

## 8 Traditional Leadership Styles That Do Not Work At All

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*Traditional leaders* face multiple challenges associated with the [millennial workforce](#), [emotional intelligence](#), security, e-leadership, virtual work environments, globalization, and the role of women (Avolio et al., 2009). Leaders practicing *traditional leadership* theories are confronted with utilizing outdated theories developed before current changes in society and advancements in technology and globalization (Bennis 2013; Latham, 2014). The practice of *traditional leadership* theories does not allow for adapting to change and therefore limits leaders' courses of action (Torres & Reeves, 2014).

Leadership in business is the capacity of a company's management to set and achieve challenging goals, take fast and decisive action when needed, [outperform](#) the competition, and inspire others to perform at the highest level they can (Twin 2020). In this article, we interrogate some of the *traditional leadership* theories that are outdated in addressing challenges in the modern workplace.

### Transactional Leadership

Northouse (2013) defined [transactional leadership](#) as a simple exchange between leaders and followers for attaining goals, giving promotions, bonuses, or other transactional exchanges for performance. Transactional leadership is an exchange process between followers and leaders (McCleskey, 2014; Rowold, 2014). Transactional leadership as a style is centered on authority and legitimacy established within organizations (Hargis, Watt, & Piotrowski, 2011). The focus of the transactional leadership style is centered on assignments, performance, task-orientated goals, and generally is focused on the day-to-day operations within organizations (Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio & Eagly, 2017).

Transactional leaders are rigid and unyielding. They do not bend the rules because the rules are there for a good reason, even if that reason is not known to them. This attitude limits innovation because team members stay focused on assigned tasks. Structured policies dictate actions instead of common sense interactions with the regulations.

### Transformational Leadership

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Transformational leadership is defined as a method where the leaders in a sense transform themselves, and through changes in their behaviors and actions connect and interact with their followers creating higher levels of motivation, morality, and ultimately performance outcomes (Lord et al., 2017). Transformational leadership has also been defined as employing a dual dynamic between leaders and followers to attain organizational results (Alsaeedi & Male, 2013).

This leadership style tries to let subordinates and followers feel that they have common goals that need to be accomplished. Also, transformational leaders often think or assume that people under them will always agree with their ideas and become motivated all the time. This becomes a setback since there will be situations in which changes should be made.

## **The Great Man Theory**

A precursor to the formal study of leadership was the Great Man theory. The Great Man theory was not necessarily based on research but more on opinions and personal perspectives of the times. The Great Man Theory hypothesizes that leaders are born and not made, hence the saying “A born leader” (Allio, 2013; Cawthon, 1996). The Great Man theory was an assumption that only certain individuals possessed the required characteristic and traits that would empower them to be leaders (Bass & Bass, 2008). The Great Man theory and trait theorist believed that individuals were born with certain leadership traits and that these traits could not be learned nor gained through education or training (Northouse, 2013).

The Great Man theory has no scientific basis and empirical validity. It is more of a speculative piece of notion. The great weakness of the Great Man Theory, apart from the improbability of inherent traits, is the absurd belief that some people become great and successful leaders independent of their environmental situations. The Great Man Theory is rejected by many modern theorists and even by some leaders themselves.

## **Path-Goal Leadership**

Path-Goal leadership is based on a theory that followers are provided goals through value rewards, and the leaders provide the best method, or path, to accomplish the goals (Hughes, Curphy & Ginnett, 2015).

The Path-Goal Theory type of leadership is outdated because it is undemocratic. The method can fail if the leader has flaws, the leaders may not be rational and act based on delusion. If there is too much dependence on the leader the system may collapse if something happens to the leader.

## Servant Leadership

[Servant leadership](#) is focused more on traits and characteristics than on a defined and accepted leadership theory (Focht & Ponton, 2015). Servant leadership has not been widely accepted nor has there been a unified and agreed-upon definition of servant leadership (Neubert, Hunter & Tolentino, 2016). Developed and introduced by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, servant leadership was identified by Greenleaf as leaders wanting to help others, a belief that “the servant-leader is servant first” and that the leader serves in a manner that enables followers to be free, wiser, healthier, more autonomous, and attracts the followers to be servants (Liden, Wayne, Chenwei & Meuser, 2014).

There are some industries where servant leadership is a misfit. For instance, a military leader would be ineffective because he or she wouldn't have the power to make quick decisions – life or death decisions that could seriously affect his or her people.

