands and pressures, leaders have choices in what to emphasize, how to allocate time, and with whom to interact (Kotter, 1982; Stewart, 1982). The leader's effectiveness depends in part on how well he or she understands demands and constraints, copes with demands, overcomes constraints,

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and recognizes opportunities.

Situations faced by student leaders, while they may have much in common, are nevertheless sufficiently different such that no one approach or set of behaviors is likely to be effective for all. That was the challenge faced in this effort – how to conduct training for student leaders that would recognize situational differences and yet still provide behavior guidance designed to increase their effectiveness as leaders of campus organizations. This training suggests that leadership or at least information about leadership can be taught (Doh, 2003), whether it will be learned, of course, may remain to be seen.

### **PROCEDURE**

A training program based on Yukl's taxonomy was developed using information from several different editions of his book, Leadership in Organizations. A form (See the Appendix) summarizing his taxonomy and situations in which each behavior would likely be important was constructed based on a fairly inclusive version of the behaviors and behavioral categories he discussed over the years. The training is designed to be conducted either at the end of an academic year for those who will take office in the next year or at the very beginning of an academic year for those who will hold office that year. During the course of the leadership training program, which could last from a couple of hours to a half-day to a whole day, the student leaders are asked to keep notes so that they may refer back to them as needed during the coming academic year.

The specifics of the training program are then as follows.

### **PREPARATION**

In preparation for the training, students should be given two (or more) short articles on leadership to read in advance. The articles should present a path-goal or situational view to familiarize students with the fundamental idea that there is no "one best way." Yukl's widely cited review in the Journal of Management (Yukl, 1989) and Tannenbaum and Schmidt's classic work (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; reprinted in 1973) have been used, for example. Another approach would be to have the student leaders read a chapter on leadership from a basic management or organizational behavior textbook.

### **INITIAL MEETING**

At a group meeting consisting of all student leaders, a brief lecture (~30 minutes) on leadership from a situational and behavioral viewpoint is delivered. This does not require an expert but rather anyone familiar with the basics of path-goal and situational theories will suffice. The idea is to reiterate the points made in the readings and set the stage for situational analysis by the students. Just as in a classroom setting, students should be given the opportunity to ask

questions and engage in general discussion to assure that they are conversant with the fundamental concepts of leadership.

After the lecture/discussion, the student leaders use the form from the Appendix of this article to describe their situations and "score" themselves for each of the items in each of the 14 behavioral categories and then total their scores for each category. This activity generally takes from 15-30 minutes. Students may ask questions about specifics, but they should be told to simply use their best judgments and first impressions. More experienced student leaders may suggest ideas to those who are less experienced during this part of the program.

### **SMALL GROUPS**

Using the student responses derived from the initial meeting, students are grouped by the behavior category in which they "scored" highest. Should the resulting groups vary widely in term of size, some could be moved to other groups by using their second highest score. The intent is to obtain several small groups of approximately equal size.

Each of these smaller groups then discusses how the behavior used to form the group could be applied in the situations faced by that group of student leaders. They should be asked to generate specific examples within the group of how that behavior might be applied by them during the upcoming academic year. If time permits, students can be re-grouped into "second highest" behavior categories to discuss those as well.

Finally, the groups are combined into the four major categories where they again exchange ideas and generate specific examples. In this way, the students gain a broader perspective on what behaviors they might use and how they might use them in dealing with opportunities and problems specific to their organizations.

### **FINAL MEETING**

After these small group discussions, the whole group gets back together for a general discussion. In this general meeting, the student leaders focus on what was learned through the program as well as more on specific behaviors that could or should be used during their terms of office. It can also be beneficial to ask the students for suggestions in modifying the training program for future use based on this session. This can be especially useful for developing an on-going program that is compatible with the particular academic institution.

### **ACTION PLAN**

One final step that can add to the impact of the training although it is not a necessary step is the development of an action plan. Students would be asked to re-read the advance material, go over all of the material developed during the sessions, and then develop action plans. The action plans

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should cover the near term (As a result of this training, what do you plan to do during the next few weeks?) as well as the longer term (How will you incorporate what you have learned during this training over the academic year? What will your personal benchmarks of success be?).

### FOLLOW-UP

At the end of the academic year, the student leaders should be asked to provide follow-up information. This might be done in a group meeting with open discussion or through the use of a simple open-ended questionnaire. The students should be asked, if looking back over their experiences, the training seemed to be useful. They should also be asked about any changes that they feel should be made in the training.

