**LEADERSHIP**

A leadership style refers to a leader's characteristic behaviour when directing, motivating, guiding, and managing groups of people. Great leaders can inspire political movements and social change. They can also motivate others to perform, create, and innovate.

As you start to consider some of the people who you think of as great leaders, you can immediately see that there are often vast differences in how each person leads. Fortunately, researchers have developed different theories and frameworks that allow us to better identify and understand these different leadership styles.

Here are just a few of the most prominent leadership frameworks and styles that have been identified.

**Lewin's Leadership Styles**

In **1939**, a group of researchers led by psychologist [**Kurt Lewin**](https://www.verywellmind.com/kurt-lewin-biography-1890-1947-2795540) set out to identify different styles of leadership. While further research has identified more distinct types of leadership, this early study was very influential and established three major leadership styles that have provided a springboard for more defined leadership theories.

In Lewin's study, schoolchildren were assigned to one of three groups with an **authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire leader.** The children were then led in an arts and crafts project while researchers observed the behaviour of children in response to the different styles of leadership. The researchers found that **democratic leadership tended to be the most effective at inspiring followers to perform well.**

**1. Authoritarian Leadership (Autocratic)**

Authoritarian leaders, also known as autocratic leaders, provide clear expectations for what needs to be done when it should be done, and how it should be done. This style of leadership is strongly focused on both **command by the leader and control of the followers**. There is also **a clear division between the leader and the members**. Authoritarian leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group.

Researchers found that decision-making was less creative under authoritarian leadership. Lewin also concluded that it is harder to move from an authoritarian style to a democratic style than vice versa. Abuse of this method is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial.

Authoritarian leadership is best applied to situations where there is little time for group decision-making or where the leader is the most knowledgeable member of the group. **The autocratic approach can be a good one when the situation calls for rapid decisions and decisive actions.** However, it tends to create dysfunctional and even **hostile environments**, often pitting followers against the domineering leader.

**2. Participative Leadership (Democratic)**

Lewin’s study found that participative leadership, also known as **democratic leadership, is typically the most effective leadership style**. **Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members**, but **they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members**. In Lewin’s study, children in this group were less productive than the members of the authoritarian group, but their contributions were of a higher quality.

**Participative leaders encourage group members to participate but retain the final say in the decision-making process**. Group members feel engaged in the process and are more motivated and creative. Democratic leaders tend to make followers feel like they are an important part of the team, which helps foster commitment to the goals of the group.

**3. Delegative Leadership (Laissez-Faire)**

Researchers found that children under delegative leadership, also known as laissez-faire leadership, were the least productive of all three groups. **The children in this group also made more demands on the leader, showed little cooperation, and were unable to work independently**.

**Delegative leaders offer little or no guidance to group members and leave decision-making up to group members.** While this style can be useful in situations involving highly qualified experts, it often leads to poorly defined roles and a lack of motivation.

Lewin noted that laissez-faire leadership tended to result in groups that lacked direction where members blamed each other for mistakes, refused to accept personal responsibility, and produced a lack of progress and work.

**Observations About Lewin's Leadership Styles**

Authoritarian leaders are often described as controlling and close-minded, yet this overlooks the potential positives of stressing rules, expecting obedience, and taking responsibility.

While authoritarian leadership certainly is not the best choice for each and every situation, it can be effective and beneficial in cases where followers need a great deal of direction and where rules and standards must be followed to the letter. Another often overlooked benefit of the authoritarian style is the ability to maintain a sense of order.

Conversely, democratic leadership tends to be centered on the followers and is an effective approach when trying to maintain relationships with others. People who work under such leaders tend to get along well, support one another, and consult other members of the group when making decisions.

**Additional Leadership Styles and Models**

In addition to the three styles identified by Lewin and his colleagues, researchers have described numerous other characteristic patterns of leadership. Here are just a few of the best-known:

**1. The Transformational Leadership Style**

Transformational leadership is often identified as the single most effective style. This style was first described during the late **1970s** and later expanded upon by researcher **Bernard M. Bass**. Some of the key characteristics of his style of leadership are the abilities to motivate and inspire followers and to direct positive changes in groups.

**Transformational leaders tend to be emotionally intelligent, energetic, and passionate. They are not only committed to helping the organization achieve its goals, but also to helping group members fulfill their potential.**

Research has revealed that this style of leadership resulted in higher performance and more improved group satisfaction than other leadership styles. Moreover, transformational leadership leads to improved well-being among group members.

**2. The Transactional Leadership Style**

The transactional leadership style views the leader-follower relationship as a transaction. **By accepting a position as a member of the group, the individual has agreed to obey the leader**. In most situations, this involves the employer-employee relationship, and the transaction focuses on the follower completing required tasks in exchange for monetary compensation.

**One of the main advantages of this leadership style is that it creates clearly defined roles.** People know what they are required to do and what they will be receiving in exchange for completing these tasks. It also allows leaders to offer a great deal of supervision and direction if it's needed. Group members may also be motivated to perform well to receive rewards. One of the biggest downsides is that the transactional style tends to stifle creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.

