

Sound Business Sense

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The last Sound Business Sense discussed the general types of management. A relevant component of leadership to consider is the style management uses to present their chosen type to the employees. Traynor & Taylor (2025) present several management styles and suggest that the style chosen is often dictated by the managers personality and the type of personnel being managed. They further indicate that the chosen style should ultimately motivate employees to work together as a single unit to meet the needs of the practice and simultaneously ensure satisfaction with their job responsibilities. This is best accomplished by being cognizant of the employee's expectations and striving to create a stress-free workplace environment. Some management styles as described in this column are better than others in reaching these goals.



Autocratic Style

The worst of these styles is likely the autocratic approach. Autocratic leaders typically make choices based on *their ideas and judgments* and rarely accept advice from employees. Autocratic leadership involves absolute, authoritarian control over the management of an organization. As with the other management styles, the autocratic style may offer *some* benefits in *some* operations. Most audiology operations are small, however, and in these intimate operations, autocratic managers are seen to be a “bossy or dictator type” that do not consider the ideas and suggestions of subordinates. Thus, employees are totally dependent upon their bosses and are not empowered to make decisions independently. Employees must adhere to management’s strict guidelines, policies, and procedures. While this style offers organization and conformity, it often leads to a lack of motivation among the employees. The autocratic style usually creates unhappy employees, often leading to high turnover within the clinic.



Paternalistic Style

Almost the opposite of the autocratic style, a paternalistic leader treats employees as family members and prioritizes their needs when making business decisions. These leaders decide what policies are best that will benefit both the employees and the organization. Paternal leaders emphasize the personal well-being of employees through their actions, recognizing them as key stakeholders within the business. They make decisions based on employee best interests by soliciting suggestions and feedback from their subordinates before implementing business decisions. These leaders serve as a role model in the organization and treat employees with compassion and respect; in return, they ask for the loyalty and trust from their employees.

A paternalistic leadership style often contributes to an amicable, friendly workplace where coworkers strive to help each other reach shared goals and usually stay motivated, enjoying their work as management direction feels like more of a mentorship than just a job. Consequently, these motivated employees are invested in the practice's success because they feel their leaders are meeting their needs. This workplace environment often leads to increased employee loyalty and high retention rates, which can improve the practices' culture and productivity.

As with all management styles, Indeed (2024) indicates that there can be disadvantages to paternalism:

- *Low morale.* Although employees can offer feedback or input on business decisions, they *rarely participate* in the decision-making process. If paternal leaders make decisions and employees disagree, it can cause tension in the workplace, leading to low morale. It is helpful for paternal leaders to communicate with employees to explain the various factors that lead to their decisions.
- *Employee dependence.* Since paternal leaders typically make all decisions related to the business,

employees may become dependent on these leaders for supervision.

- *Perceptions of imbalance.* With a paternalistic leadership style, there may be times when employees perceive an imbalance in the way their managers treat other employees. Paternal style managers can overcome these perceptions by *communicating openly with employees* about their decisions. These leaders can also make sure they're treating employees fairly and showing everyone in the organization the same level of respect.
- *Lack of delegation.* Depending upon their nature, paternal leaders may find it difficult to delegate tasks to employees. They may feel it is unfair to request assistance when expected to make the final decisions on business-related matters. This lack of delegation may cause employees to question whether leaders trust them with important tasks or projects. By delegating tasks, they increase their productivity while improving employees' leadership skills and boost team morale.



Democratic Style

The democratic management style, also known as participative leadership, is one of the most effective leadership styles (NSLS, 2024). The name of this leadership style is derived from the word “democracy,” which means “run by the people.” Democratic leaders invite employee feedback through open forums discussing the pros and cons of plans and ideas. They welcome and value others' input, relying heavily on team participation by facilitating discussions, enabling multiple employees to weigh in on decisions. Listening to the employees before finalizing plans

and operations ensures effective and healthy communication between management and employees. A democratic style fosters a feeling among employees that they are listened to as well as a part of making these management decisions, particularly when these decisions affect their everyday working environment. NSLS (2024) offers the benefits of a democratic management style:

- *Encourage creativity and collaboration.* Democratic leaders seek to get a wide range of perspectives and value the free flow of ideas. Those with this style will usually create opportunities to collaborate, facilitate brainstorming, or get input from each group member before making a decision.
- *Regularly ask for feedback.* Democratic leaders ask for feedback and appreciate the opinions of others. They may ask for feedback about something in an open-ended way, or test ideas with the group by explaining their solution to a problem and then asking what the group thinks.
- *Maintain a “team player” attitude.* Because they prioritize collaboration, leaders with this style naturally value teamwork and will actively look for ways to guide and support their team as well as bring out this mindset in others.
- *Keep flexibility at the forefront.* Leaders with this approach allow their team to do their work in their way. This may be done by delegating decisions to their team or trusting them to take charge in certain situations.
- *Place high importance on transparency and communication.* Democratic leaders keep the lines of communication open and share information with their team. This establishes a strong sense of trust and empowerment which strengthens the overall culture.



