Leadership Style Orientations of Senior Executives in Australia:
Senior Executive Leadership Profiles: An Analysis of 54 Australian Top Managers

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ABSTRACT

Research into the personality trait antecedents of executive leadership styles demonstrates the links between dispositional anchors and the following leadership orientations; autocratic, democratic, visionary-inspirational and laissez-faire. Australian senior executives in this study are shown to have a strong achievement-orientation, a tendency toward visionary-inspirational leadership, and a range of tendencies toward autocratic and democratic leader behaviours. This profile emerged out of a study in which 54 senior executives participated, and provides an update on previous senior executive leadership studies conducted on representative samples of top-level Australian managers (eg; Wood and Vilkinas, 2005; Hunt, 2006; Brown and Sarma, 2007).

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to provide new insights into the leadership-style orientations of senior executives presiding over medium and large private sector organisations in Australia. This study presents an updated perspective on corporate executive leader behaviour, by building on the top management leadership-profile studies conducted by Mukhi (1982), Sarros and Butchatsky (1996), Wood and Vilkinas (2005), Hunt (2006), Brown and Sarma (2007), and Lau, Sinnadurai and Wright (2009). Specifically, autocratic and democratic predispositions to leadership are investigated, along with individual achievement-orientation and visionary-inspirational leadership, through the identification of trait-based indicators.

Wood and Vilkinas (2005) note that there are relatively few recent studies which investigate the perspectives of senior executives in relation to their own leadership styles and preferences. An examination of the published literature on leadership by Bono and Judge (2004: 901) revealed 1,738 articles published since 1990 containing the key words 'leadership' and 'personality', yet surprisingly few studies were found to examine the trait-based antecedents of senior executive leadership styles. A recent study by Salvaggio, Schneider, Nishii, Mayer, Ramesh and Lyon (2007) pointed to the merits of identifying trait-based antecedents of leadership in order to validate their correlations with leadership style. Similar studies by Hetland and Sandal (2003) and Gorsuch (2007) provide additional evidence of the links between dimensions of personality and preferred leadership styles. The study reported in this paper provides a timely investigation into the leadership style orientations of a representative sample of 54 top managers in medium-sized and large private sector organisations in Australia.

METHOD

A survey questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on 32 trait-based items linked to four primary leadership style orientations; *autocratic*, *democratic*, *visionary-inspirational*, and *laissez-faire* styles. A further 8 items were included to measure four mixed-mode leadership orientations; *administrative-autocratic*, *visionary-autocratic*, *delegating-democratic* and *visionary-democratic*. The questionnaire items were developed by using a lexical analysis approach to uncover trait-based descriptors which are conceptually linked to the various leadership-style orientations in the literature. All items were screened for their relative neutrality prior to pilot testing this survey. The questionnaire was designed to minimise the semantic attraction of items linked to any single orientation. The questionnaire was pre-tested for reliability and validity on a sample of 45 managers in their first year of a Master of Business Administration program. Only items with composite reliabilities of greater than 0.62 were retained. A follow-up test for internal consistency was conducted on a group of 37 senior managers participating in an executive development program. Subsequent analysis revealed positive correlations between specific items retained from the first preliminary test and the leadership orientations to which they were assigned.

Questionnaires were sent to 101 senior executives throughout Australia over a six-week period, following initial phone calls to determine executives' willingness to participate in this study. The target sample was randomly selected from a computer-generated list of 404 senior executives whose names appeared in *The Australian* broadsheet newspaper over a one-year period. Since respondent perceptions are the central focus of this study, an important sampling objective was to obtain responses from executives whose activities and/or comments have been

considered newsworthy in a business context at the national level. The sample included reasonable diversity in terms of organisational size (with medium and large organisations both well represented), industry sector (primary, secondary and tertiary), executive age, and position title (chief executives, executive chairmen, managing directors, and general managers).

Included with each questionnaire was a cover letter outlining the purpose of the study, and an assurance of absolute anonymity. To ensure participant anonymity, reply-paid envelopes were provided with a return-address label attached. The questionnaire presented participants with a list of 40 descriptive items. Respondents were asked to rate the relative applicability of each item to their leadership style, along a Likert-type scale with the following anchors; 1 (*to almost no extent*), 2 (*to a slight extent*), 3 (*to a moderate extent*), 4 (*to a considerable extent*), 5 (*to a very great extent*). Composite item scores were then calculated to derive leadership-style orientations for each respondent. Individual style orientations were then plotted on a two dimensional leadership-style grid, enabling a graphical depiction of the range of leadership approaches yielded from this study.

