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10 Management Styles Of Effective Leaders

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Effective management of any size team requires a specific set of skills that go well beyond the skills you might have developed as an individual contributor in an organization. More than evaluating employees and meeting project deadlines, your job as a manager is to motivate employees to do their best work and inspire them to get invested in the company's success. Understanding and adapting your management styles is key to effective leadership.

What Is a Management Style?

How To Identify Management Styles

Understanding your own or your boss's management style can help you communicate and work more effectively as a team. Identifying a management style early on in a hiring process can also help you determine whether a role or a team is a good fit, and knowing and communicating your management style to a team can help you all make adjustments to your communication and processes as needed to work together in harmony.

To discover your management style or that of folks you're hiring, observe the characteristics that make up the way they manage:

Interactions with coworkers, direct reports and direct supervisors, as well as other project stakeholders

Communication style—how do you give and receive feedback? How do you relay and understand information?

Decision-making steps, such as whether you get input from coworkers or prefer introspection, and whether you commit to decisions quickly or take a long time to decide

Values and beliefs about work, leadership, productivity and relationships

Leadership traits, including the ability to inspire, direct, be a visionary for a project and pay attention to details

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10 Management Styles of Effective Leaders

There are a number of different management styles, from the charismatic to the transformational leadership style. When implemented correctly, all of them can be effective management styles. Review these management styles to see how the above characteristics fit into each and understand how your style or someone else's fits with the needs of a team and company.

1. Autocratic

An autocratic management style puts the manager at the top of the pyramid on a team. They make decisions and control projects without soliciting input from team members or other stakeholders.

How to identify an autocratic leader

An autocratic manager is likely to take complete control of projects and teams, making decisions without input from others. They're more likely to give directions than to inspire team members toward solutions, and they might be more focused on details than the big-picture vision. They aren't likely to elicit feedback, especially from subordinates, and the feedback they give might be more critical and punitive than constructive.

When autocratic leadership works best

In most cases, autocratic management isn't productive for a team, because it takes a top-down approach that leaves employees feeling disempowered and on edge. However, autocratic leadership can be useful temporarily when a business faces a crisis. Autocratic leaders are skilled at making decisions fast and moving forward, which is incredibly valuable when you don't have time to seek input and weigh options.

Pros

Cons

- No wavering on judgment

- Lack of diverse input into decisions

- Little opportunity for employee development and advancement

2. Democratic

A democratic management style, opposite of autocratic, puts the voice of the team at the forefront of decision-making and project management. The manager seeks input from subordinates and other stakeholders to drive the vision and direction of projects.

How to identify a democratic leader

A democratic manager is likely to solicit and implement feedback and input from members of their team, company leadership and other project stakeholders before making final decisions. They might even designate decision-makers other than themselves for various projects to ensure variety and diversity of opinion. They're not prone to snap decisions; instead, they foster an environment of consideration and debate to give everyone a voice in every step of a project.

When democratic leadership works best

Democratic leadership has a place on most teams, because it ensures team members have their voices heard and have a stake in the work they do every day. Opening decisions up to multiple voices also ensures projects and goals are seen from diverse perspectives, deepening a company or team's ability to innovate, adapt and serve a broader customer base.

However, true democracy is a slow way to make decisions, and it could result in regular stalemates that keep projects from moving forward. Democratic leadership is best for the early stages of a project, so all stakeholders can have a say in the vision and direction. It's best to designate decision-makers for the minutiae of projects to ensure efficiency and progress.

Pros

- Diversity of perspectives
- Strengthens a company's ability to serve a broad customer base
- Inspires and engages employees
- Improves innovation

Cons

- Slow decision-making
- Can lead to dead ends and stalemates that prevent projects from moving forward
- Can cause a lack of cohesion in project elements

3. Laissez-faire

A laissez-faire management style is a hands-off approach to leadership that lets team members work independently and make decisions for themselves.

How to identify a laissez-faire leader

A laissez-faire leader is likely to spend their day focused on their own work without much attention to what team members are doing. They don't seek or offer feedback, and they don't offer direction unless a team member asks for it. They don't make or guide decisions for the team or projects; instead, they let individual team members make decisions as they see fit. They might have a vision for projects but might not communicate those clearly to team members.

When laissez-faire leadership works best

Laissez-faire leadership can cause problems for many teams. Team members might feel rudderless and without support, and projects might lack cohesion because of lack of direction or communication. However, some workers might thrive under the lack of oversight, which could help them discover their own leadership skills and leave them room to innovate.

As an overall management style, laissez-faire leadership should be reserved for high-level teams of highly skilled and experienced employees, such as C-suite and other executives. But you could temporarily employ this style at select points throughout a project—ease up on oversight and feedback when you want team members to strengthen decision-making skills, cope with challenges on their own and expand creativity and innovation.

