

Leadership Styles for Program and Project Managers

by Jeff Hodgkinson

Leadership Style is a one of the potential success factors for both program and project managers. It is a 'soft skill' which is often neglected in training because it is very hard to measure a person's leadership style in a training situation. By understanding leadership styles and their impact, a PM can become great project leader. Therefore, the program and project manager must determine the most appropriate leadership style for each project team. A Program/Project Manager should choose the correct leadership style based upon the Project & Project Team requirements. Some of the most common leadership styles for a project manager include:

Leadership Style	Brief Explanation
Decision-Making Styles	
Autocratic	Makes decisions without input. This leadership style is seldom warranted, unless the PM clearly knows more about the subject matter and has immature and inexperienced team members. That is seldom the case, and if it is true the PM has made poor selections for team members. A PM who uses an autocratic style outside a 'life or death emergency' project should re-examine her/his overall methodology and motivation.
Consensus	Solves Problems and makes decisions in group with decision making based on group agreement. Unlike Democratic, this leader will not necessarily take a vote, but will rather lead discussions, 'read' the team position and personally make the decisions accordingly. This style is less formal than Democratic. It may work better for dispersed or virtual teams which cannot meet together frequently.
Democratic	Invites ideas from the team for decision-making process, goes with majority. Also known as Consultative or Participative. This style will usually result in a good decision, but may leave the minority voters disgruntled. It is important that the PM reach out to the minority voters to ensure that though they disagree with the decision, they commit to the outcome. A mature PM will never hold a vote without first consulting with the primary stakeholders in the vote. This is necessary to ensure that the vote properly addresses the issue at hand, and that all parties (including the PM) know what is at stake.
<i>Laissez Faire</i>	This French phrase means "leave it be". This style is a hands-off policy and the team is entirely self-led regarding the decision making process. Except in a very mature self-motivated team, this may lead to aimlessness and lack of success. Less mature team members may view it as a lack of interest or involvement by the PM.

Activity Management Styles	
Directive	Tells others what to do. If this style is warranted (but it seldom is) the PM must be very diplomatic and use a personal authority style which will not alienate team members. This style may be warranted in the case of an immature team, immature team members, or an extremely time-critical project. However, this style is generally not preferred because it does not develop the team nor allow adequate feedback from the team. Mature team members will resent this style and productivity will be lower in the long run.
Bureaucratic	Runs projects "by the book", ensuring the team follows procedures exactly. Some situations may call for this leadership style, such as a government contract or where regulatory requirements must be met. Usually, though, this style is the refuge of insecure project managers who fear accountability for variations from the standards. Projects may benefit from variation from published standards, if those variations can be justified. A consistently bureaucratic leadership style may indicate poor ability to manage risk or apply the Intel value of Informed Risk-Taking.

Activity Management Styles, continued	
Coaching	<p>Instructs and motivates others to enhance their skills to achieve maximum impact for the team and project. A coach is directive, but focused on individual and team development. This is very good as long as it is also in line with project goals. A project manager's first responsibility is to the project, and secondarily to the team and individual. Note that a 'coach' and a 'mentor' are not the same thing.</p> <p>A mentor's first responsibility is the individual's career and personal development, not to the project or team. Generally, team members respond well to a coaching style, and this style may benefit future projects as well as the current one. As harsh as this may sound, a good PM must be willing to delay a team member's personal development if it interferes with the objectives of the project. For example, a PM may ask a team member to defer taking a class to acquire a new skill if that skill is not needed to complete the project on schedule.</p>
Empowering	<p>Gives team members authority and tools to do their jobs. This is similar to a coach, but is less focused on teaching and directing. In contrast to a Directive style, the Empowering PM asks team members to make decisions, to choose tasks, and even to determine how those tasks are done. This PM evaluates the maturity and skill of individual team members and gives them appropriate levels of authority and freedom to accomplish the project goals. An Empowering PM helps team members learn skills needed to accomplish project goals or acquire needed tools to do their jobs.</p>
Facilitating	<p>Coordinates the input of others. A facilitating PM is primarily an organizer and dispenser of project information. This PM does not make decisions for the team, exert authority, nor direct activities. He/she simply is a contact point for team members to coordinate their individual efforts. Generally speaking, this PM has little personal authority, and simply communicates the decisions or orders of higher management. This style is appropriate for a novice PM, but may also reflect a lack of management support for true project management discipline.</p>
<i>Laissez Faire</i>	<p>Leaves the team alone. Has a hands-off policy and the team is entirely self-directed in their activities. As with a <i>laissez-faire</i> decision-making style, this style is only appropriate for very mature self-motivated teams. For any other team, it is a formula for failure and a sign of lazy or over-tasked PM. Team members will generally interpret this style as a lack of interest, and the project will suffer accordingly.</p>
Supporting	<p>Provides assistance along the way. This PM is closer to a teammate than a leader, but may have great success as a result. He/she pitches in and does some of the actual work of the project, as well as coordinating the project overall. Frequently, this style is combined with the Facilitating style.</p>

