

CONSIDERATION

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CONSIDERATION

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1. Core Definition

The term **Consideration**, in the context of behavioral leadership theory, refers to the degree to which a leader exhibits concern for the welfare, emotional state, and personal needs of their subordinates or lower-level coworkers. It encapsulates behaviors aimed at fostering mutual trust, respect, warmth, and friendship between the leader and the group members. A leader high in consideration seeks to create a supportive and psychologically safe work environment, prioritizing the human relations aspect of management over the purely technical or task-oriented demands. This behavioral dimension is critical for mitigating organizational strife, maintaining beneficial interpersonal relationships, and actively promoting feelings of both gratification and reliance within the working group. It is fundamentally an orientation toward the subordinate as an individual with specific needs and feelings, rather than merely as a functional component of the workflow.

The core manifestation of **Consideration** involves acts of supportive communication, active listening, and providing psychological support during challenging times. Leaders exhibiting high consideration ensure that employee contributions are recognized, that channels of communication are kept open and accessible, and that all members feel they are treated equitably. This relational approach stands in contrast to approaches that focus solely on output metrics or strict adherence to procedure. While high task performance is often desired, consideration recognizes that sustained performance is dependent upon the affective commitment and psychological well-being of the workforce. When leaders display genuine concern, it typically translates into higher levels of trust and loyalty from the team members, which in turn acts as a buffer against workplace stress and conflict.

Psychological dictionaries often define **Consideration** as a component of result-oriented leadership, highlighting its instrumental role in achieving organizational outcomes through improved morale. Although rooted in behavioral observation, the dimension touches upon essential socio-emotional intelligence required for effective group management. The leader's display of empathy and supportive behavior directly influences the organizational climate, promoting stability and decreasing the propensity for internal disputes. Furthermore, by fostering feelings of gratification, consideration ensures that employees feel valued for their efforts and contributions, enhancing intrinsic motivation and increasing the likelihood of long-term organizational attachment.

2. Etymology and Historical Development: The Ohio State Studies

The formalization of **Consideration** as a measurable and critical leadership dimension originated

primarily from the seminal post-World War II research conducted by the Ohio State University Leadership Studies beginning in the late 1940s. Prior to this research, leadership studies were largely focused on identifying innate "traits" that differentiated leaders from non-leaders. The Ohio State researchers shifted the paradigm toward understanding observable "behaviors" that leaders engaged in, attempting to empirically determine which actions correlated with organizational effectiveness. This behavioral approach represented a fundamental turning point in leadership theory, moving away from inherent qualities toward teachable practices.

Through extensive surveys and observations, particularly utilizing the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), the Ohio State team identified hundreds of specific leadership behaviors. Statistical factor analysis of these behaviors revealed that they clustered into two primary, largely independent dimensions: **Initiating Structure** (task orientation) and **Consideration** (people orientation). The discovery that these two dimensions were not necessarily mutually exclusive--meaning a leader could be high in both, low in both, or high in one and low in the other--was a profound theoretical breakthrough, contradicting earlier assumptions that task focus and people focus existed on a single continuum.

The conceptualization of **Consideration** was heavily influenced by the earlier Human Relations Movement in management, which emphasized the importance of social and psychological factors in the workplace, famously demonstrated by the Hawthorne Studies. The Ohio State findings provided the empirical validation needed to integrate these relational concerns into formal leadership models. Since its introduction, the concept of Consideration has served as a foundational element for nearly all subsequent behavioral and contingency models of leadership, including the Managerial Grid, Fiedler's Contingency Model, and Path-Goal Theory, solidifying its place as one of the most enduring constructs in organizational research.

3. Key Characteristics and Measurement

Consideration is characterized by a set of observable behaviors that demonstrate the leader's affective orientation toward their followers. These behaviors are fundamentally about support, empathy, accessibility, and respect. A highly considerate leader acts as an advocate for their team members, often intervening to protect them from unfair demands from higher management or to ensure fair treatment in resource allocation. They make themselves available to listen to personal and work-related issues, treating each subordinate as a unique individual rather than a replaceable cog in the machine. This focus on personalized interaction builds robust social capital within the team structure.