### 3. Situational Leadership Styles

Situational theories of leadership stress the significant influence of the environment and the situation on leadership. Two of these theories include:

* **Hersey and Blanchard's leadership styles:** Hersey and Blanchard's model is one of the best-known situational theories. First published in 1969, this model describes four primary styles of leadership, including:
1. The **telling style** is characterized by telling people what to do.
2. The **selling style** involves leaders convincing followers to buy into their ideas and messages.
3. The **participating style** is marked by allowing group members to take a more active role in the decision-making process.
4. The **delegating style** involves taking a hands-off approach to leadership and allowing group members to make the majority of decisions.
* **Blanchard's SLII leadership styles:** Later, Blanchard expanded upon the original Hersey and Blanchard model to emphasize how the developmental and skill level of learners influences the style that should be used by leaders. Blanchard also described four different learning styles, including:
* The **directing style** involves giving orders and expecting obedience but offers little in the way of guidance and assistance.
* The **coaching style** means giving lots of orders, but leaders also give lots of support.
* The **supporting style** is an approach that offers plenty of help, but very little direction.
* The **delegating style** is low in both direction and support.

**FOCUS ON DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP**

Democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership or shared leadership, is a type of [leadership style](https://www.verywellmind.com/leadership-styles-2795312) in which members of the group take a more participative role in the [decision-making process](https://www.verywellmind.com/decision-making-strategies-2795483). This type of leadership can apply to any organization, from private businesses to schools to government.

Everyone is given the opportunity to participate, ideas are exchanged freely, and discussion is encouraged. While the democratic process tends to focus on group equality and the free flow of ideas, the leader of the group is still there to offer guidance and control. The democratic leader is charged with deciding who is in the group and who gets to contribute to the decisions that are made.

Researchers have found that the democratic [leadership style](https://www.verywellmind.com/ways-to-become-a-better-leader-2795324) is one of the most effective types and leads to higher productivity, better contributions from group members, and increased group morale.

### Characteristics of Democratic Leadership

Some of the primary characteristics of democratic leadership include:

* Group members are encouraged to share ideas and opinions, even though the leader retains the final say over decisions.
* Members of the group feel more engaged in the process.
* Creativity is encouraged and rewarded.

Researchers suggest that good democratic leaders possess specific traits that include:

* Honesty
* Intelligence
* Courage
* Creativity
* Competence
* Fairness

Strong democratic leaders inspire trust and respect among followers. They are sincere and base their decisions on their morals and values. Followers tend to feel inspired to take action and contribute to the group. Good leaders also tend to seek diverse opinions and do not try to silence dissenting voices or those that offer a less popular point of view.

#### Benefits

* More ideas and creative solutions
* Group member commitment
* High productivity

#### Drawbacks

* Communication failures
* Poor decision-making by unskilled groups
* Minority or individual opinions overridden

### Benefits of Democratic Leadership

Because group members are encouraged to share their thoughts, democratic leadership can lead to better ideas and more creative solutions to problems. Group members also feel more involved and committed to projects, making them more likely to care about the end results.

### Drawbacks of Democratic Leadership

While democratic leadership has been described as the most effective leadership style, it does have some potential downsides. In situations where roles are unclear or time is of the essence, democratic leadership can lead to communication failures and uncompleted projects. In some cases, group members may not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to make quality contributions to the decision-making process. Democratic leadership can also lead to team members feeling like their opinions and ideas are not taken into account, which may lower employee satisfaction and morale.

**FOCUS ON LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP**

Laissez-faire leadership, also known as delegative leadership, is a type of [leadership style](https://www.verywellmind.com/leadership-styles-2795312) in which leaders are hands-off and allow group members to make the decisions. Researchers have found that this is generally the leadership style that leads to the lowest productivity among group members.

However, it is important to realize that this leadership style can have both benefits and possible pitfalls. There are also certain settings and situations where a laissez-faire leadership style might be the most appropriate. [Knowing your dominant leadership style](https://www.verywellmind.com/whats-your-leadership-style-3866929) can be helpful for understanding your own strengths and potential weakness.

### Characteristics of Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by:

* Very little guidance from leaders
* Complete freedom for followers to make decisions
* Leaders provide the tools and resources needed
* Group members are expected to solve problems on their own
* Power is handed over to followers, yet leaders still take responsibility for the groups decisions and actions

There have been a number of well-known political and business leaders throughout history who have exhibited characteristics of a laissez-faire leadership style. Steve Jobs was known for giving instructions about what he would like to see to his team but then leaving them to their own devices to figure out how to fulfill his wishes. Former U.S. President Herbert Hoover was famous for taking a more laissez-faire approach to governing, often by allowing more experienced advisors to take on tasks where he lacked knowledge and expertise.

#### Benefits

* Can work for motivated teams with high expertise and skills
* Creative teams may value the independence
* Works well when leader provides needed information and materials at start of project

#### Drawbacks

* Not good for groups lacking needed skills, motivation, adherence to deadlines
* Can result in poor performance and outcomes
* Leader may appear uninvolved
* Confusion over roles in the group

### Benefits of Laissez-Faire Leadership

Like other leadership styles, the delegative approach has both a number of benefits and shortcomings. Sometimes this style can be effective, particularly if it is used appropriately in the right settings and with groups that respond well.

