

# Analysis of the Leadership style of Miranda Priestly in the movie “Devil wears Prada”

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**Abstract :** The character analysis of “Miranda Priestly” in “Devil Wears Prada” and how it expounds the various Leadership theories of Management (Leadership styles, Blake and Mouton’s theory of Leadership, Behavioural approaches to Leadership etc). Miranda Priestly’s character is highly motivated in her work and strives for nothing less than excellence. She seems to have more inclination towards being a task-oriented leader. Her extreme task orientation and intrinsic motivation results in certain successes in her job; however, she is also faced with some failures in her professional and personal life. She is shown to have hardly any genuine relationships in the professional front. This explains the pitfalls of extreme task orientation in a person and supports the findings that the best leadership styles would be a balance of both.

**IndexTerms - Leadership; Task oriented; People oriented; Blake & Mouton; Contingency**

The character “Miranda Priestly” in “Devil wears Prada” is the personification of the term “workaholic”. A tough task master, she is the Editor in Chief of “Runway” magazine. The whole of Runway shudders at the thought of her. She is shown to be someone for whom the rules can be bent and she expects everyone to be at her back and call. The film begins with Andy who is looking for a job and lands at the Runway office and is greeted by Emily who was the second assistant of Miranda and had just been promoted as the first assistant. Andy comes for the interview of the role of second assistant to Miranda. Going by her physical appearance, Miranda does not seem impressed with Andy since Andy does not fit into the conventional look of a high-end fashion magazine employee. However, Miranda appoints Andy thinking that Andy might be a welcome change from her previous assistants. The film shows the transformation of Andy from someone who joins the company just to make ends meet and for the work experience to someone who seems extremely passionate about her job. Andy transforms into the stereotypical employee of the fashion industry and learns things fast so that she can prove herself. Miranda seems upset with Andy initially but when Andy fights all odds and does exceptionally well as time progresses, Miranda indirectly considers Andy as her first assistant and asks her to accompany Miranda on a trip to Paris for the fashion show for which Emily was working hard for. Though hesitant at first, Andy agrees to go for the fashion show and realizes there that Miranda’s arch rival Jacqueline from the French Runway had conspired to take up the role of Miranda as Editor in chief of Runway. Andy tries to inform Miranda the same but before she could, Miranda makes an announcement at a meeting that it would be Jacqueline instead of Nigel (who is a passionate and loyal employee of Runway and helps Andy in the beginning) who will leave Runway for Holt (a rising fashion star for whom Nigel planned to be the creative director as per Miranda’s recommendation). Later in the day, Miranda tells Andy that she knew that Andy wanted to share the news she got to know about Miranda but that Miranda already knew it. At that point Andy realizes that Miranda made a decision to save herself as she did not want to leave the fame and money her job offers and she does not mind being unethical at times and Andy says that she would never do something like that to which Miranda replies to Andy “you already did when you agreed to come for the fashion show despite knowing how hard Emily worked for it” Andy suddenly realizes that this was not the kind of life she wanted and leaves Miranda to reunite with her boyfriend with whom she had split ways. The film ends with Andy at a new job and has a chance encounter with Miranda, who ignores her and is seen to be her usual self.

This movie depicts a picture that is mostly prevalent in organizations. Miranda’s leadership style is interesting to understand and analyse.

Regarding Leadership styles, there are different behavioural approaches to leadership styles. On the basis of rewards and penalties, leadership styles are classified into two; **Positive leaders** are those who place emphasis on rewards (economic or otherwise), better employee education, greater demands for independence etc. **Negative leaders** are those who place emphasis on threats, fear, harshness, penalties. Performance will be short term in this case with high human costs. To get work done, they hold on to personnel penalties as loss of job, reprimand in the presence of others, punishment with loss of pay etc. They are more of “Bosses” than “Leaders”.

