Popular Leadership Styles

The leadership theories and styles discussed in the lesson fit within formal theoretical frameworks. However, many more terms are used to describe leadership styles, even if these don't fit within a particular system. It's worth understanding these.

1. **Autocratic leadership**

Autocratic leadership is an extreme form of transactional leadership, where leaders have absolute power over their workers or team. Staff and team members have little opportunity to make suggestions, even if these would be in the team's or the organization's best interest.

Most people tend to resent being treated like this. Therefore, autocratic leadership often leads to high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover. However, for some routine and unskilled jobs, the style can remain effective because the advantages of control may outweigh the disadvantages.

2. **Bureaucratic leadership**

Bureaucratic leaders work "by the book." They follow rules rigorously, and ensure that their staff follows procedures precisely. This is an appropriate style for work involving serious risks such as working with machinery, with toxic substances, or at dangerous heights.

3. **Charismatic leadership**

A charismatic leadership style can seem similar to transformational leadership because these leaders inspire lots of enthusiasm in their teams and are very energetic in driving others forward. However, charismatic leaders can tend to believe more in themselves than in their teams, and this creates a risk that a project, or even an entire organization, might collapse if the leader leaves. In the eyes of the followers, success is directly connected to the presence of the charismatic leader. As such, charismatic leadership carries great responsibility, and it needs a long-term commitment from the leader.

4. **Democratic leadership or participative leadership**

Although democratic leaders make the final decisions, they invite other members of the team to contribute to the decision-making process. This not only increases job satisfaction by involving team members, but it also helps to develop people's skills. Team members feel in control of their own destiny, so they're motivated to work harder by more than just a financial reward.

Because participation takes time, this approach can take longer, but often the end result is better. The approach can be most suitable when working as a team is essential, and when quality is more important than speed to market, or productivity.

5. **Laissez-faire leadership**

This French phrase means "leave it be," and it's used to describe leaders who leave their team members to work on their own. It can be effective if the leader monitors what's being achieved and communicates this back to the team regularly. Most often, laissez-faire leadership is effective when individual team...
members are very experienced and skilled self-starters. Unfortunately, this type of leadership can also occur when managers don't apply sufficient control.

6. **People-oriented or relations-oriented leadership**

This is the opposite of task-oriented leadership. With people-oriented leadership, leaders are totally focused on organizing, supporting, and developing the people in their teams. It's a participative style, and it tends to encourage good teamwork and creative collaboration.

In practice, most leaders use both task-oriented and people-oriented styles of leadership.

7. **Servant leadership**

This term, created by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, describes a leader who is often not formally recognized as such. When someone, at any level within an organization, leads simply by meeting the needs of the team, he or she is described as a "servant leader."

In many ways, servant leadership is a form of democratic leadership, because the whole team tends to be involved in decision making.

Supporters of the servant leadership model suggest that it's an important way to move ahead in a world where values are increasingly important, and where servant leaders achieve power on the basis of their values and ideals.

8. **Task-Oriented leadership**

Highly task-oriented leaders focus only on getting the job done, and they can be quite autocratic. They actively define the work and the roles required, put structures in place, plan, organize, and monitor. However, because task-oriented leaders don't tend to think much about the well-being of their teams, this approach can suffer many of the flaws of autocratic leadership, with difficulties in motivating and retaining staff.

9. **Transactional leadership**

This style of leadership starts with the idea that team members agree to totally obey their leader when they accept a job. The "transaction" is usually the organization paying the team members in return for their effort and compliance. The leader has a right to "punish" team members if their work doesn't meet the pre-determined standard.

Team members can do little to improve their job satisfaction under transactional leadership. The leader could give team members some control of their income/reward by using incentives that encourage even higher standards or greater productivity. Alternatively, a transactional leader could practice "management by exception" – rather than rewarding better work, the leader could take corrective action if the required standards are not met.
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Transactional leadership is really a type of management, not a true leadership style, because the focus is on short-term tasks. It has serious limitations for knowledge-based or creative work; however it can be effective in other situations.

10. Transformational leadership

As we discussed in the lesson, people with this leadership style are true leaders who inspire their teams constantly with a shared vision of the future. While this leader’s enthusiasm is often passed onto the team, he or she can need to be supported by "detail people." That’s why, in many organizations, both transactional and transformational leadership is needed. The transactional leaders (or managers) ensure that routine work is done reliably, while the transformational leaders look after initiatives that add new value.