Pros

- Room for employees to be creative and innovative
- Encourages employees to strengthen leadership and problem-solving skills

Cons

- Leaves team members feeling lost and unsupported
- Lack of direction and cohesion for projects and teams
- No clear vision or objectives for employees to work toward

4. Bureaucratic

A bureaucratic management style relies on rules, policies and standard operating procedures, rather than a leader's personality, interests or charisma. Team members are evaluated on standard criteria, projects are planned according to procedure and goals are meticulously measured and reported.

employee needs and work styles, because they evaluate everyone according to the same standards and communicate with everyone according to protocol. They make decisions through established practices, soliciting input only through approved channels and evaluating options according to predetermined criteria.

When bureaucratic leadership works best

Bureaucratic leadership is common in large organizations, where a company has to accommodate thousands of employees and projects, and avoid the appearance of favoritism or bias. It can be particularly important in government organizations, where work is subject to public scrutiny. Within a team, bureaucratic management can help keep team members on the same page and streamline communication.

However, bureaucracy is only effective at facilitating equity if its goals and procedures are designed equitably. Bureaucratic leadership can cause a manager to overlook an employee's unique circumstances and needs and inadvertently foster a work environment that favors certain types of employees—especially those who think and work like the manager.

Pros	Cons
• Efficient and consistent decision-making • Streamlined communication • Clear expectations and standards for employees • Clear processes, procedures and documentation for every project	• Unnecessary procedures and paperwork can slow projects or distract employees • Lack of nuance can foster an inequitable workplace

5. Servant leadership

A servant leadership style puts employees' needs, growth and professional development ahead of the needs of the manager, company or project. It prioritizes team bonding and employee well-being.

How to identify a servant leader

A servant manager is most concerned with their relationship with their employees and their employees' happiness. They'll solicit feedback and adjust their style but aren't likely to offer feedback and criticism to employees. They might not offer clear direction on a task or project, but instead will regularly check in with employees to gauge their interest and mood. They'll go to bat for employees with higher leadership, and might bear the brunt of feedback and expectations from their managers to protect their team members from criticism or extra work.

When servant leadership works best

A servant mindset is an asset for any manager when balanced with other management styles. Servant leadership makes employees feel heard, seen and cared for, which can foster an attitude of service and care among coworkers. But managers might struggle to meet company goals and motivate employees toward professional development if they focus solely on employee well-being to the detriment of project and business objectives.

Pros	Cons
• Employees feel heard and engaged • Fosters team cohesion and care • Accounts for diverse employee circumstances and needs	• Ignores project and business objectives • Can lead to inefficiency and failed goals • Goal-oriented employees might feel bored or unmotivated

6. Coaching

A coaching management style focuses on employee professional development. It incorporates regular feedback, training and day-to-day support to develop and hone employee skills and strengths.

How to identify a coaching leader

A coach-manager might share traits with a servant leader, because they put employees' needs and strengths at the forefront. But they're more in tune with how employees' strengths, needs and skills can serve the goals of the business, and they use business objectives to help employees recognize their strengths and hone their skills. They provide regular feedback, guidance, advice and resources to help employees succeed within their tasks for the company as well as develop professional skills that can help them beyond the company.

Coaching leaders involve employees in decision-making while offering clear guidance on the purpose and criteria for making a decision as well as how an employee's stance fits in with the overall vision.

When coaching leadership works best

Coaching leadership is the best fit for managers who are in a position to help employees develop professionally. The style is best suited for managers in

Pros	Cons
• Helps employees grow and develop within a company • Balances business objectives with employee needs • Engages employees in business goals	• Requires significant time and resources from the company and the manager • Well-developed employees could regularly seek new roles or leave the company

7. Charismatic

A charismatic management style relies on a leader's personality and energy to inspire, engage and motivate employees.

How to identify a charismatic leader

A charismatic manager is in tune with and in charge of how their energy affects people around them. They tend to have contagious personalities, make friends easily and effortlessly command attention when they enter a room. They know how to relay information and speak with each team member based on that person's communication style and mood, and they're known to perk up anyone in a bad mood. They can deliver critical feedback in a tone that leaves employees feeling motivated.

When charismatic leadership works best

Charismatic leaders tend to rise to the top in traditional businesses, because they naturally exhibit traits our culture favors, such as extroversion, congeniality and positivity. Managers who aren't naturally charismatic might burn out trying to mimic these traits, though. Charisma can be an asset when it's your job to inspire employees and set a broad vision, but pull back on it when you need to deliver difficult news or relay tough criticism to avoid imbuing the workplace with toxic positivity.

Pros	Cons
• Inspires and motivates employees • Fosters a positive attitude among a team • Makes employees feel heard, seen and liked	• Can foster toxic positivity • Can burn out managers who aren't naturally extroverted or social

8. Transactional

A transactional management style rewards employees for meeting specific milestones and objectives. It sets clear expectations and relies on the promise of a reward to motivate employees.

How to identify a transactional leader

Transactional managers, such as bureaucratic managers, likely document, track and report on goals, timelines and objectives meticulously where everyone can see them. They communicate clear timelines and expectations to team members and offer incentives to reach milestones on or ahead of schedule. They might offer regular feedback to help employees achieve objectives, though employees will always be aware of where they stand without a manager's input. They make decisions based on defined objectives and incentivize employees to do the same.