Based on styles and the use of power, leadership styles are classified into three-Autocratic, Consultative and Participative leaders. **Autocratic** leaders centralize power, make decisions on their own and exercise full authority and full responsibility of their own decisions. It is a negative style and is based on threats and punishment. It is positive when benevolent autocracy is followed. The advantages of this style are that it is often satisfying for the leader, permits quick decisions, allows the use of less competent subordinates, provides security and structure for employees etc. The disadvantages of this style include the fact that mostly employees dislike it, there is less organizational commitment and high turnover and absenteeism rates. **Consultative** leaders approach one or more employees and ask them for inputs prior to making a decision. Inputs would be used or rejected, if used, employees are likely to feel as though they had a positive impact and if inputs are consistently rejected, employees are likely to feel that their time has been wasted. **Participative leaders** decentralize authority and take no unilateral decisions. They use inputs from followers and participation by them. The leader and group act as a social unit. The subordinates are encouraged to express ideas, make suggestions and take action.

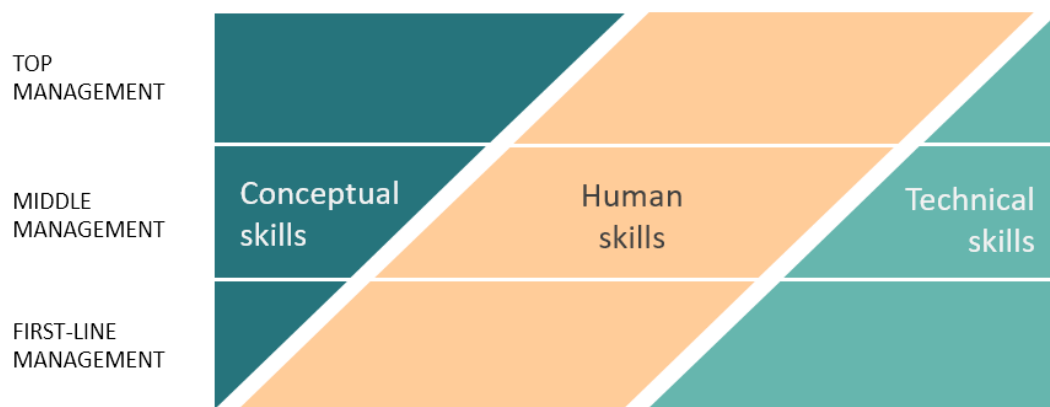
On the basis of employee and task orientations, leadership styles are classified into employee orientation and task orientation. **Considerate leaders** are concerned about human needs of employees, build team work, provide psychological support, help employees with personal problems if any etc. **Structured task-oriented leaders** believe that they get tasks done by keeping people busy, ignoring personal issues & emotions and urging them to produce. A Manager may have both orientations in varying degrees. However, “The most successful managers are those who combine relatively high consideration and structure, giving somewhat more emphasis to consideration”

An analysis of Miranda Priestley’s Leadership style on the basis of the different styles of Leadership shows that she is a negative, consultative as well as a structured-task oriented leader. It is shown that she makes decisions on her own at most times, asking opinions from few of her colleagues like Nigel who is been shown as consulted by Miranda at certain times. However, she does not value all her colleagues and subordinates. She ridicules her subordinates-Andy and Emily in front of others which clearly shows her inclination towards being a negative leader. Miranda is shown to be extremely task oriented at different times which includes when she pesters Andy to get her flight tickets to travel to her daughter’s stage performance in spite of knowing that a natural calamity has stricken and flights would be cancelled. She does not show any traces of being a considerate leader as she is hardly aware of the personal lives of any of her co-workers. She does not even bother to know. When Andy is a bit late in bringing something for Miranda, she says ”Has she died or something?”