### BENEFITS

There are numerous benefits to this training program. First and most important, student leaders focus on their particular situations and behaviors that should be relevant to them rather than on vague, general admonitions to be “good leaders.” Secondly, student leaders interact with other student leaders to exchange ideas and compare notes again focusing on their particular situations. Student leaders who have experienced this training have indicated that they feel that they gain a great deal from learning from others in a focused discussion. The instrument is regarded as a strong tool for keeping them focused.

In addition, this approach is inexpensive and easy to do. It does not require a facilitator with high levels of technical skills or a background of research in the study of leadership nor does it require special facilities or equipment. As such it is easy to administer and holds significant promise for improving the quality of student leadership on campuses.

### CONCLUSIONS

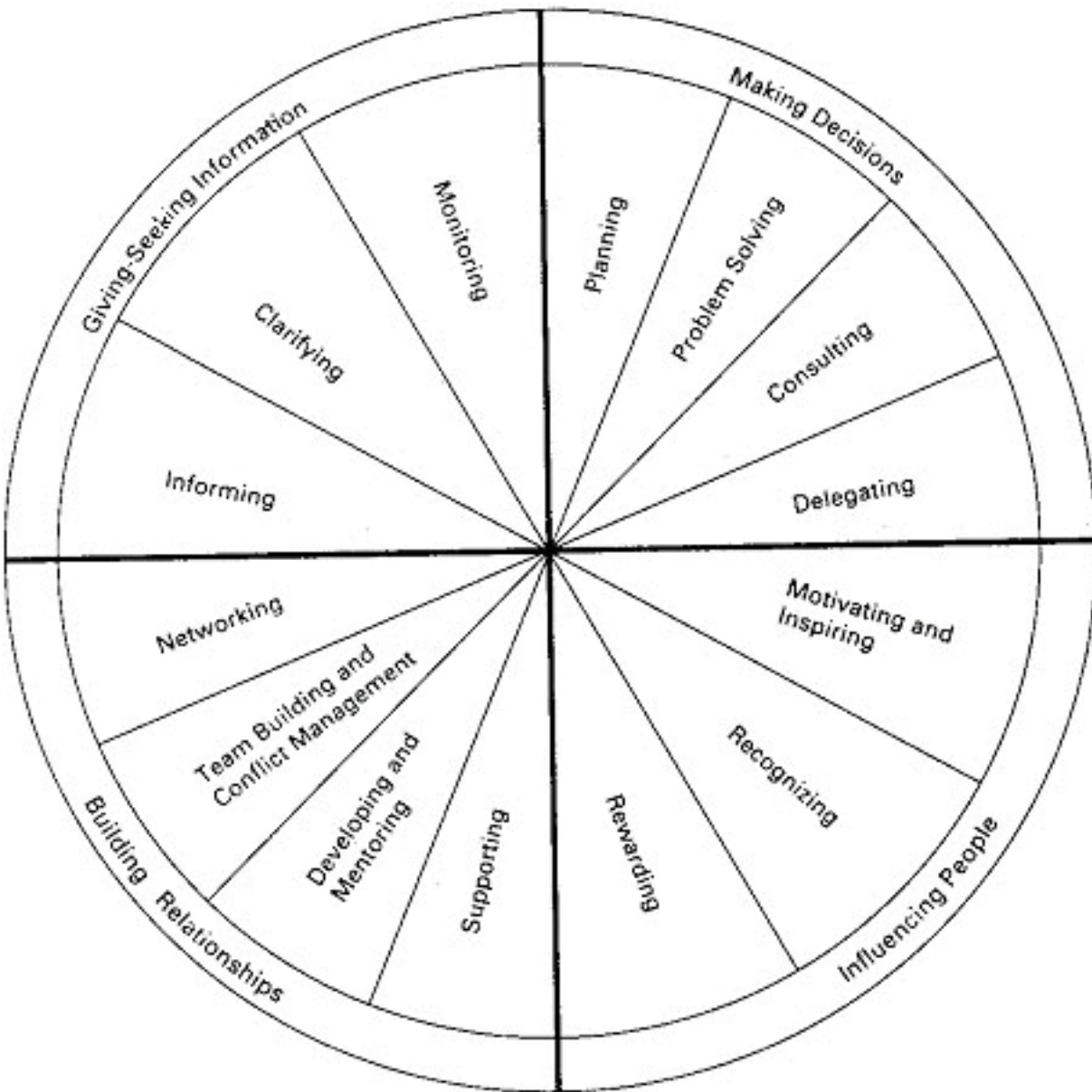
The leadership training program outlined here has been used to improve the quality of student leaders in college organizations. Even though it was intended for college or university application, it can also be used by civic organizations and at high schools. Based on extensive research, it is easy and inexpensive to conduct, has been used effectively (field tested), and has the potential to improve the quality of leadership in a wide variety of organizations.