The LBDQ, the primary instrument used to measure this dimension, provided concrete examples of considerate behavior that could be rated by subordinates. Key items designed to assess **Consideration** included statements such as: "He is easy to approach," "He puts suggestions

made by the crew into operation," "He looks out for the personal welfare of crew members," "He treats all crew members as his equal," and "He is willing to make changes." These items collectively define a pattern of behavior focused on building high-quality exchange relationships (LMX) and minimizing the psychological distance between the leader and the led. Unlike Initiating Structure, which focuses on defining roles, organizing activities, and achieving goals, Consideration focuses on the maintenance functions necessary for group cohesion and psychological health.

Empirical measurement of **Consideration** allows researchers and practitioners to benchmark leadership effectiveness and identify areas for leadership development. A consistent finding is that leaders who score high on Consideration tend to foster environments characterized by low employee turnover, reduced absenteeism, and higher levels of self-reported job satisfaction. The reliability of the LBDQ and similar instruments like the Survey of Organizations (SOO) in consistently isolating the Consideration factor across various industries and cultures has cemented its status as a universal descriptor of relationship-focused leadership behavior, albeit with cultural nuances in manifestation.

4. Relationship with Initiating Structure

The relationship between **Consideration** and its orthogonal counterpart, **Initiating Structure** (the degree to which a leader defines and organizes their role and the roles of subordinates, focusing on goal attainment), is central to the behavioral school of leadership. The Ohio State findings initially demonstrated that these two dimensions were statistically independent, meaning that a leader could simultaneously score high on both. This finding was profound because it suggested that effective leadership was not a zero-sum game where focusing on people necessarily meant neglecting the task, or vice versa. The ideal leader, theoretically, was one who managed to integrate high levels of both behaviors.

Leaders high in both dimensions--often termed "High-High" leaders--were initially hypothesized to be the most universally effective. However, subsequent research, particularly contingency models, revealed that the optimal balance between **Consideration** and Initiating Structure is dependent on the situational context. In environments requiring tight deadlines, complex procedures, or high stress (low maturity levels of followers), a heavier emphasis on Initiating Structure might be necessary, though Consideration remains vital to prevent burnout. Conversely, in highly professional, self-directed, or creative environments, high Consideration coupled with lower, facilitating levels of Initiating Structure might be more effective, allowing autonomy.

The interplay of the two dimensions significantly affects follower outcomes. While high Initiating Structure often correlates positively with productivity metrics, it can sometimes lead to tension, absenteeism, and lower job satisfaction if not tempered by sufficient **Consideration**. Consideration

acts as the emotional lubricant, making the necessary structural demands palatable and reducing the inherent friction associated with organizational requirements and control mechanisms. The synergistic combination, where the leader clearly defines expectations (Structure) while maintaining supportive relationships (Consideration), typically yields the best long-term results in terms of both performance and organizational commitment.

5. Significance and Impact on Organizational Outcomes

The significance of **Consideration** in organizational life cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts key metrics related to human capital and organizational health. Empirical studies consistently link high levels of leader consideration to enhanced employee morale and job satisfaction. When employees feel that their leader genuinely cares about their well-being, they are far more likely to report positive feelings about their work environment, leading to a palpable improvement in the overall organizational climate. This psychological linkage translates directly into measurable economic benefits for the organization, primarily through reduced costs associated with employee turnover and training replacement staff.

Furthermore, **Consideration** plays a crucial role in building robust team cohesion and trust. A considerate leader fosters an environment where subordinates feel safe to take interpersonal risks, share innovative ideas, and engage in constructive conflict resolution. This openness is a prerequisite for high-performing teams, as it enhances information sharing and collaborative problem-solving. By promoting feelings of reliability and mutual dependence within the group, consideration transforms a collection of individuals into a cohesive unit capable of overcoming complex operational challenges, thus improving collective efficacy and resilience.