Leadership behaviour is an aspect that has been theorized by Prof. Robert Katz (1995). He stated that leadership behaviour comprises three types of skills- technical, human and conceptual. A technical skill is the ability to perform the given job. Technical skills help the managers to use different machines and tools. It also helps them to use various procedures and techniques. The low-level managers require more technical skills. This is because they are in charge of the actual operations. Human relations skills are also called Interpersonal skills. It is an ability to work with people. It helps the managers to understand, communicate and work with others. It also helps the managers to lead, motivate and develop team spirit. Human relations skills are required by all managers at all levels of management. It is so since all managers have to interact and work with people. Conceptual skill is the ability to visualise the organisation as a whole. It includes Analytical, Creative and Initiative skills. It helps the manager to identify the causes of the problems and not the symptoms. It helps him/her to solve the problems for the benefit of the entire organisation. It helps the manager to fix goals for the whole organisation and to plan for every situation. According to Prof. Robert Katz, conceptual skills are mostly required by the top-level management because they spend more time in planning, organising and problem solving.

According to Prof. Robert Katz, all managers require above three managerial skills. However, the degree (amount) of these skills required varies (changes) from levels of management and from an organisation to organisation.

## Management Skills by Robert L. Katz



The above picture or diagram shows the managerial skills which are required by managers working at different levels of management. The top-level managers require more conceptual skills and less technical skills. The lower-level managers require more technical skills and fewer conceptual skills. Human relations skills are required equally by all three levels of management.

In the case of Miranda Priestley, who is a top-level manager, she is seen utilizing conceptual and technical skills, utilizing conceptual skills are seen most of the times as she makes the final decisions regarding the magazine (being the final authority) and her in depth technical knowledge is seen in a scene when Andy smirks during a session wherein a new line of clothing is being evaluated by Miranda and Miranda asks for a belt to finish a look. When an employee hands over 2 different belts saying they are both so different, Andy is seen mocking the statement by passing a ridiculing chuckle. When Miranda asks, “Is something funny?” Andy says that she feels both the belts look exactly the same to her and that she is just learning about this “stuff”. This reply completely infuriates Miranda and she starts explaining about the colour of the belt saying it is neither blue nor turquoise but it is cerulean and she elaborates on how the cerulean colour collections came into style in the fashion industry and when it became popular (the entire history behind it). That scene shows the depth of technical knowledge Miranda possesses in her field which is one of the major reasons for her success, however though she has a good amount of technical and conceptual skills, she lacks human skills which is equally important at the top management level.

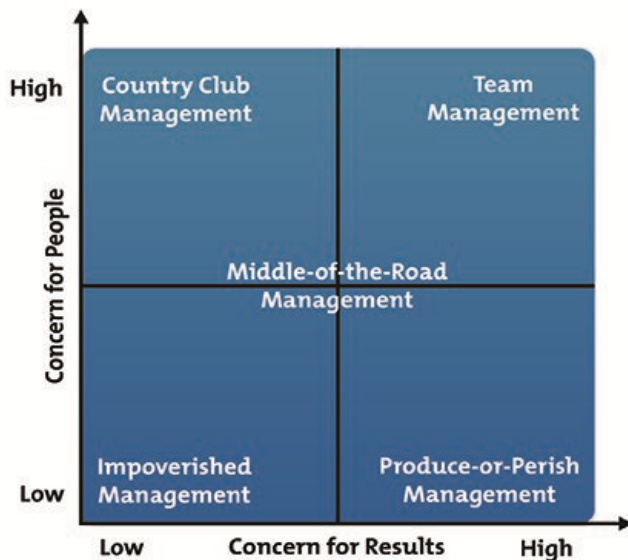
Different models of leadership help explain it better. One of the models is known as the Managerial Grid, or Leadership Grid, the Blake and Mouton leadership model which was developed in the early 1960s by management theorists Robert Blake and Jane Mouton. It plots a manager’s or leader’s degree of task-centeredness versus his/her person-centeredness and identifies five different combinations of the two and the leadership styles they produce.