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APPENDIX

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS FOR STUDENT LEADERS  
What Leader Behaviors Are and When It Is Important To Use Them



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This figure is from G. A. Yukl, Leadership in Organizations. 3rd ed.; NY: Prentice-Hall, 1994, p. 72, and is used with permission. The remaining information is adapted from various editions of that work — 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> editions; 1981, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006.

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### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

#### **NETWORKING:**

##### Definition:

Socializing informally, developing contacts with people who are a source of information and support, and maintaining relationships through periodic interaction, including visits, telephone calls, and correspondence, and attendance at meetings and social events.

##### Examples:

The training director met with heads of clubs to find out how we can improve the design of the new training program to better suit our needs.

The student body president visited the new computer facility at another campus to get better acquainted with their new system and to see if we can adapt some features of their management information system for use on our campus.

##### Important To Use When (the sum of the following is 9 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Our group depends on many other groups.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Our group activities are affected by changing policies, plans, and priorities determined by higher levels within the school or student government.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Our group must change its products, services, or timetables to accommodate the needs of others outside our group.

#### **SUPPORTING:**

##### Definition:

Acting friendly and considerate, being patient and helpful, showing sympathy and support when someone is upset or anxious, listening to complaints and problems, looking out for someone's interests.

##### Examples:

On the day of a big storm, our project chairperson told us that we could leave early so we wouldn't get caught in traffic jams.

The chair of the committee was very sympathetic and tried to console a member who was upset about something.

##### Important To Use When (the sum of the following is 18 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    What we do is dangerous, and group members are anxious about safety.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    What we do is boring and tedious.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    What we do is difficult and frustrating, and group members may become frustrated and discouraged by setbacks and lack of progress.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Members must deal with people who are frequently hostile or irate.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Members work under pressure of difficult deadlines imposed by others.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Members lack self-confidence and feel insecure.

#### **MANAGING CONFLICT AND TEAM BUILDING:**

##### Definition:

Facilitating the constructive resolution of conflict, and encouraging cooperation, teamwork, and identification with our group.

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### Examples:

The club president took the executive committee out to lunch to give everybody a chance to get to know the new officers.

The project chairperson met with two members who were having a dispute about a project and helped them to resolve it in a way that satisfied everyone.

### Important To Use When (the sum of the following is 15 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    People have interdependent jobs, requiring considerable cooperation.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Differences in values and beliefs are likely to cause suspicion, misunderstanding, and hostility.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    People must work together in close proximity under stress for long periods of time.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    People compete against each other for rewards, status, and resources.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Our group depends on many other groups.

### ***DEVELOPING AND MENTORING:***

#### Definition:

Providing coaching and helpful advice, and doing things to facilitate a person's skill acquisition, professional development, and advancement.

### Examples:

The committee chairperson encouraged me to attend a workshop that would help me learn about the new computer system and develop my programming skills.

A club officer encouraged me to set personal development goals (e.g., to learn a new procedure) and introduced me to others who could help me to achieve that goal.

### Important To Use When (the sum of the following is 9 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Members of our group lack experience and knowledge about their jobs and/or careers.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    Members of our group are from groups (women, minorities, etc.) that are not well represented in existing managerial ranks.

Seldom      Frequently

1 . . . 3    . . . 5    The nature of the work or technology is changing, and members need to learn new skills and procedures.

## **EXCHANGING INFORMATION**

### ***MONITORING:***

#### Definition:

Gathering information about activities and external conditions affecting what is to be done, checking on the progress and quality of what is being done, evaluating the performance of individuals and the group, analyzing trends, and forecasting external events.

### Examples:

The club president walked along where things were being done checking progress and asking the members if they had any problems.