Personal Authority Styles	
Organizational	<p>Receives authority due to position in organization. This is the normal starting point for a PM on any given project. As the project progresses and the team gets to know the PM, the personal authority style should change to one of the more active styles. A PM who cannot motivate respect through anything other than position in an organization needs to improve their personality and style. Generally, if Organizational authority is all the PM has, team members will become either apathetic or disrespectful over time. Thus the project will suffer.</p>

continued

Personal Authority Styles, continued	
Charismatic	Leads a team primarily through magnetism of personality. Charismatic leaders inspire a high level of enthusiasm and success on short projects, but have the focus wrong. Focus should be on the project goals and team development, not on the leader. Further, if the teamwork is based on the charismatic leader, the project may fail if the PM changes. There is great danger that a charismatic leadership style may devolve into an autocratic one, so a charismatic PM must always be on the guard not to indulge personal ego in this way. However, a charismatic leadership style can be very effective if combined with preferred styles, such as democratic, consensus, coaching or empowering.
Transformational	Inspires team with a shared vision of the future. Similar to Charismatic, but in this case it is the leaders' vision rather than personality which provides the motivational aspect. The great value of a transformational leadership style is the level of commitment and enthusiasm it elicits from the team. Teams thus motivated need very little supervision and are likely to be very proactive and innovative. Even if the PM leaves the project, a Transformational leader will leave a legacy of enthusiasm to the team.
Referent / Expert	Gains cooperation of team due to their respect of project manager's personal expertise in the project/program subject matter. A PM who knows nothing about the subject of the project will gain little respect from the team. A PM who is knowledgeable about the project subject will get much greater respect, cooperation and results from the team. A combination of good subject skills plus good PM skills will result in the best possible results for the project. The Referent/Expert PM must be on the guard against internal bigotry regarding the subject. Frequently subject matter of the project will have two polarized camps, such as "Windows versus UNIX" or "old way versus new way." The PM must rise above these emotional 'religious disputes' to unite the team, applying the Intel Value of 'disagree and commit.'

Although some of these styles are generally less favored, all of them have an appropriate place. A great PM will employ any or all of these leadership styles depending on the situation. A blending of styles is usually needed. The leadership styles properly used in a given situation depends on several factors as follows:

- The personality and maturity of the manager. An immature or ineffective manager will use the same management style in all situations. A mature and effective manager will evaluate the circumstances and vary management style to match the situation.
- The urgency and criticality of the situation. A long-term development project, for example, will allow relaxed style with great latitude for dealing with conflicts and issues. This type of situation gives the manager the ability to focus as much on the development of the individuals and the team as on the project. A short-term crisis project (such as a multi-user outage) requires a more directive approach, with greater emphasis on the issue than on team or personal development.
- Maturity level of the individual. Individuals with more experience can be allowed more leeway and freedom from management. Recent college graduates or new hires will benefit from tighter boundaries and more direction. Less mature team members will actually stress more from having to make decisions or engage in activities for which they have less training and experience – they need a teacher/coach rather than a mentor. Mature teammates will chafe and resent similar boundaries.
- Maturity Level of the team. Teams which have not previously worked together may require greater oversight. Long-established well-motivated teams may be managed better with a Referent/Laissez Faire approach. A newly established team, even if it is made up of experienced team members, may need more of a Consensus/Transformational emphasis. Teams with a mixture of maturity levels and expertise may need more flexible direction, such as Democratic or Coaching.

- Structure and working model of the team. Teams which are co-located and meet face-to-face frequently may benefit from a more casual approach. Virtual or dispersed teams may need a more directive leadership style because they have less direct communication.
- The culture of the company or organization. In a company with a very tight, directive culture the PM will be expected to give more frequent and detailed reports. This, in turn, will require more reports and structure from the project team. However, even in such a culture, the PM needs to be a positive influence to develop the team members' skills and also the team's esprit.

In summary, the mastery of 'soft skills' in knowing and understanding the different leadership styles and when to apply them will greatly benefit your project management abilities as each has a place and time given the situation. It is a good bet that not just in work but in life you have had to use each one of the leadership styles listed in some form but not known it. In all styles, you should know when they are being applied to you and how to respond back.

For more information

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