Some examples of when this style of leadership works well:

**When team members have the skills to succeed.** Laissez-faire leadership can be effective in situations where group members are highly skilled, [motivated,](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-motivation-2795378) and capable of working on their own. Since these group members are experts and have the knowledge and skills to work independently, they are capable of accomplishing tasks with very little guidance.

**When group members are experts.** The delegative style can be particularly effective in situations where group members are actually more knowledgeable than the group's leader. Because team members are the experts in a particular area, the laissez-faire style allows them to demonstrate their deep knowledge and skill surrounding that particular subject.

**When independence is valued.** This autonomy can be freeing to some group members and help them feel more satisfied with their work. The laissez-faire style can be used in situations where followers have a high-level of passion and [intrinsic motivation](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-intrinsic-motivation-2795385) for their work.

While the conventional term for this style is 'laissez-faire' and implies a completely hands-off approach, many leaders still remain open and available to group members for consultation and feedback. They might provide direction at the beginning of a project, but then allow group members to do their jobs with little oversight.

This approach to leadership requires a great deal of trust. Leaders need to feel confident that the members of their group possess the skills, knowledge, and follow through to complete a project without being micromanaged.

### Downsides of Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership is not ideal in situations where group members lack the knowledge or experience they need to complete tasks and make decisions. This style of leadership has been linked to negative outcomes including poor job performance, low leader effectiveness, and less group satisfaction.

Some people are not good at setting their own deadlines, managing their own projects and solving problems on their own. In such situations, projects can go off-track and deadlines can be missed when team members do not get enough guidance or feedback from leaders.

Some possible negative sides of the laissez-faire style:

**Lack of role awareness.** In some situations, the laissez-faire style leads to poorly defined roles within the group. Since team members receive little to no guidance, they might not really be sure about their role within the group and what they are supposed to be doing with their time.

**Poor involvement with the group.** Laissez-faire leaders are often seen as uninvolved and withdrawn, which can lead to a lack of cohesiveness within the group. Since the leader seems unconcerned with what is happening, followers sometimes pick up on this and express less care and concern for the project.

**Low accountability.** Some leaders might even take advantage of this style as a way to avoid personal responsibility for the group's failures. When goals are not met, the leader can then blame members of the team for not completing tasks or living up to expectations.

**Passivity and avoidance.** At its worst, laissez-faire leadership represents passivity or even an outright avoidance of true leadership. In such cases, these leaders do nothing to try to motivate followers, do not recognize the efforts of team members, and make no attempts at involvement with the group.

If group members are unfamiliar with the task or the process needed to accomplish the task, leaders are better off taking a more hands-on approach. Eventually, as followers acquire more expertise, leaders might then switch back to a more delegative approach that gives group members more freedom to work independently.

### Where Laissez-Faire Leaders Might Thrive

If you tend to have a more laissez-faire approach to leadership, there are areas and situations where you might tend to do better. Working in a creative field where people tend to be highly motivated, skilled, creative, and dedicated to their work can be conducive to obtaining good results with this style.

For example, a delegative leader might excel in a product design field. Because team members are well-trained and highly creative, they likely need little in the way of management. Instead, an effective leader can provide minimal oversight and guidance and still produce high-quality results.

Laissez-faire leaders typically excel at proving information and background at the start of a project, which can be particularly useful for self-managed teams. By giving team members all that they need at the outset of an assignment, they will then have the knowledge they need to complete the task as directed.

Even in such fields, it may pay to utilize a variety of leadership approaches at different phases of the work process. For example, laissez-faire leadership may be most effective during the early phases when a product or idea is being brainstormed or created. Once the design is in place and ready for production, it may be best to switch to a style that involves more direction and oversight.

A leader with this style may struggle in situations that require great oversight, precision, and attention to detail. In high stakes and high-pressure work settings where every detail needs to be perfect and completed in a timely manner, a more [authoritarian](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-autocratic-leadership-2795314) or managerial style may be more appropriate. Using a laissez-faire approach in this type of scenario can lead to missed deadlines and poor performance, particularly if group members are unsure of what they need to be doing or do not have the skills they need to perform tasks with little to no direction.

The laissez-faire style of leadership is often dismissed as one that leads to poor group outcomes, but it can be appropriate and effective in a variety of situations. In setting where group members are highly skilled and motivated, it can actually produce excellent results. Because team members get to exercise a great deal of freedom free from excessive micromanaging, they often feel more inspired and creative.

If you tend to be more of a laissez-faire leader, you may find it helpful to think about the sort of situations where you might excel in a leadership role. In settings where the group needs more oversight or direction, you may find that you need to consciously focus on adopting a more authoritarian or [democratic approach](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-democratic-leadership-2795315). By examining your own style, you can hone your skills and [become a better leader](https://www.verywellmind.com/ways-to-become-a-better-leader-2795324).