RESPONSES

A total of 54 completed questionnaires were received within the twelve week period after the last surveys were mailed out. This yielded a response rate of 53%, which is quite favourable in comparison with similar mail surveys. This high response rate can be attributed to the preliminary telephone contact exercise aimed at confirming participants' initial willingness to complete the questionnaire. Not unexpectedly, given the sampling method, 67% of responses came from executives in organisations with over 1000 employees. A moderate representation of medium-sized firms (24%) was also achieved, with a smaller representation of small organisations (9%) obtained. A well-balanced representation of executives according to position title was achieved in the sample; 39% of respondents were CEOs, 22% were executive chairmen, 20% were managing directors, and 11% were general managers.   In relation to age, 48% of the respondents were between the ages of 41 and 50, with a further 41% falling into the age range of 51-60.

THE LEADERSHIP ORIENTATION PARADIGM

This study involves an examination of leadership-style orientations along two dimensions (see Figure 1). A democratic-autocratic continuum akin to that first proposed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) was used to provide a conceptual framework within which to examine authoritarian and participative inclinations with respect to leadership orientation.   Eight items in the questionnaire provided a measure of an autocratic, authoritarian predisposition, depicted in the paradigm on the left-hand side of the horizontal axis. A further 8 items in the questionnaire provided a measure of a democratic, participative predisposition, depicted at the right-hand side of the horizontal axis. A separate visionary-inspirational orientation scale was developed, containing 8 positive indicators and 8 negative indicators. These are conceptually anchored to the poles of the vertical axis. Laissez-faire leadership is conceptualised as the antithesis of the high-achievement orientation noted to correlate with visionary inspirational leaders in the literature (Bass, 1985a; Heaven, 1987; Bass, 1997; Avolio, Bass and Jung, 1999; Heltand and Sandal, 2003).   This scale provides additional information about leader preferences and behaviours, particularly with respect to individuals who are neither necessarily autocratic nor particularly democratic in their approaches to leadership activity, but fall somewhere in between. By transposing the achievement orientation scale over the central point of the horizontal autocratic-democratic continuum, and having it run vertically from low-achievement orientation at one extreme, to high achievement orientation at the other extreme, the leadership orientation paradigm depicts two separate dimensions (see Figure 1). The resulting horizontal and vertical axes provide frames of reference from which to simultaneously evaluate an individual's leadership style in terms of each of the two dimensions.

Preliminary Discussion – Leadership Theory Development
Prolific and sustained research into the field of leadership over the past six decades has produced a considerable array of theories, ideas, models and paradigms with no small amount of debate surrounding the relative merits of each approach. The development of leadership theory alone has been both continuous and rapid over this period (Bass, 1997; Judge, Bono, Iles and Gerhardt, 2002; Bono and Judge, 2004). A review of the literature reveals no less than five major approaches to the study of leadership since the 1930s, ranging from the relative complexity of situational and contingency approaches to leadership in which a number of variables are considered simultaneously, to the comparative simplicity of early trait theories which aimed to predict leader emergence by

identifying specific characteristics or personality traits (DuBrin, Dalglish and Miller, 2006). Between these two extremes lies a vast body of studies which view leadership in functional, behavioural or stylistic terms.

Functional approaches to leadership studies have concentrated efforts on identifying the roles and functions required of individuals in positions of leadership (eg: Kotter, 1990; Miles, 1959). Behavioural approaches have explored the variety of manifest leader behaviours, and leadership-styles approaches have focused on the range of ways in which leaders relate to subordinates and approach tasks. The common tendency among many of these studies has been to concentrate the investigation on two important variables popularised by the Ohio State Leadership Studies (Hemphill and Coons, 1957; Shartle, 1960), and the Michigan Studies (Bowers and Seashore, 1966); the concern for production or *task-oriented leadership*, and the concern for people or *employee-centred leadership*. This emphasis can be traced back to an important landmark in leadership research by Lewin, Lippit and White (1939) which examined the effects of *autocratic*, *democratic* and *laissez-faire* leadership styles upon groups of eleven-year-old school children, and provided quite specific operational definitions of autocracy and democracy. Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) leadership continuum built upon the early findings of Lewin and his colleagues to provide a uni-dimensional model of leadership ranging from a boss-centred or autocratic orientation, to a subordinate-centred or democratic orientation. Critics of this model have suggested that by implying that an autocratic style of leadership is more task-orientated than a democratic style, the continuum proposes a false dichotomy between the two styles (Guest, 1989). Subsequent prominent leadership-styles models, notably Blake and Mouton's managerial grid (1964, 1978, 1982), and the more contemporary leadership grid (Blake and McCanse, 1991), have attempted to overcome the perceived problems of uni-dimensionality by deriving two-dimensional paradigms from the original leadership variables identified in the 1939 study of Lewin, Lippit and White.