While the link between **Consideration** and objective productivity measures (like output quantity) can be complex and situation-dependent, the long-term impact on discretionary effort is clear. Subordinates of considerate leaders are often willing to exert effort beyond minimum requirements--known as Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs)--because they feel a moral obligation to reciprocate the supportive treatment they receive. This discretionary effort, which includes helping coworkers, advocating for the organization, and volunteering for extra tasks, is a vital, intangible asset that sustains organizational excellence over time. Therefore, consideration is not merely a soft skill, but a strategic component of human resource management that drives sustainable competitive advantage.

6. Modern Relevance and Integration into Contemporary Models

Although the concept of **Consideration** was formalized decades ago, its principles remain intensely relevant and have been absorbed into modern, post-behavioral leadership theories. For example, Transformational Leadership theory, a dominant paradigm since the 1980s, includes a

sub-dimension called **Individualized Consideration**. This component directly echoes the original concept, defining it as the extent to which the leader attends to each follower's needs for achievement and growth, acting as a coach or mentor to help them develop their potential. This integration demonstrates the enduring validity of focusing on the personal development and emotional needs of subordinates as a core leadership task.

Similarly, the rising popularity of Servant Leadership--a model that prioritizes the needs of the followers and the larger community--is fundamentally based on a high level of **Consideration**. Servant leaders practice empathy, stewardship, and the healing of organizational divisions, all of which are advanced manifestations of the basic relational concern defined by the Ohio State studies. These modern models validate the hypothesis that a foundation of genuine concern and support is necessary before higher-order motivational strategies, such as intellectual stimulation or charismatic influence, can be effectively applied.

In the modern workplace, characterized by increasing complexity, remote work environments, and heightened focus on work-life balance and mental health, **Consideration** has become more crucial than ever. Leaders must proactively demonstrate empathy through digital channels and manage boundaries effectively, ensuring that their structural demands do not overwhelm the personal capacities of their team members. The ability to express consideration effectively across diverse, sometimes decentralized, teams is now considered a key competency for contemporary leaders navigating dynamic and often unpredictable operational landscapes.

7. Debates and Criticisms

Despite its widespread acceptance, the **Consideration** dimension has faced certain theoretical and practical criticisms. One primary debate revolves around its potential for cultural relativity. The specific behaviors that constitute "concern" or "support" are not universal; what is viewed as highly considerate in a collectivist culture (e.g., direct personal intervention) might be perceived as intrusive or unprofessional in an individualistic culture (e.g., some Western European nations). Therefore, while the underlying dimension of relational focus is globally applicable, the operationalization and effectiveness of considerate behaviors must be carefully tailored to the prevailing cultural norms of the specific workforce.

A second criticism concerns the potential for **Consideration** to be misused or mismanaged. Leaders who exhibit extremely high consideration without sufficient Initiating Structure can be perceived as overly permissive, leading to a lack of accountability, role ambiguity, or decreased productivity. In some contexts, particularly those requiring urgent action or strict adherence to safety protocols, an overemphasis on accommodating emotional needs may compromise operational rigor. This highlights the importance of the "High-High" leader who balances relational warmth with clear performance expectations, ensuring that consideration facilitates, rather than

undermines, organizational structure.

Finally, some organizational theorists debate the causal directionality of the relationship between leader behavior and follower response. While traditional models suggest that leader consideration *causes* higher satisfaction, it is plausible that leaders respond to existing high morale or performance levels within a group by being more supportive and considerate. This reciprocal influence means that interpreting the results of LBDQ studies requires careful consideration of the interaction effects, acknowledging that effective leadership is often a dynamic, iterative process of mutual adjustment between the leader and the led, rather than a unidirectional flow of influence.

Further Reading

[Ohio State University Leadership Studies \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire \(LBDQ\) \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Servant Leadership \(Wikipedia\)](#)