

Leadership Styles

This White Paper focuses on the different styles and approaches a leader can use; you need to select or develop a style that works with your personality, and fits the culture of your team. The foundations of effective leadership are discussed in WP1014¹. As a generalisation, the role of the leader is to deal with uncertainty, so that the managers can deal with the complexity.

Leadership Styles

According to Daniel Goleman there are six styles of leadership²:



- **Visionary:** mobilize people toward a vision. Works best when a clear direction or change is needed. Most positive climate.
- **Coaching:** develop people for the future. Works best when helping people and building long-term strength. Positive climate.
- **Affiliative:** create emotional bonds and harmony. Works best to heal rifts in teams or motivate people in stressful times. Positive climate.
- **Democratic:** build consensus through participation. Works best to create consensus or get input. Positive climate.
- **Pacesetting:** expect excellence and self-direction. Works best to get quick results from a highly competent team. Negative climate.
- **Commanding:** demand immediate compliance. Works best in crisis or with problematic people. Negative climate.

These concepts have been expanded on by others (before and after Goleman) to offer a wide range of approaches that may be beneficial. However, no one style of leadership fits all situations, so it helps to have an understanding of several styles.

Common leadership styles (in alphabetical order) include:

1. **Autocratic Leadership** (similar to 'commanding'): The leader has a lot of power and staff and team members have little opportunity to make suggestions. The benefit of autocratic leadership is that it's incredibly efficient. Decisions are made quickly, and work gets done efficiently; the downside is that most people resent being treated this way. Best used in crises, when decisions must be made quickly and without dissent.
2. **Bureaucratic Leadership:** The leader works "by the book" and follows rules rigorously, and ensure that their people follow procedures precisely. This is appropriate for work involving serious safety risks or where large sums of money are involved. It is ineffective in teams and organizations that rely on flexibility, creativity, or innovation.

¹ For more on *the foundations of effective leadership* see: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1014_Leadership.pdf

² For more on *The Six Styles of Leadership*, see Daniel Goleman (2000), *Leadership that gets results*.

3. **Charismatic Leadership** (similar to ‘pacesetter’): The leader inspires enthusiasm within the team and is energetic in motivating others to move forward. The downside to charismatic leaders is that they can believe more in themselves than in their teams.
4. **Democratic/Participative Leadership**: The leader makes the final decision, but includes team members in the decision-making process. They encourage creativity, and team members are often highly engaged in projects and decisions. Team members tend to have high job satisfaction and are productive because they're more involved in decisions. However, this approach can slow decision-making, and can often hinder situations where speed or efficiency is essential.
5. **Interactional**: Combines elements of transactional, transformational and charismatic leadership. The leader’s approach to each interaction is determined by the relationship between the leader's personality and the specific situation. Interaction occurs when a behaviour of one team member causes change in the behaviour of another and the leader optimises this by considering how workers’ interactions with each other could impact the work environment.
6. **Laissez-Faire Leadership**: describes leaders who allow their people to work on their own (a ‘hands-off’ approach). They provide team support with resources and advice, if needed, but otherwise don't get involved. This leadership style can be effective if the leader monitors performance and gives feedback to team members regularly; and is most likely to be effective when individual team members are experienced, skilled, self-starters.
7. **People-Oriented / Relations-Oriented Leadership** (similar to ‘affiliative’ and ‘coaching’): leaders are totally focused on organizing, supporting, and developing the people on their teams. This is a participatory style and tends to encourage good teamwork and creative collaboration. The downside is that some leaders can take this approach too far; they may put the development of their team above tasks or project directives.
8. **Servant Leadership**: (see below) describes a leader often not formally recognized as such. Servant leaders often lead by example. They have high integrity and lead with generosity.
9. **Task-Oriented Leadership**: Task-oriented leaders focus on getting the job done and can be autocratic. They actively define the work and the roles required, put structures in place, and plan, organize, and monitor work. The benefit of task-oriented leadership is that it ensures that deadlines are met, and it's especially useful for team members who don't manage their time well. However, because task-oriented leaders don't tend to think much about their team's well-being, this approach can suffer many of the flaws of autocratic leadership, including causing motivation and retention problems.
10. **Transactional Leadership**: This leadership 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. This leadership style clarifies everyone's roles and responsibilities. People who are ambitious or who are motivated by external rewards – including compensation – often thrive in this environment. The downside is that team members can do little to improve their job satisfaction.
11. **Transformational Leadership** (similar to ‘visionary’): These leaders are inspiring because they expect the best from everyone on their team as well as themselves. This leads to high productivity and engagement from everyone in their team. The downside of transformational leadership is that while the leader's enthusiasm is passed onto the team, he or she can need to be supported by ‘detail people’. In business, transformational leadership is often the best leadership style to use.