An important shift in the study of leadership occurred in the mid-1980s. The dominant paradigm for leadership research evolved from its focus on the employee-centred versus production-centred leadership dichotomy, to the mode of exchange between the leader and the subordinates (Holander, 1986). Downton (1973) was the first to distinguish between two major types of 'exchange' that leaders could be observed to conduct with their subordinates, but it was Burns (1978) who first established the dichotomy in his presentation of the new paradigm of *transformational* versus *transactional* leaders. Transformational leaders were identified as individuals who inspired and challenged subordinates to transcend their personal interests in order to achieve goals of benefit to the wider group, team, unit, organization, or society. Transactional leaders by contrast were seen to focus on standard performance levels rather than inspiring subordinates to go beyond routine accomplishment (Burns, 1978).

This paradigm was modified by Bass (1985a, 1985b) who proposed that rather than viewing transformational and transactional exchanges as a simple dichotomy, transformational exchanges were in effect 'augmentations' of the routine but necessary transactional exchanges. Factor analytic studies conducted by Bass (1985a), Hater and Bass (1988) and Seltzer, Numerof and Bass (1989) demonstrated that transformational leadership could be organized according to four dimensions; *idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration*. The remaining factors extracted in Bass's research were *contingent reward, management by exception (active), management by exception (passive), and laissez-faire*. The first three of these remaining factors provide measures of transactional leadership, whereas the fourth is widely considered to constitute an abdicative leadership approach.

The first dimension of transformational leadership, *idealized influence,* refers to leaders who instil pride in followers and engender loyalty from subordinates (Bass and Avolio, 1990). The second dimension of transformational leadership, *inspirational motivation,* refers to leaders who inspire followers by stimulating enthusiasm and articulating a strong vision for the future (Bass and Avolio, 1995). The dimensions of *idealized influence* and *inspirational motivation* are strongly correlated, and can be used together to derive a measure of charisma (Bass, 1998: 5). The third dimension of transformational leadership, *intellectual stimulation,* refers to leaders who articulate new ideas that challenge established organizational thinking, and who encourage followers to rethink conventional practices (Bass and Avolio, 1995). The fourth dimension of transformational leadership, *individualized consideration,* refers to leaders who provide subordinates with special attention, and who recognize the unique needs of individual followers (Bass and Avolio, 1995).

Transformational leadership theory has been advanced as a behavioural theory, with the implication that transformational behaviours can be learned (Bass, 1998). However, studies into the relationship between personality and leadership, have demonstrated that elements of transformational leadership are conceptually related to personality traits (Ross and Offerman, 1997; Judge and Bono, 2000; Hetland and Sandal, 2003; Salvaggio et al.,

2007). For example, Judge and Bono (2000) hypothesized that extraversion and openness to experience would be positively related to intellectual stimulation and to transformational leadership overall; that agreeableness would be positively related to individualized consideration; and that neuroticism would be negatively related to intellectual stimulation and to transformational leadership overall (Judge and Bono, 2000: 900-901). The present study proposes a significant relationship between inspirational motivation and high-achievement orientation.

Leadership Research – An Integrated Perspective.

While a distinctive evolutionary process has underpinned the development of employee- and task-centred leadership-style paradigms, little emphasis has been placed upon integrating these leadership styles into a conceptual model that also accommodates transformational leadership behaviour. Variously referred to as charismatic, visionary, inspirational, and outstanding leadership; transformational leadership has been heralded as a comparatively new but distinct paradigm in leadership research (Bass and Avolio, 1990; Simms and Lorenzi, 1992; Hetland and Sandal, 2003). It is suggested that in order to clarify the relationship between this relatively new paradigm and the series of more conventional leadership-styles models, a paradigm which combines autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, and visionary-inspirational approaches to leadership is necessary. Utilising a trait-based perspective to identify the antecedents of autocratic, democratic, visionary-inspirational, and laissez-faire leadership styles, a paradigm is proposed that provides an integrative representation of each of these four important leadership orientations. This paradigm is presented in Figure 1.

