

Leadership Styles – a starting point

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When exploring the topic of leadership styles – a myriad of models and approaches jumps to mind. It is not uncommon to start remembering (reflecting on) leaders you have known or who have had influence on you personally – both good and bad. The exercise is very useful – and is best contextualized in terms of the size, nature and focus of the organization in which these leaders operated. It is also feasible that good leaders you have encountered fluctuated between styles – given changing circumstances.

Influenced by Knight (2024) – six specific leadership styles are well worth consideration -

[6 Common Leadership Styles — and How to Decide Which to Use When \(hbr.org\)](#)

Coercive leadership

The focus here is on ensuring compliance and fast turn-around results. The leader can be aggressive at times – demanding often – and sometimes even outright rude. Industries with strict deadlines and processes often cultivate this particular style – and though it is often effective in terms of outcomes – it is generally not appreciated by underlings and subordinates.

Authoritative leadership

This is largely about developing a strong vision for the future, and ensuring those plans are carried out – often to the letter. The style can be very productive – but not particularly democratic or sensitive to the needs of those around the leader. Some refer to it as a ‘military’ style approach where the greater good is the most important thing.

Pacesetting leadership

The intent is about setting standard – and leading ‘from the front’. It is usually evidenced in the leader taking a proactive role in the operation – and setting the pace. It can be a very useful style in that it provides the larger team with a rhythm and flow of activity that is built on expectations – and those laid out by the pace setter. It can also be exhausting if the pace is too fast and too demanding. Pacesetters are often high achievers.

Affiliative leadership

The focus here is about building a sense of emotional affiliation with team members. It can be useful in developing identity and mission but can be difficult for those who do not quite ‘fit the mold’ so to speak. The approach can be highly effective – and at the same time alienating.

Democratic leadership

The approach is largely about gaining consensus – or at least a majority view on managing and progressing. The style is demanding in that it requires gaining ‘buy in’ from members – but the outcome can become quite powerful and pervasive.

Coaching leadership

The focus here is on encouraging performance with a particular view of developing leaders within the group – whether they stay with the company or move on to lead other institutions. This approach often creates high levels of support and loyalty.

*On reflection – all six styles can be useful and effective. The most effective leaders (in my mind and my memory) were the ones that were able to adjust their style to suit the circumstance – and this often meant varying to suit the circumstance within the same organization. A good example is an organization that started as a small entity with the prevailing leadership being **democratic** – but as the organization grew and grew the style varied to at times **authoritative** and then on to **coaching**. Size, focus and timing are huge factors influencing leadership style.*

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