No one style of leadership fits all situations, by understanding the pros and cons of each style, you can adapt your approach to your situation.



The effectiveness of different leadership approaches has summarised by the Australian Leadership Foundation:



The Servant Leader



Servant leadership is nobler than transformational leadership. It emphasises core personal characteristics and beliefs over any specific leadership techniques. The characteristics of servant-leadership include attributes such as empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, stewardship, building community. With servant leadership in place in an enabling organization, we can make wonders happen!

The concept is summed up in the statement by Gandhi: *"The mob is well ahead of me, I lead them."* Some translate this to mean he is getting old and physically following behind the crowd, but he still can lead from there. Servant leadership puts a different perspective of that statement, that is, he was able to empower, enable, mentor, and encourage others to lead or do the job that they are capable of doing!

Servant Leaders are not afraid to share their authority with others to achieve a common goal. Authority must company assigned responsibility to empower the individual to achieve what was expected from them. Project managers are in the perfect position to act as servant leaders. As a servant leader, the PM is someone who recognises that they are a servant first and focuses on the development of their team members and building a sense of community among the team. The emphasis is on the leader as someone who is there primarily to help the team overcome obstacles (and there are always obstacles that the team will require assistance in overcoming).

The effective servant leader uses skills such as trust, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight and empathy; they lead their team not through a command-and-control approach, but through activities like coaching and listening to empower each of the team's members to contribute fully to the team's success.

The concept is very old, there are passages that relate to servant leadership in the Tao Te Ching, a document attributed to Lao-Tzu, who is believed to have lived in China in the 4th century B.C., but has modern application in a wide range of project management areas and is particularly relevant in many Agile



methodologies where a key function of the project manager is to ‘clear roadblocks’ to allow the team to perform.

Humility is an important aspect of this style of leadership. Leader humility involves leaders modelling to their followers how to grow and produce positive organisational outcomes by leading followers to believe that their own developmental journeys and feelings of uncertainty are legitimate in the workplace or team. A humble leader recognises the limitations in his/her capabilities and seeks continual growth, and in doing so leads their followers into similar growth and learning - they model how to grow to their followers. Credit is shared, mistakes and limitations are acknowledged and used to trigger learning by doing, and follower’s strengths are highlighted and valued.

Conversational Leadership

Conversations with others in the organisation, up, down and across the hierarchy can advance or impede progress towards our objective. As a leader, the conversations you have (or refuse to have) define the quality of your thinking and are central to the building of effective relationships that ultimately affect the outcomes you deliver.

Effective leaders create a safe environment in which all participants can contribute to a shared meaning rather than needing to constrain their thoughts to protect themselves. Within this safe environment people can confront reality and challenge both your thinking and their thinking which in turn encourages curiosity, leading to understanding and the discovery of optimal solutions to problems.

Authentic Leadership³

“To thy own self be true.” – Polonius, *Hamlet*

Authentic leaders are:

1. **Self-aware and genuine.** Authentic leaders are self-actualized individuals who are aware of their strengths, their limitations, and their emotions. They also show their real selves to their followers and realize that being self-actualized is an endless journey, never complete.
2. **Mission driven and focused on results.** They are able to put the mission and the goals of the organisation ahead of their own self-interest. They do the job in pursuit of results, not for their own power, money or ego.
3. **People who lead with their heart, not just their minds.** They are not afraid to show their emotions, their vulnerability and to connect with their employees. This does not mean authentic leaders are *soft*, communicating in a direct manner is critical to successful outcomes, but it’s done with empathy; directness without empathy is cruel.
4. **Focused on the long-term.** As company leaders they are focused on long-term shareholder value, not in just beating quarterly estimates; they realize that to nurture individuals and to nurture a company requires hard work and patience, but the approach pays large dividends over time.

The Trusted Advisor

Project managers should strive to become Trusted Advisors to their customer (and senior management), but this is a difficult position to reach. Trusted Advisors are involved in all stages of the client's decision making

³ See: *Authentic Leadership*, Bill George’s 2003.



processes to help them create value. Achieving this requires high levels of ethics, credibility, and the ability to 'speak the customer's language'⁴.