The Leadership Orientation Paradigm

This paradigm proposes that two important determinants of leader behaviour provide us with an appropriate model of four primary leadership orientations (see Figure 1) and at least eight different leadership styles (see Figure 2). Across the horizontal axis is Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958, 1973) leadership continuum, ranging from autocratic to democratic leadership approaches. This model proposes that the determining personality variable along this continuum is *uncertainty-avoidance*, or expressed another way, *tolerance for ambiguity*. Tannenbaum and Schmidt's study identified tolerance for ambiguity as "a key variable in a person's manner of dealing with problems" (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973: 175). Subsequent leadership studies have shown that individuals with low uncertainty-avoidance tendencies will more naturally adopt a participative approach to group leadership, while it is the high uncertainty-avoidance tendency in individuals that underpins their autocratic leadership orientation (eg: Choma, Ashton and Hafer, 2010). A top-down approach to communication coupled with an aloof or remote approach to exercising leadership over group members minimises the emergence of uncertainty in the form of threats or challenges from subordinates. Autocratic leaders typically measure high on uncertainty-avoidance, and thus have a natural inclination to command and control, thereby avoiding what they perceive to be the weaknesses inherent in more democratic approaches (McCormick and Burch, 2008). Democratic leaders, by contrast, tend to score rather lower on uncertainty-avoidance and are therefore better able to tolerate the moments of uncertainty that can accompany democratic consensus-seeking processes. Challenges from subordinates are also less likely to be taken personally, and are more likely to be redirected toward furthering collective efforts (Zaleznik, 1992; Zeffane, 1994).

Across the vertical axis of the leadership orientation paradigm, we have two very different leadership styles; laissez-faire and visionary-inspirational (otherwise known as transformational or charismatic leadership). Until the early 1990s, the complexity of transformational leadership had resulted in its neglect as an area of mainstream research and investigation. As a consequence, none of the prominent pre-1990 leadership models or paradigms adequately incorporated this orientation into a conceptual representation of leadership-style orientations. Laissez-faire leadership has also received at best inconsistent attention as an orientation worthy of investigation, presumably because it is often assumed to be of minimal use as a style.

As noted earlier, the concept of transformational leadership originally emerged from a study by Burns (1978), who described this approach to leadership as a process of elevating the levels of follower-consciousness, thereby satisfying higher-order needs of subordinates. Charismatic leadership studies have closely parallelled research into transformational leadership, to the point where researchers have referred to the two concepts analogously (Shamir, House, and Arthur, 1993). Whilst Burns (1978) held the view that charisma was too ambiguous a concept to be classifiable, House (1977) has suggested that charismatic leaders may be identified by their capacity to alter the perceptions of followers.

Common identifiable qualities in charismatic leaders include; a strong belief in their own goals and ideas (a vision), a strong belief that some form of change is both possible and necessary (a future orientation), an intense

commitment to pursue their goals and ideas to completion (an achievement-orientation), and an exceptional ability to convey their goals and ideas to others in a manner that encourages sustained collective commitment. This is also referred to as the capacity to inspire others (House, 1977). According to Eden (1989) and Drake, Wong and Salter (2007), charismatic leaders communicate high performance expectations to group members and provide inspiration for subordinates. Bass and Avolio (1990) suggest that charisma is an important component of transformational leadership, which correlates strongly with inspirational motivation in particular. The leadership orientation paradigm focuses upon what are arguably the two most important dimensions of transformational leadership across a wide range of circumstances; a strong belief in one's own goals and ideas (a vision), and the capacity to instil in others a contagion to perform (the ability to inspire). Accordingly, *visionary-inspirational* leadership is proposed as an important leadership orientation. Taken together, visionary and inspirational leadership qualities have been observed to emanate from individuals with an unusually high need for achievement (Quinn and Hall, 1983; Zaleznik, 1983; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Bass, 1985a; Hater and Bass, 1988; Conger and Kanungo, 1988). The desire to achieve is in itself a powerful motivator (McClelland, 1985). There is also emerging evidence to suggest that individuals with a high need for achievement are more likely than others to actively seek out environmental conditions which provide an outlet for that need (Heaven, 1987). This does not negate the impact of environmental conditions upon leader effectiveness, it merely indicates the resurgent qualities inherent in individuals with a high achievement orientation. Visionary-inspirational leadership may be viewed as the antithesis of laissez-faire leadership for this very reason. The laissez-faire leader is unlikely to display the same intensity or the same resurgent qualities inherent in the achievement-oriented individual. For the laissez-faire leader, adverse environmental conditions are often weathered passively until the tempestuous forces dissipate, or until the ship goes down. The vertical axis of the leadership orientation paradigm indicates the key determinant of laissez-faire and visionary-inspirational approaches to leadership to be achievement orientation.

