

# Finding Your Strength

## Leadership Toolbox

### Podcast Transcript

*Centennial Student Union & Student Activities*

*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

Welcome to the Student Activities' Online Leadership Toolbox. My name is Greg Wilkins, and I am the Associate Director of Student Activities at Minnesota State Mankato. I am going to be your podcast guide. This podcast is about finding your strength through your leadership style. I will focus this conversation with the work of Kurt Lewin, a psychologist and leadership theorist.

In 1939, a group of researchers led by psychologist Kurt Lewin set out to identify different styles of leadership. While further research has identified more specific types of leadership, this early study was very influential and established three major leadership styles. In the study, groups of schoolchildren were assigned to one of three groups with an authoritarian, democratic or laissez-fair leader. The children were then led in an arts and crafts project. Researchers then observed the behavior of children in response to the different styles of leadership.

#### **Authoritarian Leadership (Autocratic)**

Authoritarian leaders, also known as autocratic leaders provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. There is also a clear division between the leader and the followers. Authoritarian leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group.

Researchers found that decision-making was less creative under authoritarian leadership. Lewin also found that it is more difficult to move from an authoritarian style to a democratic style than vice versa. Abuse of this style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial.

Authoritarian leadership is best applied to situations where there is little time for group decision-making or where the leader is the most knowledgeable member of the group.

#### **Participative Leadership (Democratic)**

Lewin's study found that participative leadership, also known as democratic leadership, is generally the most effective leadership style. Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members, but they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members. In Lewin's study, children in this group were less productive than the members of the authoritarian group, but their contributions were of a much higher quality.

Participative leaders encourage group members to participate, but retain the final say over the decision-making process. Group members feel engaged in the process and are more motivated and creative.

### **Delegative (Laissez-Faire) Leadership**

Researchers found that children under delegative leadership, also known as laissez-fair leadership, were the least productive of all three groups. The children in this group also made more demands on the leader, showed little cooperation and were unable to work independently.

Delegative leaders offer little or no guidance to group members and leave decision-making up to group members. While this style can be effective in situations where group members are highly qualified in an area of expertise, it often leads to poorly defined roles and a lack of motivation.

The work of Lewin is one of many theorists. If you Google or go to the library to research leadership theory you will find many, many more. I hope that this is a beginning you will want to explore more.

Let's wrap up what we discussed. Lewin observed different results with three different leadership styles: authoritarian, democratic or laissez-fair. Each produced different results with some having increased results in productivity and others in overall quality and autonomy.

As a leader, you have the opportunity to create a dynamic group. In using Lewin's theory you too might observe that by getting others involved in a participatory style you may have greater success than by being autocratic or totally delegative.

Alright, it's now time for your involvement. I'd like for you this week to think about how you lead in your group. Do you hold on to all the tasks and do everything or do you share the responsibility among your members? I would like to encourage you to get other members of your group involved. If you do a lot of organizing, give the responsibility to someone else in the group. If you do a lot of the talking, have someone else run the meeting. Ask other members of your organization to take a leadership role. You will find that when they are involved, there is greater ownership among the membership.

Let's review quickly what was presented: we discussed Kurt Lewin and his research findings, reviewed three different leadership styles (Autocratic, Democratic, and Delegative), and how you can affect change in your organization. By understanding theory, you can build a more dynamic group.

This podcast was presented by Student Activities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Find other podcasts at [mnsu.edu/activities/toolbox](http://mnsu.edu/activities/toolbox).