

How to Identify Your Leadership Style

By Catherine Tansey, January 8, 2021

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If leadership is “the ability to motivate a group to achieve a vision and a goal,” as defined in a 2012 study about leadership published in the *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, then leadership style is the manner in which you do so. Your leadership style may change over time, as human beings aren’t static, but research shows that the innate drivers that contribute to leadership styles are largely influenced by past experiences and natural personality traits.

The science behind leadership styles and how to identify them first became popular in the 1970s. Since then, the leadership sphere has become part of the even greater \$11.6 billion business coaching industry. Along the way, various companies and research institutes created their own leadership assessments that group participants into a fixed leader archetype or style. However, many experts contend this isn’t the only or best way to identify your style as a leader, but rather a useful tool in the process.

“Humans don’t fit into neat little boxes,” said Michelle Duval, business coach and CEO of Fingerprint for Success. “Looking at motivations and attitudes takes into account the fact that people adapt and mature. It allows for a much more dynamic view of humans and how their leadership styles can change over time.”

What experts do agree on is that identifying and understanding your leadership style will make you a stronger leader. Here’s why it’s important, and how to identify your own style of leadership.

Understanding Your Natural Strengths

By investigating and identifying your leadership style, you’ll be able to better recognize your natural strengths and weaknesses, and increase your awareness of how other people experience your decision-making in the workplace.

With this awareness of how you interact with others at work, as a leader you’re able to make more thoughtful decisions and identify opportunities for growth and success. When people are in the grip of survival thinking, like facing high-pressure decision-making on a tight deadline, they tend to revert to their most innate, reactive way of responding. But with a purposeful awareness of yourself and your leadership styles, the option to respond differently becomes possible.

“Personal insight is a powerful tool for behavior change,” said Karen Laos, leadership coach who specializes in working with high-achieving women. “Rather than reacting out of frustration, we’re able to take a moment, pause, and come back to the conflict at hand after we’ve taken time to process.”

It’s difficult to attain self-awareness without objective input from others; in that vein, learning about your leadership style or styles can also help you understand how other people perceive your actions.

“Identifying our leadership style is important because it gives us insight into other people’s experience of us,” noted Clare Montaeu, PhD, an organizational scientist who uses neuroscience-based training programs to facilitate change in organizations. “We can’t possibly know other people’s experience of the world. And that can lead to many misunderstandings and opportunities for miscommunication that damage our ability to lead effectively and powerfully.”

Becoming familiar with your leadership style can help you understand the impact you’re having on others and how they’re experiencing you as their leader. Here’s how to home in on your own.

3 Ways to Identify Your Leadership Style

There is no one “right way” to find your leadership style. Some experts swear by traditional, formal assessments, while others believe a qualitative examination of yourself is more effective. Here are three methods to consider as you begin to identify your unique style.

1. Take a formal leadership-style test or assessment.

If you’ve spent any time in the corporate world, you’ve probably taken some form of personality assessment or leadership-style test. The results categorize test-takers as a certain “type” of leader, like Affirming, Laissez-Faire, or Innovator, but the exact designations depend on the type or brand of assessment you take.

Formal leadership-style evaluation is useful in highlighting where you excel.

“Personality and leadership inventories and models help identify leadership strengths, the traits that come easily to you, so you can optimize those strengths to lead more efficiently and powerfully,” Montaeu said.

Additionally, this type of leadership-style assessment can help you recognize areas for improvement. “[They] can also help you identify your blind spots. These are places where other people’s experience of you, the people you are leading, may not be so favorable,” Monteau added.

2. Consider the traits in others that you’d like to emulate.

Identifying your leadership style isn’t simply a result of being told, “This is how you are,” after taking an assessment. Rather, individuals can take an active role in shaping their leadership style by reflecting on the characteristics and skills they’ve admired in other leaders and working to embody those traits.

We don’t exist — or work — in a vacuum, and valuable information can be gleaned from observing what the leaders around you are doing well, and then cultivating those same characteristics in your own interactions. “I always knew I wanted to be a leader who sees the best in people and identifies strengths in others, in part because of the experiences I had with others in positions of authority,” Laos noted.

For instance, if you notice that your manager cultivates a sense of psychological safety on the team by showing their vulnerability, like sharing openly their need to take a mental health day, you might jot this down in a journal. When a moment arises for you to be similarly open and vulnerable with your own team, such as during a team-building exercise where you discuss the challenges of work-life balance while working remotely, you may be inclined to share more honestly, rather than posturing for the sake of appearing strong.

This is a thoughtful process that involves observation, reflection, and then action. “Take the time to understand what you value and define how you would like to show up as a leader,” urged Julie Jensen, an HR and leadership coach. “For example, if you value transparency and honesty, you need to routinely role-model this behavior

with your teams. This may take the form of difficult — but kind and respectful — performance feedback, or enthusiastic recognition of a job well done.

3. Ask for input from those who know your leadership style.

Asking your team for their honest opinion about your performance as a leader can be a difficult topic to broach, for all parties involved. When you're in a position of authority as a supervisor, it can be hard for your direct reports to feel comfortable and safe voicing their thoughts on how they perceive you. And as a leader, it can feel vulnerable to seek out and receive this kind of feedback. But outside input helps contextualize the other information you have about your leadership style. Again, leadership doesn't happen in a vacuum, and how the people you are leading perceive you is a crucial piece of the puzzle.

"It's always good to ask other people what they think of you as a leader," Duval said. "Use an anonymous method to get feedback from team members about things like how they would describe your leadership style or how much autonomy they feel they have in making decisions."

Performance reviews provide an excellent opportunity for leaders to learn about how their team perceives their style and performance. Because performance reviews are an event that's already taking place, leaders may find it easier to elicit honest and constructive feedback from employees at that time — versus scheduling a separate meeting on the topic or approaching an employee by email with this request.

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True leaders welcome the opportunity to learn — about their organization, their chosen field, and themselves. While identifying your leadership styles takes energy and openness, leaders who do so will be rewarded with heightened self-awareness that supports their ability to better lead their teams and people.

Taken from an online article:

<https://lattice.com/library/how-to-identify-your-leadership-style>