



The boss is a dictator

A new approach to organisational leadership is emerging.

An interesting debate is emerging around the nature of organisational leaders. The thinking stems from a concept we understand very well, that a 'leader' is a person who is elected by the people. The word we use for someone who assumes power and leads without being elected is 'dictator'. The thinking suggests that we are failing our organisations because we are setting up mini dictatorships, and then attempting to train alternative behaviours to overcome situations where we believe we have a bad boss.

Some are quick to shoot down this analogy highlighting the successful leadership of many a dictator, or arguing that organisational bosses are in fact elected through a series of interviews and selection mechanisms, but we think this innovative perspective is worth giving some further thought.

It is certainly an interesting idea, would we produce more effective organisational leaders if the process of promotion more directly involved the opinions and votes of the team they were to head up? For a while at iManage we've been advocating that one single character determines whether someone has become a leader, that is whether they have followers. We have yet to find a genuine leader that has no followers at all.

It is also interesting to note that dictators often rule using an element of fear over their people, this is certainly something that would not be welcome in organisations today. Often referred to as coercive power, the dictator secures followers because it is perceived that they can bring about negative outcomes if they do not comply with their requirements. Of course this is a form of influence power that can be found in almost all organisations in one form or another, even if it is limited to the organisations disciplinary procedures. Followers are created this way, but they are hardly likely to be the most motivated workforce. Would an elected leader be better at generating followership?

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So, is an elected leader more likely to be followed by the team? Immediately we can acknowledge two problems: 1. Unless it's a unanimous vote some of the electorate will not get who they wanted as the boss - will this effect their willingness to follow? 2. Even elected officers fall out of favor, as we regularly witness on the global political stage.

What is certain is that elected leaders have to behave in a different way to dictators. Think about these following differences in the light of your own organisations behaviours.

Dictator System	Free System	Circle Your Organisation?
In a dictator system subjects try to keep themselves in their dictators good books.	In a free system leaders try to keep themselves in their citizens good books.	Dictator / Free
In a dictator system dictators have absolute power.	In a free system leaders do not have absolute power, they are subject to various controls.	Dictator / Free
In a dictator system subjects most prevalent emotion is fear.	In a free system citizens are fearless.	Dictator / Free
In a dictator system criticism of leaders is forbidden.	In a free system leaders are routinely criticised, openly and in public.	Dictator / Free



Dictator System	Free System	Circle Your Organisation?	Total Free
In a dictator system dissent is not tolerated.	In a free system dissent is built into the system by the mechanism of having opposition.	Dictator / Free	Add the total Free score
In a dictator system subjects suffer from learned helplessness.	In a free system citizens are perpetually taking initiatives.	Dictator / Free	
In a dictator system there is a culture of secrecy, subjects aren't always told what is going on.	In a free system freedom of information is a right of citizens.	Dictator / Free	Total Dictator Add the total Dictator score
In a dictator system the dictator decides whether or not you qualify as a good subject. If he or she decides that you aren't you can be executed. Your fate, however good you are is in the dictators hands.	In a free system your leader's fate is in the citizens hands.	Dictator / Free	

Whether looking through this list you feel your organisation resembles a dictatorship or not, such an analysis highlights the distinct need for our bosses (at all levels) to understand leadership in it's widest possible sense. Our experience at iManage suggests that we have learned how to become managers, but only a few have learned how to become a true leaders of their people. The ability to generate followers is little understood in many organisations, beyond that which is evident through dictator style leadership. Providing managers a deep understanding of the nature of leadership is a step in the direction of reducing dictatorships and replacing them with leaders that generate motivated followers who willingly provide support.



If you are interested in reading more about this concept we would recommend “Why your boss is programmed to be a dictator” by Chetan Dhruve, who is leading thought in this area. If you are really interested in finding out more about how your managers can learn to lead please give us a call.