

Lecture Transcript: Introduction to Leadership Styles

Module: Principles of Management and Leadership

Duration: Approximately 5–7 minutes of spoken content

Good morning everyone. Today we're going to explore four common leadership styles that are widely discussed in management and organisational behaviour: autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and situational leadership.

Understanding these styles is important because leadership is not simply about being in charge. Effective leaders influence, motivate and guide others towards achieving shared goals. Different situations often require different approaches, and successful leaders are usually able to adapt their style depending on the circumstances.

Let's begin with autocratic leadership.

An autocratic leader makes decisions independently and expects team members to follow instructions with little or no input into the decision-making process. Communication is generally one-way, flowing from the leader to the team.

This style can be particularly effective in situations where quick decisions are needed, such as during emergencies or when managing health and safety risks. For example, a fire service incident commander may need to make immediate decisions without consulting every member of the team.

However, autocratic leadership can also have disadvantages. Team members may feel excluded, less motivated, or less committed to decisions because they have not been involved in the process. Over time, creativity and innovation may be reduced if people feel their opinions are not valued.

Next, let's consider democratic leadership.

Democratic leaders encourage participation and seek input from team members before making decisions. Although the leader usually makes the final decision, team members are given opportunities to share ideas, opinions and expertise.

This leadership style often leads to higher levels of engagement, motivation and job satisfaction because people feel valued and involved. For example, a project manager developing a new service might consult team members about potential improvements before deciding on the final approach.

The main disadvantage is that decision-making can take longer. If there are many stakeholders involved, reaching agreement may be challenging, particularly when time is limited.

Our third style is laissez-faire leadership.

The term laissez-faire comes from a French phrase meaning "let do" or "allow to do." Leaders using this approach provide minimal direction and allow team members considerable freedom to manage their own work.

This style can be highly effective when working with experienced, skilled and self-motivated individuals. For example, a university research team made up of experts in different fields may require very little direct supervision.

However, laissez-faire leadership can create problems if team members are inexperienced, unclear about expectations, or require more guidance. Without sufficient direction, productivity and accountability may decrease.

Finally, let's look at situational leadership.

Situational leadership is different from the previous styles because it suggests there is no single best way to lead. Instead, leaders should adapt their approach according to the needs of the situation, the task and the individuals involved.

For example, a leader may adopt an autocratic style when dealing with a crisis requiring immediate action, but use a democratic approach when planning a long-term strategy. Similarly, they may use a more supportive or hands-off approach when working with experienced team members who are capable of working independently.

The key principle of situational leadership is flexibility. Effective leaders assess the circumstances and adjust their behaviour to achieve the best outcomes.

To summarise, autocratic leadership involves leader-led decision-making and can be effective in urgent situations. Democratic leadership encourages participation and can improve engagement and motivation. Laissez-faire leadership provides high levels of autonomy and works best with experienced and self-directed teams. Situational leadership emphasises adapting leadership behaviour according to the needs of the situation and the people involved.

As future managers and professionals, it is important to recognise that no leadership style is universally effective. The most successful leaders understand the strengths and limitations of different approaches and apply them appropriately within different contexts.