Laissez-Faire Style

Laissez-faire management style is also known as delegative leadership in which management is hands-off and allows employees to make the decisions. Although the laissez-faire management style can have benefits and possible pitfalls, Cherry (2024) indicates this management style often

leads to the lowest productivity among employees. However, in certain settings and situations, laissez-faire leadership might be the most appropriate. Using this style, managers are employed just for the sake of it and do not contribute much to the organization. While employees are not dependent upon the managers; they make decisions and manage their work on their own. Those individuals who have the dream of succeeding in the organization consistently outshine employees who are simply showing up for work. Thus, there is minimal, if any daily or monthly direction given by management as the employees are free to work on their own schedule but their given tasks must be completed by a certain date. This style is often used in design and manufacturing operations where employees are assigned a project and work on their own schedule, at night, weekends, or regular hours as long as their project is completed on schedule. Cherry (2024) offers the benefits and liabilities of the Laissez-faire management style as:

- *Benefit: It encourages personal growth & innovation.* Because leaders are so hands-off in their approach, employees have a chance to be hands-on creating an environment that facilitates growth, development, creativity, and innovation.
- *Benefit: It allows for faster decision-making.* Since there is no micromanagement, employees under laissez-faire leadership have the autonomy to make their own decisions. They are able to make quick decisions without waiting weeks for an approval process.
- *Liability: Lack of role clarity.* In some situations, the laissez-faire style leads to a poorly defined role. Since employees receive little to no guidance, they might not be sure about their role within on the project and what they are supposed to be doing with their time.
- *Liability: Poor involvement with the group.* Laissez-faire leaders are often seen as uninvolved and withdrawn, which can lead to a lack of cohesiveness within the practice or company. Employees sometimes pick up on this and express less care and concern for the project.
- *Liability: Low accountability.* Some managers take advantage of this style as a method of avoiding responsibility for employee failures. When goals are not met, management can blame employees for not completing tasks or living up to expectations.
- *Liability: Passivity.* At its worst, laissez-faire leadership represents passivity or even an outright avoidance of true leadership. In such cases, some managers do nothing to try to motivate followers, not recognizing the efforts of employees and make no attempt at involvement with the project.

Management needs to be very careful in the use of the laissez-faire style. Some people are not good at setting deadlines, managing projects, and solving problems on their own. Under this leadership style, projects can go off-track and deadlines can be missed when team members do not get enough guidance or feedback from leaders.

Management by Walking Around Style

Managing by walking around is a strategy where managers leave their desks and walk the workplace to understand employees and their ongoing work better. It requires a random or unstructured schedule such that staff is not expecting a check-in at a pre-approved time, and managers get a real sample of what is going on. Managers that keep themselves to their office limit the information they receive and how it is received. When staying in their office they must wait for

employees to proactively come to them or learn through status reports and staff meetings.

These managers treat themselves as an essential part of the team and take pride in being efficient listeners. They interact with the employees to determine their concerns and take note of their suggestions. These managers often join in with the team on projects and work alongside their employees, thus, becoming more of a colleague, mentor and guide than an overseer or boss. By creating spontaneous interactions with staff in a more informal setting allows them to ask questions directly. When implemented correctly by managers with the required skill set, it can add real value.

Direct contact with employees can lead managers to be knowledgeable of information that may otherwise not be apparent to them at their desks. Andreev (2024) lists the benefits of this management style as:

- Better Communication and Relationships
- Unique and New Perspectives
- Faster Problem Solving
- Improved Creativity in the Workplace

While some management techniques are directed at efficiency and organization, others are behavioral and are concerned with the effects of changes on employees, focusing on understanding motivation and behaviors. Often referred to as human relations management, the goal is the cultivation of positive management relationships so that employees believe they are a valuable part of the organization and are motivated accordingly to do their best work. Practice managers should consistently strive to improve working conditions. Research into behavioral management has repeatedly demonstrated that when employees feel management is concerned about them by improving their working conditions, they work harder and with better accuracy in all areas of their responsibilities.

Next Topic: How to implement these types and styles of management within audiology practices.

References

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