

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Key insights

- There are many different, equally valid styles of effective leadership.
- Each style has strengths and weaknesses of which effective leaders must be aware.
- Individual leadership styles often vary with context.
- Power in leadership derives from multiple sources, including expertise and relationships as well as position (reinforcing the distinction between leadership and authority).

Core quadrants leadership styles exercise

This exercise is adapted from the National Outdoor Leadership School's "no-doze" leadership styles class (Gookin & Leach 2009). This leadership styles class is useful at any time, but is most effective when the individuals of a group or team know each other. The better participants know each other, the better the information provided by the exercise. In other words, this should be a very constructive exercise to do with your teams at home, and can be repeated over time.

Goals of the exercise

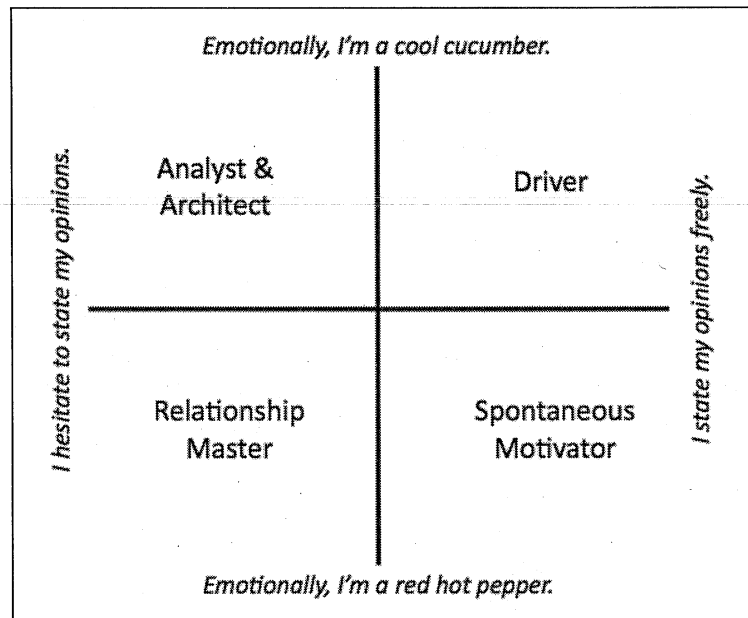
- Acknowledge the variety of valid styles of effective leadership.
- Gain insight into the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of different styles.
- Enhance awareness of individual "default" leadership styles.
- Build insight into how to lead others with different styles and needs.
- Develop comfort and facility with giving and receiving feedback as a leader.

Steps in the exercise

1. **Continuum One: approach.** Find an open space large enough to accommodate your group and outline a continuum line with two extreme ends defined in this way:
 - a. The extreme left is "**water**" (or another funny name like "amoeba"): "I don't often voice strong opinions, particularly if I think it will hurt someone's feelings or be a waste of time. I put others before myself consistently. I'm very flexible. You probably don't really know where I stand on issues, or what I think about you, unless you ask me very directly. It's hard for me to state my own needs."
 - b. The extreme right is "**wind**" (or "terrier"): "I state my opinion and take stands easily. People know exactly what I think, feel, and want. I'm an open book and you don't even have to read the words because I will tell them to you, especially if you cross one of my lines. I tell it like I see it and have no a problem telling you when you're wrong if need be."
2. Ask team members to place themselves anywhere on the continuum where they view themselves, and place yourself as well. **The precise middle is out of bounds.**
3. **Continuum two: emotion.** Without moving from this place on the continuum, have everyone move themselves along a second perpendicular continuum with the extreme ends defined in this way:
 - a. Emotionally cool ("**cool cucumber**"): "I am calm and rational, and I do not get flustered about anything. I even have difficulty acting excited about things that I really care about. My emotions are a glassy pond."

- b. Emotionally hot (“**hot pepper**”): “I tell everyone how I feel about everything. I get angry at injustice. I cry at sad movies. My emotions are extremely active – both high and low.”

These descriptions refer to how a person feels internally, which may be very different from how they are perceived by others. (See below.)



4. At this point, ask team members if they are willing to give and receive feedback about how others perceive their leadership style (i.e. where they have placed themselves along the continua). If yes, ask those who want to, *one at a time*, to step out of the line and move others' positions. Take turns doing this, while everyone else maintains his/her position. It generally works best if people don't feel that they need to justify why they moved anyone yet. Use silence or a few words like "I'm going to put you here."
5. At this point, everyone will be standing in one of four quadrants: explain the continua in a non-judgmental way, recognizing that **all styles are equally valid and important** (otherwise everyone will try to move to the middle).
- Talk about **strengths, weaknesses, and function of each quadrant**, using the descriptions in the chart on the next page. Make sure to spend equal time on each quadrant and emphasize that all styles are important by using value-free language in discussing each quadrant.
 - Some people will express that they have more than one favorite style. Ask them to discuss why and when they change styles (i.e. the **context-dependency** of leadership).
 - Ask team members to move to the quadrant from which it is hardest for them to lead and talk about this.
 - If you are leading this exercise as an instructor, let participants know what your dominant style is, or have them place you. Demonstrate that instructors have different style preferences, too, but these may change depending on events, social context, and roles.
 - If someone is way out in the corner of one quadrant, this indicated that for the context s/he had in mind, s/he is heavily oriented to one style. What are the benefits and drawbacks?
 - What happens if there is no one representing a style? Does a group need all four styles?

