6 Management Styles and When to Use Them

Think back on your career and the managers you have had. I am sure that you have had good managers and others who were maybe not so great. When I ask people to list what made the good managers "good," most of the examples they give me are to do with behavior, or style.

One of the interesting things about style is that managers with the most flexibility in style get the best outcomes from their people. Leadership style is not about good/bad, right/wrong: leadership style depends on the task, people and situation to be managed.

According to Hay-McBer there are six key leadership or management styles.

The DIRECTIVE (Coercive) style has the primary objective of immediate compliance from employees:

The "do it the way I tell you" manager
Closely controls employees
Motivates by threats and discipline

Effective when:

There is a crisis
When deviations are risky
Ineffective when:

Employees are underdeveloped — little learning happens with this style
Employees are highly skilled — they become frustrated and resentful at the micromanaging.

The AUTHORITATIVE (Visionary) style has the primary objective of providing long-term direction and vision for employees:

The "firm but fair" manager
Gives employees clear direction
Motivates by persuasion and feedback on task performance
Effective when:

Clear directions and standards needed
The leader is credible
Ineffective when:

Employees are underdeveloped — they need guidance on what to do
The leader is not credible — people won't follow your vision if they don't believe in it

The AFFILIATIVE style has the primary objective of creating harmony among employees and between manager and employees:

The "people first, task second" manager

Avoids conflict and emphasizes good personal relationships among employees
Motivates by trying to keep people happy
Effective when:

Used with other styles
Tasks routine, performance adequate
Counseling, helping
Managing conflict
Least effective when:

Performance is inadequate - affiliation does not emphasise performance
There are crisis situations needing direction

The PARTICIPATIVE (Democratic) style has the primary objective of building commitment and consensus among employees:

The "everyone has input" manager
Encourages employee input in decision making
Motivates by rewarding team effort
Effective when:

Employees working together
Staff have experience and credibility
Steady working environment
Least effective when:

Employees must be coordinated
There is a crisis - no time for meetings
There is a lack of competency - close supervision required

The PACESETTING style has the primary objective of accomplishing tasks to a high standard of excellence:

The "do it myself" manager
Performs many tasks personally and expects employees to follow his/her example
Motivates by setting high standards and expects self-direction from employees
Effective when:

People are highly motivated, competent
Little direction/coordination required
When managing experts
Least effective when:

When workload requires assistance from others
When development, coaching & coordination required

The COACHING style has the primary objective of long-term professional development of employees:

The "developmental" manager
Helps and encourages employees to develop their strengths and improve their performance
Motivates by providing opportunities for professional development
Effective when:

Skill needs to be developed
Employees are motivated and wanting development
Ineffective when:

The leader lacks expertise
When performance discrepancy is too great - coaching managers may persist rather than exit a poor performer
In a crisis

STYLES IN ACTION

The DIRECTIVE leader orders the team around, sets high standards and disciplines those who don't meet the standard. I brief the leader beforehand to change his / her mind several times during the activity and also to take a phone call and leave the room. When the leader is out of the room, the team usually stops work — concerned about the consequences of continuing without the micromanagement. After the activity the team reports that they are frustrated, angry and disengaged. It is interesting how quickly the team loses enthusiasm and initiative under the directive leader. The leader reports that the style is "high maintenance — I felt like I had to be everywhere, watching everyone, it was exhausting"!

The AUTHORITATIVE (Visionary) leader sets the vision for the team, clearly and compellingly, then steps back and allows the team to work. The leader steps in from time to time to reiterate the vision if required, but that is all he / she does. The leader reports that the style was "easy — I didn't have to do much and I could see how the style would free me up to operate strategically". The team report enjoying the activity, and feel enormously proud of the work they have done, often getting out their smart phones to take pictures posing with their creation.

The AFFILIATIVE leader takes time helping the team to bond. They often sit down for a cup of tea and a round table sharing of stories. Often the activity is not even commenced as the team gets caught up in getting to know each other. More task focused team members often look around and get anxious when they can see other teams working. Sometimes one of those people will leap in and take control, effectively "sacking" the leader. The team reports that they enjoyed the sharing and relaxed atmosphere, but that they started to wonder when they would start work. The leader often reports that it was "challenging keeping the focus on team bonding — they started to get sick of me after a while"

The PARTICIPATIVE (Democratic) leader starts by asking all the team members what they would like to do, then voting on the options. They start in the car park, and I have on occasion seen the team vote to get a coffee and disappear. They are then startled to find when they return that there was an activity to do that they missed! Even when the team votes to come inside and do the activity the progress is slow as everything has to be agreed before action happens. Team members report that they enjoyed being consulted and having a voice in the decision making, but

got anxious when they could see lack of progress compared with other teams. The leader reports that "it was easy — I didn't have to make any decisions".

The PACESETTING leader sets a cracking pace from the beginning. The team operates with high energy, engagement and motivation. The leader sets members tasks, but then takes the task off them if they are "not performing" and gives it to someone else. Despite this, the team members remain engaged, seeing this as a consequence of the high standards set by the leader. At the end of the task the team reports that they enjoyed the experience, are proud of what they achieved, but are exhausted. The leader is often exhausted too, saying "it was fantastic, but really challenging to maintain the pace and focus. I am glad we only had to do it for 40 minutes"!

The COACHING leader focusses on the learning experience. When a team member proves to be particularly good at an aspect of the task, the leader has them demonstrate and teach the others. The team gets absorbed in the learning and people are often surprised to hear that the time is up. They are engaged with and proud of their achievements, even though they often don't fully complete the task. The leader often reports that they "really enjoyed working with the team and I'd love to have had more time so we could finish because we were doing a great job".

It is a fascinating exercise that demonstrates clearly that there is no best style. The most appropriate style will depend on the people (their experience, values, motives) and the situation (stable/changing, new/seasonal team, short/long term focus). The key to being an effective leader is to have a broad repertoire of styles and to use them appropriately.