The Blake Mouton Managerial Grid is based on two behavioural dimensions:

- **Concern for People:** this is the degree to which a leader considers team members' needs, interests and areas of personal development when deciding how best to accomplish a task.
- **Concern for Results:** this is the degree to which a leader emphasizes concrete objectives, organizational efficiency and high productivity when deciding how best to accomplish a task.

Blake and Mouton defined five leadership styles based on these.

The Blake Mouton Managerial Grid



The Leadership Grid® figure from Leadership Dilemmas – Grid Solutions by Robert R. Blake and Anne Adams McCauley (formerly the Managerial Grid by Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton). Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, Copyright 1991 by Grid International, Inc.

**Impoverished Management – Low Results/Low People-**The Impoverished or "indifferent" manager is mostly ineffective. With a low regard for creating systems that get the job done, and with little interest in creating a satisfying or motivating team environment, his results are inevitably disorganization, dissatisfaction and disharmony.

**Produce-or-Perish Management – High Results/Low People-**Also known as "authoritarian" or "authority-compliance" managers, people in this category believe that their team members are simply a means to an end. The team's needs are always secondary to its productivity. This type of manager is autocratic, has strict work rules, policies and procedures, and can view punishment as an effective way of motivating team members. This approach can drive impressive production results at first, but low team morale and motivation will ultimately affect people's performance, and this type of leader will struggle to retain high performers.

**Middle-of-the-Road Management – Medium Results/Medium People-**A Middle-of-the-Road or "status quo" manager tries to balance results and people, but this strategy is not as effective as it may sound. Through continual compromise, he fails to inspire high performance and also fails to meet people's needs fully. The result is that his team will likely deliver only mediocre performance.

**Country Club Management – High People/Low Results-**The Country Club or "accommodating" style of manager is most concerned about her team members' needs and feelings. He/she assumes that, as long as they are happy and secure, they will work hard. What tends to be the result is a work environment that is very relaxed and fun, but where productivity suffers because there is a lack of direction and control.

**Team Management – High Production/High People-**According to the Blake Mouton model, Team management is the most effective leadership style. It reflects a leader who is passionate about his work and who does the best he can for the people he works with. Team or "sound" managers commit to their organization's goals and mission, motivate the people who report to them, and work hard to get people to stretch themselves to deliver great results. But, at the same time, they're inspiring figures who look after their teams. Someone led by a Team manager feels respected and empowered and is committed to achieving her goals.

As per the Blake and Mouton leadership styles grid, Miranda falls clearly in the “Produce or perish management” grid due to her extremely high concern for production and very low concern for people. This is her primary as well as secondary leadership style. Since she practises this type of leadership style, she gets things done as efficient as could be. However, her workers are not shown to ever enjoy working with her. Even hearing her name brings in a certain sense of fear in all and nobody ever dares to question her. The long-term pit falls of this style of leadership is turnover and that is shown in this movie when Miranda’s most efficient assistant Andy quits in the end. Though Miranda noticed how efficient Andy is compared to her previous assistants, she never changed her leadership or working style to suit anyone. Since Andy was highly achievement oriented, she worked against all odds that faced her at the start of joining Runway like being ignorant of the fashion industry and being informed that she “has no sense of style or fashion”, “fat” etc. She worked hard to prove her worth and Miranda took complete advantage of her. Little did Miranda realize that each person has different priorities and when Andy realized the extent of workaholic she has turned to be that she is losing her values and ethics, she realized that it is time to quit. Had Miranda put the effort to understand Andy’s priorities and ensure Andy is being satisfied at her workplace by incorporating the “Team-Management” style, Andy might have stayed much longer.

As stated in different theories and styles of Leadership, in a broad sense, a combination of people and task orientation would always work best. In the words of Daniel Goleman, “The best leaders don’t know just one style of leadership-they are skilled at several and have the flexibility to switch between styles as the circumstances dictate.” Every leader needs to be aware of this as well as work towards practicing the same so that they are holistically successful leaders.

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