6. **Developing yourself as a leader** At this stage the exercise moves into small group discussion. One goal of developing yourself as a leader is to be aware of your preferred quadrants and your less comfortable ones. This will help you to know and build upon your strengths, and to be aware of areas that you need support or practice. Effective leadership requires an understanding of personal style, a good read on the situational context, and the group (social context). In the exercise, at this stage allow everyone to move back to his or her main quadrant and discuss the following questions with others in that quadrant. Some questions to explore:
- a. What is it like to lead from this quadrant?
 - b. Which other leadership styles are easiest to follow, and which are hardest? Recognize the tendency to “other” styles that are unfamiliar to you.
 - c. In what situation does this style work best? When does it not work well?
 - d. How can you learn from and partner with other quadrants?

ARCHITECTS & ANALYSTS

Emphasize meaning and conceptual functions

- + information and opinion seekers
- + good at analysis and process observation
- + prefer to make decisions based on facts
- + can generate novel solutions that work
- + translate feelings and experiences into ideas
- can be slow to make decisions or stuck in details
- can happily leave most decisions to others and focus on only one decision
- watch out for non-involvement or unrealistic ideas

If a leader has this style, honor his/her need for information while also requesting that the leader tells you how s/he will decide or delegate and when.

Some effects on the team & larger system

Architects and analysts are often in the minority but their function is essential. If a team doesn't pay attention to this area, it will miss out on significant learning that comes from observation and analysis. The team may also be missing important process steps or alternative perspectives. Too much of this style in a team may stall movement because the discussion, laid-back attitude and analysis allow opportunities to pass. Analysts & architects are essential developing new alternatives at the systemic level.

DRIVERS

Emphasize action and directing

- + information and opinion givers
- + decision making is easy
- + often the keepers of the vision in a group
- + great at taking a position, being direct, making things happen
- + usually not upset by critical feedback
- can be impatient with decision-making
- may offend by deciding without adequate input from others
- make mistakes when deciding without sufficient information
- can be perceived as impersonal & lose connection with group
- have to be careful not to "overlead"

If a leader has this style, be as direct as possible with him/her. Bring problems and opinions to them: they expect this.

Some effects on the team & larger system

If a team does not have drivers, they must pick up driver functions or they can fail to meet far-reaching goals. Mature drivers are non-reactionary individuals with strong ability in the other quadrants, and they help ground a group. When this style is not mature, there may be too much individuality or structure. Turf battles or a lack of member autonomy and collaboration can ensue. Drivers are essential in scaling up actions & alternatives.

RELATIONSHIP MASTERS

Emphasize connection and caring

- + excellent at building & sustaining community & networking
- + support, praise and feel concern – work well on a team
- + great at building rapport, consensus, commitment, seeking feedback
- + display high regard for others' wishes, viewpoints and actions
- + access to private/personal/little known information
- may not take an unpopular stance if it puts a relationship at risk
- can put so much emphasis on relationship that tasks and decision-making fall behind
- can forget or downplay own needs, to their detriment

If a leader has this style, you may need to ask him/her to be more specific in outlining expectations. Encourage critical feedback from them and tell them when you want to know what they think and want.

Some effects on the team & larger system

You cannot have too much caring and respect – it is the glue that's essential for a team to function. As a leader, it is powerful when combined with other quadrant functions. If the team has only this style, it may not take enough risks or make enough decisions to move forward significantly. The team may also avoid conflict to the extent that there is a lack of depth in genuine connection and innovation. Within larger systems, relationship masters play a critical role in building networks & collaborations.

SPONTANEOUS MOTIVATORS

Emphasize emotional stimulation

- + energizers who often voice their ideas and supply passion to follow those ideas
- + great at motivating and inspiring others through their vision
- + good at energetic dialogues with other group members
- can be emotionally bound to their ideas; objectivity can be their biggest challenge
- can create a highly emotionally charged climate if they put too much emphasis on challenging others and confronting assumptions

If a leader has this style, know your own position and don't be afraid to voice it. Ask him/her to give concrete examples to back up viewpoints.

Some effects on the team & larger system

Spontaneous motivators are often light bulbs. Teams & communities need this function to sparkle, create, prod, stir the pot and impassion. A team without this style may be functional, but somewhat lackluster. When mature people with this style are appropriately manage their emotional involvement, this is highly effective. If too much of this style is present in a leader, or if they are not mature, teams can be overly reactive or so impassioned about their ideals that they lose touch with other realities. Many charismatic leaders at small and large scales, as well as cult leaders, come from this quadrant.