## Authoritarian - Autocratic Leadership

One of the earliest established leadership styles, possibly the first, can arguably be the [authoritarian style](#), practiced by the autocratic leader (Flynn, 2015). Autocratic leaders have been defined as being closed-minded, power-orientated, controlling, and in some contexts considered an example of transactional leadership (Bass, 2008; Giltinane, 2013). The authoritarian or autocratic leader is portrayed as overbearing and bossy, and they gain control over followers with rules, demands, threats, and punishment (Flynn, 2015).

Among all the recognized autocratic leadership strengths and weaknesses, perhaps one of the most prominent is that this [leadership style](#) can cause employees to resent their leader and even their organization. An autocratic workplace environment is typically not friendly to innovation or outside-the-box thinking, and this can leave workers feeling intellectually stifled. It can also mean workers' personal needs are neglected, causing them to feel like their supervisor does not care about them as individuals.

## Laissez-faire Leadership

Unlike what is considered traditional leadership practices, [laissez-faire leadership](#) is generally defined as a non-transactional and passive avoidance style of leadership (Bass, 1985, 2014; Avolio & Bass, 1991). Laissez-faire is arguably the least studied leadership style due to its absence of traditional leadership behaviours (Sudha, Shahnawaz & Farhat, 2016; Yang, 2015). Laissez-faire leaders are normally absent, detached, and relinquish their responsibilities to subordinates (Bass, 1985; Yang, I. (2015).

Laissez-faire leaders typically do not direct or use authority with their followers, and do not make a decision related to day-to-day operations, therefore enabling followers to manage themselves and solve difficulties encountered (Bhatti et al., 2012). Typically, laissez-faire is not a recommended style of leadership and is not suggested in organizational environments where followers do not possess the ability or skills to problem solve, manage, or operate independently.

## Future of Leadership

The literature review thus far reviewed multiple leadership styles, each serving or continuing to serve the purpose of providing leaders with an established set of designated skills, attributes, and guidelines to effectively lead (Allio, 2013; Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012).

One of the many challenges for organizational leadership is generational differences between the older generation and the younger generations (Anderson, Baur, Griffith, & Buckley, 2016). The continual growth of the younger generation, commonly referred to as millennials, presents unusual situations, attitudes, and personality differences that impact leadership approaches (Anderson et al., 2016).

Millennials adapt to continuous changes in technology and hold a strong advantage over both their older counterparts, and their leaders who oftentimes have difficulties adapting (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012). Millennials hold varied perspectives related to leadership, teamwork, expectations, and communication, all of which contribute to the challenge for leadership to adapt (Kaifi et al., 2012).

The changing organizational environments impact varied business practices, technological changes, stakeholder expectations, while adapting to millennials' personality traits (Hartman & McCambridge,

2011). Historically the transition of time from one generation to the next shows changes in values and attitudes (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Millennials are hard workers and can work well in teams, however, they are also more likely to maintain a balanced life and not be inclined to work overtime or weekends (Ferri-Reed, 2012).

## **E-Leadership**

The term “E-Leadership” was introduced just over a decade ago and has since become a commonly used term (Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker, 2014). The evolution of technology and continuous change in communications and various other business operations has resulted in an additional requirement for leaders to be adaptable to e-leadership methods (Avolio et al., 2014). In addition to traditional leadership concerns associated with past practices, today’s leaders must take into account multi-cultural considerations, globalization, time, and distance (Lilian, 2014).

The advent of virtual teams has resulted in improved team member communication and collaboration while allowing the leader's flexibility to delegate and empower followers (Cowan, 2014). Virtual team effectiveness is improved through established communication methods and review processes that incorporate team member contributions with a leader’s oversight and review (Morgan, Paucar-Caceres, & Wright, 2014).

Globalization and advancements in multiple organizational operating systems have presented additional challenges for leaders (Lilian, 2014). Organizations have transitioned through restructuring and the adoption of new ways to conduct business (Lilian, 2014). The evolution of remote and geographically separated workforces has influenced the development of [virtual teams](#) (Avolio et al., 2014). The virtual team concept presents challenges for leaders to operate across multiple time zones without physical face-to-face contact or interaction (Lilian, 2014). These leaders must adapt to [delegation](#) and trust in followers, and in their confidence and security with the knowledge that followers will produce desired results (Savolainen, 2014).

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