LEADERSHIP ORIENTATIONS – AN EMERGENT PATTERN AMONG SENIOR EXECUTIVES

Much has been written about the concept of vision as an integral component of effective leadership. Indeed visionary leadership has been a much vaunted feature of organisation-wide transformation initiatives over the past 20 years since 1990 in particular. North and South American CEOs credited with visionary leadership qualities over this period have included Steve Jobs, Ricardo Semler, Jack Welch, Andrea Jung, Meg Whitman and Brenda Barnes. Their Australian counterparts in the international arena are perhaps Rupert Murdoch and the late Kerry Packer, both high-profile chief executives who had the foresight to invest heavily and with great success in technologies of the future. At the national level, Gerry Harvey qualifies as a visionary leader for his singular efforts in developing the Harvey Norman retail chain beyond Australia's shores, and for maintaining organisational growth and success in the face of fierce domestic and international competition. Gail Kelly, CEO of one of Australia's largest banks and one of the ten most influential women in the world, has also been described as both inspirational and transformational in her approach to leadership.

In order for a vision to be translated into productive activity, the vision itself needs to be communicated, accepted, and enthusiastically embraced by a wide range of individuals throughout the organisation. The ability to inspire collective effort, to engender a desire to perform, and to sustain productive goal-oriented activity over a period of time are all elements of inspirational leadership. Taken together, visionary and inspirational leadership qualities combine to indicate a leadership orientation that is neither necessarily highly autocratic, nor highly democratic. By simultaneously evaluating the leadership styles of a group of senior executives along the two dimensions indicated in Figure 1, a profile of senior executive leadership orientations emerges (see Figure 3).

The Autocratic-Democratic Continuum

The results of the survey undertaken in this study indicate that just over three quarters of all respondents (75.5%) displayed some tendency towards democratic rather than autocratic approaches to leadership. Of the total respondents, just 2% exhibited a strong autocratic orientation, a further 5.5% indicated a moderate autocratic orientation, and 17% revealed a slight autocratic tendency. This gave a total of 24.5% displaying some tendency towards autocratic leadership. With respect to the democratic end of the continuum, 44% of respondents gave indication of a slight democratic orientation, 26% exhibited a moderate democratic orientation, and 5.5% gave evidence of a strong democratic tendency. A significant proportion of the executives surveyed (61%) indicated only a slight tendency towards either the autocratic or democratic end of the spectrum along this continuum. This finding provides some evidence to suggest that categorising individuals according to this uni-dimensional measure is likely to yield a limited number of definitive profiles in terms of whether individuals are more likely to adopt autocratic or democratic approaches to leadership in situations where circumstances afford them with some choice. The results

do indicate however, that a sizeable percentage of senior executives are neither particularly high, nor particularly low, on uncertainty avoidance. That this 61% is neither strongly predisposed to autocratic or democratic leadership styles, suggests that more might be learnt about the leadership orientations of senior executives by focussing upon another determinant of style; namely achievement orientation.

The Achievement-Orientation Continuum

A study by Hunt (2006) revealed a high-achievement orientation to be the number one factor identified by senior executives as impacting upon their approaches to management. It is not surprising therefore that this study provides further evidence in support of this perception. Adopting a trait-based approach to leadership, it has been argued that a very high achievement orientation is likely to provide evidence of visionary-inspirational leadership capabilities. In particular, intense commitment to the pursuit of goals to completion is an important characteristic of visionary-inspirational leadership (House, 1977; Avolio, Bass and Jung, 1999; Hunt, 2002; Bono and Judge, 2004). An analysis of the responses from participants along the achievement orientation continuum reveals that 89% of the executives surveyed have either a moderate, distinct, or very strong inclination toward visionary-inspirational leadership. Excluding those executives with a moderate orientation along this dimension, 52% of respondents exhibited either a distinct (33%) or very strong (19%) tendency toward visionary-inspirational leadership practices. A total of 11% of respondents exhibited only slight tendencies toward either end of this continuum indicating that as a uni-dimensional measure of leadership-style, it is perhaps more likely to yield definitive classifications among senior executives than the autocratic-democratic continuum used in isolation.

<div align="center">CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS</div>

Previous empirical research into the leadership preferences of Australian upper-echelon managers has shown a high achievement propensity to be an important factor in determining their leadership-style orientation (Hunt, 2006). The present investigation provides further support for this finding. A strong achievement orientation is observable in individuals who consistently exhibit a commitment to meeting self-imposed performance standards, and is closely linked to high-level goal attainment activity (House, 1971; McClelland, 1985; Heaven, 1987; Schuler, Sheldon and Frohlich, 2010). The need to achieve specific and measurable results is most evident in individuals who possess high internal performance standards, and is strongly indicative of high growth-need strength (McClelland, 1985; Elliot and McGregor, 2001; Dries, Pepermans and Carlier, 2008). Furthermore, an individual's achievement orientation is likely to impact significantly upon executive career progression (Lyness and Judiesch, 2008), as well as shaping each individual's preferred leadership style (Hunt, 2006).

