

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SERIES (ALDS) SESSION 2

Leadership Style and Practice

"The best leaders have the ability to effectively communicate, engage, and influence across a full spectrum of different perspectives and personalities."

— Germany Kent, Media Professional, Writer, and Producer

Session Goal

The goal of this session is to begin to recognize your preferred leadership style and how identity informs and intersects with your leadership practice.

Leadership style can be appreciated as the approach a leader uses to provide direction, execute plans, and motivating people. There is no fixed leadership style. Flexibility in the context of leadership is critical if one is to navigate today's everchanging higher education landscape. Consider, if you will, how your personality influences your leadership style and how this can impact, for better or worse, the dynamics of your department, as well as your interactions with others (e.g., university leadership, colleagues on committees, etc.) when engaged in university work. To begin thinking more intentionally about leadership style, think about the following questions. Are you

- more authoritarian or egalitarian?
- a person who prefers face-to-face engagement or do you prefer to conduct business by email?
- comfortable when faculty and staff approach you with professional and personal troubles?
- a person who avoids conflict at all cost or a person that is willing to face conflict?
- trusting enough of your colleagues to delegate critical tasks?
- more likely to tend towards skepticism or finding a solution to a problem?
- a perfectionist?
- comfortable passing along all manner of tasks and not following up or providing guidance?

Based on your responses to these questions, which of the following four leadership styles do you think best fits you?

- Autocratic: Authoritarian and result-focused
- Democratic: Supportive and innovative
- Laissez-faire: Hands-off
- Transformational: Challenging and communicative

Descriptions of these and other leadership styles, along with advantages and disadvantages, can be found at the Indeed.com [Career Development blog](#). By taking time to acquaint yourself with different types of leadership, you might come to identify particular areas to improve upon or develop your own leadership style. As you do your work, try to remember these three guiding statements:

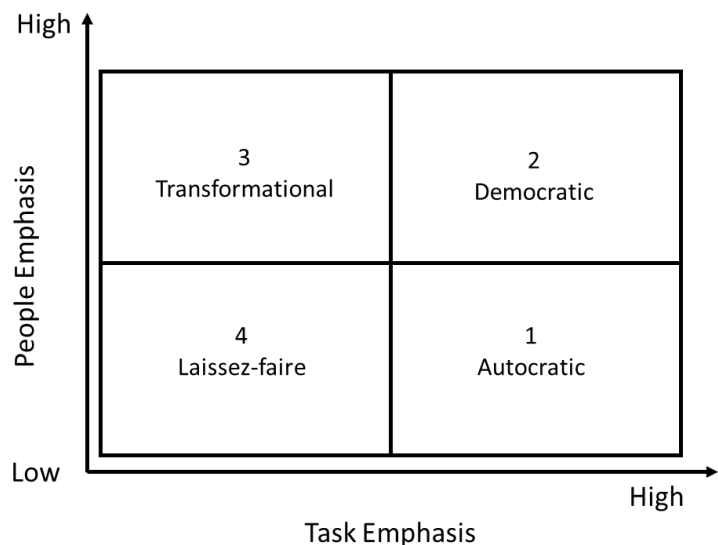
- Understanding yourself better is the first step to becoming more effective when working with others.
- Everyone's work style is influenced by other factors such as life experiences, education, and maturity.
- Learning about people's traits and characteristics can help you understand their priorities and how they may differ from your own.

Four Quadrant Leadership Style Map

Adapted from *Expert Program Management: [Important Leadership Styles – And When to Use Them](#)*

Leadership is the ability to motivate a group of people to move towards achieving a shared goal. A leader is the person in a group that possesses the combination of leadership and personality skills that makes others choose to work to achieve a shared goal. There are many different styles of leadership and understanding which type you are will better equip you to avoid the common pitfalls associated with a particular style. The ability to adjust leadership style based on the situation is critical. For example, turning around a struggling department might require a more forthright approach than growing an already successful department. Moving between leadership styles is facilitated by having an appreciation of the depth of skills associated with a team.

Consider the following four quadrant map that describes the relationship between four common leadership styles and the degree of people vs task emphasis. Note, the higher the skill level of the team members, the higher the box number and the more suitable that style of leadership. So, for example, employing an autocratic leadership style is appropriate when leading a team with a low skill level. The laissez-faire leadership style on the other hand is better suited with a group having a very high degree of skill. Using this map as a guide you can see:



- Autocratic leaders have a high task emphasis and low people emphasis.
- Democratic leaders have a high task emphasis as well as a high people emphasis.
- Transformational leaders have a low task emphasis and high people emphasis
- Laissez-faire leaders have a low task emphasis and low people emphasis

The essential point – a leader’s style should change according to which quadrant the groups’ capabilities reside. Another point to note from this map, that isn’t immediately apparent, is that the abilities of the leader, with respect to *soft* and *hard* skills, must increase as we move from box 1 to 4. Why might this be the case? Although everyone has a default leadership style, appreciating the pros and cons of the different styles helps a leader more effectively move between quadrants.

So, let’s consider some of the characteristics of the four styles and consider some advantages and disadvantages.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is leader-centered, and leader driven. All or nearly all of the decision-making resides with the leader, and there is little if any opportunity for team members to offer consultation. An autocratic leader will expect the team to execute, with no questions asked. With autocratic leadership, authority is in the hands of a single person, the leader. What are a few advantages and disadvantages of this leadership style? Provide an example of when it best to employ autocratic leadership?

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership also called participative leadership is focused on the team and is distinguished by the free sharing ideas via open discussion and shared decision making across the team. In this form of leadership, the leader guides and directs conversations. This type of leadership works best when team members are knowledgeable and secure (confident) with their knowledge and experiences. What are a few advantages and disadvantages of this leadership style? Provide an example of when it best to employ democratic leadership?

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership requires one to model the behavior they expect to see, set clear goals through effective communication. A transformational leader will have high expectations but understands the importance of guiding the team by supporting their work toward a goal. As a leader, he/she works to motivate their team by promoting an honest, no-blame culture where the focus is solving a problem, and not who is responsible for creating the problem. What are a few advantages and disadvantages of this leadership style? Provide an example of when it best to employ democratic leadership?

Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by a leader who doesn't lead the team but instead allows the team to self-direct its work. This is a hands-off style and in contrast to the other leadership styles, all authority is given to the team (e.g., goal setting, strategic planning, problem-solving, etc.). This type of leadership requires, as one would surmise, a very strong team of confident, highly skilled, self-managing people. What are a few advantages and disadvantages of this leadership style? Provide an example of when it best to employ democratic leadership?

After considering these four leadership styles, which of these, if any, have you experienced as a member of a "team" and not as the leader? Have you ever considered your leadership style or an persons' style of leadership?