

Introduction

Leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people. As seen by the employees, it includes the total pattern of explicit and implicit actions performed by their leader (Newstrom, Davis, 1993).

The first major study of leadership styles was performed in 1939 by Kurt Lewin who led a group of researchers to identify different styles of leadership (Lewin, Lippit, White, 1939). This early study has remained quite influential as it established the three major leadership styles: (U.S. Army, 1973):

- **authoritarian or autocratic** - the leader tells his or her employees what to do and how to do it, without getting their advice
- **participative or democratic** - the leader includes one or more employees in the decision making process, but the leader normally maintains the final decision making authority
- **delegative or laissez-fair (free-rein)** - the leader allows the employees to make the decisions, however, the leader is still responsible for the decisions that are made

Credit: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadstl.html>

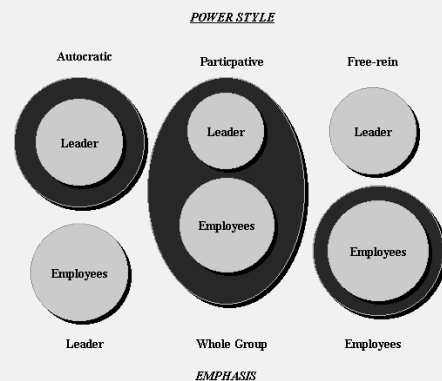
Authoritarian or Autocratic Leadership

When leaders tell their employees what they want done and how they want it accomplished, without getting the advice of their followers. Appropriate conditions to use this style is when you have all the information to solve the problem, you are short on time, and/or your employees are well motivated.

Some people think of this style as a vehicle for yelling, using demeaning language, and leading by threats. This is not the authoritarian style, it is an abusive, unprofessional style called "bossing people around."

The authoritarian style should normally only be used on rare occasions. If you have the time and want to gain more commitment and motivation from your employees, then you should use the participative style.

Leadership Styles



Participative or Democratic Leadership

The leader including one or more employees in the decision making process determine what to do and how to do it. However, the leader maintains the final decision making authority. Using this style is not a sign of weakness, rather it is a sign of strength that employees respect.

This is normally used when you have part of the information, and your employees have other parts. A leader is not expected to know everything—this is why you employ knowledgeable and skilled people. Using this style is of mutual benefit as it allows them to become part of the team and allows you to make better decisions. Even if you have all the answers, gaining different perspectives and diversity of opinions normally provide greater creativity than insularity.

Delegative or Laissez-faire Leadership

The leader allows the employees to make the decisions. However, the leader is still responsible for the decisions that are made. This is used when employees are able to analyze the situation and determine what needs to be done and how to do it. You cannot do everything! You must set priorities and delegate certain tasks. This is not a style to use so that you can blame others when things go wrong, rather this is a style to be used when you fully trust and have confidence in the people below you. Do not be afraid to use it, however, use it wisely!

NOTE: Laissez-faire (or *lais-ser faire*) is the noninterference in the affairs of others. [French : laissez, second person pl. imperative of *laisser*, to let, allow + *faire*, to do.]