

# Teamwork and Leadership

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about two crucial aspects of group communication in business environments, and how they can be navigated effectively. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. The Basics of Teamwork

Teamwork is a compound word, combining "team" and "work." Teams are a form of group normally dedicated to production or problem-solving. That leaves us with the work.

This is where our previous example on problem-solving can serve us well. Each member of the team has skills, talents, experience, and education. Each is expected to contribute. Work is the activity, and while it may be fun or engaging, it also requires effort and commitment, as there is a schedule for production with individual and group responsibilities.

Each member must fulfill their own obligations for the team to succeed, and the team, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest member. In this context, we don't measure strength or weakness at the gym, but in terms of productivity.

Teams can often achieve higher levels of performance than individuals because of the combined energies and talents of the members. Collaboration can produce motivation and creativity that may not be present in single-contractor projects.

Individuals also have a sense of belonging to the group, and the range of views and diversity can energize the process, helping address creative blocks and stalemates. By involving members of the team in decision-making, and calling upon each member's area of contribution, teams can produce positive results.

### 1a. Addressing Challenges

Teamwork is not without its challenges. The work itself may prove a challenge as members juggle competing assignments and personal commitments.

The work may also be compromised if team members are expected to conform and are pressured to go along with a procedure, plan, or product that they themselves have not developed.

Groupthink, or the tendency to accept the group's ideas and actions in spite of individual concerns, can compromise the process and reduce efficiency. Additionally, personalities and competition can play a role in a team's failure to produce.

We can recognize that people want to belong to a successful team, and celebrating incremental gains can focus the attention on the project and its goals. Members will be more willing to express thoughts and opinions, and follow through with actions, when they perceive that they are an important part of the team. By failing to include all the team members, valuable insights may be lost in the rush to judgment or production.

Making time for planning, and giving each member time to study, reflect, and contribute can allow them to gain valuable insights from each other, and may make them more likely to contribute information that challenges the status quo.

Unconventional or "devil's advocate" thinking may prove insightful and serve to challenge the process in a positive way, improving the production of the team. Respect for divergent views can encourage open discussion.

## 1b. Understanding Group Dynamics

Group dynamics involve the interactions and processes of a team and influence the degree to which members feel a part of the goal and mission. A team with a strong identity can prove to be a powerful force, but it requires time and commitment.

A team that exerts too much control over individual members can run the risk of reducing creative interactions and encourage tunnel vision; however, a team that exerts too little control, with attention to process and areas of specific responsibility, may not be productive. The balance between motivation and encouragement, and control and influence, is challenging as team members represent diverse viewpoints and approaches to the problem.

A skilled business communicator creates a positive team by first selecting members based on their areas of skill and expertise, but attention to their style of communication is also warranted.

Individuals that typically work alone or tend to be introverted may need additional encouragement to participate. Extroverts may need to be encouraged to listen to others and not dominate the conversation.



### BIG IDEA

Teamwork involves teams and work, and group dynamics play an integral role in their function and production.

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## 2. Paths to Leadership

Whether or not there is a "natural leader," born with a combination of talents and traits that enable a person to lead others, has been a subject of debate across time. In a modern context, we have come to recognize that leadership comes in many forms and representations.

Once it was thought that someone with presence of mind, innate intelligence, and an engaging personality was destined for leadership, but modern research and experience shows us otherwise.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Just as a successful heart surgeon has a series of skill sets, so does a dynamic leader. A television producer must both direct and provide space for talent to create, balancing control with confidence and trust.

This awareness of various leadership styles serves our discussion as groups and teams often have leaders, and they may not always be the person who holds the title, status, or role.

## 2a. Democratic Path

A democratic leader is elected or chosen by the group, but may also face serious challenges.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If individual group members or constituent groups feel neglected or ignored, they may assert that the democratic leader does not represent their interests.

The democratic leader involves the group in the decision-making process, and ensures group ownership of the resulting decisions and actions as a result. Open and free discussions are representative of this process, and the democratic leader acknowledges this diversity of opinion.

## 2b. Emergent Path

An emergent leader contrasts the democratic path by growing into the role, often out of necessity.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The appointed leader may know little about the topic or content, and group members will naturally look to the senior member with the most experience for leadership.

