



Understand your Leadership Style

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The definition of leadership has been much debated for many years with no single term seemingly able to satisfy all situations and all Academics. Most frequently leadership is seen as the action of leading a group of people or an organization, or the ability to do so¹. How a leader approaches and carries out their role is known as their leadership style. No one leadership style is successful all of the time. Successful leaders must have the ability to use multiple leadership styles and change between them as circumstances dictate.

Why is leadership important?

Medical leadership is fundamental to improving the performance of the health service². Physician engagement is a key marker for high performing hospitals³. A higher level of engagement is more likely to engender a positive effect including satisfaction and commitment, thus leading to better performance at an individual and organisational level⁴.

What is a leadership style?

A leadership style describes the way in which a leader influences those around them, motivates people and implements plans. There are many different leadership styles described in the literature. Early writers focused on the characteristics of successful leaders. Trait theory suggested that intelligence, integrity, drive and self-confidence were all crucial for successful leadership. However, this has been proven to not always be the case⁵.

Focus then shifted to the behaviours of successful leaders and how a leadership style impacted on groups. Blake and Mouton described the difference between 'task focused' and 'people focused' leaders⁶. By plotting a leader's 'focus on tasks' against their 'focus on people', five different leadership styles emerge in the form of a leadership grid (see figure 1). However, these two factors are not on opposite sides of a scale. Increasing focus on people does not necessarily reduce focus on results. The Leadership Grid clearly shows that a leader must focus on both people and results to be successful.

Academic focus then switched to the context or situation requiring leadership. Situational leadership describes four styles; directing, coaching, supporting and delegating⁷. Good leaders have to adapt each of these styles to take account of different situations. This approach also resonates with an adaptive leadership style⁸.

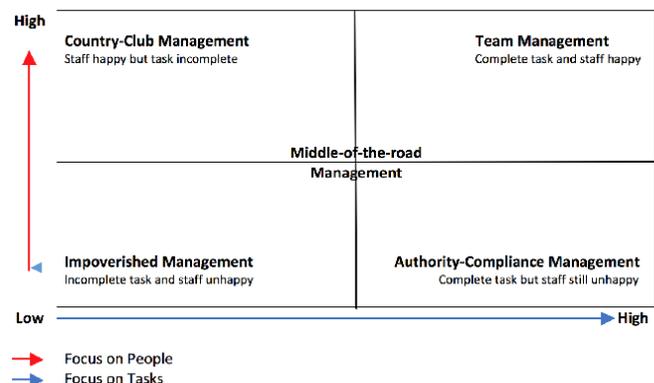


Figure 1: The Leadership Grid (Blake and McCanse 1991)⁹

Transformational leadership surfaced in the 1980s and described the concept of leading by transforming others to work towards a common agreed goal. This was particularly relevant for organisations that were subject to continuous change, like the NHS.

Leadership Styles and Emotional Intelligence:

Whilst medical leadership is fundamental to improving performance; emotional intelligence, which describes the ability to effectively manage ourselves and our relationships, has been shown to play an integral role in formulating a leadership style. There are four dimensions to emotional intelligence; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. Based on these four dimensions 6 different leadership styles have been identified⁹ (table 2). The most successful leaders use 4 or more different leadership styles, whereas the least effective use only two or less.

Table 2: Six leadership styles based in emotional intelligence (Haygroup 2006⁹)

Leadership Style	Description	Effective when . . .	Least effective when . . .
Directive "Do what I say!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tells staff what to do. Demands immediate compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applied to simple tasks. Used in emergency situations. Used with failing employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applied to complicated tasks. Used with motivated staff. Used over long periods of time.
Visionary "Come with me."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops and sells clear vision. Encourages employees to achieve vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In times of change. The leader is seen as the expert. New staff need guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used with highly experienced staff. The leader is not credible. Staff require development.
Affiliative "People come first."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates harmony. Keeps staff happy. Emphasis on employees' needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team performance is good. Morale needs boosting. There is a conflict within a team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is poor performance within a team. Team members require advice and guidance.
Participative "What do you think?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages employees to make decisions. Holds meetings and listens to concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members have specialist skills. Team members are more experienced in particular situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used in emergency situations. Team members are inexperienced.
Pacesetter "Do it this way."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads by example. Sets high standards. Takes responsibility for tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members are motivated and skilled. Quick results are needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are numerous tasks which require delegation. Team members require guidance and development.
Coaching "Try this."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops employees for the future. Provides advice and feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members can identify their own weaknesses and want to improve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The leader is inexperienced. Used in emergency situations. Team members are resistant to changing their ways.

Factors Affecting Choice of Leadership Style

When choosing a leadership style it is important to consider key factors that might affect a style's success. Commonly these include:

- Time pressure
- Levels of stress
- Internal conflicts
- The amount of respect/trust in a relationship
- Where the knowledge lies – with the leader, with the worker or both

- The ability and type of workers around you
- The nature of the task – simple or complicated, structured or unstructured

The right choice of leadership style may make the difference between a task's success and its failure.

Conclusion

All leadership styles can be effective if used with the right people in the right situation. Conversely, no leadership style is effective all of the time. Success as a leader is dependent upon the ability to understand the people around you and the situation being faced, and requires the ability to flexibly change leadership style as circumstances dictate in order to achieve the desired objectives.

Further Information

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