The project leader asked me to meet with her today to report on the new activity.

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Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 21 or more):

- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Members of our group are inexperienced and likely to make mistakes.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Mistakes and accidents would be expensive or would endanger the health and lives of people.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Disruptions in the work flow are likely, due to equipment breakdowns, technical problems, materials shortages, bad weather, and so on.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Activities are disrupted by deliberate interference or the hostile actions of outsiders (e.g., terrorists, military units).
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Members of our group have interdependent tasks requiring continuous coordination.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Our group depends on other groups or carries out joint projects with other groups or organizations.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Our group has difficult deadlines imposed by higher levels within the school or student government.

### **CLARIFYING ROLES AND OBJECTIVES:**

#### Definition:

Assigning tasks, providing direction in how to do things, and communicating a clear understanding of responsibilities, objectives, deadlines, and performance expectations.

#### Examples:

A club officer told me about a rush activity that must be given top priority, and he gave me some suggestions about how to do it.

The project chairperson met with me for 2 hours to establish performance goals for the coming year and discuss my action plans for attaining the goals.

Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 21 or more):

- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Our members lack skills and do not know what to do or how to do it.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      The work is complex and unstructured, causing ambiguity about procedures and priorities.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      The organization has elaborate rules and regulations that must be observed, and members are not familiar with them.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      The nature of what needs to be done or technology is changing, and members need to learn new skills and procedures.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      There is a crisis or emergency, and members are confused about how to respond.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Members of our group have interdependent tasks requiring continuous coordination.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3      ... 5      Work unit activities are frequently affected by changes in policies, plans, or priorities determined by higher levels within the school or student government.

### **INFORMING:**

#### Definition:

Disseminating relevant information about decisions, plans, and activities to people who need it to accomplish their tasks, providing written materials and documents, answering requests for technical information.

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### Examples:

The club president held a meeting to tell us when new equipment would arrive and how it would affect us.

The student body vice president briefed us about some forthcoming changes in policy so we could make any necessary preparations.

### Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 18 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Members of our group are dependent upon the leader for relevant information because they lack direct access to this information.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    There is a crisis or emergency, and members of our group are anxious and concerned about what is happening.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Members of our group have interdependent tasks requiring continuous coordination.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Our group depends on other groups or carries out joint projects with other groups or organizations.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Our group activities are frequently affected by changes in policies, plans, or priorities determined by higher levels within the school or student government.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Our group must frequently change its products, services, or time-tables to accommodate the needs of people outside of our group.

## DECISION MAKING

### ***PLANNING AND ORGANIZING:***

#### Definition:

Determining long-range objectives and strategies, allocating resources according to priorities, determining how to use personnel and resources to accomplish a task efficiently, and determining how to improve coordination, productivity, and the effectiveness of the group.

#### Examples:

My committee chairperson devised a shortcut that allows us to prepare our reports in 3 days instead of the 4 days it used to take.

The club vice president prepared a staffing plan indicating how many new members would need to be recruited next year to accomplish our goals.

### Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 12 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Our group carries out large, complex projects that extend over a period of months.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Our group has several different types of tasks to perform, and efficiency depends on how well the work is organized and sequenced.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Members of our group have interdependent tasks requiring coordination.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Our group depends on other groups or carries out joint projects with other groups or organizations.

### ***CONSULTING:***

#### Definition:

Checking with people before making changes that affect them, encouraging suggestions for improvement, inviting participation in decision making, incorporating the ideas and suggestions of others in decisions.



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### Examples:

My project chairperson asked me to attend a meeting with him and the club president to develop a new schedule, and he was very receptive to my ideas on the subject.

The student body president called a meeting of the executive group to evaluate the new project and get our ideas about when to begin it.

### Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 12 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Members of our group possess relevant knowledge and information needed by the leader to solve problems and make good decisions.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    Members of our group share the leader's task objectives and are willing to cooperate in making a good decision.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    There is adequate time for use of consultation.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    The leader has the skill to manage any conflict among members in a group meeting.

### ***DELEGATING:***

#### Definition:

Allowing group members to have substantial responsibility and discretion in carrying out activities, handling problems, and making important decisions.

### Examples:

My project chairperson gave me a new task and encouraged me to handle it any way I think is best.

The club treasurer gave me the authority to make purchases directly from the supplier up to a specified amount of money without prior approval.

### Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 9 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    The leader is overloaded with responsibilities.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    The subordinate is competent and shares the leader's task objectives.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5    The subordinate is willing to assume more responsibility.

### ***PROBLEM SOLVING:***

#### Definition:

Identifying task-related problems, analyzing problems in a timely but systematic manner to identify causes and find solutions, and acting decisively to implement solutions to resolve important problems or crises.

### Examples:

The committee chairperson held a meeting to let us know that we were behind schedule on a critical project. After we identified the source of the delays, she suggested a way to solve the problem.

Our group was shorthanded due to illness, and we had an important deadline to meet. The project leader arranged to borrow two people from another group so we could finish the task today.

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Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 18 or more):

- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Disruptions in the work flow are likely, due to equipment breakdowns, technical problems, materials shortages, bad weather, and so on.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Activities are disrupted by deliberate interference or the hostile actions of outsiders (e.g., terrorists, military units).
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Members of our group have interdependent tasks requiring continuous coordination.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Our group depends on other groups or carries out joint projects with other groups or organizations.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Our group activities are frequently affected by changes in policies, plans, or priorities determined by higher levels within the school or student government.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Our group must frequently change its products, services, or timetables to accommodate the needs of people outside of the group.

## INFLUENCING

### ***MOTIVATING AND INSPIRING:***

#### Definition:

Using influence techniques that appeal to emotion or logic to generate enthusiasm for the activities of the group, commitment to objectives, and compliance with requests for cooperation, assistance, support, or resources; setting an example of appropriate behavior.

#### Examples:

My committee chairperson held a meeting to talk about how vital the new project is for the group and said he was confident we could handle it if we all did our part.

The club treasurer made a presentation with detailed financial information and elaborate graphs to convince other club officers that the new project would be workable.

Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 15 or more):

- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Errors and mistakes are costly and difficult to correct, or would endanger the lives and health of people.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      What we do is dangerous, and group members are anxious about their safety.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      What we do is boring and tedious.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      What we do is difficult and group members are likely to become frustrated and discouraged by setbacks and lack of progress.
- Seldom      Frequently  
1 ... 3    ... 5      Our group is highly dependent upon resources, cooperation, and political support from superiors, peers, and outsiders.

### ***RECOGNIZING:***

#### Definition:

Providing praise and recognition for effective performance, significant achievements, and special contributions; expressing respect and appreciation for someone's accomplishments.

#### Examples:

The club president complimented me on the professional manner in which I handled a difficult situation and said I am developing well in my new position.

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In a meeting, the committee chairperson told us she was very satisfied with our work and said she appreciated the extra effort we made this month.

Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 9 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5      Performance is determined primarily by an individual's skill rather than luck or uncontrollable events.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5      Members of our group are unable to get much direct feedback about their performance from others, such as coworkers and clients.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5      Members lack self-confidence and feel insecure.

### ***REWARDING:***

#### Definition:

Providing or recommending tangible rewards such as a financial reward or promotion for effective performance, significant achievements, and demonstrated competence.

#### Examples:

The student body vice president recommended a new position for an individual with the best record of performance.

I received a lot of recognition last year after I increased our group's performance.

Important to Use When (the sum of the following is 9 or more):

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5      Performance is determined primarily by skill rather than luck or uncontrollable events.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5      Performance can be measured accurately, or compliance with requests can be confirmed.

Seldom      Frequently

1 ... 3    ... 5      The leader has authority to dispense desirable rewards.

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For a full-scale application of Dr. Yukl's concepts for organizations, "COMPASS: The Managerial Practices Survey," should be used. For information contact: Manus Associates, 100 Prospect Street, South Tower, Stamford, CT 06901, (203) 326-3880, FAX (203) 326-3890.

The leader behavior taxonomy has changed somewhat over the years and there are now only three metacategories (rather than four managerial activities) and more emphasis on strategic and change-oriented behaviors. Nevertheless, for student leaders this tested approach seem entirely satisfactory. For the advanced taxonomy, see Yukl, G. 1999. An evaluative essay on current conceptions of effective leadership. European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 8(1), 33-48; Yukl, G., Gordon, A., & Taber, T. 2002. A hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behavior: integrating a half century of behavior research. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 9 (1), 15-33; and Yukl, G., & Lepsinger, R. 2004. Flexible Leadership: Creating Value by Balancing Multiple Challenges and Choices. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.