Leadership Style – Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum Theory

In 1973, Tannenbaum & Schmidt came up with a range of leadership behaviours, from “boss-centered” (task oriented) to “subordinate-centered” (relationship oriented).

The Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum model shows the relationship between the level of authority used by the manager and the levels of freedom that manager gives to a team.

**Tell**  
Manager takes decision and announces it

**Sell**  
Manager decides and then “Sells” his decision to the team

**Consult**  
Manager presents decision with background ideas for the decision and invite questions

**Empower**  
Manager allows team to develop options and decide on the action, within the manager’s received limit
Here you can find a quick test to see what your preferred leadership style is:
In each of the 12 sections, score all the statements in the column on the right-hand side, as follows:
0 point: I never do this, 1 point: I rarely do this, 2 points: I sometimes do this, 3 points: I often do this, 4 points: I always do this.

1. Decision-Making
(a) I make the decisions and announce them. 
(b) I make the decisions but announce how and why I made them. 
(c) I ask my team for their ideas before making decisions. 
(d) I set clear parameters within which my people are allowed to make their own decisions.

2. Sharing Information
(a) I pass on information only if it is unavoidable. 
(b) I make the decisions but announce how and why I made them. 
(c) I try to answer team members’ questions openly and honestly. 
(d) I make available all information, apart from that which is personally or commercially sensitive.

3. Delegation
(a) As a general rule, I do not delegate. 
(b) I delegate occasionally, but when I do I follow up carefully. 
(c) I delegate regularly, to individuals who have demonstrated that they can handle it. 
(d) I use delegation as a means of developing new skills in my people.

4. Degree of Autonomy
(a) I am always closely in control of how people go about tasks in my department. 
(b) I suggest how people should go about their work, but am prepared to listen to alternative suggestions. 
(c) I encourage people to think about how to go about their work and agree it with me. 
(d) I set objectives, but let people decide themselves how they will achieve them.

5. Standards of Work
(a) I lay down the standards I expect to be achieved. 
(b) I explain why standards have been set as they are. 
(c) I communicate standards, but allow individuals to have their say. 
(d) I help my team to identify appropriate standards for their jobs.

6. Management of Change
(a) When change is forced on me, I tell people exactly how we are going to respond to it. 
(b) I try to explain the reasons for change. 
(c) In responding to change, I ask team members for their ideas. 
(d) I expect my people to come up with suggestions for handling change situations.

7. Response to Mistakes and Errors
(a) When mistakes occur, I find out who is responsible and make it clear that such errors will not be tolerated. 
(b) My main concern when mistakes occur is that people understand why they made them. 
(c) When mistakes occur, I ask people how they would do things differently if the same situation happened again. 
(d) I do not mind some mistakes, so long as people use them as genuine learning opportunities.

8. Attitude to Risk-Taking
(a) I try to operate in a way which removes all possible risk. 
(b) I only take carefully calculated risks. 
(c) I am prepared to take reasonable risks, provided I am able to effect a contingency plan. 
(d) I am happy to undertake risky ventures if the potential benefits are high.
9. Approach to Conflict
(a) I try to prevent conflict in any of my dealings.
(b) Where conflict occurs, I try to sort it out quickly.
(c) I feel reasonably relaxed about conflict, provided I have the situation under control.
(d) I encourage constructive tension, provided it leads to new ideas.

10. Developing People
(a) I identify development opportunities for individuals in my team without necessarily inviting their opinions.
(b) I identify development opportunities for individuals in my team, highlighting the benefits for them and the team.
(c) I suggest development opportunities but invite feedback before we reach a joint decision.
(d) It is the responsibility of individual team members to identify development opportunities and put the necessary arrangements in place, with my support.

11. Communication
(a) I tell my team what they need to know.
(b) When communicating, I am most concerned about passing on information, but am prepared to answer any questions.
(c) Communication is about passing on information accurately, but it is important to get feedback.
(d) I believe in genuine, two-way communication and I actively encourage my team to inform me, question uncertainties and challenge my opinions.

12. Availability
(a) I prefer issues to be raised with me in writing or at formal meetings.
(b) My people can raise anything with me, provided they have an appointment.
(c) My people know I will make time for them, if their issue is urgent.
(d) I try to operate an ‘open door’ policy at all times.

The 4 leadership styles are based on research work from Tannenbaum and Schmidt - R Tannenbaum and W H Schmidt, ‘How to Choose a Leadership Pattern’, Harvard Business Review (March–April 1958).

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My Leadership Style is: [ ] TELL [ ] SELL [ ] CONSULT [ ] EMPOWER