

Leadership Styles:

Leadership is not a "one size fits all" thing; often, you must adapt your approach to fit the situation. This is why it's useful to develop a thorough understanding of other leadership frameworks and styles; after all, the more approaches you're familiar with, the more flexible you can be.

Listed below are some of the most common leadership styles. Read them through and answer the questions at the end of the descriptions.

Autocratic leaders

Autocratic leaders make decisions without consulting their team members, even if their input would be useful. This can be appropriate when you need to make decisions quickly, when there's no need for team input, and when team agreement isn't necessary for a successful outcome. However, this style can be demoralizing, and it can lead to high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover.

Democratic leaders

Democratic leaders make the final decisions, but they include team members in the decision-making process. They encourage creativity, and people are often highly engaged in projects and decisions. As a result, team members tend to have high job satisfaction and high productivity. This is not always an effective style to use, though, when you need to make a quick decision.

Laissez-faire

Laissez-faire leaders give their team members a lot of freedom in how they do their work, and how they set their deadlines. They provide support with resources and advice if needed, but otherwise they don't get involved. This autonomy can lead to high job satisfaction, but it can be damaging if team members don't manage their time well, or if they don't have the knowledge, skills, or self-motivation to do their work effectively. (Laissez-faire leadership can also occur when managers don't have control over their work and their people.)

Bureaucratic Leadership

Bureaucratic leaders follow rules rigorously, and ensure that their people follow procedures precisely. This is appropriate for work involving serious safety risks (such as working with machinery, with toxic substances, or at dangerous heights), or with large sums of money. Bureaucratic leadership is also useful for managing employees who perform routine tasks. This style is much less effective in teams and organizations that rely on flexibility, creativity, or innovation.

Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leadership resembles transformational leadership: both types of leaders inspire and motivate their team members. The difference lies in their intent. Transformational leaders want to transform their teams and organizations, while leaders who rely on charisma often focus on themselves and their own ambitions, and they may not want to change anything. Charismatic leaders might believe that they can do no wrong, even when others warn them about the path that they're on. This feeling of invincibility can severely damage a team or an organization.

Servant Leadership

A "servant leader" is someone, regardless of level, who leads simply by meeting the needs of the team. The term sometimes describes a person without formal recognition as a leader. These people often lead by example. They have high integrity and lead with generosity. Their approach can create a positive corporate culture, and it can lead to high morale among team members. Supporters of the servant leadership model suggest that it's a good way to move ahead in a world where values are increasingly important, and where servant leaders can achieve power because of their values, ideals, and ethics. However, others believe that people who practice servant leadership can find themselves "left behind" by other leaders, particularly in competitive situations. This style also takes time to apply correctly: it's ill-suited to situations where you have to make quick decisions or meet tight deadlines.

Transactional Leadership

This style starts with the idea that team members agree to obey their leader when they accept a job. The "transaction" usually involves the organization paying team members in return for their effort and compliance on a short-term task. The leader has a right to "punish" team members if their work doesn't meet an appropriate standard. Transactional leadership is present in many business leadership situations, and it does offer some benefits. For example, it clarifies everyone's roles and responsibilities. Because transactional leadership judges team members on performance, people who are ambitious or who are motivated by external rewards – including pay – often thrive. The downside of this style is that, on its own, it can be chilling and amoral, and it can lead to high staff turnover. It also has serious limitations for knowledge-based or creative work. As a result, team members can often do little to improve their job satisfaction.

Transformational Leadership

The leadership frameworks discussed so far are all useful in different situations, however, in business, "transformational leadership" is often the most effective style to use. Transformational leaders have integrity and high emotional intelligence. They motivate people with a shared vision of the future, and they communicate well. They're also typically self-aware, authentic, empathetic, and humble. Transformational leaders inspire their team members because they expect the best from everyone, and they hold themselves accountable for their actions. They set clear goals, and they have good conflict-resolution skills. This leads to high productivity and engagement.

Questions (answer on a separate piece of paper):

1. Which leadership style do you think you use the most? The least?
2. What are the strengths of your dominant style? Limitations?
3. Which type of leader do you like to work under the most? The least?
4. If you could change your dominant leadership style, which one would you choose to use the most?