As a counterpoint to the opinion-based, open-ended surveys conducted into the field of managerial endeavour, the present study has drawn upon the existing empirical literature to develop a specific set of personality measures that provide evidence of pre-dispositional preferences for particular leadership orientations. The limitations of self-report questionnaires were minimised in this study through the careful semantic selection of value-neutral descriptor items, thereby enhancing the probability that respondents would be inclined to reflect their own leadership and personality preferences, rather than a set of preferences considered to be acceptable to broader societal value-frameworks. The anonymity preserved in the administration of this survey, and the target sample of senior executives - who may be expected to have more confident and stronger, more resolute opinions than their more junior and less experienced counterparts - also combine to provide valuable quantifiable insights into the perceptions of upper-echelon managers concerning executive leadership orientations. The results of this study show that leadership styles among Australian senior executives reflect a range of autocratic and democratic practices, but that these executives are three times more likely to reflect democratic practices than autocratic ones. The results of this study further indicate that these executives have a definitive tendency to exhibit patterns of leadership action that are underpinned by a strong achievement-orientation.

The implications of these findings for corporate executive trainers and other human resources development professionals are worth noting. The unique nature of senior executive leadership activity presents specific challenges for those individuals responsible for developing leadership capabilities in upper-echelon managers. The wealth and variety of experiences that normally accompany senior executive talent help to shape the ongoing development of individual personalities and preferences for specific leadership styles and behaviours. Hence, generic or off-the-shelf leadership training modules based on highly prescriptive management frameworks may have diminished relevance and hence limited utility-value for top managers. Consequently, with respect to training and development initiatives, the pre-diagnostic phase is pivotal in determining the most appropriate approaches to enhancing senior executive leadership capabilities. Accordingly, this paper has posited and tested a new framework

with which to capture the primary leadership orientations of top managers. This framework, referred to as the leadership orientation paradigm, is based on a number of empirically tested personality antecedents of specific leadership styles. Whilst the framework may conceptually relate more broadly to managers and leaders at various levels throughout an organisation, the present study has focused on investigating and validating these links at the senior executive level. Further research into the broader applications of this paradigm to middle and first-line managers is necessary, in order to determine its utility value as a multi-level diagnostic tool for managers. It is reasonable to conclude that, as a result of this study, the leadership orientation paradigm may serve two useful purposes as a framework for understanding senior executive leadership styles and preferences. First, it can be used as a self-diagnostic tool capable of building deeper self-awareness on the part of CEOs and other senior executives, in relation to their *preferred* leadership approaches and orientations, based on their inherent predispositions and personality traits. In this respect, it represents a departure from other leadership models that tend to promulgate a contingency approach to leadership. However, this paradigm does not necessarily exclude the possibility of leadership style-modification according to contextual demands. In other words, the leadership orientation paradigm enables managers to recognise and acknowledge the important role that personality factors play in shaping the leadership preferences of individuals in positions of significant authority, whilst also indicating alternative leadership styles that may be necessary in certain situations, but to which certain individuals may be less well suited due to the strength of specific traits and predispositions. Second, the leadership orientation paradigm can be employed at the senior executive team level, to determine whether a range of leadership approaches and preferences exist within the top management executive group. The literature on senior executive teams suggests that a variety of leadership styles can provide a complementary framework for dealing with organization-wide issues (Daily and Schwenk, 1996; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Kets De Vries, 2007) and accordingly, may be expected to yield superior team-based outcomes in terms of strategic direction-setting, problem-solving approaches, and disturbance-handling initiatives (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2006; Carmeli and Halevi, 2009).

A further implication arising from this study concerns the degree to which leadership styles can impact upon the culture of the firm, thereby influencing commitment levels of employees and performance at the group and organisational levels. Results from this study show some inclination toward democratic and participative leadership practices on the part of Australian executives. Prior research on this issue has yielded strong evidence that participative leadership practices correlate strongly with high-commitment organisational cultures and positive levels of employee motivation and performance (eg: Ugboro and Obeng, 2000; Ergeneli, Gohar and Temirbekova, 2007; De Hoogh and Hartog, 2008). In addition to the evident democratic leadership orientation noted in this study, the survey data also yields evidence that leadership styles of Australian top managers are shaped significantly by a strong achievement orientation. It has been noted that the ability to inspire collective effort and to sustain productive goal-oriented activity on an organization-wide basis are manifestations of visionary-inspirational leadership, an approach fuelled primarily by a strong need to achieve results. These findings are likely to be of interest to corporate training specialists responsible for leadership development programs targeting top management.

