

6 Management Styles and When to Use Them

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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.

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