Six strategies from professional sports leadership:

1. **Have a game plan:** A clear vision and action plan ensure that all 'players' are focused on the same end-result; any project with an un-articulated objective has very little chance of success.
2. **Associate the game-plan with individual goals:** If the team members aren't genuinely focused on attaining the goals ... little change will be made. The key to project success is getting everyone on the team motivated to achieve the goals.
3. **Do Drills:** Isolate the key skills required to succeed, and develop exercises that hone those specific skills through practice. A good coach knows the strengths and weaknesses of the team and creates drills or exercises to strengthen the team's weaknesses.
4. **Put talented people in roles that suit their aptitude:** Fill talent voids in your organisation, as opposed to filling an open job title. Don't be afraid to give someone new responsibilities or roles if his demonstrated traits suit what's needed. To be successful, leaders have to put the best people into each role and then trust them to do their job. The great thing is trust is a self-fulfilling attitude⁵.
5. **Use appropriate communication modes and content:** The best coaches in any arena know how to mould their communication style and content to befit the person they are coaching, leading to greater understanding, better rapport, and longer retention. It's not what you say, but how you say it.
6. **Celebrate:** "Achieving goals and surpassing milestones deserve credit. Celebrating a win doesn't have to take a lot of time, and helps the team feel like they've accomplished something. Otherwise, the job becomes a never-ending death march (which nobody appreciates).

The Virtual Leader

Leading a virtual team is one of the most difficult jobs in business. Challenges include: infrequent face-to-face contact, lack of resources, difficulties in building a collaborative atmosphere virtually, lack of time to focus on leading the team, shifting team and organizational priorities, and difficulties in managing poor performers. Some of these are management problems such as ensuring adequate time for the work and minimising unnecessary change, others are a fact of virtual life. Communication is the most important skill required to successfully overcome these issues, particularly responsiveness and following-up. Key practices the virtual team leader needs to master include:

Effectively managing change. You must develop a process for helping your teams adjust to change and help them consistently handle and implement changes. One important step in this process is to involve your team members in decisions that affect them. Doing so increases the quality of the team's decision making and helps maintain high levels of enthusiasm and commitment for the duration of a given change.

Foster an atmosphere of collaboration. Look for new and innovative ways to infuse team spirit and trust into your team. This will help to boost productivity and cooperation. Build an environment that supports collaboration by finding ways for team members to interact and communicate informally. For example, you might choose to use *same-time* technologies such as Instant Messaging and other collaboration tools to help increase more spontaneous communication (but be aware of global time differences). Another important component of promoting collaboration is productively managing the conflicts that emerge⁶. Because conflict

⁴ For more on **Advising Upwards** see: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P077_Advising_Upwards.pdf

⁵ For more on **trust** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1030_The_Value_of_Trust.pdf

⁶ For more on **conflict management** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1041_Managing_Conflict.pdf



can often initially go undetected in virtual environments, as a virtual team leader you must proactively look for signs of it and take steps to resolve it in a timely manner.

Communicate team goals and direction. Successful virtual team leaders clearly articulate team goals and direction to ensure that everyone has a shared vision⁷. They also periodically revisit these factors to both reinforce their importance and make adjustments as necessary. Shared team goals are especially crucial for virtual teams, because they give members a sense of purpose and meaning that sustains them when they are working alone or without regular direct contact with the team leader or other team members. Clear goals also help to unify the actions of a geographically dispersed team and keep members focused on execution.

Develop strong interpersonal communication skills. It's no secret that team members who work virtually sometimes feel isolated and find it more difficult to tap into the office grapevine. This feeling of isolation can negatively impact morale and productivity. Therefore, the most effective leaders establish informal and formal communication methods to ensure that people have the information they need to do their jobs and to feel *plugged in*.

Virtual working arrangements do not suit everyone. People work differently, they have different work styles, and they have varying degrees of comfort with using electronic communications technology. In order to effectively manage a virtual team, the project manager needs to accurately assess each person's level of comfort or willingness to be in a virtual setting, and look for any behaviour that may signal that a virtual team worker is suffering from "disconnection". If so, assess the problem and be prepared to implement appropriate actions to overcome the issue.

Summary

Leadership is becoming more important, success is no longer achievable through ridged command and control and the issuing orders. The most effective project and program managers are skilled in both managing and leading⁸; they have a personal leadership style that allows them to work with and support their teams to achieve the outputs expected by their primary stakeholders.

First published 17th February 2019, augmented and updated.



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⁷ For more on **effective explanations** see:
https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1090_Effective_Explanations.pdf

⁸ For more on **competency** see WP1056: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1056_Competency.pdf