The conclusions drawn from this study are based on explicit, quantified and weighted perceptions of 54 top management executives in Australia today. Accordingly, they provide an important update to the small but growing body of research into the nature of senior executive leadership in Australia. This study provides encouraging evidence that Australian senior executives, while displaying a range of preferences along the autocratic-democratic continuum, are more democratically inclined in their approaches to leadership, and more highly driven by a need to achieve, than is commonly acknowledged elsewhere in the literature.

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Figure 1 The Leadership Orientation Paradigm: Four Primary Orientations Along Two Separate Dimensions:
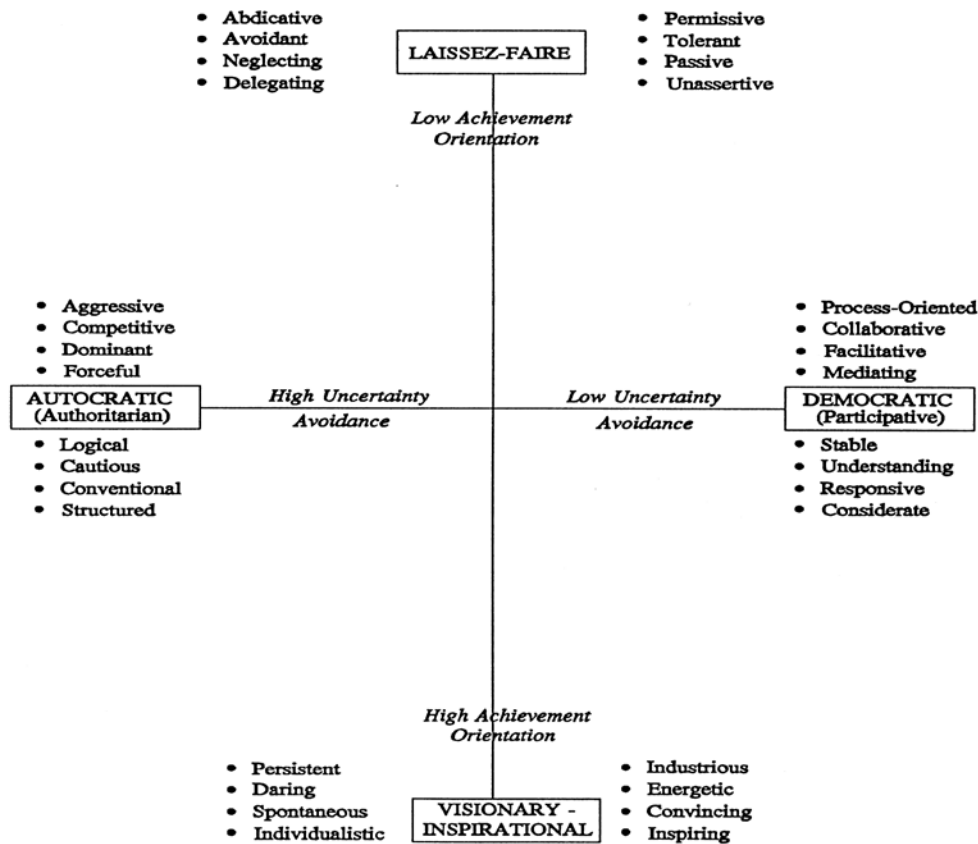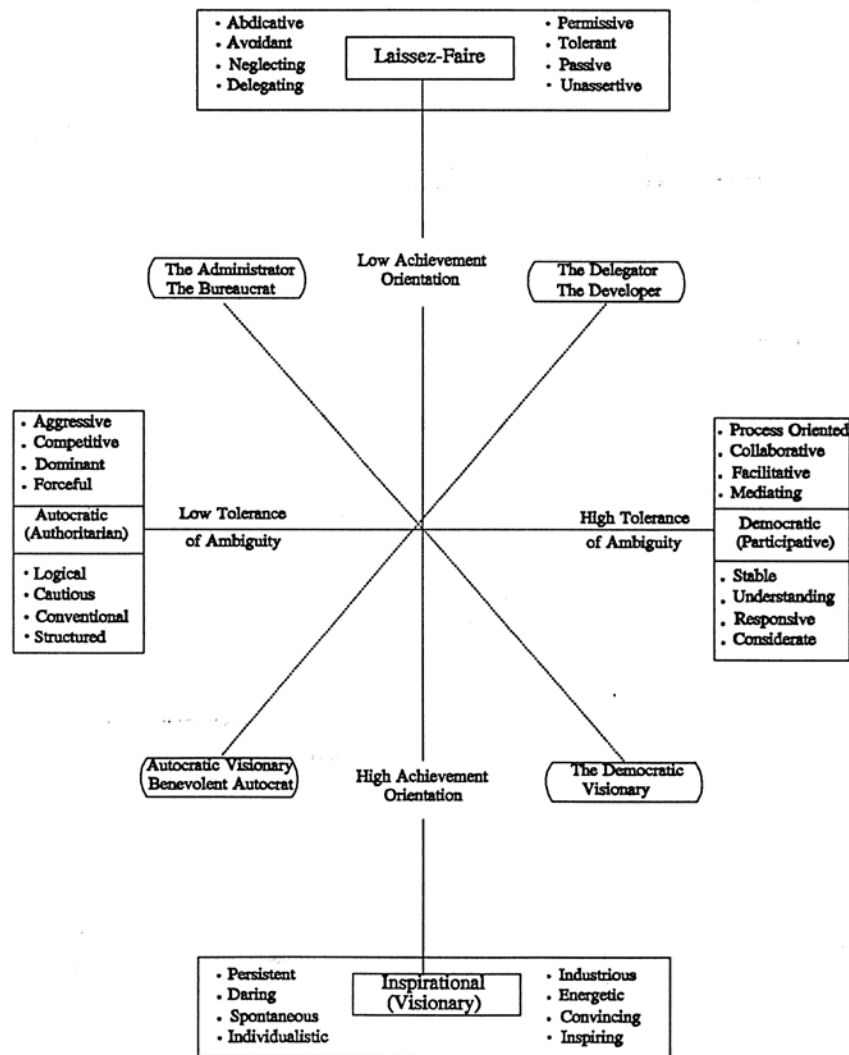
Figure 2 The Leadership Orientation Paradigm: Four Primary Orientations and Four Mixed-Mode Orientations:
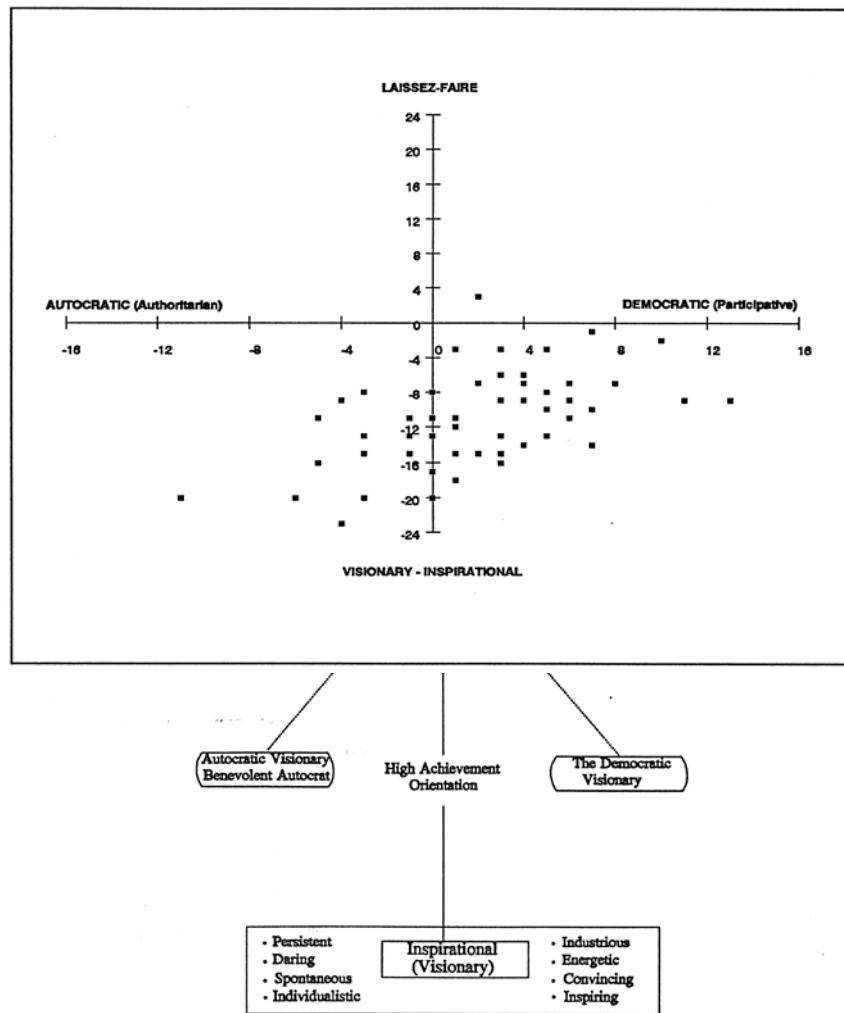
Figure 3 Scatter Diagram Showing the Range of Leadership Styles Exhibited by a Sample of 54 Senior Executives