When transactional leadership works best

Transactional management might sound like a poor relationship, but the style can be an asset on some teams. Competitive team members might be motivated by rewards even if those rewards are as small as a pizza party or a plaque, because they like to cross milestones. However, transactional management is best suited for cases where you have the authority and resources to deliver meaningful rewards, such as commissions, bonuses and other benefits, because those offer motivation while honoring the relationship between the employee and the company.

Pros	Cons
• Motivating for competitive employees • Sets clear expectations for employees • Strong documentation and communication of goals, objectives and timelines	• Could be boring or discouraging for uncompetitive employees • Feels patronizing for employees if rewards are nominal

9. Transformational

A transformational management style focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to think outside of the box to raise the bar, both to achieve business goals and reach their full professional potential.

change and rapid growth and get bored with stability and stagnation. They're big thinkers, always pushing the vision of the company forward (regardless of their role), and they encourage team members to do the same. These managers question the status quo and provide as much feedback to their bosses as to their subordinates.

When transformational leadership works best

Transformational management is important in rapidly growing companies, such as startups, and those within fast-changing industries. Managers need to be skilled at steering their teams through change and developing team members according to a company's changing needs. Too much focus on growth and change can be detrimental to day-to-day success, however. Transformational leaders need to balance setting clear expectations and stable milestones to keep employees from feeling like they can never cross a finish line.

Pros	Cons
• Makes a team and business adaptable to changing industry needs • Develops agile teams and employees • Keeps an eye on the big picture	• Ever-changing milestones can demotivate employees • Rapidly changing needs can lead to employee attrition

10. Situational

A situational management style is a mix of all of them: Management style is adapted to the situation and team members' needs.

How to identify a situational leader

A situational manager understands the pros and cons of various management styles, when each works best, and how to apply them to different team members and business cases. They might adopt an autocratic style in a crisis, employ democratic leadership to name company values, employ coaching with green employees and use bureaucratic motivational tools with competitive workers.

When situational leadership works best

Managers with large, diverse teams and varied projects need to adopt a situational leadership style to meet the various needs of their employees.

Pros	Cons
• Adapts to immediate needs and goals • Serves a variety of employees and company goals • Prepares a manager to oversee any type of team or project	• Might apply uneven standards to different team members • Harder to automate and standardize practices for efficiency and transferability

How To Adopt a New Management Style

Adopting or incorporating new management styles requires not only changing your behaviors and protocols but also evaluating your values, beliefs, attitude and personality type.

If you identify your predominant management style and realize some of its characteristics aren't the right fit for your role within your organization or for the people on your team, follow these steps to adapt and incorporate characteristics of a more fitting management style:

1. Name the problem

No management style is inherently always good or always bad. You don't have to change your style just because it's perceived as the wrong way to manage—your management style might be a great fit for the environment you're in and the people you manage.

If you're feeling friction or having trouble achieving your team's goals, start by identifying the problems. Do you have an unmotivated team? Are you missing deadlines? Is communication inconsistent? Do team members feel left out of conversations or in the dark about expectations?

Once you identify the real problems, consider how your management style might contribute to them. If you're missing deadlines, for example, is it because you're being too democratic with decision-making and extending the time it takes to make progress on a project? Or is it because you're too hands-off and team members don't have enough milestones to hit before a final project deadline?

2. Understand other management styles

Once you identify the characteristics of your management style that aren't working, discover the characteristics of others that might address your problems.

3. Know your strengths

Not everyone is suited for every management style. Understand your professional and personal strengths and weaknesses and how those intersect with the characteristics of various management styles.

For example, you might be suited for autocratic leadership if you're highly analytical and introspective, but democratic, coaching and charismatic management might not come easily to you.

4. Manage big changes with your team

Some changes in your management style might only happen within you—adjusting how you respond to feedback or letting go of beliefs about your relationship with coworkers, for example. But often, a change in management style means changes to protocols and procedures for your team. Even if this change is for the better, you'll need buy-in from your team to implement it effectively.

Employ the basic principles of change management to involve your team in decisions about new processes, motivate them to want to make changes, appeal to their individual needs and guide them through changes.

5. Communicate clearly

Don't assume team members will naturally adapt to changes in protocols or procedures. Clearly communicate any changes you'll make, when they'll take effect, any new expectations you have for employees and what they can expect from you going forward.

Communicating about changes is also an opportunity to get feedback and suggestions from team members to ensure your new management style is in line with their needs.

Bottom Line

Understanding various management styles is important to effective leadership in any team or organization. Recognizing the style of management you're most drawn to can help you seek roles you're best suited for and understand how to adjust when you face challenges. Identifying the pros and cons of other management styles can help you adapt to each situation and adopt the characteristics of any management style that's best suited for various circumstances.

Learn more: Read our leadership development guide to learn how to create effective leaders.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- + **What is a good management style?**
- + **What are the traits of a good leader?**
- + **What is the least effective leadership style?**



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