If the democratic leader fails to bring the group together, or does not represent the whole group, subgroups may form, each with an emergent, informal leader serving as spokesperson.

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# 3. Types of Leaders

We will now look at some different types of leaders in action and draw on common experience for examples.



### Self and Social Awareness: Skill Reflect

Do you ever play a leadership role at work? As you read this section, reflect on the type of leader you are. Is it the same in every situation? Does it change depending on the circumstances? Is it different in your personal life?

There are four main types of leaders commonly found in professional environments:

1. Autocratic leaders
2. Laissez-faire leaders
3. Leaders-as-conductors
4. Leaders-as-coaches

## 3a. The Autocratic Leader

The autocratic leader is self-directed and often establishes norms and conduct for the group.

In some settings, we can see that this is quite advantageous, such as during open-heart surgery or a military exercise, but it does not apply equally to all leadership opportunities.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The heart surgeon does not involve everyone democratically, is typically appointed to the role through earned degrees and experience, and resembles a military sergeant more than a politician.

### 3b. The Laissez-faire Leader

Contrasting the autocrat is the laissez-faire, or "live and let live" leader. In some professional settings, employees may bristle at the thought of an autocratic leader telling them what to do. They have earned their role through time, effort, and experience and know their job.

A wise laissez-faire leader recognizes this aspect of working with professionals and may choose to focus efforts on providing the employees with the tools they need to make a positive impact.

#### IN CONTEXT

Imagine that you are in the role of a television director and you have a vision or idea of what the successful pilot program should look like. The script is set, the lighting correct, and the cameras are in the correct position. You may tell people what to do and where to stand, but you remember that your job is to facilitate the overall process.

You work with talent, and creative people are interesting on camera. If you micromanage your actors, they may perform in ways that are not creative and that will not draw in audiences. But if you let them run wild through improvisation, the program may not go well at all.

Balancing the need for control with the need for space is the challenge of the laissez-faire leader.

### 3c. The Leader-as-Conductor

The leader-as-conductor involves a central role of bringing people together for a common goal.

➞ **EXAMPLE** In the common analogy, a conductor leads an orchestra and integrates the specialized skills and sounds of the various components the musical group comprises.

In the same way, a leader who conducts may set a vision, create benchmarks, and collaborate with a group as they interpret a set script. Whether it is a beautiful movement in music or a group of teams that comes together to address a common challenge, the leader-as-conductor keeps the time and tempo of the group.

### 3d. The Leader-as-Coach

Coaches are often discussed in business-related books as models of leadership for good reason. A leader-as-coach combines many of the talents and skills we've discussed here already.

A coach may be autocratic at times, give pointed direction without input from the group, and stand on the sidelines while the players do what they've been trained to do and make the points. The coach may look out for the group and defend it against bad calls, and may motivate players with words of encouragement. We can recognize some of the behaviors of coaches, but what specific traits have a positive influence on the group?

Coaches are teachers, motivators, and keepers of the goals of the group. There are times when members of the team forget that there is no "I" in the word "team." At such times, coaches serve to redirect the attention and energy of the individuals to the overall goals of the group. They conduct the group with a sense of timing and tempo, and at times, they relax and let the members demonstrate their talents. Through their listening skills and counseling, they come to know each member as an individual, but keep the overall team focus clear. They set an example.

Coaches, however, are human and by definition are not perfect. They can and do prefer some players over

others and can display less than professional sideline behavior when they don't agree with the referee. Still, this style of leadership is worthy of your consideration in its multidisciplinary approach.



#### BIG IDEA

Coaches use more than one style of leadership and adapt to the context and environment. A skilled business communicator will recognize that this approach has its merits.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about different leadership styles that can affect the ability of a team to function and success. **The basics of teamwork** involve creating a situation where each member of the team can work to their full potential, which is done by **addressing challenges** as they arise and **understanding group dynamics**.

You also learned that different leadership styles are not inherently good or bad; rather, they are context-dependent. **Paths to leadership** can be **democratic**, where a leader is chosen by a group, or **emergent**, where a leader evolves into the role out of necessity. **Types of leaders** include **autocratic leaders**, **laissez-faire leaders**, **leaders-as-conductors**, and **leaders-as-coaches**. Analyzing the various leadership styles and their influence in different contexts will aid your pursuit of skillful business communication.

Best of luck in your learning!

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