

## Participative Leader

*"The hands, legs, and head are different parts of the body but work together for the good of the body."*

Participative leadership style is better described by its original name "democratic" and often referred to as "team leadership style". This involves all members of a team in identifying essential objectives, developing strategies and procedures to accomplish those objectives. The focus is to create commitment, consensus and innovation.

This style creates a positive performance environment by building the buy-in or consensus, and gets valuable input from the team. The leader functions as a facilitator, team-building leader, rather than simply issuing orders or making assignments.

Participative leadership builds on a triad of emotional intelligence abilities: teamwork and collaboration, conflict management, and influence. Where Daniel Goleman defines *emotional intelligence* as: how leaders handle themselves and their relationships.

The best communicators are superb listeners - and listening is the key strength of the participative leader. Such leaders create the sense that they truly want to hear the team's thoughts, concerns, and that they are available to listen. They are true collaborators, working to spur their team members rather than top-down leaders. And they know how to quell conflict and create a sense of harmony - for instance, repairing rifts within the group.

The participative leadership theory encompasses the importance of being trustworthy and opening up a proper channel of communication so that each person in the organisation know what is expected out of them and have a vision of where the organisation expects to be in future.

Team-building leaders have supernatural insight into people. They find or develop leaders with the right abilities, character, and chemistry with other team members. They place people in the right positions for the purpose of producing the right results.

Nelson Mandela, the respected African model leader says:

*"It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership." - Nelson Mandela*

This type of leadership style can be utilised in business settings, volunteer organisations and even in the function of the home and family. However, the leader does not abdicate the responsibility of leading and taking the final decision.

This style is often used when the leader wants to get support and buy-in, to come up with ideas or to invite other people's input. It is said

*"Many brains are better than one."*

This affirms the characteristic of a true leader in making others listen and follow. It is a fact that with team spirit and team play, any organisation can be successful.

This leadership model is one in which the leader aims at building up relationships and at the same time a confident tough task maker enjoying the respect of the team. Leadership by example: aiming at creating an environment where all the team members can exceed their potential.

If the right people are in the right slots doing the right things for the right reasons, they'll get the work done without the leader looking over their shoulder.

The key is drawing together the right people, putting them in the right positions, then letting the team play hard and have fun as they progress towards fulfilling the mission.

Of course, the participatory style can have its drawbacks. A leader who over relies on this approach may result in frustrating endless meetings in which ideas and ideas are considered, at times consensus is elusive, and the only visible outcome is to schedule yet more meetings.

A leader who puts off crucial decisions, hoping to thrash out a consensus may end up with confusion and lack of direction, with resulting delays or rising conflicts. An efficient participatory leader is sensitive to this fact and will know when to move on.

Some of the challenges that participatory leadership face are: the time it takes from problem to solution; the style does not lend itself to every type of workplace environment; the style needs a team with generally same level of knowledge; and leaders might not be inclined to share sensitive information which may be critical in arriving at an informed decision.

Participative leadership may fail where the team is relatively inexperienced. Evidently, a precondition for effective participative leadership is to have a team that is sufficiently experienced and appropriately knowledgeable.

However, the extra time necessary for this process often leads to decisions that ultimately benefit everyone to a greater degree than faster decisions that are more limited in scope. The time lost in decision-making is the fast united and informed implementation.

A leader guides, motivates, and encourages the team towards a mission of the organisation. Some people have a natural flair for taking the lead while others develop leadership qualities over a period of time and adopt a suitable style of leadership that suits the needs of the team.

A good leader should be able to assess the requirements of the team members and adopt a style of leadership that befits the team and the situation.

Effective participative leadership allows the talents and skills of all the team members to be utilised in arriving at decisions and taking courses of action.

The participative style may appear to be more about people than tasks, but it is about mobilising a coercive team to perform greater tasks.

The level of participation will depend on the strategic objectives to be accomplished. Decisions on how to implement strategy may be highly participative, whilst decisions on performance evaluations would be taken by the leader.

Participative leadership is set to increase team satisfaction, reduce the workload of managers, create better teamwork, decisions well-thought through from all angles; with all contributing to a good product in a conducive healthy work environment and thus high productivity.