

# Leadership Styles

## Choosing the Right Approach for the Situation

### Types of Leadership Styles

There are as many approaches to leadership as there are leaders, from Lewin's Leadership Styles framework of the 1930s to the more recent ideas about transformational leadership. There are also many general styles, including servant and transactional leadership. Building awareness of frameworks and styles can help you to develop your approach and to be a more effective leader.

From Winston Churchill and Angela Merkel, to Queen Elizabeth I and Martin Luther King, there can be as many ways to lead people as there are leaders.

Fortunately, businesspeople and psychologists have developed useful frameworks that describe the main ways that people lead. When you understand these frameworks, you can develop your own approach to leadership, and become a more effective leader as a result.

In this article and video, we'll highlight some of the common approaches to leadership that you can use. We'll also look at some specific styles of leadership, and we'll explore the advantages and disadvantages of each.

These frameworks and styles of leadership are based on several different approaches to leadership. You can read more about these approaches in our article on [Core Leadership Theories](#).

### Useful Leadership Style Frameworks

So, let's look at some useful approaches – shown mainly in the order they appeared – that you can use to become a more effective leader. Your own, personal approach is likely to be a blend of these, depending on your own preferences, your people's needs, and the situation you're in.

## Lewin's Leadership Styles

Psychologist Kurt Lewin developed his framework in the 1930s, and it provided the foundation of many of the approaches that followed afterwards. He argued that there are three major styles of leadership:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.)

Lewin's framework is popular and useful, because it encourages managers to be less autocratic than they might instinctively be.

## The Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid

The **Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid** was published in 1964, and it highlights the most appropriate style to use, based on your concern for your people and your concern for production/tasks.

With a people-oriented style, you focus on organizing, supporting, and developing your team members. This participatory style encourages good teamwork and creative collaboration.

With task-oriented leadership, you focus on getting the job done. You define the work and the roles required, put structures in place, and plan, organize, and monitor work.

According to this model, the best style to use is one that has both a high concern for people and a high concern for the task – it argues that you should aim for both, rather than trying to offset one against the other. Clearly, this is an important idea!

## Path-Goal Theory

You may also have to think about what your team members want and need. This is where [Path-Goal Theory](#) – published in 1971 – is useful.

For example, highly-capable people, who are assigned to a complex task, will need a different leadership approach from people with low ability, who are assigned to an ambiguous task. (The former will want a participative approach, while the latter need to be told what to do.)

With Path-Goal Theory, you can identify the best leadership approach to use, based on your people's needs, the task that they're doing, and the environment that they're working in.

## Six Emotional Leadership Styles

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee detailed their [Six Emotional Leadership Styles](#) theory in their 2002 book, "[Primal Leadership](#)."

The theory highlights the strengths and weaknesses of six common styles – Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetter, and Commanding. It also shows how each style can affect the emotions of your team members.

## Flamholtz and Randle's Leadership Style Matrix

First published in 2007, Flamholtz and Randle's [Leadership Style Matrix](#) shows you the best style to use, based on how capable people are of working autonomously, and how creative or "programmable" the task is.

The matrix is divided into four quadrants – each quadrant identifies two possible styles that will be effective for a given situation, ranging from "autocratic/benevolent autocratic" to "consensus/laissez-faire."

## 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. (This was first published in 1978, and was then further developed in 1985.)

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.

However, 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.

## Specific Leadership Styles

As well as understanding the frameworks that you can use to be a more effective leader, and knowing what it takes to be a transformational leader, it's also useful to learn about more general styles, and the advantages and disadvantages of each one.

Let's take a look at some other styles of leadership that are interesting, but don't fit with any of the frameworks above.

### Note:

Remember, not all of these styles of leadership will have a positive effect on your team members, either in the short or long term. (See our article on [Dunham and Pierce's Leadership Model](#) for more on how your actions as a leader will affect your team.)

## 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, as was shown in the 2008 financial crisis.

## 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. And, because transactional leadership judges team members on performance, people who are ambitious or who are motivated by external rewards – including compensation – 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.

### **Key Points**

In business, transformational leadership is often the best leadership style to use.

However, no one style of leadership fits all situations, so it's useful to understand different leadership frameworks and styles. You can then adapt your approach to fit your situation.