



## Editorial

# Understanding leadership: A paradigm shift from authority to accountability

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Leadership today is understood very differently from how it was in the past. Earlier, leadership was largely associated with authority—the notion that holding a title or position gave someone the right to command and control others. While authority may secure obedience, it does not necessarily inspire genuine motivation or lasting results.

Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow, and it is defined in multiple ways, like:

“Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”<sup>1</sup>

“Leadership is a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose.”<sup>2</sup>

“Leadership is the ability to step outside the culture... to start evolutionary change processes that are more adaptive.”<sup>3</sup>

To become a distinguished leader, a person needs to develop 11 skills to have an impactful leadership.

## Leadership Skills

Good leadership is a result of the careful application of 11 skills that any post leader or officer can learn to use.

1. Understanding the needs and characteristics of the post

2. Knowing and using the resources of the group
3. Communicating
4. Planning
5. Controlling group performance
6. Evaluating
7. Setting the example
8. Sharing leadership
9. Counseling
10. Representing the group
11. Effective teaching

After acquiring these leadership skills, every leader works through a different approach based on the situation encountered, which can be categorized as a leadership style.

Leadership Style is about the patterns of a leader's interaction with his/her followers. As leadership style impacts the motivations of employees, either positively or negatively.

There are various leadership styles<sup>4,6</sup> adopted by leaders to accomplish goals, and leaders need to utilize various styles to be effective. The more styles a leader uses, the better. Mastering the authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching styles creates the best work culture and improves organizational performance. Leaders should consider building teams that incorporate leadership styles they themselves may lack. Let us discuss different leadership styles to understand and incorporate them in our professional growth, as mentioned in **Table 1**.

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**Table 1:**

Leadership Style	Intent/Focus	Characteristics	Examples
Coercive	Obtain immediate employee compliance	Tight control; emphasizes negative feedback; directive and commanding	In a hospital during a mass casualty incident, the emergency department head gives strict instructions: “Triage all red-tag patients first. No one deviates from the protocol.” There is no time for discussion—immediate action is required.
Pacesetter	Set high-performance standards	Seeks quick results; expects excellence; works best with skilled, motivated teams	A senior nurse shows perfect procedure execution and says: “Maintain this exact process. Our unit must be the fastest and most accurate in the hospital.”
Authoritative	Mobilize people toward a vision	Long-term strategy; clear direction; uses influence to gain buy-in	A hospital administrator says: “Our goal is to be the safest hospital in the region. We will invest in new technology and empower each unit to strengthen patient care processes.”
Affiliative	Promote harmony and cooperation	People-first approach; focuses on relationships; tasks come second	An employee looks stressed. The leader responds: “Take the afternoon off if you need it. Your well-being matters more than the work right now.” People come before tasks.
Democratic	Build group consensus and commitment.	Group-based decision-making, shared responsibility, and encouragement of participation.	The leader regularly holds open discussions: “Let’s put everyone’s ideas on the table. No idea is off-limits—collectively, we’ll choose the best one.”
Coaching	Develop people for future performance	Focus on strengths/weaknesses; provides guidance; supports career growth	An employee struggles with presentations. The leader responds: “Let’s practice together. I’ll give you feedback after each run, and we’ll build your confidence step by step.” The approach is supportive and instructional.

In the current global scenario, leadership is moving from “*I command*” to “*I support and empower*.” True leadership is not about the power one exercises over others, but the responsibility one embraces to guide, develop, and enable others to perform at their best.

The Shift in leadership approach is required today, due to the difference in both the approaches, as leadership based on authority and power is position-based, emphasis on directing and controlling, the leader issues instructions; compliance is driven by fear or obligation; success is leader-focused.

While in leadership based on accountability, power comes from responsibility and accountability, emphasis on guiding and collaborating, leaders clarify expectations and support the team.

There is a need for a shift from authoritative leadership towards an accountability approach due to multiple benefits linked with the leadership based on an accountability approach: -

1. Work environments are more team-oriented – People work best when they feel valued and engaged.

2. Employees seek meaning and ownership – They want to understand the purpose behind their work.
3. Trust fosters innovation – A culture of accountability encourages openness, learning, and problem-solving.

A leader who leads through accountability demonstrates the behaviour they expect from the team. He/She takes responsibility for decisions and outcomes, encourages others to grow by giving autonomy and support, treats mistakes as learning opportunities, not reasons for blame, and builds trust through consistency, fairness, and honesty.

In conclusion, as the saying goes, that with great power comes great responsibility, similarly, every leadership position has accountability/responsibility attached with it. The sooner a leader understands that leadership is more about accountability than authority, the better the outcomes.

## 1. Conflict of Interest

None.

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